

Item 2 – ‘Future C4EO validated local practice’

2.1 Guide to validating your local practice:
from concept to validation



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™ **C4EO** Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services

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1. Introduction

This guide describes the thinking and process stages for organisations and individuals wishing to examine and evaluate their local practice with a view to its validation. The focus is on things to think about as you plan and implement your practice, intervention or service redesign. Those likely to be interested in the validation process will include children and young people's services in local authorities; partner agencies such as the NHS, police, fire and rescue services; voluntary organisations and charitable foundations; as well as schools, academies and colleges.

The support offered by the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO) to help you achieve this is explained, along with the various options available to those wishing to take their local practice through the C4EO validated local practice process.

This document forms one of two guides on the complete C4EO validation process. It should be read in conjunction with *Validated Local Practice: how to run a robust validation process* (C4EO, 2012a), which offers more detail on developing and implementing validation processes and options on how C4EO can support you in this.

Background to C4EO

C4EO was established in 2008 and rapidly became a best practice hub for 'what works' in children's services. It is used by local authorities across England, as well as other organisations such as those in the third sector.

C4EO aims to help those working in children's services improve the life chances of all children and young people and, in particular, those that are the most vulnerable.

C4EO works with local services, drawing on expert practitioners recruited on a part-time basis from across the children's sector and who have a sound understanding of the current issues facing the sector. A key part of the training received by these expert practitioners is focused on Outcomes-Based Accountability (OBA), see Friedman (2005). Experts and representatives from academic, research and other institutions have also supported C4EO's work to ensure that improving outcomes for children, young people and their families is based on the best available evidence.

C4EO has developed a range of products and support services to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families. Excellence in local practice, combined with national research and data about 'what works' has been gathered in one place. C4EO shares this evidence and the best of local practice with all those who work with and for children and young people and provides practical 'hands on support' to help local areas make full use of this evidence.

C4EO's services are commissioned by a wide range of organisations including the Department for Education; the Children's Improvement Board, involving the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), the Local Government Association (LGA), and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE); individual or regional groupings of

local authorities; social enterprises and charitable foundations; local consortia (of schools, GPs etc); and/or voluntary and community organisations.

C4EO validated local practice – why use?

In the current economic climate, and against the background of performance and results-based accountability, there is an increasing need for organisations (including local authorities, their partner agencies, charitable foundations etc) to demonstrate that key performance indicators have been met and that they have delivered value for money. In addition, third sector organisations are under increasing pressure to show that their work is having an impact in order for them to gain funding.

In this context, C4EO has developed a robust system for assessing the effectiveness of local practice submitted for evaluation under its validated local practice process. Working across the public, private, voluntary and community sectors, C4EO has built up a large evidence bank of practice examples from the experience of frontline service provision, and these validated examples of practice ‘of what works’ are shared to help those working in the sector in the pursuit of excellence and to inspire further good practice across the regions.

The benefits of validating your practice with C4EO

The C4EO validation process provides a system which is a benchmark of value, excellence and recognition. C4EO can offer you an **objective evaluation** of your work conducted by peer professionals and experts in the field. Successful organisations can then confidently promote the fact that their local practice has been validated through a **nationally recognised, objective** and **rigorous** scrutiny process.

Using the C4EO system will provide you with:

- confidence in using a tried and tested validation process that has been backed by government
- access to a robust and objective process, supported by specially trained experts and fellow practitioners
- tools to help you in your self evaluation
- peer to peer advice, if required
- high quality judgement and feedback
- use of the C4EO brand logo/kitemark, which is instantly recognised and equated with excellence.

The next sections provide a framework to help you to think through and evidence your journey to validation.

C4EO can offer you support throughout the whole process of evidencing the impact of your practice or intervention. See section six for further details on the resources and options available to you.

2. Concept: what are you trying to achieve?

It is at the 'ideas' phase where most of the planning happens and it is important to clear space in your timetable to do this properly. At concept stage, it is imperative to clearly define:

- **What** you are trying to achieve
- **Why** you are doing it
- **How** you will do it and how you will measure the impact on children and young people.

