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A Self-Evaluation Guide for

Virtual School Head Teachers and

Care Experienced Teams in Scotland

Feedback:

This toolkit has been developed in collaboration with the Virtual School Head Teachers' (VSHT) and Care Experienced Teams' (CET) Network, which has been facilitated by CELCIS since 2019. It is the first version of a self-evaluation guide for Virtual Schools in Scotland. Virtual Schools and Care Experienced Teams are invited to use it and trial its effectiveness. Feedback and comments will be used for further development and to publish future versions. To share your feedback, contact Larissa Gordon, VSHT for Aberdeen City and CELCIS National Advisor to the VSHT and CET Network: lagordon@aberdeencity.gov.uk

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Context

All children and young people have a fundamental right to education. Most children need support during their educational journey. Care experienced children and young people may require additional support during their time in education to meet their distinct, and often unseen, needs.

A 'Virtual School' is an organisational model rather than a physical building. It offers an additional layer of support for the education of care experienced learners through one person or a team. The term Virtual School is used interchangeably to refer to:

- The way that some local authorities organise the support they provide for care experienced children and young people.
- The group of care experienced children and young people for whom a local authority is responsible.
- The person (Virtual School Head Teacher (VSHT)) or team (Care Experienced Team (CET)) who offers support to care experienced children, young people, families, carers and schools.

The post of VSHT and the model is relatively new in Scotland. The [Virtual School Head Teachers' (VSHT) and Care Experienced Teams' (CET) Network](#) ('the Network') was established by CELCIS in 2019 to support and connect those working in the role, share good practice, and drive progress towards better educational experiences for all care experienced children and young people. The Network, currently made up of 18 local authorities, collaborated to publish this guidance to help colleagues to evaluate the support they offer care experienced learners. It can also be used as a planning tool for Virtual School improvement.

Introduction

Self-evaluation is the process by which members of staff reflect on their practice and identify areas for action to stimulate improvement. There are numerous approaches that physical schools use for self-evaluation including How Good is Your School? (HGIOS) which is a nationally and internationally recognised approach to school improvement. Given that Virtual Schools in Scotland are a recent innovation there is no agreed framework or consensus on how to reflect on practice, measure progress or stimulate improvement that focuses on care experienced learners. Network members agreed to adapt HGIOS, an approach which is well-known and well regarded, as the starting point. A number of other care experienced education guides (see useful resources p. 13) were used to inform subsequent thinking and development.

Virtual Schools offer multi-systemic support to children, families, carers and those who live with, support, and teach them.
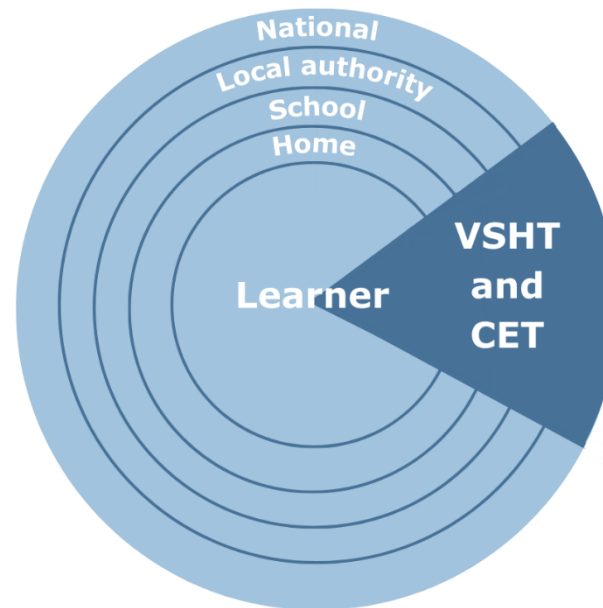
Figure 1. Virtual School: Multi Systemic Support.

There are inherent complexities when considering self-evaluation for a Virtual School:

- Learners can be enrolled in different schools, both within and outside of the local authority, that have a legal responsibility for their care and education.
- The VSHT or CET does not line manage all staff responsible for educating or providing support to learners.
- Virtual Schools are often 'accountable' for outcomes but only have indirect influence.
- The role and model are new and evolving in diverse ways in each local authority.

How to use this guide

This is a non-prescriptive guide for VSHTs and CETs to use to engage in evidence-based analysis of what is working well and what needs to improve to have greater positive impact on the education and wellbeing of care experienced learners. It has been designed with the intention that practitioners will adapt and use it according to their context and apply it individually, to a team or to the local authority. It can be used to evaluate individual practice as well as more collaboratively to include a wider range of partners and consider the system as a whole. Self-evaluation is not a linear process and there is no 'right' place to start, the sections and order in this guide are a suggested approach.

