

# Guidelines for Validated Self-Evaluation

**Support and challenge for educational  
psychology services in driving  
improvement**

April 2015

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## Abbreviations

LO	Lead Officer
EPS	Educational Psychology Services
LF	Lead Facilitator
AA	Associate Assessor
ALO	Area Lead Officer
EA	Education Authority
HMI	HM Inspector
IA	Inspection Administrator
TMs	Team members
VSE	Validated Self-Evaluation
ADES	Association of Directors of Education in Scotland
PEP	Principal Educational Psychologist
EPs	Educational Psychologists

## The Vision

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 educational psychology services (EPS). It is led by the EPS and involves a partnership in which Education Scotland works alongside the service and applies its knowledge of education, in addition to expertise in evaluation.

The purpose of the VSE process is to support, extend and challenge the service's own self-evaluation, to affirm, or otherwise, their evaluation of strengths and areas for improvement, thereby strengthening outcomes for learners and other stakeholders. The process is collaborative and uses many of the principles which underpin a collaborative enquiry approach to evaluation, intervention and improvement. In EPS, to address national objectives, the focus of the partnership between EPS and Education Scotland is on closing the poverty-related attainment gap. This is achieved through working together with partner agencies and stakeholders, to improve outcomes for all. Early intervention and prevention are key to the work of EPS and as such, underpin much of the service delivery in which services engage. It is anticipated that self-evaluation of services will demonstrate the impact and outcomes from the application of early intervention and prevention.

VSE acknowledges that the responsibility for improving services and outcomes lies with the EPS. 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.

### Aims and objectives of the VSE model:

The model aims to:

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

### Key principles

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*'.

Education Scotland is committed to working collaboratively and in partnership with other public bodies and local authorities, promoting and supporting a climate of ambition. Improvement

within Education Scotland is set within the broader national context. Any development in relation to evaluative activity needs to take account of the current scrutiny landscape. Key influences on how Education Scotland takes forward its remit can be found in the Crerar (2007) review<sup>1</sup> which sets out a series of recommendations related to streamlining external scrutiny of public bodies. This resulted in the development of a 'shared risk assessment', where all of the national scrutiny bodies working in councils determine a joint plan for improvement. More recently the Christie<sup>2</sup> report has also been published with relevant recommendations on delivering high-quality public services in a context of reducing resources. In both reports, there is a strong emphasis on partnership working and the value added by collaborating and sharing knowledge and expertise. In addition, in looking at what makes a successful education system, McKinsey and Company (2010)<sup>3</sup> provided robust evidence about the impact of collaborative working in systems which were moving from 'good to great'. The VSE approach moves away from interrogative approaches which 'do things to services' to working with people to effect positive change and ownership of that change. Collaborative enquiry and high-quality professional dialogue are central to the success of validated self-evaluation.

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<sup>1</sup> The Crerar Review: The Report of the Independent Review of Regulation, Audit, Inspection and Complaints Handling of Public Services in Scotland (2007)  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/PublicServiceReform/IndependentReviewofReg/latest-news/TheCrerarReview>

<sup>2</sup> Christie Report 2011: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/06/27154527/0>

<sup>3</sup> McKinsey and company (2010) How the world's most improved school systems keep getting better

## How VSE works

### 1.1 High-quality self-evaluation focused on improvement

In terms of *culture*, self-evaluation should:

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

In terms of *design*, self-evaluation should:

- be focused on outcomes for service users;
- 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 flexible and have the scope to recognise differences in service levels and types;
- 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.

In terms of *accountability*, self-evaluation should:

- be proportionate, dovetailing with the essential functions of external scrutiny bodies to ensure that those who need less scrutiny get less scrutiny;
- be integrated with, and form part of, the organisational or partnership performance management and public reporting arrangements.

In terms of *process*, 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.

The VSE engagement will follow the PRAISE framework as set out in Appendix 1.

### 1.2 In what ways is VSE different from inspection?

VSE is validation rather than inspection, however it is evaluative and therefore forms part of a scrutiny approach.

VSE is not part of a cyclical programme of inspections, however it is anticipated that all 31 services will participate in the VSE process. A programme of named services involved, covering the period from April 2015 to end of March 2016 has been shared with the profession and education authorities. The programme has taken account of the National Scrutiny Plan to minimise demands on education authorities. Phase two of the VSE programme will be announced in due course.

At the self-evaluation stage of the VSE, the role of HM Inspectors (HMI) is to support and challenge the service in its approaches to self-evaluation and help them develop an action plan for improvement. High-quality professional dialogue, scaffolding, and mentoring are essential skills applied by HMI and team members during the VSE partnership.

