



Children's Services Partnership

Self-Evaluation and Continuous Improvement Approach



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Why Are Curiosity and Inquisitiveness Important?

Professor Stephen Hawking

The confidence to question is one of the greatest gifts we can give our children. The ability to answer questions comes further down the list – it’s that sense of wonder that is such an important building block.

It’s not just vital for learning, but also to navigate the wide world. Knowing how to question, for example, if a news story can be trusted, whether a politician’s promise can be believed, how to find out how something works, and so on, is vital for us all.

We’re all born with an innate curiosity. First words soon form first questions: “Why shoes? Why breakfast? Why moon?” Although admittedly infuriating at times, the ‘why’ phase is a wonderful first glimpse into an enquiring young mind. If we nurture this curiosity in our children, who knows what great questions they may ask throughout their lives – and what incredible answers they might be driven to find!

1 Introduction

We often speak about self-reflection and self-evaluation as having the same meaning, and the phrase *holding up a mirror* to ourselves is coined to illustrate the importance of seeing ourselves as others may see us. This can apply to us all as individuals and to the organisations in which we work. With self-reflection, we might not always like what we see but it is an important process if we are to be honest with ourselves and take opportunity of making any necessary changes based on the reflection we see.

Self-evaluation should be a useful process which is rigorous and enables you to be critically reflective about yourself as a professional and your practice. Organisationally, self-evaluation should support the organisation to:



- Reflect on what it has done;
- Think about what it might do next; and
- Consider progress and development.

These guideline outlines the partnership's approach to self-evaluation and continuous improvement. The delivery of this will require each partner to develop its processes to support and embed the approach, and its principles, within their organisation.

2 Background

Partners across Children's Services should continue to be fully committed to self-evaluation to evidence how well they are protecting, enabling and empowering people who receive their services, and how well they evidence that:

- Children are experiencing outcomes which continually and positively impact on their lives.

For example, an important aspect of evaluating the quality of information which is contained in an individual child's or young person's file is to ascertain "how well we are doing" by reviewing the effectiveness of file recording and record keeping throughout the assessment, care planning and review processes.

3 Care Inspectorate Quality Improvement Framework:

The Care Inspectorate Quality Improvement Framework (QIF) is for community planning partnerships, exactly like our own partnership, to support self-evaluation of services for children and young people in need of care and protection and is designed to lead to improvement in services. It seeks to place the child at the centre of self-evaluation and evaluates the impact services can have on a child's life as well as the positive outcomes to which they can lead.

It can be used by the full range of services which contribute to the health and wellbeing of children, young people and their families and is used by the Care Inspectorate's Strategic Scrutiny Children's Team and their scrutiny partners, for inspections of community planning partnerships:

- Education Scotland;
- Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) and
- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS),

Throughout the Care Inspectorate guide to QIF, the terms 'children and young people in need of care and protection', 'vulnerable children and young people' and 'care experienced children and young people' are used to refer to:

- Children and young people in need of protection,



- Young people and young adults for whom community planning partnerships have corporate parenting responsibilities.

'Partnerships' are defined as groups of services and organisations who have collective responsibility for improving services for children and young people in need of care and protection. Arrangements vary across local authority areas but may include:

- Community planning partnerships
- Chief officers' groups
- Health and social care partnership
- Children's services planning groups
- Child protection committees
- Corporate parenting champions boards
- Community safety partnerships.

The Five Inspection Questions (QIF p.8)

The quality improvement framework poses five inspection-specific questions which partners can also use to add a further layer of assurance and confidence to their evaluation. These inspection questions underpin evaluation and enable robust conclusions to be drawn on the quality of practice on each of the themes that they cover. For example, two questions focus on child protection, two on experiences for children and young people who are looked after, and one on leadership.

1. How good is the partnership at recognising and responding when children and young people need protection?
2. How good is the partnership at helping children and young people who have experienced abuse and neglect stay safe, healthy and recover from their experiences?
3. How good is the partnership at maximising the wellbeing of children and young people who are looked after?
4. How good is the partnership at enabling care experienced young people to succeed in their transition to adulthood?
5. How good is collaborative leadership?

Quality Indicators (QIF p.4 and p.9)

Within the framework's 10 areas, the 22 quality indicators cover the key aspects of the work of community planning partnerships and key strategic planning groups in the delivery of services for children, young people in need of care and protection and their families, as well as a global indicator on the capacity for continued improvement.

Each indicator has related illustrations describing what very good and weak practice can look like which can be used as a gauge to the quality of services.