Evaluate

Reflect on improvement

Report findings

Self evaluation

Analyse evidence

Ask challenge questions

Choose focus theme

Figure 2. A guide to Self-Evaluation of Virtual Schools.

1. The Improvement Cycle

This continuous improvement cycle adapted from HGIOS illustrates the key features of evidence-based self-improvement at Virtual School and system-wide levels. It shows how system leaders can empower practitioners to interpret nationally shared aims, such as The Promise, and apply them in their local contexts in ways which are most appropriate to them. Working with the cycle can help people understand the importance of regular and rigorous evidence-based internal and external evaluation to inform further improvement.

Looking outward

Learning from what happens in Virtual Schools across Scotland and the UK to challenge our own thinking in line with key policies that directly impact on care experienced learners

Looking forward

Exploring what the future might hold for care experienced learners and planning how to get there. Contributing to the pledge made to learners in The Promise

Looking inward

Knowing ourselves inside and out through effective self-evaluation. Understanding that Virtual Schools are different but all offer support at different levels of the system
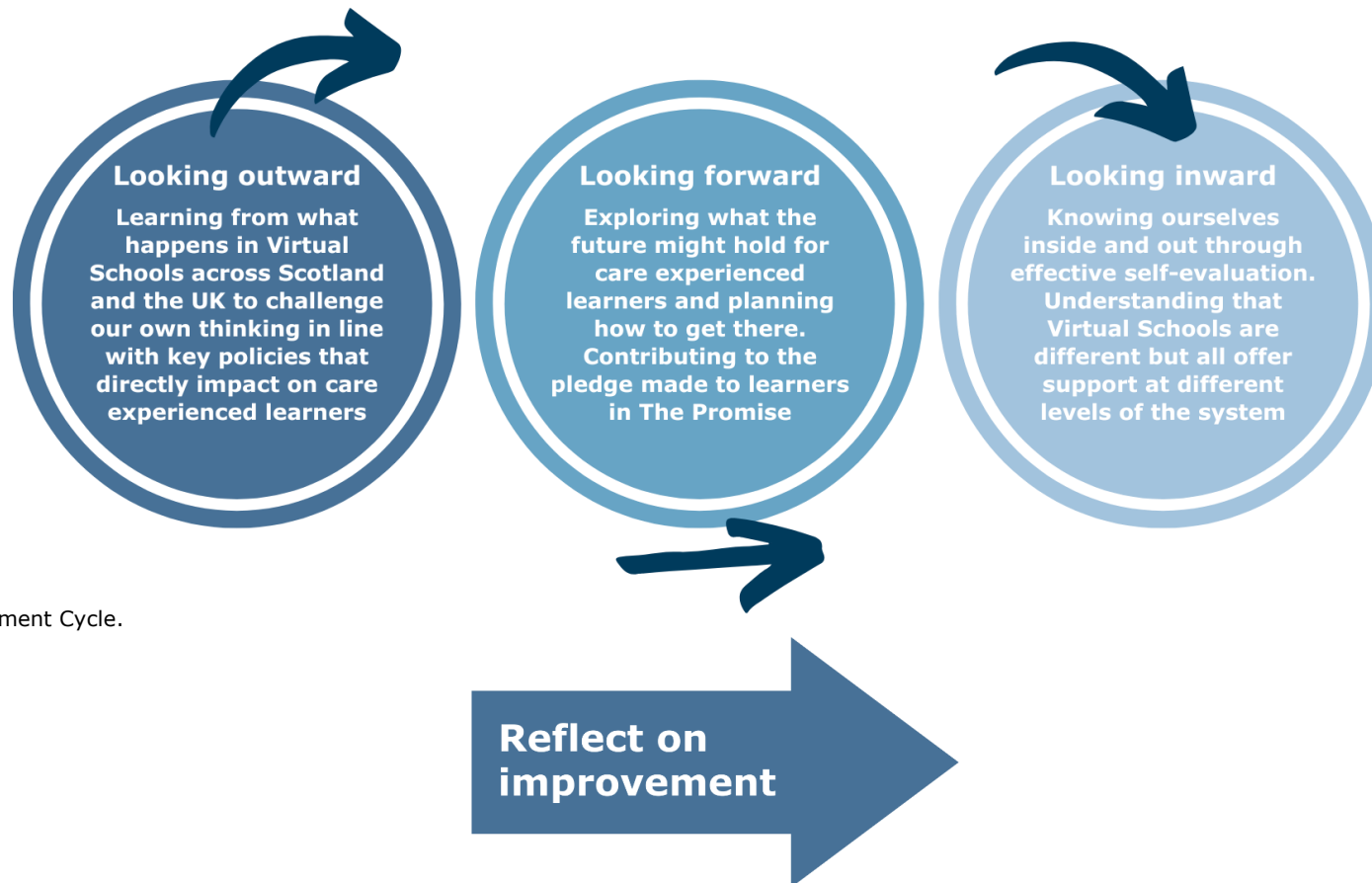
Figure 3. Improvement Cycle.