### 1.3 Overview of the VSE process

The process of VSE has three main stages:

#### **Stage 1: Setting up the VSE**

Contact is made by Education Scotland via the Lead Facilitator (LF) for an initial discussion about scheduling and focus for a VSE. Care is taken where possible to ensure that wider authority inspections are not happening at the same time and EPS factors are taken into account. The EPS will continue with the evidence gathering associated with self-evaluation. There will inevitably be a sharper focus on those areas agreed as the key themes for the VSE.

#### **Stage 2: VSE Fieldwork**

Education Scotland will provide a team of HMIs and Associate Assessors (AAs) to work alongside the EPS and authority staff with the purpose of validating the quality of the EPS' self-evaluation. The joint working at this stage will normally last one week. The duration of Stage 2: VSE Fieldwork may vary depending on the size of the service, which is in keeping with a proportionate approach.

The composition of the Education Scotland team working with services will depend on the size of the EPS. It will always include promoted Health and Care Professions Council registered EPs, including at least one who will be a practising principal/depute principal EP. The EPS will have established themed groups for each of the themes identified and these will meet throughout the Stage 2: VSE Fieldwork week.

#### **Stage 3: Reporting**

The EPS will report on and publish information from the evaluation activity undertaken during the VSE. In addition, Education Scotland will publish a report which will focus on improvement and validate, or not, the EPS' self-evaluation.

## 1.4 What happens if the self-evaluation cannot be validated?

The process of VSE is built on the premise that education authorities and EPS 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 which arise, however, where the EPS' 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 the EPS the opportunity to focus work on strengthening their self-evaluation. In such cases, Education Scotland may be able to provide additional support to ensure the service can fully engage in a VSE. If this is not possible alternative arrangements may be required.



## More detailed advice

### 2.1 Stage 1: Setting up the VSE

**Please refer to Appendix 2 which provides a diagrammatic timeline of the VSE tasks and processes. This Appendix is intended to provide a summary of the following information.**

There are two main parts involved in setting up a VSE.

#### **Stage 1(a): Setting up the VSE (8 weeks before Stage 2: VSE Fieldwork)**

The EPS receives an official letter from Education Scotland notifying the service of the VSE engagement.

Key aspects of this part for EPS are:

- briefing by EPS' senior staff for the service and other stakeholders about the VSE;
- collation and gathering of existing self-evaluation evidence; and
- agreeing how self-evaluation will be taken forward in relation to the service specific themes.

Self-evaluation is not an event or a performance. Rather, it is a continuous process of improvement in which organisations are expected to know themselves and their strengths and areas for development well. As such, VSE should build on often well-established processes and approaches. The service will, however, start the formal VSE process by collating and analysing all relevant evidence on the quality of service functions delivered across the local authority. This is likely to form a normal part of the self-evaluation processes already undertaken by the service in, for example, the development of its Standards and Quality report or equivalent. Appendix 3 provides a pro-forma which services could use to structure their self-evaluation story.

Relevant evidence may include:

- existing evidence on the quality and impact of the service's 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 plans, the Council's Single Outcome Agreement, the Children's Services Plan, the Education Service Improvement Plan, Shared Risk Assessment, and any other relevant documentation;
- a range of management information including individual and project outcomes; budgetary and resource provision; staffing levels; the turnover of management or staff; information systems; and any legislative changes which may impact upon the ability of the service to deliver its statutory functions.

## Stage 1(b): Focus of the VSE (4 weeks before Stage 2: VSE Fieldwork)

The LF will contact the EPS and agree a time to visit the principal educational psychologist (PEP) to discuss the VSE themes. This will occur approximately four weeks after receipt of the formal notification. It is expected that the EPS will have the following when the LF visits:

- A self-evaluation of service delivery such as that in Appendix 3;
- A self-evaluation form for the themed areas such as that in Appendix 4;
- Suggested membership and chairs of the themed groups; and
- A draft time table of possible activities for the field work stage of the VSE.

The EPS should have a very clear idea, from its self-evaluation report, what it needs to explore in more detail during the VSE. Ideally, the service will have a summary of the key strengths and areas for improvement in each of the two (or three) themed areas of learning and teaching and partnership working (see Appendix 4). This will form the basis of a discussion with the LF from Education Scotland to help identify the specific areas for further investigation during Stage 2: VSE Fieldwork. The LF engages with the EPS and education authority over two days. This will involve: planning, exploring a timetable, exploring the focus for each of the themes, membership of themed groups, and sharing the process with staff (EPS) and other stakeholders (jointly delivered). The two days might be a week apart in order that the planning and negotiation of who does what and when can be agreed.

A link to the EPS' self-evaluation documents will be made in the final report published by Education Scotland. The service may also include other documents however these will not be part of the validation process. When Education Scotland reports that they are validating the EPS' self-evaluation, they are referring to those documents presented by the service for the VSE and the VSE processes explored during the Stage 2: VSE Fieldwork stage.