What key outcomes have we achieved?	How well do we meet the needs of our stakeholders?	How good is our delivery of services for children, young people and families?	How good is our operational management?	How good is our leadership?
1. Key performance outcomes	2. Impact on children, young people and families	5. Delivery of key processes	6. Policy, service development and legal measures	9. Leadership and direction
<p>1.1 Improvements in the safety, wellbeing and life chances of vulnerable children and young people.</p>	<p>2.1 Impact on children and young people.</p> <p>2.2 Impact on families.</p>	<p>5.1 Recognition and response to initial concerns.</p> <p>5.2 Assessing risk and need.</p> <p>5.3 Care planning, managing risk and effective intervention.</p> <p>5.4 Involving individual children, young people and families.</p>	<p>6.1 Policies, procedures and legal measures.</p> <p>6.2 Planning and improving services.</p> <p>6.3 Participation of children, young people, families and other stakeholders.</p> <p>6.4 Performance management and quality assurance.</p> <p>6.5 Securing improvement through self-evaluation</p>	<p>9.1 Vision, values and aims.</p> <p>9.2 Leadership of strategy and direction.</p> <p>9.3 Leadership of people and partnerships.</p> <p>9.4 Leadership of improvement and change.</p>
	3. Impact on staff		7. Management and support to staff	
	3.1 Impact on staff		<p>7.1 Recruitment, deployment and joint working.</p> <p>7.2 Workforce development and support.</p>	
	4. Impact on the community		8. Resources and capacity building	
	4.1 Impact on the community		<p>8.1 Management of resources.</p> <p>8.2 Commissioning arrangements.</p>	
<p>10: What is our capacity for improvement? Global judgement based on an evaluation of the framework of quality indicators</p>				



4 Scrutiny

The word scrutiny had an original meaning of “sorting rubbish” and we might be forgiven for thinking that aspects of this definition may still apply. From a self-evaluation perspective, scrutiny is the process of examining and analysing information and data held in the organisation on specific topics of interest (often priorities) and is closely associated with inspection. Scrutiny fits well with professional challenge and curiosity, and the high-level organisational questions in the Care Inspectorate Quality Improvement Framework including: How Good is the Partnership at recognising and responding when children and young people need Protection?; and How Good is the Collaborative Leadership? illustrate how important scrutiny is in the overall self-evaluation process. The aim once again is to have information and knowledge which can lead to improved services.

Scrutiny is not a “negative” word, it is part of the process of getting beneath the data and seeking to understand what is actually happening beyond the presentation of the information and statistics. It often includes the question “**so what**” in seeking to know what difference processes and services are making to the lives of the people we support and serve. Leaders, managers, professionals, qualified and skilled staff should apply scrutiny to their work and seek to understand the meaning of information, including what people say, and data within their day to day work or strategically within their organisations. Scrutiny involves close examination of key business processes, in this instance, our child protection processes.

Leaders often talk about the need to “get beneath the skin” of their services and scrutiny can play a valuable role in achieving this. Managers can undertake scrutiny activity by asking simple questions such as:

- Can you advise me of your usual practice in closing cases?
- Which professional framework or approach are you using?
- What is your usual approach to this particular matter?
- What evidence do you have to support your findings?
- How do you know that?
- To which statistics have you referred?
- What are others saying about it?
- Have you undertaken a benchmark?

For example, the simple question “Can you advise me of your usual practice in” often reveals deep and meaningful information on that which is being examined, highlighting differences of perception, procedural understanding, and practice. Like “professional challenge” and “professional curiosity”, scrutiny should be encouraged and welcomed for the positive change and improvements it can generate. The Quality Improvement Framework provides a meaningful structure for us all as individuals, teams and organisations to sharpen our skills in challenging appropriately and seeking to scrutinise information placed before us.



5 Support and Challenge

All professionals need appropriate support, guidance and direction in their often stressful and difficult roles, particularly in child protection. It is well evidenced that professional supervision, annual performance review, and “time and space” for reflection are essential elements of ensuring support is provided. Effective communication can also contribute to how well professionals feel supported and equipped to undertake their duties which is an important aspect of any effective self-evaluation approach. The key questions within the Care Inspectorate Quality Improvement Framework (p.6-7):

1. How good are we?
2. How do we know?
3. What we plan to do next?

The word “challenge” can conjure up images of conflict and contention which some may find off putting and threatening. Professional challenge is the process of reflective questioning which can lead to a better understanding of decision making, why people do things, and the rationale and thinking behind it. Questions such as:

- What was the thinking behind this decision?
- Can you help me understand why you took this approach?
- Did you consider any other suitable approaches?
- What did you think the outcome might be – did you consider the potential for unintended outcomes?
- Did you ever consider changing your approach to maximise effectiveness?

