

ANGUS COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE – 21 APRIL 2011

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE: RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

ABSTRACT:

The purpose of this report is to advise the Education Committee of the range of research and evaluation activity undertaken by the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) and its impact on service users including parents, children and young people, and staff in Angus.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 It is recommended that the Education Committee:

- (i) note the terms of this report
- (ii) note the range of research and evaluation being undertaken by the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) in Angus Council
- (iii) note the conclusions of the HMIE national aspect report on the importance of the research function of Educational Psychology Services (EPS) in Scotland

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Educational Psychology Services (EPS) in Scotland provide five core services namely consultation, assessment, intervention, training and research (Currie 2002).

2.2 As outlined in the Angus EPS Mission Statement, the aim is to provide and deliver services of the highest quality through a commitment to conduct research projects to inform local policy and practice.

2.3 Following the HMIE inspection of Angus EPS in June 2009, the service's delivery of key processes in the area of research and strategic development, was evaluated as good.

2.4 Given staff shortages at the time of the inspection, the research function of the service remained under-developed. However, with the successful appointment of new EPs and a full staffing complement, it was possible to re-develop the research function of the EPS in Angus.

2.5 Within the EPS Improvement Plan (2009-11), one of the priority areas was to promote EPS research and evaluation work by using the research skills of EPs to take forward corporate priorities and developing a portfolio of EPS research to disseminate to stakeholders and the wider professional community.

2.6 In order to realise this, an EPS Research Strategy was developed in May 2010 and a Research and Evaluation Group was established to consider research proposals including ethical scrutiny against British Psychological Service guidelines. In addition, all EPs were given protected time to carry out the core functions of research and evaluation.

2.7 As a result of the above arrangements and enabled by a full staffing complement, Angus EPS has been able to respond to local and national priorities and successfully engage in the following range of research and evaluation activity.

3. CURRENT POSITION

3.1 The following paragraphs provide an overview of recent and current research activity.

3.2 ***The Educational Inclusion of Looked After Children (March 2011)***
What are the factors that promote the inclusion of Looked After Children in education?

Rationale: The publication *'Learning with Care: the Education of Children Looked After Away from Home by Local Authorities'* (HMIE), stated that research evidence indicates an educational disadvantage for looked after children (LAC), extending across attainment and achievement levels. However, there are some looked after children who do experience educational success. The purpose of this research is to identify what works to support the inclusion of looked after children in education.

Relevance: This research links with the local and national priority of supporting the educational needs of looked after children and minimising the disadvantages that can be present for this population. It also supports the 'Angus Corporate Parenting Strategy' and 'Getting it Right for Every Child in Angus'.

Methodology: Two EPs will gather the views of key stakeholders including: children and young people who are or have been looked after; parents and guardians of looked after children; designated managers in schools; service managers within Social Work and Health; and members of the Additional Support Needs team. These will be analysed using an Activity Theory framework which compares themes and trends in qualitative data.

Expected outcomes/impact: Identifying positive factors in relation to the inclusion of this population will support a preventative approach to meeting the needs of looked after children in education. One outcome of this may be an enhanced understanding of what works and a reduction in the exclusion rates of looked after children across Angus.

3.3 **Exclusions Research (March 2011)**

Rationale: One secondary school in Angus is currently reviewing its exclusion procedures and processes with a view to reducing exclusion rates and promoting earlier intervention and prevention of exclusions. The purpose of this research is to gather the views of staff, pupils and parents on their understanding of current exclusion procedures and processes and to consider what changes may be necessary and what alternatives could be put in place to ensure a focus on inclusion within the school.

Relevance: New draft national guidance, *'Included, engaged and involved Part 2: a positive approach to managing school exclusions'* was issued in October 2010 to build on Part 1 (Dec 2007) which focused on improving attendance at schools. Other national developments include a Curriculum for Excellence and the Getting It Right for Every Child agenda, which promotes alternatives to exclusion through greater multi-agency collaboration. In secondary schools, although Angus figures were below the national average, exclusions in 2009 were higher than the comparator authority group average.