The LF and the EPS will explore how the agreed themes will be taken forward. Two themes will be from those agreed nationally with the profession and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES). For larger services an additional theme may be explored which the EPS can select, based on local/service priorities.

### National themes

<b>1. Learning and teaching</b>	EPS' contribution to learning and teaching with a focus on raising attainment and achievement for all and closing the poverty-related attainment gap.
<b>2. Partnership working/Impact on the wider community</b>	To capture health and wellbeing, Getting it Right for Every Child and partnership working. Prevention and early intervention will be central to this area.

Both themes will capture the value added by EPS locally as well as to the national agenda, demonstrating how they build capacity in the educational system and wider community. The purpose of the themed groups will be to conduct a formal self-evaluation of the noted area of provision. The themed group could be a new grouping or an existing network or group. The service will establish facilitation and support arrangements for each group along with clear guidance for its operation. Involvement of a broad range of stakeholders in the work of the themed groups is important. One benefit of this is to ensure that self-evaluation incorporates evidence from as wide a range of sources as possible.

Stakeholders who may be represented on the groups could include some or all of the following:

- EPS, authority and partner staff (social workers, health professionals, teachers, support staff);
- parents;
- quality improvement staff (eg QIOs);
- young people; and
- elected members and others.

As noted previously, the EPS and Education Scotland will *jointly* deliver briefings for staff and key stakeholders during this stage. The audience will vary but should be as wide and inclusive as possible. It is crucial that involvement and communication is comprehensive. Similarly, the service should want, and seek to involve, a wide range of stakeholders in the VSE process. It will be important to include them at this early stage of the process. Briefings to stakeholders could include some of the following: senior leaders, elected members, parents, young people, representatives from other services who work with educational psychologists, and partners from the community planning partnership: including health, social care and the voluntary sector. It will be for each service to determine the range and breadth of stakeholder engagement.

Themed groups are likely to start meeting prior to the start of the VSE process. They would be expected to have undertaken some preparatory work but not have completed their work before the VSE process begins. As part of their leadership of the process/groups, the service would agree a programme of activity for Stage 2: VSE Fieldwork. Members of the themed groups will undertake this focused self-evaluation activity.

## **2.2 Stage 2: VSE Fieldwork (8 weeks after receipt of letter)**

The purpose of this stage is for the Education Scotland team to work collaboratively with service staff and other stakeholders for a week to improve and develop their understanding of self-evaluation and add to the quality of the process. During this time, the Education Scotland team will work closely with the authority on the self-evaluation process, particularly in relation to the quality of the evaluation activity around the agreed themes. The EPS leads this phase of the exercise. 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.

Acting independently, Education Scotland will work closely with EPS staff to help support them to carry out evaluative activities comprehensively and effectively. The themed groups may use some of the following approaches and activities to look at delivery and outcomes of the EPS:

- case studies;
- learner journeys;
- analysis of data;
- focus groups;
- user surveys;
- project/research outcomes;
- observation of practice;
- consultations by the service and EA; and
- self-evaluation and inspection reports for alignment purposes, particularly in relation to meeting learning needs.

Key elements of this phase are likely to include:

- sharing skills in self-evaluation;
- capacity-building;
- sharing knowledge of self-evaluation approaches;
- asking helpfully challenging questions;
- ensuring that there is comprehensive coverage of all relevant areas;
- challenging expectations;
- responding to the needs of service staff; and
- disseminating good practice.

Education Scotland will not conduct an independent survey of stakeholders as it would be anticipated that this form of activity would have been included, as appropriate, within the regular work of the service or of the specific theme groups.

During the course of the VSE phase, the Education Scotland team will form a view about the alignment of the service's self-evaluation with that observed during the VSE.

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

At the end of Stage 2: VSE Fieldwork, a meeting will be held involving senior leaders from the EPS, authority managers and representatives of the Education Scotland team. The purpose of this meeting is to evaluate the activity that has taken place and to focus on identified strengths and areas for improvement in the EPS' self-evaluation. The key question is whether or not the

EPS' self-evaluation is leading to improvement in the delivery of a high-quality psychological service within the authority.

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

Day 1 Monday pm	a) Presentation by EPS/EA. b) Break out into themed groups and agree pattern of activities. c) Getting familiarised to form a team partnership with Education Scotland.
Day 2 Tuesday	a) Activities. b) Time for reflection at end of day.
Day 3 Wednesday	a) Activities in the morning. b) Time for reflection. c) High-level messages emerging by the afternoon.
Day 4 Thursday	a) Activities in the morning. b) Time for reflection. c) VSE Team meeting in the afternoon (e.g. chairs/team members, Education Scotland, PEP) to write strengths and areas for improvement. Education Scotland and EPS may work together for the whole afternoon, separately, or a combination of both.
Day 5 Friday	a) Summary of strengths/areas for improvement for each theme and for the self-evaluation process. b) Discussion of next steps shared with EA senior staff/managers and EPS. This may be in the morning or afternoon depending on the progress made during the week. Progress may be dependent on the size of the service and the number of self-evaluation activities required.