Can help develop a reflective process which can, in itself, lead to change and in turn can create improvement. A positive “friction” can be created from professional challenge which generates motion, leading to improvement and change. Organisations which perform well and efficiently have cultures which encourage “questioning” and “support and challenge”.

Figuring out how to be part of a new or a changing work culture can at times be frustrating for us all. People create cultures and it is important that we get to know our colleagues which we can do in various ways including working on team projects, co-working with families, leading small scale tasks or developments, engaging in team meetings and socialising in the work space during breaks or team development sessions. This promotes common interests, builds trust, helps identify team strengths and interests, areas for development and professional allegiances.

Professionals from the point of being students *in learning*, are encouraged to ask questions if they do not understand something and professional groups enjoy and benefit from having students for that reason amongst other things. Students often ask questions, intentionally or unintentionally, which challenge *perceived wisdom*, workplace *norms* and *culture*. Sometimes the answer they receive is; “that’s how we do things around here” or that is the



“organisational way”. Reflective practitioners can hear these questions to really think about what they are doing and why they are doing it in a particular way.

Exploratory questioning and curious enquiries (professional curiosity) can help professionals reflect on whether or not these ways or processes provide:

- Clear understanding
- Maximum outcomes
- Efficiency
- Effectiveness
- Evidence based practice
- Fairness and equity
- Value for money

Self-evaluation and organisational-evaluation processes are essential for service improvement and development and cultures which support these processes can more effectively identify their own strengths and areas for development.

6 Benchmarking

Benchmarking is a well tried and tested approach which allows organisations to compare their existing performance against others and adopt improvements that fit their overall approach to continuous improvement and culture. There are different aspects to benchmarking from sharing simple forms to comparing complex business processes such as how a Public Service's Duty process works. The overall point of benchmarking is to identify internal opportunities for improvement based against our “family group comparators”. These will be different for each of our partnership members.

The term “there is no point in reinventing the wheel” is related to benchmarking activity and captures the simplicity of the approach – if someone else or some other place has already done it, why do we not politely ask them for it. Benchmarking should be widely encouraged and promoted wherever required as the benefits for learning, development and saving time can be considerable. If we are a “benchmarking” partnership we must ensure we fully cooperate and facilitate benchmarking requests from others.

Depending on the nature of the benchmarking activity, whether it is us asking or responding to requests, it can be straightforward or complex as per the above examples, so consideration of the time and approach required should be carefully undertaken.

7 Reflective Practice

There are different types of “reflective practice” and two of the main ones are: Reflection-in-action and Reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action is the reflection which takes place



whilst you are involved in the situation and allows real time opportunity (in the light of the responses being received) to adjust your position or take a different approach.

Reflection-on-action is the reflection on action you have undertaken and are thinking back on it. In straightforward terms reflection is learning through and from experience towards gaining new insights and understanding. If done openly and honestly, it allows us as individuals, teams and organisations to think about what has happened, what part we played in it and the impact of our actions on others.

Reflective practice acknowledges that your personal feelings influence the situation and how you have begun to reflect on it. By breaking down reflection into evaluation of the events and their analysis we can begin to make clear links between the learning that has happened from the experience and our future practice.

Even with reflection and evaluation, unless this is done deeply and honestly with time and space, the process could result in superficial reflection as it does not connect to critical thinking or analysis. Reflection should include meaningful consideration of assumptions you may hold about the experience, the need to look objectively at different perspectives. Reflection should hold an internal personal or organisational explicit suggestion that the learning will result in a change of assumptions, perspectives or practice. A professional, team or organisation could legitimately respond to the question 'what would you do or decide next time?' by answering that you would "do the same" but does that constitute deep level reflection?

There should always be reflection after inspections to help people consider their roles in the process, their contribution to the work of the organisation, the contributions of others and what they have learned. This is regardless of the outcome of the inspection good, bad or indifferent. The process should be organised and led by senior leaders within the organisation who should skilfully set up the right conditions for the reflective session to take place. These conditions should include:

- The timing of the reflective session or sessions, taking account of how the workforce may be feeling, for example, directly after disappointing findings or once the dust has settled
- The setting, ensuring the environment is conducive and comfortable for open and honest discussion – sometimes away from the usual work environment
- The tone and style of communication, non-blaming, clear purpose and outcomes, learning and development for improving services
- Expectations and plans on how to manage: blame (it was the senior managers' fault); conflict (I do not agree, you are wrong); denial (it wasn't that bad our team was mentioned positively); avoidance (the inspection method was flawed) and emotions (this is upsetting, we always work hard and do our jobs to the best of our abilities)

Effective organisations have clear understanding of these matters and face them head-on, squarely and honestly.



