

Validated self-evaluation

**Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
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 Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Educational Psychology Service?

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Educational Psychology Service (CNESEPS) wanted to use the VSE, to deepen their knowledge and understanding of their strengths and areas for development in a number of key areas of service delivery. The CNESEPS is a very small service of two practitioners which includes the Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP) and as such recognised the challenge of delivering a service where demand outstrips capacity. They were keen to use the VSE process to explore areas where they could make the most positive impact. Using the findings from previous inspection reports and their self-evaluation, they identified two main themes which they wished to explore in greater depth:

- How well do we use data to secure good outcomes for children in Comhairle nan Eilean Siar?
- How well do we adapt our practice to meet the needs of all stakeholders?

For the Learning and Teaching theme, the CNESEPS wanted to consider the implementation of evidence-based practice, ensuring that their interventions were based on high quality data. This was recognised as particularly important given the challenging geographical context of the service. The CNESEPS were keen to ensure that they selected the most appropriate interventions to meet the needs of local children, young people and their families. This was a well-established area of service practice, and psychologists had routinely undertaken small scale evaluation and review

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

activity focused on specific projects and interventions. The service wanted to scrutinise their work across the different levels of service delivery including learners, teachers, school leaders and partners. They wanted to look more closely at the impact and outcomes which had been achieved as a result of specific interventions. The range of activities selected was over ambitious, covering practice in a number of areas including mediation, differentiation and a case work review process. The collation and use of data is variable across the service, the activities identified a number of areas, including the impact of professional learning where data collation and analysis should be strengthened. The range of activities within this theme presented a challenge to the CNESEPS to blend stakeholder feedback from the separate events into a coherent narrative. It was not possible, at the time of the VSE for stakeholders across all aspects of the theme to engage fully in the VSE process. However, there were strengths identified in a number of areas of activity and the stakeholder feedback was consistently positive when obtained.

Under the 'partnership' theme the service again was over ambitious, selecting several activities to reflect on as part of the VSE process:

- *Dr You*: a community library project designed to make available relevant and accessible literature on a range of additional support needs.
- A Nurture project to support children with attachment related support needs.
- Support to Adult Services staff working with young people with complex needs on transition from education.
- Developing team skills in supporting children and young people on the Autism Spectrum.

Whilst the partnership theme explored a wide range of service activity, the VSE process would have been strengthened if there had been clearer links between the selected activities and the evidence gathering process to support self-evaluation.

The CNESEPS worked hard to bring together an appropriate range of partners to work with them through the VSE process. Partners participating in the VSE included social workers, teachers, headteachers, a librarian and early year's staff. However, in a number of cases relevant partners had not been able to participate in the process. The service recognised that further and more regular engagement is required with a wider range of stakeholders including parents and young people. Partners who were involved in the VSE process were affirming and supportive of the service's work.

The two members of the CNESEPS chose not to take on a leadership role for each theme but to collaborate across both themes through the VSE. During the VSE process, the service recognised that allocating theme leads would have allowed for more progression in the learning from themed activities. In nearly all instances the activities were chaired by Educational Psychologists (EPs). There was no particular methodology or format used to structure the activities, however, as the week progressed there was a developing focus on the key questions and greater use of flip charts to record discussions. In a number of activities helpful clerical support was provided for minute taking. The PEP and EP met at the end of each day with the Education Scotland team to share their findings across activities.

Education Scotland staff recognised that a great deal of planning and effort had gone into the VSE process which included work on the documentation and with partners/stakeholders. However, a number of activities did not provide the service with the information required to deepen their self-evaluation, the service recognised this, and with support from Education Scotland reviewed and refined a number of themed activities. Through such joint evaluative activity, Education Scotland staff were able to provide strong support for the CNESEPS' self-evaluation processes and guide the evaluation of service performance and delivery.

3. What did HM Inspectors learn about the quality of self-evaluation in Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Educational Psychology Service?

