External Evaluation Process Guidance

Stages of the External Evaluation

The external evaluation involves four key stages:

1. Developing the scope and the plan of the external evaluation
2. Undertaking the evaluation – on-site
3. Making judgements of self-evaluation capability and performance undertaken by the Practice Education Team
4. Reporting the findings.

Each of these stages is explained in detail in the next part of this resource.

Stage One: Developing the Scope and Plan for an External Evaluation

The evaluation team should contact each other and ascertain who will act as lead evaluator and agree the areas to be covered.

The lead evaluator is responsible for:

- Facilitating agreement on the scope of the external evaluation
- Ensuring the depth and breadth of the external evaluation is sufficient to answer the key evaluation questions
- Contacting the HSC Trust’s Executive Director of Nursing to agree the external evaluation timetable and documentation required in advance e.g. self-assessment/evaluation activities, policies, protocols, annual reports
- Ensuring a range of relevant stakeholders are engaged in the external evaluation e.g. focus groups.
The plan of enquiry involves the ‘what, who and how’ aspects of the evaluation process. The evaluation team must therefore determine:

- What might be important and must be looked at during the external evaluation?
- What do the evaluators need to find out to answer the relevant evaluation questions (Appendix 8)?
- Who do the evaluators need to talk to?
- What are the likely or possible sources of information that will be required?
- How will the necessary information be gathered?
- What role will each evaluator play during the data collection methods e.g. document analysis and focus groups?
- How will the data from the document analysis and focus groups be analysed and interpreted, ensuring objectivity?
- How will the strengths, areas for improvement, and opportunities for innovation be presented?
- What role will each evaluator play in the writing up of the evaluation report?
Stage Two: Undertaking the External Evaluation

Following analysis of the relevant documentation it is recommended that the external evaluators conduct two focus groups at two different levels within the HSC Trust.

Recommendations for Conducting the External Evaluation Focus Groups

- Focus group one should include representation from stakeholders across the range of NMC regulated programme activity areas (including specialist areas) at practice/operational level. Relevant representation should also be sought from the HEIs.
- Focus group two should include stakeholders at strategic/management level. Relevant representation should also be sought from the HEIs.
- 4-8 people in each group is regarded as ideal, as too few can cause an imbalance in the group dynamics, and too large causes the group to be unwieldy and difficult to manage.
- Take care with the sampling, so that each person carries a particular characteristic.
- Ensure all take part, have something to say and are comfortable saying it. Chair the meeting (act as facilitator) so that the meeting is open-ended but to the point.
- The use of a second ‘follow up’ focus group in order to probe deeper into emergent themes may be necessary.
- An ‘independent’ facilitator may be necessary if participants may be affected by the relationship with the facilitator.
- A co-facilitator is required to take notes.
- The establishment of ground rules is vital prior to the session.
The external evaluation focus group interviews with stakeholders should be focused on six high-level questions which can be answered by evaluating the quality of the infrastructure (Practice Education Team) systematically across ten key areas. The external evaluation team should seek to answer the following questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External Evaluation Focus Group Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. **What key outcomes has the Practice Education Team achieved?** e.g. improvements in performance; fulfillment of statutory competencies and duties.  
  Key Area 1. Key performance outcomes |
| 2. **How well does the Practice Education Team meet the needs of its stakeholders?** e.g. positive impacts on student performance, attrition rates; staff best practice; HEI partnerships.  
  Key Area 2. Impact on students  
  Key Area 3. Impact on staff  
  Key Area 4. Impact on the HEI community |
| 3. **How good is the delivery of education processes?** e.g. delivering quality practice education; inclusion, equality and fairness; improvements in mentor preparation.  
  Key Area 5. Delivery of education processes |
| 4. **How good is the Practice Education Team’s management role?** e.g. policy review and development; operational planning; recruitment and retention of staff and students; support and teamwork; partnership working; financial and resource management; information systems.  
  Key Area 6. Policy development and planning  
  Key Area 7. Management and support of staff  
  Key Area 8. Partnerships and resources |
| 5. **How good is the Practice Education Team’s leadership?** e.g. providing vision, values and aims; leading change and improvements; an expert lead to other staff; developing the practice of others; acting as a role model  
  Key Area 9. Leadership |
| 6. **What is the Practice Education Team’s capacity for improvement?** e.g. changing the culture of practice education, including bringing about a change in staff attitudes and behaviour and evidence-based practice; providing strong leadership, for example by acting as an advocate of staff views or by developing team morale; empowering staff by building capacity, confidence and encouraging extension of roles; providing and emphasising the importance of staff supervision.  
  Key Area 10. Capacity for improvement? |
The following sample recording template may be used:

## Sample External Evaluation Focus Group Recording Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Area/s</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer/Evidence</th>
<th>Areas for development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>What key outcomes have been achieved?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2, 3 &amp; 4</td>
<td>How well does the Practice Education Team meet the needs of their stakeholders?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>How good is the delivery of education processes?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6, 7 &amp; 8</td>
<td>How good is the Practice Education Team’s management role?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>How good is the Practice Education Team’s leadership?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>What is the Practice Education Team’s capacity for improvement?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stage Three: Making Organisational Judgements