In determining **what** you are trying to achieve and **why**, you will need to think carefully about:

- your aims and objectives – what you are actually aiming to do
- why you need to do what you are planning to do
- what need this will satisfy
- who you are targeting/who your customers are and why (e.g. looked after children, disadvantaged families, young people not in education, employment or training)
- what you already know and don't know and whether there are any gaps in your knowledge base (e.g. any relevant local contextual information, service history and background information and research evidence)
- whether what you are intending to do will be a pilot programme or a main programme.

In identifying **how** you will do what you are intending to do and how you will assess how much of what you set out to do you have actually achieved, you will need to be clear about:

- the project team – who will be responsible for what, when and how
- how the project will be resourced and financed
- how you will measure impact and/or learning
- whether you can identify a discrete area for measurement and/or learning
- how the intended outcomes for the target group will be **Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely (SMART)**
- the measurement tool/intervention you will use
- whether any training will be necessary (and in what)
- the wider value/benefit of the project to your authority/organisation or other partners
- the benefits to service users other than the direct target audience for the initiative and to other potential beneficiaries.

You will also need to be clear about your key stakeholders and identify those from whom you will need backing or support, such as your Director of Children's Services, Head of Service and/or Lead Member.

3. Planning: checklist for planning your project

In planning your project it is helpful to have a point of reference of things to check or remember. A checklist for some of the things you will need to help you in doing this is provided below.

Project plan

- Has a project plan been compiled?
- Are you clear about the lines of accountability - who is responsible for what?
- Have you conducted a risk assessment?
- Do you have a 'Plan B'?

General points to check

- What is the timeframe? Is it achievable?
- Do you have enough resource - for example, staffing, budget, time?
- What are the critical success factors?
- How will you link data to your aims and objectives and to your previously defined 'measurables' (concept stage)?
- What are the likely obstacles and challenges to successful implementation e.g. culture, attitudes, staffing?
- Have you managed to get the key partners/influencers/stakeholders on board and who else might help or influence?

Specifics - measurement and evaluation

- What type of measurement do you have in place - qualitative and/or quantitative?
- Do you have baseline data and how will you ensure pre- and post- intervention data collection; how will this happen and is it possible?
- Will you need to commission an external evaluation report?
- Have you clearly defined the cohort and what will be the likely cohort size? Is this enough to make the results reliable?
- Will there be a carefully matched comparison group (or control group - the 'gold standard' measure)?
- Do you have any case studies you could use?

Note on quantitative measurement

Quantitative measurement can be in the form of a simple feedback questionnaire completed, for example, by parents after attending a parenting programme. It is important to conduct before and after questionnaire surveys with the same cohort in order to measure the impact your practice or intervention has made. Ideally, objective, standardised measurement tools should be used in order to give robust and reliable results.

4. Implementation/operation: all systems go

With the concept and planning stages completed, you are now ready for action. The keys to successful implementation include:

- Excellent project management - keeping to the project plan, milestones, deadlines and budget.
- Understanding the importance of communication and ensuring that all involved understand how their role fits into the whole.
- Ensuring the continual 'buy in' of all involved.
- The (continued) engagement of the required sample/cohort/target population.
- Consistent and accurate recording/data collection.
- Robust and secure data and information storage.
- Understanding the importance of quality assurance.

5. Interpreting the evidence: finding your way through the maze

Having seen your project through from concept to implementation, the next step can prove to be the hardest – interpreting the results and understanding how your service is making a difference to the lives of children, young people and their families.

In essence, when interpreting your results, there are three types of questions you need to ask (C4EO, 2012b):

- **How much** have we done?
- **How well** have we done it?
- **What difference have we made** (to the lives of the children, young people and their families)?

Some further questions you will need to ask yourself are:

- What do the results mean? What do they tell us?
- Have we measured what we wanted to measure?
- Can we link our data to clear outcomes for the children and/or young people?
- Are there any unintended benefits?