Overall the CNESEPS commitment to self-evaluation for improvement is strong. However, robust and rigorous processes and procedures to support their strategic aspirations are at an early stage of development. They recognised that their initial self-evaluation and related documentation required significant re-thinking and worked on this collaboratively with Education Scotland colleagues throughout the VSE process. The range of activities across the VSE themes were of variable quality, in terms of their usefulness to the process. In a number of activities the focus was often too specific and it was difficult to formulate service action or next steps arising from the activities. CNESEPS colleagues, supported by the Education Scotland team, were able to extract a number of strengths and areas for improvement to support the development of next steps. There was evidence that EPs were starting to recognise the need to prioritise work and to differentiate between improvement priorities and ad hoc tasks. In too many instances, service requests or activities were not planned for, recorded or reviewed but delivered as a reactive response to an internal, education authority request.

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

CNESEPS, with the support of the Education Scotland team, identified a number of strengths and areas for improvement both in relation to the core VSE themes and the overall quality of their self-evaluation. While Education Scotland worked closely with CNESEPS after the VSE to help them to review their self-evaluation report the service recognises that further and more intensive work is still required. The CNESEPS current report has been published on their website (www.cne-siar.gov.uk).

Education Scotland and CNESEPS agreed on the following next steps to improve their self-evaluation processes further:

- Review the role and remit of the service, in consultation with stakeholders, ensuring the service is able to deliver a high quality psychological service designed to meet the needs of children and families within the resources of a small service team.
- Establish, with support a service wide self-evaluation process which uses high-quality data and comprehensive stakeholder feedback to establish deliverable service priorities and formally report on service strengths and areas for improvement.
- In collaboration with senior leaders, enhance the role of the CNESEPS in supporting the delivery of the key education priorities including pedagogy, literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.

- Develop service level agreements in collaboration with key partners to promote accountability, support commissioning and clarify joint expectations of service delivery.
- Improve the quality and rigour of data collation at project, school and education authority levels to help them improve their outcome evidence base, for example, the use of Insight information from inspections and importantly, the National Improvement Framework.

5. What is Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Educational Psychology Service's capacity for improvement?

The VSE has come at a time of strategic change, where there is an opportunity to relook at the focus and role of the service. The role of the CNESEPS, particularly in relation to key aspects of education policy including attainment, assessment, health and wellbeing and core learning and teaching could be extended. Closer links could be established with educational colleagues, particularly with senior leaders across the authority. The service priorities and deliverables are not yet sufficiently embedded within the wider Services for Children and importantly Education Service priorities. There is an important role for senior leaders in formally commissioning the CNESEPS to align with and support the delivery of key authority priorities. Senior leaders within the authority appreciated the opportunity provided by the VSE for further reflection about the wider role of the CNESEPS. They accepted that greater support and challenge was required from the senior leadership team directed at improving service performance. It was agreed, for example, that the education authority and CNESEPS now needed to consider how the service could be better engaged in the delivery of the national priorities.

There is a strong culture across the service of wanting to do a 'good job' and make a difference to the lives of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's children and families. There were positive examples of practice in relation to specific groups of learners, including those with additional support needs, and a number of focused projects including *Dr You*. As the VSE process progressed, the service engaged in honest and challenging dialogue with the Education Scotland team. Service team members, in their themed groups, demonstrated a move towards more focused and objective analysis of the evidence gathered during the VSE self-evaluation activities. The service understands that they need to look outwards to practice in other services and research to improve performance, as well as ensuring their voice and practice is better promoted across the authority. The service correctly identified the need to review its role and spread of activity in partnership with the senior leaders across the authority. They also recognised the need to work more systemically with schools and the authority to apply their psychological knowledge to a wider range of issues. The VSE process provided an opportunity for the service to revisit and reflect on their strategic contribution across the authority and consider how they could withdraw more from delivering services and interventions which other partners might be better placed to deliver.

The service responded well to the support they received from Education Scotland, engaging in high-quality professional dialogue. They recognise that further joint working with Education Scotland is required to improve the quality of their service self-evaluation and its alignment with Education and Children's Services. CNESEPS have agreed to work with Education Scotland to help develop their self-evaluation processes and actions from the VSE. This will be provided by one of Education Scotland's educational psychology associate assessors.

The education authority and CNESEPS recognise that service capacity requires close monitoring to ensure that the service meets its full statutory requirements on behalf of children, young people and families across the Western Isles. Education Scotland, through its Area Lead Officer for the authority, and Lead Officer for educational psychology will maintain contact with the service to monitor service capacity.

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Further information about the EPS VSE reports and self-evaluation can be found on the service's website www.cne-siar.gov.uk

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