

**VALIDATED SELF-EVALUATION (VSE) EXERCISE: ARRANGEMENTS TO
EVALUATE THE EDUCATION FUNCTIONS OF ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise the Council about arrangements for the forthcoming validated self-evaluation (VSE) exercise in relation to the Council's education functions, to be carried out jointly by Education Scotland and Argyll and Bute Council. By education functions, we mean the functions above the level of individual establishment, ie the way in which the council manages these establishments.
- 1.2 The education functions of Argyll and Bute Council were the subject of very positive reports by HM Inspectorate of Education, published in June 2005, and June 2007. The last published report concluded that the authority had established a "very effective and rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluating performance in all of its educational establishments". A strong culture of continuous improvement was now clearly evident across all sectors of the service."
- 1.3 In accordance with the terms of Section 9 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000, HM Inspectorate of Education were charged with providing, when requested by Scottish Ministers, an external evaluation of the effectiveness of a local authority in exercising its functions in relation to the provision of education.
- 1.4 As members will be aware, HM Inspectorate of Education and Learning and Teaching Scotland merged to form a new national body named Education Scotland. The statutory duties placed on HMIE by the 2000 Act now fall to Education Scotland.
- 1.5 Over the past three years, HM Inspectorate of Education radically revised approaches to inspection in response to the expectations of the Crerar report about the need to reduce the cost and the burdens associated with the external scrutiny of public services. Related commitments and procedural changes have resulted in a much more streamlined approach to the inspection of schools and in

the decision to end the cycle of inspection of the education functions of local authorities (known as INEA 1 and INEA 2).

- 1.6 Now, the education functions of Scottish Councils are scrutinised by a process jointly carried out by a Council and Education Scotland. The starting point of this process will be a Council's own self-evaluation findings and outcomes. This process is known as validated self-evaluation (VSE).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Council:
- i). note the terms of this report
 - ii). note the background to the introduction of jointly managed 'validated self-evaluation' exercises as a replacement for external inspection exercises
 - iii). note the nature and scope of and the procedural arrangements for the forthcoming exercise in relation to Argyll and Bute Council's education functions.

3. DETAIL

What is validated self-evaluation?

- 3.1 Validated self-evaluation (VSE) is not an inspection. It is a voluntary process to support and challenge education authorities to improve its provision and outcomes for learners.
- 3.2 VSE is led by the education authority and involves a partnership in which Education Scotland works alongside the authority and applies its knowledge of educational delivery and expertise in evaluation. The purpose of this is to support and challenge the education authority's own self-evaluation, and so affirm and strengthen outcomes for learners.
- 3.3 VSE acknowledges that the responsibility for improving services and outcomes lies with the education authority. It recognises that self-evaluation is becoming well embedded across the Scottish educational system and that high quality evaluation can lead to continuous improvement for learners and the achievement of excellence in practice and provision.
- 3.4. The stages and timescales for the VSE exercise in Argyll and Bute Council, are shown in 3.5
- 3.5 **Stage 1: Initial engagement, ongoing to October 2012**

The District Inspector and Education Scotland Lead Facilitator discuss and agree the shape of the VSE for the particular authority. They then work with the authority to brief staff and key stakeholders, and undertake preparatory work for the next phases.

Stage 2: Working together on self-evaluation, w/b 1st October 2012

Education Scotland provides a team to work alongside authority staff with the purpose of improving the quality of the education authority's self-evaluation.

Stage 3: Stocktaking, mid-October 2012

Education Scotland and the authority discuss the self-evaluation process and the self-evaluation outcomes. They then agree what activity requires to happen next.

Stage 4: Working together on matters arising, w/b 26th November 2012

Education Scotland works with the authority to validate the outcomes of self-evaluation undertaking further appropriate evaluative activities as necessary.

Stage 5: Reporting phase, probably into 2013

Education Scotland and the authority will jointly prepare a public report which focuses on improvement.

3.6 There are three mandatory areas that are assessed in every VSE:

- § Improvements in performance
- § Impact on learners
- § Capacity for improvement

The other areas are selected by the authority and these are:

- § Positive Starts (Early Years)
Positive Starts, the vision for the Early Years Service recognises that every child should have access to the best possible learning and healthcare service that meets individual needs and promote resilience and wellbeing. The Service is committed to creating a system and climate whereby every child can fulfil his or her potential as a successful learner, confident individual, effective contributor and responsible citizen.
- § Opportunities for All (16+ Learning Choices)
Opportunities for All recognises each young person as an individual with an entitlement to access the qualifications, activities and experiences that best equip them to fulfil their full potential. Young people need to be able

to move into positive and sustained destinations. In order for them to do so, they must have the opportunity to develop the skills and capabilities that will enable them to contribute fully to their families, their local communities and to the Scottish economy.

§ Support to Schools (School Review)

School Review has been a central part of the quality assurance process within Argyll and Bute Council's education processes. A review of the process in 2010 acknowledged self-evaluation as a core professional skill. This review also reflected changes in the HMI inspection processes. In addition it was recognised that best practice would involve a wider range of staff to be involved in the review process. The outcome of this review was the development of a school review process based on partnership working and focussed on the schools self-evaluation.

§ Literacy

Literacy has been a prominent theme throughout the Education Services planning documents over the last five years, in line with the implementation of Curriculum of Excellence. Through careful consideration of the underlying capabilities on which the four key literacy skills are based, Argyll and Bute has put in place a range of initiatives, documentation and training to enhance learning and teaching.

- 3.7 Officers of Education Scotland will work closely with staff to consider and support approaches to self-evaluation and service improvement. Following that initial collaboration, the Council will be asked to submit a self-evaluation document. The nature and extent of engagement activities will be determined with Education Scotland staff following detailed consideration of the completed self-evaluation and agreement about tasks to be undertaken jointly in respect of service improvement priorities.
- 3.8 It should be noted that there is a strong commitment within Education Scotland to ensure that the nature and extent of VSE activities take proportionate account of the self-evaluation evidence and documentation provided by the Council. VSE, as indicated above, is not an inspection exercise; its purpose is to validate or affirm, or otherwise, the authority's own self-evaluation.
- 3.9 Arrangements to be made for joint development and improvement tasks will involve meetings with officers, elected members and stakeholders and, as a matter of course, explore current improvement commitments and the outcomes and impacts of these commitments.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 At the conclusion of the VSE process, Education Scotland will work closely with Council officers to prepare and agree a report on the quality of self-evaluation in the authority. The VSE report will not provide ratings or evaluations on the previous HMIe six point scale. The report must be robust, and give an overall view of the quality of the work of the authority, determined through their self-evaluation. The main purpose of a VSE report is to support and challenge the education authority to secure continuous improvement across the range of its functions.

5. IMPLICATIONS

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------|---|
| 5.1 | Policy: | None |
| 5.2 | Financial: | None |
| 5.3 | Personnel: | None |
| 5.4 | Equal Opportunities: | None |
| 5.5 | Legal: | None |
| 5.6 | Risk: | There would be reputational risks to the Council arising from a negative VSE exercise |
| 5.7 | Customer Service | None |

Cleland Sneddon
Executive Director of Community Services
Argyll and Bute Council
September 2012

For further information contact: Carol Evans, Head of Education