8 Professional Curiosity

Being professionally curious can be difficult if you are used to seeing yourself, or alternatively are seen by your team, as being the smartest person in the room. The technique of “curious enquiry”, requires people to begin important conversations with the initial stance that they are partially ignorant and others in the team have a perspective or information which they currently do not possess. As Ed Schein (2013) puts it, you must become “temporarily dependent and vulnerable”.

A curious enquiry might start with the admission, *‘I am a bit stuck here. I really don’t know the answer so I would like to hear what you think.* People, of course, should ask such questions in the right way, openly, politely and non-accusatory. Be careful with your tone and inflections. Curious questions can easily be interpreted as sarcasm or leading to some other yet to be revealed hidden agenda.

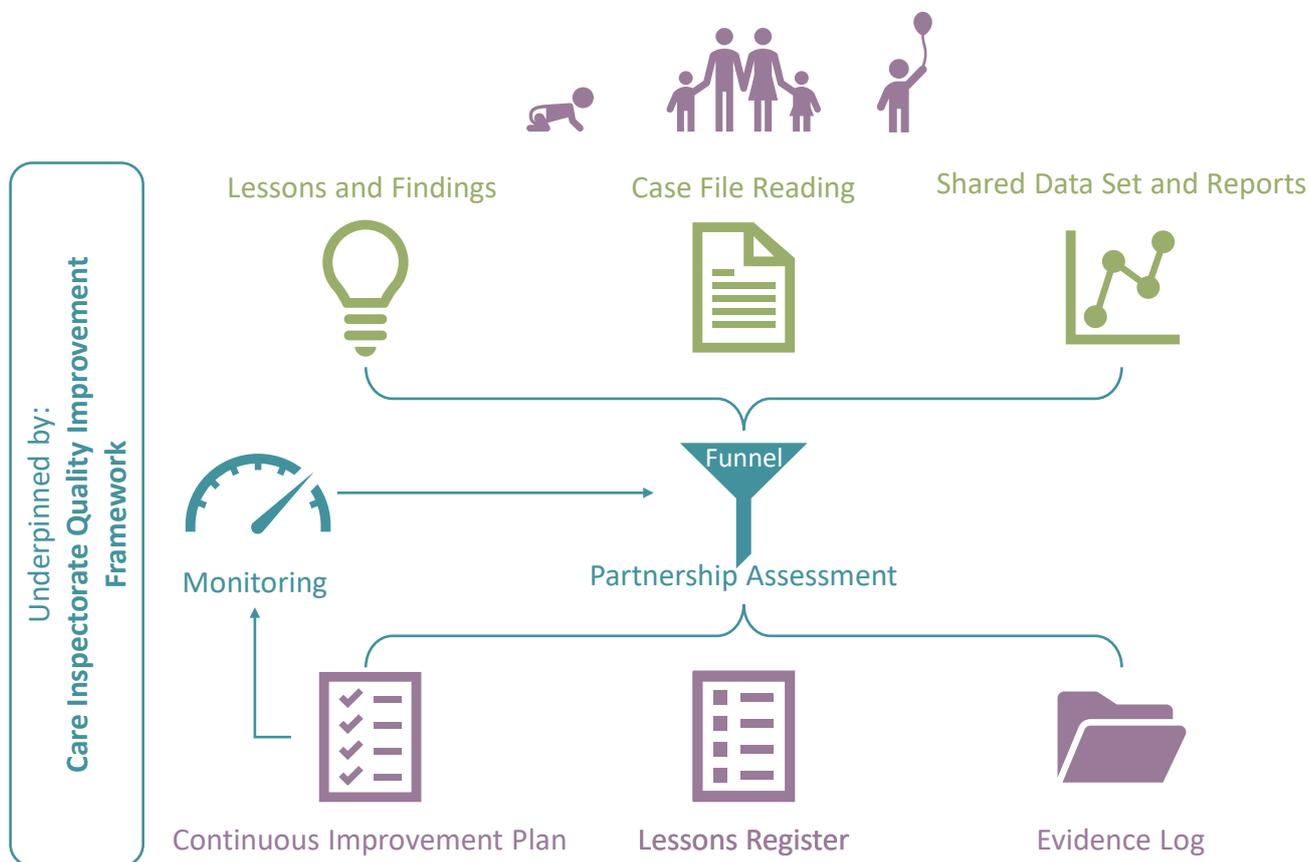
Professional culture should always be friendly and respectful, and everyone has a responsibility for ensuring this is acted out in behaviour and presentation. Having a “can do” and positive attitude, good manners, and appropriate work habits (for example, avoiding office gossip) will show that individuals are professional, and the organisation is professional. It takes time to gain the trust of colleagues including those in your own team as well as those in other services with whom you work in partnership. To get them on board with ideas we should listen, observe and gather evidence, including from self-evaluation activities, before suggesting changes.

