



EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE

VALIDATED SELF-EVALUATION REPORT AND ACTION PLAN

Education and Social Care

JUNE 2015

BACKGROUND

The Moray Educational Psychology Service (EPS) took part in a week of Validated Self-Evaluation activities in conjunction with colleagues from Education Scotland during W/C May 11th 2015.

Moray EPS Approach to Continuous Improvement

The service's Continuous Improvement Policy was introduced in 2011. A revision of this document began in 2013 to take account of the Aspect Report on Educational Psychology Services in Scotland and to ensure evaluation data more explicitly supported the process of improvement planning.

The policy is ambitious in its scope and sets out a clear agenda for self-evaluation and continuous improvement.

A central tenet of the service's approach to continuous improvement is the utilisation of activities centred around themes. Based on evidence, the service first identifies an area which requires review and development. Principles of action research are then applied as the service undertakes a detailed needs analysis – the results of which are used to inform the service's improvement plan. Activities undertaken as part of the plan are then systematically evaluated.

Validated Self-Evaluation

Validated self-evaluation (VSE) supports the work of educational psychology services (EPS) by extending and challenging the service's own self-evaluation and affirming, or otherwise, their evaluation of strengths and areas for improvement.

The VSE process was led by the EPS in Moray and was supported by colleagues from a range of agencies. Colleagues from Education Scotland worked alongside the service and partners to provide the aforementioned support and challenge.

As part of the validated self-evaluation process, services are expected to focus on two themes:

- 1) Learning & Teaching
- 2) Partnership working

With regard to Moray's VSE, the first themed audit centred on the service's impact in relation to work that had, over a two year period, been undertaken in relation to identifying and supporting literacy difficulties. The second area focused on the service's work and impact in the early years. The service's work in relation to this area was, at the time of VSE, at the needs analysis phase.

The latter part of this report will describe the key themes arising from the VSE process and the action points subsequently agreed.

In the first instance, the report will offer an appraisal of the services overarching strengths.

OVER-ARCHING STRENGTHS

The VSE process not only affirmed but also extended the service's understanding of its overarching strengths. Some of these strengths are documented in this section with reference to the relevant quality indicators from the document Quality Management in Local Authority Educational Psychology Services.

QI 5.7 Delivery of key processes: Improving the Quality of Services

The service has a strong commitment to continuous improvement and is highly systematic in its use of self-evaluation data towards this end. The service's continuous improvement policy is robust and sets out a clear vision. Embedding the use of themed audits over the last two years has been important in ensuring self-evaluation data links clearly to action planning.

The VSE process was positive for the service because, in large part, it was not a discrete activity. It formed part of on-going and existing processes in relation to both themes.

The service utilises a range of tools to support self-evaluation and reflection and it consults a range of stakeholders. Underpinning the tools and processes is an open, reflective, respectful and transparent culture within the team. The service is motivated to improve outcomes for young people and their families.

The service has experienced significant periods of short-staffing and, despite this, self-evaluation remained core to what was done.

QI 5.4 Delivery of key processes: Professional Development & Training

Moray EPS offers a wide range of training opportunities for both school based staff and for the wider group of stakeholders. In recent years, a number of factors have impacted positively on the visibility and the impact of the training activity, including:

- The on-going development of a more strategic approach to training within the local authority
- EPS activity having established links to relevant local authority plans. The EPS contributes explicitly to the workforce development plans for both the Schools section and the ASN section of the Education and Social Care departments
- A tighter and more narrowly focused menu of training offered by the service

The impact of the training is noticeable in many areas including the following. Solution-oriented training has continued to support the running of assessment and planning meetings. A range of work has taken place around mindset / effective feedback. This has happened across contexts and across age ranges. The service is also able to demonstrate increasing impact as a result of literacy training. The impact in relation to literacy will be discussed in section 3.

QI 2.1 How well do we meet the needs of stakeholders?: Impact on children and young people.

Moray EPS recognises the need to keep outcomes for children, young people and their families central to its work and self-evaluation processes reflect this. Questions posed always keep the following in focus:

‘So what does that mean for the child? What difference has this made?’.