The sort of evidence you are likely to have collected to help in this might include:

- An internal or external evaluation.
- Clearly stated outcomes for children and young people with identified performance measures and data.
- Quantitative and/or qualitative evidence of the journey of improvement, for example, 'before and after' data.
- The views of children and young people or other service users or service beneficiaries/the target group (qualitative feedback).
- The views of practitioners, professionals and/or other stakeholders involved in providing the service (qualitative feedback).
- Quantitative (and/or qualitative) evidence of sustained progress for the cohort after a stated period, for example, six months or one year.

This data may also help you and others to evaluate whether the intervention offers value for money.

For additional support to help you on your journey see the free C4EO [Outcomes-Based Accountability \(OBA\) tool](#) and other [online resources](#).

6. C4EO evaluation: the final test

C4EO's knowledge bank of emerging, promising and validated local practice has been built up and developed since 2008 and the expertise of C4EO trained staff can assist you in your path to validation. There are different ways that C4EO can offer support in helping you to evaluate the impact of your local practice intervention. You can:

- Use the **free** resources and examples of already validated practice on the [C4EO website](#).
- Complete the validation forms available on the C4EO website and submit your local practice example to us for **validation at a C4EO panel**.
- Request 'local practice' support from **C4EO Sector Specialists** at any point from project conception through to interpretation and evaluation.
- Develop your **own local validation process by purchasing the right to use the C4EO brand and process**.

Use of free C4EO resources

C4EO works closely with the Children's Improvement Board and the Association of Directors of Children's Services to support individual local authorities and/or Local Safeguarding Children's Boards or any other organisation that has the shared aim of improving children's outcomes. C4EO also collaborates with a wide range of partners from across the public, private, community and third sector to offer the best available evidence, research and effective practice of 'what works' to help build capacity in local areas.

The C4EO website provides a range of free resources including tools for Outcomes-Based Accountability (OBA); interactive ELearning tools that present the main findings from C4EO research in a user-friendly way; case studies of how local services are being delivered using innovative funding mechanisms; interactive maps and data; the C4EO cost-effectiveness model and accompanying tools and templates, including the two documents listed below; and a wide range of examples of practice evaluated by C4EO.

Delivering Children's Services in the UK and Other Parts of the World

C4EO has also published an international rapid review titled *Delivering Children's Services in the UK and Other Parts of the World* which covers the policy context for delivering children's services in the UK and other countries. This review aims to articulate the variety of models for children's services delivery that exist internationally and places these in the context of current UK policy and practice.

Can I Afford To? Can I Afford Not To? (2011)

This document asks: what are the most effective ways to deliver services for all our children and young people and, in particular, for our most vulnerable and disadvantaged children or their families? How can we secure services as efficiently as possible, in the context of reducing resources?

Grasping the Nettle: Early Intervention for Children, Families and Communities (Executive Summary) (2011)

This practice guide highlights the challenges and opportunities in supporting children, families and communities through early intervention, based on effective local, national and international practice.

Submitting your example to a C4EO validation panel

In C4EO's validated local practice process, each submission of local practice is rigorously evaluated by a validation panel against a set of robust criteria.

C4EO offers an objective evaluation of practice examples against three levels of validation - full validation, promising practice and emerging practice, conducted by peer professionals and experts in the field. Known as C4EO Sector Specialists, these experts are supported in the C4EO validation process by a C4EO Assessor who ensures the whole process is run correctly and the C4EO validation systems applied rigorously. The C4EO Assessor is also responsible for quality assurance. She attends the validation panel as an observer and ensures an accurate reflection of the panel judgements is confirmed to submitters. So, if you submit your practice example to C4EO and it is successful at one of our panels, you can confidently promote the fact that your local practice has been validated through a **nationally recognised, objective** and **rigorous** scrutiny process.