Methodology: Semi-structured interviews are being carried out within school with a random sample of staff of different promotional levels and experiences, a sample of pupils who have been excluded on one or two occasions, and a sample of pupils who have been excluded frequently. A control group of pupils will be interviewed within a focus group possibly during a Pupil Council session. Letters have also been sent out to the parents/carers of those pupils who have been interviewed asking if they would be willing to participate in a phone interview with the researchers.

Expected outcomes/impact: The perspectives of pupils, parents and staff will inform school practice, as well as the current revision of the Angus exclusion guidance for HTs being undertaken by the Additional Support Needs Joint Action Group.

3.4 **Identifying Student and Staff Development Needs at Angus College (February 2011)**

Rationale: Angus College has identified that the current economic climate has resulted in a different population of students enrolling in their courses. Consequently the learning and social/emotional needs the young people present with have changed. This in turn affects the continued professional development (CPD) needs of Angus College staff. Thus, the purpose of the research is to identify the current student and staff development needs and highlight any issues around the recruitment, retention and support of students with additional support needs

Relevance: By supporting Angus College to identify and meet the needs of their students, this research is contributing to the 16+ Learning Choices and More Choices, More Chances agenda by increasing the number of young people to have access to and sustain their positive destination. This research will also contribute to the Senior Phase of Curriculum for Excellence by improving the transition of young people from secondary school to this post school provision.

Methodology: An investigative approach is currently being undertaken within one department of Angus College, with findings to inform recommendations for other departments across the whole college. A range of methods is being employed including class observations, and semi-structured interviews with college management, teaching staff, team leaders from all departments linked with this team, Angus Secondary School staff and college students. Analysis of school links with the college, the application processes, personal development programmes and college policies and guidelines will also be reviewed.

Expected Outcomes and Impact: The research will be of interest to both the College and Education Directorate. It is hoped that the research and subsequent recommendations will inform practice for school staff and college staff. The aim is to improve outcomes for young people in Angus by enhancing their access to, and their sustained positive destination, at Angus College.

3.5 ***Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to research participants' experience of a local Parents' Support Group (October 2010)***

Rationale: The research aimed to identify how successfully the group experience matched parental expectations, the strengths and shortfalls, and future developments of the parent support group.

Relevance: Nationally, this research links to the Early Years Framework (2008) aims of supporting parents as part of their communities and National Priorities 3 (Inclusion and Equality) and 4 (Values and Citizenship); and the vision that Scotland's children and carers are respected and responsible, nurtured and included. Locally, Corporate Objective 3 (Promote Learning for All Ages and Ability) and the Education Service's commitment to working co-operatively are both met.

Methodology: Three semi-structured interviews were carried out, and analysed following an IPA approach which aims to investigate the experience of the participants and understand their personal perspective in an in-depth manner.

Expected outcomes/impact: The findings of this research indicate key themes for consideration for future parent support groups:

- they are a useful forum for information sharing
- participation of local professionals known to parents was key to initial attendance and creating a positive group atmosphere
- parents had the opportunity to meet others in similar situations
- having different parents attending week to week, can be viewed positively in that a range of people are given the opportunity to benefit, but also inconsistent attendance was a barrier to parents developing relationships

In addition to the range of research projects currently being undertaken, the Educational Psychology Service has also been engaged in a number of evaluations including:

3.6 ***Evaluating the Impact of Co-operative Learning in Angus Schools (2010-2011)***

Rationale: Angus Council invested in Co-operative Learning training for all schools across the authority to support the Curriculum for Excellence and improve how teachers teach and pupils learn. Co-operative Learning is a powerful methodology which, if practised confidently, can assist teachers to create the type of learning environment needed to deliver a practical skills-based curriculum with a clear focus on well considered learning outcomes (Evaluation Report, 2011). A Review Team was established in June 2010 to evaluate the impact of the use of Co-operative Learning methodologies on pupils, staff and parents. The Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP) and Assistant Psychologist (AP) were members of the Review Team.