The service’s impact is evident in a number of areas. As a brief illustration, stakeholders report tangible differences for children who are transitioning where an EP is involved compared to when they are not. Practitioners report that they have developed better approaches to assessment and intervention as a result of working with the EP. The service’s web-site receives regular and positive feedback with many noting that mini-papers support practitioners to support young people.

During the VSE week, stakeholders also recognised the ‘chain of impact’ arising from EP work (i.e. improved outcomes are noted for young people as a primary impact but there are also secondary benefits in terms of generalising practice, saving time etc)

QI 9.2 Leadership & Direction

The service has a clear sense of purpose and direction. This is supported by a range of detailed guidance documents and clear processes for improvement planning. The service has well-embedded processes for supervision and expectations of EPs are high.

The Principal EP and the service more widely are well-respected. This is evidenced in the response the service had in the lead up to and during the VSE process. A range of stakeholders willingly supported the service during the week.

Leadership is distributed throughout the team and there is a strong sense of collegiate ownership in tasks and activities.

VALIDATED SELF-EVALUATION THEME 1: LITERACY

Activities to support the identification and addressing of literacy difficulties have formed part of the service's improvement plan in both sessions 13/14 and 14/15.

The service has undertaken a broad range of tasks as part of this action plan. Most notably, an 'Addressing Literacy Difficulties' framework was published in April 2014 and was revised and re-published in April 2015. In addition, a pilot training programme on Precision Teaching was developed, delivered and systematically evaluated.

The EPS viewed the Validated Self-Evaluation visit as an opportunity to explore the impact of this work in a more detailed and systematic manner and to support the service in forming Year 3 of the literacy difficulties action plan.

Over the course of the week, the service engaged in a wide range of activities with these aims in mind. Activities included focus groups, visits to schools, individual interviews with professionals and parents and reviews of case-files.

The following themes emerged from these activities:

1. The EPS has a significant impact in relation to mediating literacy difficulties. This impact stems from activities spanning the 5 core functions of the EP role. As a result of EP input, practitioners:
 - Have a better understanding of literacy development from the early years – encompassing both technical and higher order skills
 - Feel more confident in assessing for difficulties and using appropriate methods
 - Are making better use of more targeted / evidence based intervention - based on assessment
 - Have increased awareness of effective intervention strategies
 - Report being more able to reflect on their own practice
2. Whilst the quality of the work is high, there is a need for the work of the EPS to link to other activities related to literacy across the Community Planning Partnership
3. The EPS systematically evaluates training. This feedback is consistently positive. The service takes the views of participants seriously and is able to evidence improvements as a result of that feedback. That said, the VSE process generated several ideas about how the impact of EPS training could be further enhanced to ensure longer term impact
4. The service undertakes a range of activities in relation to broader aspects of learning, which extend beyond additional support needs. However, as things stand, the EPS work in relation to literacy is still largely focused on children with support needs. Stakeholders' understanding of broader aspects of the EPS role could be developed.

There is also a need to broaden the EPS role still further and beyond that of technical reading / writing – focusing on wider aspects of literacy including listening and talking and higher order skills. The service has a very strong basis on which to take this work forward.

5. Processes for reviewing the impact of casework are beginning to embed. However, this would benefit from further reflection and consideration.

Table 1 notes the high level action points arising for the literacy themed work.

Table 1: High level actions arising from VSE process

Theme	Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring literacy activity forms part of a coherent / strategic approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liaise with relevant Heads of Service with a view to establishing a literacy reference group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring that activities (particularly in relation to training) have a longer-term sustainability and impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise training to better support teachers with GTC / Professional Update requirements Revise evaluation procedures to take a longer-term view of impact Ensure training is tailored to the needs of particular audiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broaden the role of the EPS to encompass wider aspects of literacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liaise with relevant Heads of Service with a view to establishing a literacy reference group Liaise with relevant Education Support Officers with a view to supporting wider developments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve procedures for tracking and monitoring of progress including those from groups who might be deemed vulnerable (e.g. Looked After Children; those from low socio-economic backgrounds) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audit of use of review of involvement procedures particularly around measuring impact. Liaise with Head of Schools and Curriculum Development re wider role of EPS in relation to tracking monitoring. This is a priority as stated in the 2015-18 Schools' section's strategic plan

3. VALIDATED SELF-EVALUATION THEME 2: EARLY YEARS

The Educational Psychology Service in Moray recognises its potential to contribute significantly to early intervention agenda.