Team members, managers and leaders should seek to bring solutions to the table and engage with colleagues by knowing what they are talking about. Professional challenge will be easier in a context and culture of building a reputation of being clear-headed, objective, reasonable, and trustworthy.



9 Self-evaluation Approach and Elements

The graphic below outlines the core elements of the self-evaluation approach. The approach is underpinned by the Care Inspectorates Quality Improvement Framework.



Each element of the approach is outlined below:

Links to page number

Lessons and Findings from:

- Complaints
- Positive feedback
- Joint investigation report
- Significant case reviews
- Internal or external audit
- Appreciative enquiries
- National findings and reviews
- Shared experiences and benchmarking from other island authorities
- Feedback from public, staff and partners
- Supervision, team meetings and staff development activities
- Other appropriate reviews and self-evaluation activities



Case File Reading

Quarterly case file reading completed by the Partnership using the Care Inspectorate's standard guidance and template.



Shared Data Set and Reports

A Shared set of children's services reports and metrics that will be supplied to committees and boards across the partnership. A measurements plan will outline the data sets required for their production.



Partnership Assessment Funnel

Partnership assessment of all lessons, findings, data and reports to assess what action is required. Items should be added to the 'Continuous Improvement Plan; 'Lessons Register' or 'Evidence Log' as appropriate.



Monitoring

A monitoring register to scrutinise improvements to ensure that delivery is not only completed but delivers the required outcomes and benefits.



Continuous Improvement Plan

An organic partnership improvement plan which provides a single pane of glass through which to view for all improvements required across the Children's Services.



Lessons Register

A repository of lessons that apply to current and future operations across the partnership.



Evidence Log

A log of improvements evidence. This will include both evidence of the delivery of improvements and their impact on outcomes.



10 Annexes and Supporting Documents

Quality Improvement Framework (Care Inspectorate)

- A quality framework for children and young people in need of care and protection (Revised August 2019)
 - https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/documents/4506/Quality%20framework%20for%20children%20and%20young%20people%20in%20need%20of%20care%20and%20protection%202019_Revised.pdf
- Joint self-evaluation guidance (September 2019)
 - https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/003_Guidance_to_CPP_on_self_evaluation.doc

Case file reading (Care Inspectorate)

- Case file reading guidance
 - https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/015_File_reading_guidance.pdf
 - https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/011_Local_file_readers_guidance.doc
- Case file reading template (February 2019)
 - https://www.careinspectorate.com/images/013_File_reading_template.pdf

Reporting measurements plan

Partnership measurements plan outlining the data sets required for the productions of shared set of reports and metrics.

Continuous Improvement Plan (P0318-PRJB-002)

An organic partnership improvement plan which provides a single pane of glass through which to view for all improvements required across the Children's Services.

Lessons Register (P3018-PRJD-003)

A repository of lessons that apply to current and future operations across the partnership.

Evidence Log (P3018-PRJD-002)

A log of improvements evidence. This will include both evidence of the delivery of improvements and their impact on outcomes.



11 Version History

Document status				
Version	Status	Date	Amended by	Reason / overview
0.0.A	Draft	28 October 2020	JL / AJR	First completed draft
0.0.B	Draft	3 December 2020	JL / AJR	Second draft for partnership review
0.0.C	Draft	4 December 2020	JL / AJR	Minor changes and corrections
0.0.D	Draft	16 December 2020	JL / AJR	Addition of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 Benchmarking • 7 Reflective Practice • 10 Annexes and Supporting Documents – links and references added Other small additions and changes including additions to 'Lessons and Findings' list.
1.0	Live	5 January 2021	AJR	Live version as approved by Partnership's Improvement Plan Delivery Leadership Group.