

Validated self-evaluation

**North Lanarkshire 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 Lanarkshire Council's Educational Psychology Service?

North Lanarkshire Council has very recently restructured its services and, as a result of this, North Lanarkshire Council's Psychological Service (NLCPS) is now part of the newly formed Education, Youth and Communities (EY and C). Further planned changes include locality reshaping. The Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP) continues to be responsible for the overall strategic management of the service and is based in EY and C headquarters. Despite austerity, NLCPS has been able to maintain a large team of researchers. This is due to its strong analytical skills and its success in attracting pieces of commissioned work. The team's portfolio currently includes providing analytical services related to North Lanarkshire Council's work on the Scottish Attainment Challenge. The service has in place a framework for continuous improvement based on self-evaluation. This is organised around two broad themes, namely Learning and Teaching and Health and Wellbeing. It continues to develop this framework to ensure a clear focus on outcomes and impact. NLCPS used the VSE process to take a closer look at how best to capture outcome and impact evidence as well as the value added by its psychological knowledge and skills. In addition, it wanted to build on its positive contribution to, for example, the Scottish Attainment Challenge by using VSE as an opportunity to identify ways to ensure that its work continues to be closely aligned with the Assistant Chief Executive's clearly articulated vision and the council's five key corporate priorities.

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

The service's self-evaluation activities related to the two national themes were designed to answer two high level questions and a number of supplementary challenge questions in the style of *How Good Is Our School?* 4.

In the Learning and Teaching theme, the overarching question was; 'In the area of learning and teaching, how effective is NLCPS in using evidence-based approaches to build capacity and improve outcomes for children, focusing on four main areas of intervention; Literacy, Numeracy, Autism Spectrum Disorder and Video Enhanced Reflective Practice'.

In the Partnership theme the service asked the overarching question; 'How well do we improve the wellbeing of children through effective partnership working?'

Almost all activities arranged for the VSE activity week took the form of discussion groups composed of Educational Psychologists, Research and Development Officers, partners and stakeholders.

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

The service's self-evaluation resulted in a sound assessment of its strengths and areas for development and HM Inspectors and Associate Assessors were able to validate the self-evaluation.

Work by NLCPS to build on its HM Inspectorate of Education Inspection (2010) had been effective in ensuring that it now has well-established systems in place for improvement planning. Its approach is task-focused, with responsibility for taking forward aspects of the improvement plan resting with service improvement teams which involve all staff members.

The service is data-rich and has very strong analytical capabilities which it utilises effectively to identify its strengths and areas for development. This is particularly true in the case of its evidence-based interventions, for example, Video Enhanced Reflective Practice, Video Interaction Guidance and well-established work related to the council's literacy strategy. In the course of the VSE, the service became increasingly aware of the need to refine and simplify data sources and to continue to ensure data literacy of all staff.

Staff had carried out a great deal of intensive work in preparation for the VSE week. They had produced a number of self-evaluation reports including one for each of the national themes. These reports were informed by a strong body of evidence and a significant volume of data. Two theme leads were identified for each of the two themes. However, the VSE week engaged a majority of staff from the service and the task of chairing and recording of outcomes of the discussion groups was shared by a wider group of staff.

The areas chosen by the service for each of the two themes provided an opportunity for staff to reflect, with partners, on a wide range of their work and identify what the service does well and in what ways it could improve its offer to stakeholders. Almost all participants in the discussion groups showed great willingness to engage in the process

and were very supportive of the service's work. This clearly reflects the value that stakeholders place on NLCPS.

The service provided participants in each of the discussion groups with a helpful briefing paper in advance and in almost all groups a brief overview of the theme was given at the outset. In the best examples the key question was displayed prominently to use as a prompt and graphics were used well to capture key findings on an iterative basis. The service had scheduled important daily review meetings to enable it to consider its findings to date and plan its approach to the next day's activities. Staff made appropriate use of these sessions. For example, by taking action to ensure that the depth and pace of professional dialogue in the discussion groups was sufficient to allow them to be confident in the answers they were gathering to the key questions. In doing so, they succeeded in strengthening the evaluative aspect of the activities as the week progressed. Questions from both NLCPS staff and partners became progressively more focused, challenging and probing.

Through its professional dialogue with partners and stakeholders, the service recognised the importance of continuing to refresh its vision and review its delivery model to ensure that these take account of the changing local and national context.

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

The VSE created a valuable opportunity for NLCPS staff to engage in professional dialogue with partners and stakeholders. This allowed it to confirm that its partners place a very high value on its offer, in particular its research base and its well-established portfolio of evidence-based interventions. There was strong evidence of the impact of the service's partnerships, for example, important commissioned work was having a positive impact on the quality of learning and teaching and was providing opportunities for local practitioners to access high-quality Career Long Professional Learning. The service was able to confirm that it makes a strong contribution to EY and C's work, including in relation to the Scottish Attainment Challenge and The National Improvement Framework.

NLCPS and Education Scotland agreed on a number of areas that the service will take forward in its action plan. These include:

- build on its existing strong practice of organising interventions into a coherent framework and continue to ensure the appropriate balance between its universal, targeted and specialist offers;
- consider the use of improvement science to support the scaling up of interventions and ensure sustainability;
- explore further the concept of distributive leadership to optimise staff contributions to agreed service aims and continue with its work to review the service's vision and delivery model to take account of the changing local and national context; and
- refine and simplify data sources and continue to ensure data literacy of all staff.

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

There is a high level of psychological knowledge within NLCPS and the service has a strong record of working in partnership with central staff to ensure that its expertise is utilised to address local and national priorities. As a result, it is highly valued within the local authority and by other stakeholders. The Assistant Chief Executive demonstrates very strong leadership and a clearly articulated vision for the service. The PEP is well-respected and most staff are sighted on the national improvement agenda. Members of the leadership team are at the core of local approaches to high-profile national initiatives, for example, the Scottish Attainment Challenge. HM Inspectors are therefore confident that the service has capacity to continue to improve. Given the markedly changing context within which the service is carrying out its work, our Area Lead Officer will maintain contact with the service and, going forward HM Inspectors have invited the local authority to request support from Education Scotland if they would find it helpful to do so.

Clare Lamont
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.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=32430

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