The work of the service ties in closely with many of the Key Change themes which form part of the Early Years Collaborative.

In recent months, the service has been engaged in a variety of activities including training on addressing emotional well-being, nurturing approaches in practice and on mindset / effective feedback.

Despite the provision of this work, evidence from team meetings etc suggested that EPs felt that their role isn't clearly defined, is under-utilised and is peripheral to the strategic focus within the authority. Role clarity has also been impacted upon by various changes at local and national level.

Prior to the VSE process beginning, the EPS had initiated a themed audit to explore its impact in the early years.

As a result of this audit four key themes emerged relating to:

- Partnership with parents
- Role clarity
- Multi-agency partnership
- Transition

The EPS decided to use the VSE process to build on what has been started, and to help inform an action plan which the service would look to implement in the 2015/16 academic session and beyond.

Over the course of the VSE week, the service engaged in a wide range of activities with these aims in mind. Activities included focus groups, visits to Early Learning and Childcare Centres, individual interviews with professionals and parents and reviews of case-files.

The following themes emerged from these activities:

1. The EPS has a significant impact in relation to early years' partnerships.
 - As previously noted, stakeholders report tangible differences for children who are transitioning where an EP is involved. This is particularly evident around the nursery to P1 transition.
 - As a result of solution-oriented training, the model for the pre-school assessment team (MIDAS) meetings has changed.
 - Partnership managers have reported that they are more cognisant of staff well-being following input.
 - Following a pilot project on the use of effective praise, qualitative differences were noted in the dialogue of staff and the engagement of children.

- Feedback from parents suggest they felt involved & listened to by their child's EP and that the EP helped shape their understanding of their child's needs
2. The EPS engages with a broad range of partners. The service is well respected. There remains a need for greater engagement with these partners to ensure clarity of role in absolute terms and in relation to other services
 3. EPS training activities are valued and positively evaluated. The development of an Early Years Strategy is an opportunity to embed the work within a clear framework. Work to clarify the EPS contribution to the strategy has already begun.
 4. The understanding of broader aspects of the EPS role could be developed. As things stand, the activities of the EPS are predominantly focused on children with additional support needs
 5. Processes for reviewing the impact of casework are beginning to embed. However, this would benefit from further reflection and consideration.

Table 2 documents the high level actions arising from the Early Years audit.

Table 2: High level actions arising from VSE process (Early Years)

Theme	Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure clarity of role among stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systematically engage with stakeholders to clarify role and procedures for accessing the service – particularly partnership playgroups, health colleagues and social work Engage with QIO (Early Years) and other relevant officers with a view to establishing a multi-disciplinary early years team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broaden the role of the EPS to encompass universal aspects of provision in the early years. This would orientate activities to help close the attainment gap. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with the Early Years and GIRFEC Partnership Officers to negotiate a training role for the EPS linked to the Early Years Strategy (e.g. cognitive education, supporting literacy development, solution-oriented training). Link with other stakeholders about the delivery of joint training
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve procedures for tracking and monitoring of progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audit of use of review of involvement procedures particularly around measuring impact. Provide support for EPS staff to implement revised processes

4 NEXT STEPS

What is denoted in Tables 1 & 2 represents high level action points. It is acknowledged that these actions need to be described in greater detail.

More detailed action planning as part the 2015/16 Strategic Improvement Plan will be finalised at an Improvement Planning Day in August. This is outwith the normal timescales but will allow for:

- a) Greater scrutiny of the VSE data
- b) Two team members to be part of that process following their return from maternity leave.
- c) The involvement of stakeholders who formed part of the VSE groups.