The external evaluation team must be able to demonstrate how they reached their conclusions and cite the evidence used to support their judgements using the Criteria for Rating Answers to Key Evaluation Questions below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA FOR RATING ANSWERS TO KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance is clearly very strong or exemplary in relation to the question. Any gaps or weaknesses are not significant and are managed effectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance is generally strong in relation to the question. No significant gaps or weaknesses, and less significant gaps or weaknesses are mostly managed effectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance is inconsistent in relation to the question. Some gaps or weaknesses. Meets minimum expectations/requirements as far as can be determined.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance is unacceptably weak in relation to the question. Does not meet minimum expectations/requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence unavailable or of insufficient quality to determine performance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stage Four: The External Evaluation Report

The purpose of the external evaluation report is to clearly set out the findings and conclusions of the external evaluation process, including the reasons for the conclusions being reached. The report is intended to support both accountability and improvement in Practice Education Teams. It has multiple audiences which include:

- Potential and enrolled students who want to know the level of confidence they can have in the quality of the programmes and the nature of the learning environment that the Practice Education Team provides
- Practice Education Coordinators and Practice Education Facilitators needing to know the level of confidence they can have in the educational performance and quality of the practice learning environment
- Practice Education Teams needing to gain a more in-depth understanding about what is working well, what can be improved and/or possible opportunities for improvements and innovation
- Professional bodies and HEIs needing to gain information about the quality of the HSC Trust’s practice learning environment and capacity and capability of the Practice Education Team
- The DHSSPS needing to know the impact of the Practice Education Team from a funding perspective.

The report is therefore the product of the external evaluation and is intended to be used by the Practice Education Teams to maintain or strengthen their self-assessment and educational design, delivery, assessment and evaluation processes. The findings and judgements contained within the external evaluation report will also inform the scope of the next external evaluation when it is scheduled.
External evaluation report

The following five criteria should be used by the external evaluators as standard yardsticks for deciding if the implementation of the infrastructure to support learning and assessment in practice should be regarded as a success:

Assessing success:

- Effectiveness
- Impact
- Relevance
- Sustainability

In addition, to assist in determining the impact of the Practice Education Team the external evaluators may want to consider the following:

**Short-Intermediate and Longer-term impacts:**
- The impact of the new posts in terms of the perceived quality of support for mentors, the quality of the clinical learning environment in terms of students’ experience, the placement capacity and innovative practices within learning environments
- Practice/HEI partnership

**Process Evaluation**
- Barriers and enablers to the learning environment
- Strengths and weaknesses of different models of implementation and development of posts
- Inter-professional learning developments in practice

**What is the impact on PEF and PEC professionals?**
- Changes in subject or process knowledge, confidence and self-esteem
- Changes in mentors/students’ knowledge, confidence and practice
- Improved reflection on practice
- Ability to lead change initiatives
- Disseminating key outcomes to relevant audiences.
Issues to consider for layout and content of the external evaluation report are presented in Figure 11.

**Figure 11: Example of layout and content of external evaluation report**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. EFFECTIVENESS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The extent to which the practice education team has achieved its objectives.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Evaluation Question:</strong> Has the team achieved its objectives or will it do so in the future?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. IMPACT</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The totality of the effects of the practice education team, positive and negative, intended and unintended.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Evaluation Question:</strong> What is the overall impact of the team, positive and negative?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. RELEVANCE</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The extent to which the practice education team conforms to the needs and priorities of stakeholders.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Evaluation Question:</strong> Is the team consistent with the needs and priorities of its stakeholder groups?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. SUSTAINABILITY</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The continuation or longevity of benefits from the practice education team.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Evaluation Question:</strong> Can the benefits produced by the team be maintained?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To assist in determining the impact of the Practice Education Team the following may provide a helpful guide:

**Short-Intermediate and Longer-term impacts:**
- The PEF and PEC role
- The impact of the new posts in terms of the perceived quality of support for mentors
- The impact on the quality of the clinical learning environment in terms of students’ experience
- The placement capacity
- Innovative practices within learning environments
- Inter-professional learning in practice
- Practice/HEI partnership

**Process Evaluation**
- Barriers and facilitators to the learning environment
- Number of students that can be accommodated in both hospital and community placements
- Examples of innovative practice which act as barriers/facilitators to the learning environment
- Practice/Academic partnership
- Identify strengths and weaknesses of different models of implementation and development of posts
- Explore inter-professional learning developments in practice

**What is the impact on PEF and PEC professionals?**
- Changes in subject or process knowledge
- Changes in confidence and self-esteem
- Changes in their (or students’) knowledge, confidence, self-esteem, practice
- Improved reflection on practice
- More confidence in managing and influencing student motivation
- Greater ability to question alternative viewpoints
- The ability to lead change initiatives
- Disseminating key outcomes to relevant audiences.