Reflect on improvement

2. Evidence

Triangulation is the process used to ensure evaluative statements about strengths and aspects for development are grounded in a robust evidence base. Virtual Schools collect a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data and information. Depending on the focus of the evaluation, triangulation will involve care experienced learners, their families and those who teach and support them. This process will lead to a shared assessment of priorities and an understanding of capacity for improvement.

Quantitative data
Virtual Schools gather a wide range of quantitative data, for example about attainment, Co-ordinated Support Plans, attendance, exclusions, Child's Plans, and positive destinations. Effective self-evaluation includes rigorous interrogation of this data by staff who are data-literate and use the data to plan and inform next steps, including targeted intervention.

People's views
Children and young people, staff, parents and carers, and other stakeholders such as social work should all have regular opportunities to share their views about the Virtual School. Examples of how people's views can be gathered include through surveys, focus groups, ongoing professional dialogue, education authority quality improvement, and minutes of team meetings.

Triangulation of evidence

Qualitative data
Virtual Schools can evidence impact through the use of qualitative data. This may include case studies that show the role of the Virtual School in supporting a child or young person's education experience and journey, including evidence of advocacy, removing barriers to learning, supporting a transition, or maintaining a care placement.
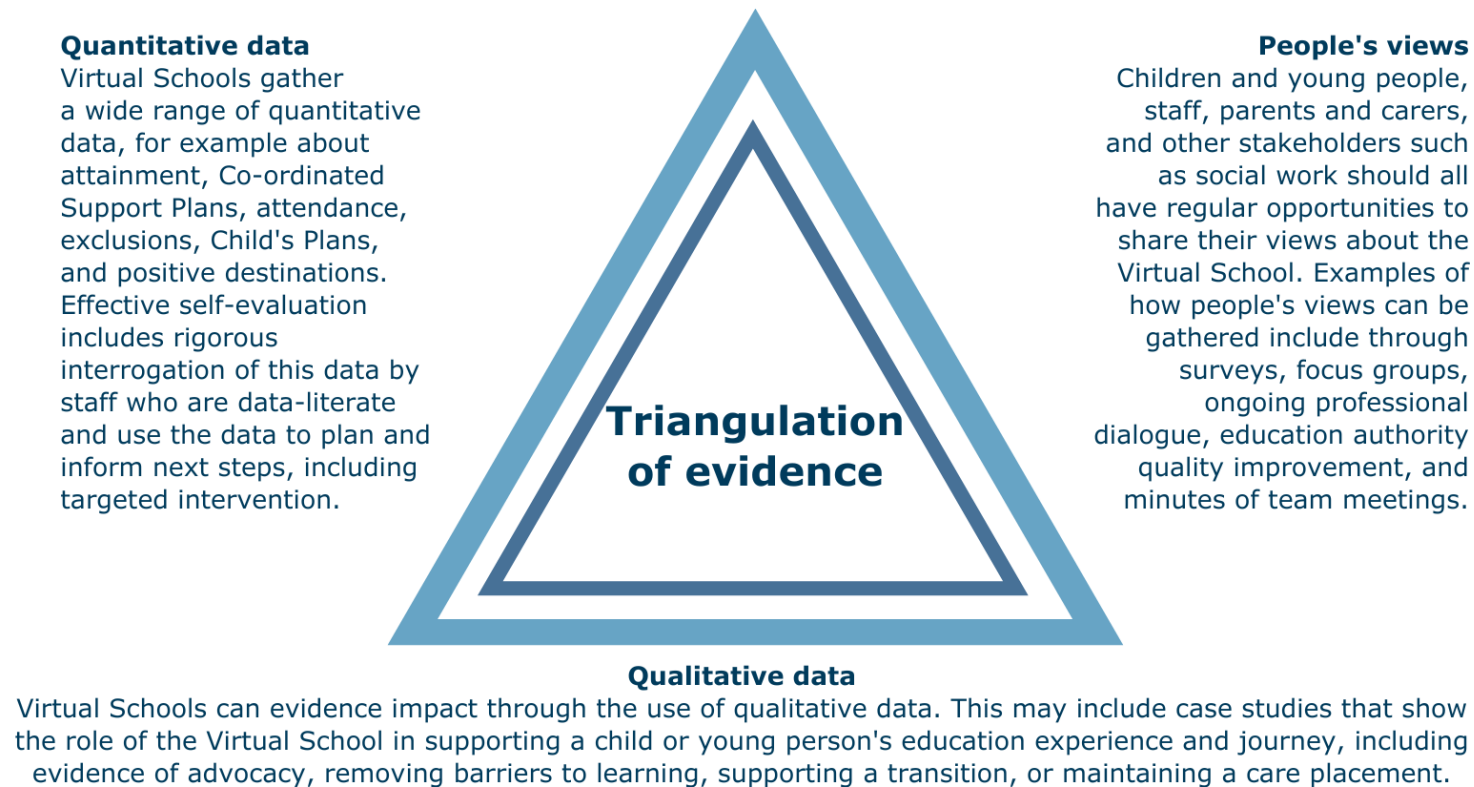
Figure 4. Triangulation of Evidence.