Relevance: Co-operative Learning approaches link strongly with the four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence as well as the thinking skills highlighted in the 'How Good is our School: the Journey to Excellence' report (2006). National Priorities 1, 2, 4 and 5 are also achieved through this approach.

Methodology: The PEP and AP worked jointly with EDS colleagues to establish the most effective evaluation methodology. The evaluation carried out by the Review Team gathered information in the following ways:

- A sample of thirty-two focus schools was identified including all eight secondary schools and a range of small, medium and large primary schools from each of the school clusters
- Semi-structured interviews were held with members of School Management Teams
- Semi-structured interviews were held with Co-operative Learning Supporters
- Focus groups were held with a sample of P1-P3 pupils
- A sample of P4-P7s completed a questionnaire on Glow
- A sample of S1-S6 pupils completed a questionnaire on Glow
- All parents in the sample were issued with a questionnaire to return to their school for inclusion in the survey.
- All teachers within the sample schools, who had attended a Co-operative Learning Academy, were to complete an online questionnaire on Glow.

Outcomes/impact: The impact of Co-operative Learning on teacher practice was found to be considerable. Pupils enjoyed co-operative learning activities and reported on them as positive experiences, especially in upper secondary. The full report is available at <http://intranet/Departments/Education/Documents/The%20Impact%20of%20Cooperative%20Learning%20on%20Pupils%Staff%20and%20Parents.pdf>

3.7 **Evaluation of the Angus S4 "On2FEET" Programme (2009-2010)**

Rationale: The aim of the On2FEET (On to Future Education, Employment and Training) programme is to increase the proportion of school leavers going to positive destinations after school. Each school identified an On2FEET Mentor and a Depute Head Teacher (DHT) who in turn, identified fifteen S4 pupils who may require additional support in the transition from school into positive destinations. The evaluation of the programme has been led by the Educational Psychology Service since the pilot of On2Feet in 2006/07.

Relevance: Under the Scottish Government's More Choices, More Chances agenda, funding was again made available to each secondary school in Angus during session 2009 - 2010 for the On2FEET programme.

Methodology: The evaluation of the 2009 - 2010 On2FEET programme was developed and implemented by two members of the Educational Development Service, three members of the Educational Psychology Service, one Careers Adviser from Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and an On2FEET Mentor. A series of focus groups were held with On2FEET pupils in each of the eight Angus secondary schools. Questionnaires were also devised for On2FEET Mentors, school Careers Advisers and senior management for each school.

Outcomes/impact: An evaluation report was written by the two Educational Psychologists and Assistant Psychologist. Recommendations were made to address themes such as pupil involvement, selection, communication and time allocation.

3.8 Future evaluations which the Educational Psychology Service has been commissioned to undertake include:

- An evaluation of the impact of 'Getting it Right for Every Child In Angus'
- An evaluation on the effectiveness of active learning in Angus' Extended Support Provision
- An evaluation of the 'Safe not Scared' domestic abuse awareness raising materials in Angus schools

4. SELF-EVALUATION

4.1 One of the main roles of the research and evaluation group is to systematically evaluate and quality assure the current levels of EPS performance on all aspects of its work through consultation with the service's key stakeholders.

4.2 ***An Evaluation of Post School Psychological Services (2008-2009)***

"Post school psychology has so much potential, when it happens it's very effective. There just needs to be more of it."

Rationale: Following recommendations from the Beattie Committee Report (1999) which identified a need for "continued access to psychological service support for young people aged 16-24 with additional support needs", Angus Educational Psychology Service has been planning and delivering Post School Psychological Services (PSPS) at a strategic level. As part of the 2008/09 Partnership Group improvement plan within the EPS, it was agreed that an evaluation of the impact of PSPS would be carried out to help maintain continuous improvement and inform national PSPS developments. At the time, Angus was the first authority in Scotland to evaluate PSPS in this way.

