

Validated self-evaluation

**Orkney Islands 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* (GIRFEC). 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 Orkney Islands Council's Educational Psychology Service?

Orkney Islands Council's Educational Psychology Service (OICEPS) is part of Education, Leisure and Housing. The Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP) manages the EPS and the Pupil Support Service. The vision for the EPS is 'ensuring our systems support changes in practice and culture so that children and young people get the right help, at the right time in the right way'. The service used the VSE to develop its self-evaluation processes across all functions of the service and to provide clarity around its strengths and areas for improvement. In the two themes for learning and teaching and partnership working they chose to look at the impact of their work on health and wellbeing, and the implementation of GIRFEC.

The learning and teaching theme explored two key questions.

- What impact is the EPS having in the area of health and wellbeing?
- What is the potential of using the educational psychology team for reflecting on and planning for wellbeing across the authority?

The service has a significant role in addressing wellbeing needs across schools and services within Orkney Islands Council, including capacity building with school staff and partners. They believe that emotional wellbeing and resilience is the foundation for good learning. The aim of their wellbeing interventions was therefore stated in their planning as 'helping all children understand and manage their thinking and their

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

feelings, in order to develop self-efficacy, form positive relationships and realise the four capacities' as outlined in Curriculum for Excellence. The theme linked directly to outcomes from the School Service Plan 2014-2016 and actions derived from the EPS Plan 2014-2016. The EPS actions included one specifically highlighting the need for evaluative activity 'with partners to identify the lessons learned from using a collaborative approach to wellbeing work in schools'. This action had been progressed in advance of the VSE engagement, with the week of focused activity building on the data collected to date.

The activities undertaken were:

- action research with young people regarding the development and implementation of courses relating to *Coping with Challenge and Change*;
- discussions with staff from a primary school, secondary school and halls of residence on the impact and next steps for Educational Psychology involvement following staff training on approaches to *Coping with Challenge and Change*; and
- focus group discussion including education partners and senior managers to consider the evaluation of training delivered, the impact of Educational Psychologists (EPs) involvement and ways in which interventions can become embedded in authority planning around wellbeing.

The themed group was chaired by the PEP, with other group members having active engagement in the process and demonstrating clear roles.

The key questions addressed during the VSE in the partnership theme were:

- How well do people understand GIRFEC?
- How can the EPS support practice firmly embedded in GIRFEC principles?

The EPS had taken a lead role in implementing GIRFEC by providing:

- training for the named person and lead professional;
- guidance to partners in how to run GIRFEC meetings and how to apply the philosophy underpinning GIRFEC using the legislative framework;
- the templates for a Child's Plan using solution-focused approaches; and
- advice on policy and practice to the GIRFEC Implementation Group.

Previous self-evaluation data indicated that there were key strengths in the EPS's contribution to building capacity in schools and other agencies to apply GIRFEC legislation and to meet the needs of children better.

Measures of impact using questionnaires and focus groups indicated that:

- the GIRFEC documents were widely used by health visitors and schools;
- parents liked the process;
- professionals liked the collaborative integrated summary and planning prompted by the paperwork; and
- children were able to see the plan as it is constructed and contribute to the process.

The service wanted to use the VSE to gather more evidence about how to improve practice and address some of the challenges identified in their self-evaluation. For example:

- variation in the quality of assessment and planning depending on the lead professional;
- insufficient use by professionals of the approach for children not involved with the EPS; and
- the quality of recording and review was variable across schools and agencies.

To take a closer look at the above challenges, the core group engaged in four activities with focus groups.

- Interviews with parents who had a Child's Plan across a number of schools and age groups.
- An interview with a headteacher and principal teacher of support for learning about the strengths of the guidance and process and where improvements could be made.
- Review of the paperwork with educational partners and social work manager.
- Meeting with key partners to draw out the high level strengths and areas for improvement.

Given the size of the service and the demand on partners, the activities were very successful in helping the EPS to add to their existing self-evaluation data and to begin to explore solutions to address challenges previously identified.

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

The EPS is well integrated into authority planning structures and supports the vision of Education, Leisure and Housing very well. Their objectives take very good account of national and local priorities.