### **2.3 Stage 3: Reporting (weeks 9 to 20)**

Education Scotland will prepare a short report which focuses on the scope of the VSE, the degree of rigour and challenge required, agreed strengths and areas for continued improvement. Reference will be made to the EPS' report on their/council website. The agreed actions will be incorporated into the Partnership Agreements currently being rolled out across educational authorities.

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 both Education Scotland and the authority;

- the document is capable of use as an evidence source by other inspections of strategic functions;
- the principal audience is council service users/local residents; and
- the report will be a web-based publication.

### **Structure of the final report**

The report will be structured as follows:

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

### **Discussion of the report with the EPS and education authority**

The VSE model is based upon an open and trusting relationship between Education Scotland and the authority. The final report should contain a clear plan for action that is jointly agreed by the authority and Education Scotland.

## Appendix 1

### Principles for productive partnership working and professional engagement

#### The PRAISE framework

The 'Best Practice Framework for HM Inspectors' guides Education Scotland's interactions during VSE. The following principles have been identified as underpinning best practice.

**Purpose** – being clear about the overall purpose of the VSE and retaining this throughout. Creating a shared agenda with staff in the organisation and amongst members of the VSE 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/assessor'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 VSE 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 Timeline

Stage 1:			Stage 2:					Stage 3
Stage (1a) Setting up the VSE			Stage 2: VSE Fieldwork					Stage 3: Reporting
			Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	
			AM	AM	AM	AM	AM	
Letter week 5. LF phone call. EPS preparation before or on receipt of letter. Notice of Education Scotland's engagement date for stage 2 8 Weeks before stage 2				Activities  Reflection	Activities  Reflection	Activities  Reflection	Summary of strengths/areas for improvement for each theme and for the self-evaluation process	Report Writing  Sharing  Editing  Publication
Stage 1(b) Focus of VSE			PM	PM	PM	PM	PM	
Week 5 LF visit briefing PEP, EA and stakeholders.	4 weeks before stage 2 Focus of the VSE (See App. 4)  Profile of key Services, send QI report + EA + EPS staff details (See App. 5) to Education Scotland 2 weeks before stage 2	A) Presentation by EPS/EA  B) Breakout into themed groups and agree pattern of activities, getting familiarised to form learning and teaching partnership with Education Scotland	Activities  Reflection	Activities  High level messages emerging  Reflection	VSE Team Meeting (e.g. chairs/team members, Education Scotland, PEP to write strengths and areas for improvement	Discussion of next steps is shared with EA senior staff manager, EPS		
EPS generates self-evaluation report (See App. 3 for possible sub-headings)								
-10 -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1			Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 ←Weeks			Week 9					Weeks→ 10 11 12 13 14 15



## Appendix 3

### Service self-evaluation pro-forma

As part of the VSE, you are asked to complete, in consultation with key stakeholders, a brief self-evaluation outlining your key strengths and areas for development/next steps in the context of the following four key questions. There is no prescribed approach to undertaking the self-evaluation, and services are encouraged to build on their current practice for the VSE.

To support services in this process, a pro-forma with examples of relevant sub-headings for a typical service self-evaluation is included below

- ‘What key outcomes have we achieved?’;
- ‘How do we meet the needs of our stakeholders?’;
- ‘How good is our leadership?’; and
- ‘How good is our capacity for improvement?’

The self-evaluation document will provide important information about service performance and improvement to guide the VSE process and open up dialogue between service staff 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 the work underway across the two themes of learning and teaching and partnership working. Services may wish to produce a summary of key strengths and areas for further investigation which will form the basis of the evaluative activity during the VSE.

#### Self-evaluation summary:

<b>What key outcomes have we achieved?</b>

<b>Overarching strengths</b>

<b>Key Challenges</b>

<b>Areas of strong practice</b>

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

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

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

## Appendix 4

### Educational Psychology Services - self-evaluation of themes as part of VSE

Name of EPS:	
Name of education authority:	
Date of completion:	

#### What key outcomes have we achieved?

<b>National theme 1 – learning and teaching</b>
Where are we now?
How do we know?
What are our strengths?
Where are our challenges?
What do we need to find out more about?

<b>National theme 2 – partnerships</b>
Where are we now?
How do we know?
What are our strengths?
Where are our challenges?
What do we need to find out more about?

<b>Service theme 3 (optional)</b>
Where are we now?
How do we know?
What are our strengths?
Where are our challenges?
What do we need to find out more about?



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