Methodology: Two EPs and one Assistant Psychologist evaluated the impact of direct service delivery to post school providers using questionnaires and follow-up interviews.

Outcomes/Impact: The evaluation found that the input of PSPS helped improve practice, develop partnerships and meet training needs of post-school providers. Feedback also indicated an increased interest in EPS research services which in turn led to the commissioning of the current research at Angus College, as outlined earlier.

4.3 **Evaluation of EPS services to children and young people**

"The difference it made to me was that I feel more confident about myself and able to do more."

Evaluations demonstrate that children and young people are happy with the services they receive from EPS and can identify how input from the psychologist has made an impact on their lives. Young people show appreciation for being listened to and for gaining a greater understanding of themselves and how to manage their difficulties.

4.4 **Evaluation of EPS services to parents**

<http://sr3county2k304/staffnet/Services/EPS/Leaflets/Parent%20Survey.pdf>

"The EP helped us confirm our child's needs and also get the support he needed at school. As parents we have always been kept involved."

Evaluations show that parents appreciate the respect shown and support offered by the psychologist, as well as their views being sought in decisions that affect their child. Parents feel that the Educational Psychology Service contributes to achieving better outcomes for their children and themselves.

4.5 **Evaluation of EPS core services to schools**

<http://sr3county2k304/staffnet/Services/EPS/Leaflets/Ser%20Del%20to%20Schs%20Core%20Functions.pdf>

"The psychologist is an active listener, allowing the individual to lead the conversation, scaffolding a route to a possible resolution. Discussion with our EP is always fruitful."

Evaluations show that school staff in Angus value the support and challenge offered by the educational psychologist and recognise the EP's contribution to building capacity in schools.

5. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Recommendations from the March 2011 report, *'Educational Psychology in Scotland: making a difference'*, an HMle aspect report on the findings of inspections of local authority educational psychology services 2006-10, included the following aspects for improvement:

'The research function of educational psychology services could contribute more to improving outcomes for children and young people. This applies in particular to the priorities selected for research and the use that is made of the results of research to inform policy and practice' and 'The research function in most EPS should be strengthened to enhance its contribution to practice and, for example, evaluate new initiatives and projects'.

Given the research and evaluation work currently being undertaken by the Educational Psychology Service in Angus, the service is now well placed to meet these national recommendations. The particular background, training and skills of educational psychologists can add value to the work of the Education Department and Angus Council by influencing policy development and educational practice from evidence based research.

- 5.2 Angus EPS will continue to promote its research and evaluation activity with schools and other stakeholders and to disseminate findings via VIEW, the EPS website (<http://sr3county2k304/staffnet/Services/EPS>) and professional journals. Indeed, one of our current EPs has recently had a research article published and another is awaiting publication of her PhD research in a prominent peer-referenced journal.

Ref: Turner, S., Randall, L. & Mohammed, A. (2010). 'Doing an effective job? Measuring the impact of casework'. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 26 (4), p.313-329

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising from the terms of this report.

7. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no Human Rights implications arising from the consideration of this report.

8. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The issues dealt with in this Report have been the subject of consideration from an equalities perspective. An [equalities impact assessment](#) is not required.

9. SINGLE OUTCOME AGREEMENT

- 9.1 This report contributes to the following local outcomes contained within the Angus Single Outcome Agreement:

- We are better educated, more skilled and more successful, renowned for our research and innovation (National Outcome 3)
- Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs (National Outcome 15)

10. CONSULTATION

- 10.1 The Chief Executive, Director of Corporate Services, Head of Finance and Head of Law and Administration have been consulted in the preparation of this report

**NEIL LOGUE
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION**

NOTE: No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

ED/NL/SRD