- Strengthening links with other agencies.
- Ensuring successful transitions for all pupils.
- Developing capacity in Orkney to meet the needs of all children and young people.
- Maximising impact and efficiency of the EPS.
- Supporting self-evaluation in schools and services through Appreciative Inquiry to promote reflection and planning for improvement.

In preparation for the VSE the service used stakeholder evaluations, discussion and reflection very well to identify next steps. They know their schools well and respond very effectively to identified needs. For example, their joint work with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service to alleviate anxiety related difficulties in one secondary school. They should consider how they could scale up many of these very good examples of partnership working and effective intervention, to ensure equality of access while taking into account the demands of the geography. The activities undertaken in both themes built effectively on self-evaluation activity undertaken prior to the VSE week. For example, training delivered to S5 and S6 pupils had been evaluated

and analysed previously and was used to inform the VSE activity with S1 to S3 pupils. This resulted in highly productive discussions which built on prior learning and clearly informed next steps.

A very good range of stakeholders participated across the activities, providing both support and challenge. The EP theme leads also asked challenging questions about the delivery of EP services, for example, why should it be EPs who lead this work, why not someone else? Partners were well prepared for the activities and demonstrated a clear understanding of purpose. Theme group members were assigned roles in advance, such as scribe and summariser, which contributed to the groups remaining on task, using appropriate and focused questions and capturing high quality information. In the GIRFEC theme, questions were developed to help provide consistency within each activity and across partners. The questions were mainly about process and it was agreed that they required to be more impact focused. There was very good evidence of the learning from each activity being taken forward to inform the next discussion. For example, the messages provided by young people on the development of courses on *Coping with Challenge and Change*, were used to extend the questions that were asked of primary and secondary school staff and house parents who had received training on the same topic. The EPS synthesised information and data very well and were able to extract the higher order messages from the feedback provided by partners and from each of the activities. For example, in the GIRFEC theme it was acknowledged that the parents interviewed about their experiences of their Child's Plan were articulate and confident and therefore the service needed to test their findings across a wider range of stakeholders from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The structure for reflection of evidence worked very well and highlighted strengths, areas for concern, and barriers preventing improvement.

All participants were honest in their analysis and contributions, providing insights which were helpful to the EPS in identifying where they could add more value. Across the self-evaluation, there was evidence of approaches becoming embedded in practice, with school staff and partners taking ownerships of interventions leading to sustained implementation of approaches. For example, stakeholders were able to describe how they had extended and adapted approaches to meet the needs of their school. Throughout the discussions, solution-focused questioning and appreciative enquiry were evident, leading to high quality information being obtained from partners and stakeholders. Theme group chairs were skilled at allowing conversations to flow while maintaining a focus on the purpose of the activity.

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

- The service may wish to give further consideration of how to build their vision for future work around the Children Service's themes of Relationships, Wellbeing and Disadvantage. This may integrate their work even further at a strategic level.
- The service should consider gathering evidence in a more systematic way, including identifying trends over time. This would support the service's aim to target their resource better and ensure children and young people get the right help, at the right time, in the right way. The use of wider school service information such as data on exclusions, health and wellbeing outcomes, and attainment will help to provide stronger data sources for decision making.

- Exit strategies and points for re-engagement in relation to EPS interventions should be more carefully considered by using self-evaluation information to determine what schools need further EPS involvement and when practice is well-embedded. This will allow the service to target their service more effectively and ensure greater equality of access.
- The use of self-evaluation to investigate the synergies between the EPS and pupil support service may help to identify better how to deploy skills so that children and young people and other stakeholders get the right help, at the right time in the right way.

5. What is Orkney Islands Council's Educational Psychology Service's capacity for improvement?

Education Scotland is confident that OICEPS has the capacity to continue to improve. It is a very small service which demonstrated its ability to impact on a wide range of services across Orkney Islands Council. The PEP provides strong leadership with a clear vision shared across all EPs. Given the size of the service, capacity building through the development of skills in others will continue to be a key focus of service delivery. Best value will be determined by targeted services based on robust self-evaluation data. Education Scotland is confident that the EPS will continue to build on their strengths and develop their use of self-evaluation data further.

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Further information about the EPS VSE reports and self-evaluation can be found on the service's website <http://www.orkney.gov.uk/Service-Directory/E/educational-psychology-service.htm>

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