If you would like to make a submission for validation by a C4EO validation panel, submission forms can be completed [online](#), by downloading the relevant submission template found on the [Local Practice Examples](#) page of the C4EO website or by contacting the C4EO team at c4eo@nfer.ac.uk. If you would like to discuss your submission first, then please call Monica Hetherington, Operational Manager – VLP on 01753 637178 or email contactus@C4EO.org.uk.

Once you have gathered your material and evidence together to submit a practice example for C4EO validation, you may find it helpful to use the 10-point checklist below to ensure you provide the essential information the panel members will need.

10-point checklist: essential information to include in your submission

1. Provide enough contextual background about your practice example to give a complete picture of the local context. Clearly identify why the practice was needed. Is your example based on national or local research evidence? Has the practice been identified as a specific need in other work your authority or organisation has conducted?
2. State clearly the aim of the project/practice/intervention and its goal/purpose. Identify your rationale and intended measurable outcomes.
3. Tell the story – what was done and why; describe the step by step process so that it can be of use to others.
4. State who the intervention was for (providing numbers of participating children, young people or families).
5. Describe who else was involved, for example, other stakeholders and agencies.

6. Identify any barriers/issues and show how these were overcome; describe what you learnt from this.
7. Present your evidence of impact (absolute numbers and percentages) and outcomes for children, young people and their families. If you are submitting under 'emerging practice' (service redesigns/major transformations), describe what you plan to do and provide your timelines. Evidence of impact for submissions going through the full validation process might come from:
 - i. internal or external reviews
 - ii. children or parent feedback surveys
 - iii. other surveys/data
 - iv. external evaluations
 - v. evidence from Ofsted inspections or similar.
8. Provide details of costs and funding plus plans and timelines for these. Demonstrate that your practice provides value for money. Have you conducted a cost-benefit analysis? Can you demonstrate that long-term impact outweighs costs or that there are cost savings? The C4EO website offers access to a free cost-effectiveness tool along with support from a team of finance specialists equipped with the latest tools to help develop effective strategies for success.
9. State if you think your practice could be replicated elsewhere and whether others could use it? Has the practice already been replicated elsewhere in your own or other authorities, for example? Describe any measures you have in place to ensure its sustainability.
10. Provide any learning points/advice or tips for others wishing to follow your example.

Over the whole process of evidencing your practice, C4EO can offer the following essential elements:

- trusted, credible support delivered by real experts
- bespoke support, tailored to local needs
- confidential peer challenge, insight and positive support
- support from C4EO colleagues experienced in the C4EO local validation process in compiling local practice submissions
- support in using the C4EO cost effectiveness model
- publishing and dissemination networks to help you raise the profile of your work.

Support from C4EO Sector Specialists

C4EO offers a sector-led Tailored Support Service which provides practical 'hands-on' support and challenge to build capacity and improve outcomes at the frontline of local service provision. C4EO Sector Specialists can help you in your journey to evidence your local practice by, for example, providing advice and support as you develop your practice; providing support as you develop ways of evaluating your impact; or helping you should you wish to complete and submit the C4EO validated local practice forms to evaluate your progress.

C4EO's Sector Specialists who are expert practitioners recruited from education and children's services, health, police, schools, youth and the voluntary sector. They are trained to use Outcomes-Based Accountability (OBA) to support multi-disciplinary working, joint commissioning and performance management.

Contact us on 020 7843 6358 or contactus@C4EO.org.uk to discuss further how we might help you.

Using the C4EO brand to run your own validation panel

C4EO can also provide support to individual local authorities, other organisations or a regional group network of LAs, for example, who may decide to run their own validation process using the C4EO brand. To support this work, C4EO has published a parallel manual *Validated Local Practice: How to Run a Robust Validation Process* (2012a) which provides a detailed a framework for running your own validated panels.

C4EO can offer you support throughout the whole process of evidencing the impact of your practice or intervention. Contact us on 020 7843 6358 or contactus@C4EO.org.uk to discuss further how we can tailor support to meet your requirements

References

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