To frame thinking, consideration should be given to the strategic priorities, aims and targets of the Virtual School including those locally, regionally, and nationally. This might include consideration of:

- Attendance
- Exclusions
- Achievement & Attainment
- Wellbeing

Outcomes are most useful when they are contextualised and are accompanied by a narrative that analyses trends over time and accounts for the variance that can be characteristic of small groups of learners.

Analyse the evidence

3. Focus themes

It is important, during self-evaluation, to be aware of the context that the process is taking place within, and key themes which are relevant to children and young people and the staff who support them.

The voice and rights of children and young people; the findings of the Independent Care Review and The Promise Change Programme; the proposed changes to the Curriculum for Excellence; the broader proposed education reform, including the recommendations of the ASN review and the incorporation of the UNCRC are all important and relevant policy and legislative drivers.

The table below is a synthesis of key themes from discussions held with members of the VSHT Network when considering the current legislative and policy context. Whilst the list is not exhaustive, these themes be may helpful areas to hold in mind or a lens through which to carry out an evaluation.

Universal support	Whole family support	Building capacity
Relationships	Wellbeing	Listening
Inclusive practice	Supporting the workforce	Poverty
Language	Children's Rights	Participation

Choose focus theme

4. Challenge questions

A key part of self-evaluation is posing questions (p.17-18) to support professional dialogue and point towards practice that is working well and areas that may require change.

Self-evaluation should have an overall question that it is seeking to answer:

- What is our capacity for improvement?
- How good is our Virtual School?
- How good is our educational support for care experienced learners?

Evaluation may then move on to posing further detailed questions on different aspects of practice within the education system:

1. Support for care experienced learners and their families.
2. Partners that support care experienced learners.
3. Leadership and capacity.

Ask challenge questions

5. Findings

Self-evaluation is the process by which members of staff reflect on their practice and identify areas for action to stimulate improvement. The logical conclusion of any self-evaluation process is a summary report that answers the questions that were posed and points towards strengths and areas for development. The Summary Self-Evaluation guide (p.14) provides a suggested framework.

Report findings

6. Evaluation

There are a number of potential approaches to making an assessment of the quality of education support being offered to care experienced learners. Practitioners may choose to evaluate, measure or make a judgement by using a scale, through a more narrative approach or a combination of the two (see Evaluation examples p.17-18).

Narrative		Scale
Embed	6	Excellent
Sustain	5 4	Very good Good
Maximise	3	Satisfactory
Prioritise	2 1	Weak Unsatisfactory

Evaluate impact

Useful resources

How good is our school? Since 1996 HGIOS has become a nationally and internationally recognised brand, which underpins effective self-evaluation as the starting point for school improvement. It is a key aspect of the Scottish approach to school improvement.

Looked after and learning. This booklet designed for teachers and educators draws on decades of research and practice to highlight how to deliver a positive educational journey for all with a focus on those with care experience.

NAVSH Peer Review. Many Virtual Schools in England have adopted a peer approach to self-evaluation inviting colleagues from other local authorities to offer challenge on efficiency and effectiveness.

Aberdeen City Virtual School Head Teacher Toolkit. Designed for the local authority in discharging the statutory responsibility to secure improvement in the quality of school education with a focus on the key responsibilities of the VSHT.

Keeping the promise to our children, young people and families. The plan that complements the pledge to care experienced people which highlights key themes that underpin the work.

Joining the dots: Virtual School Head Teachers' and Care Experience Teams Summary Report. Summary of findings of semi structured interviews carried out with members of Scotland's VSHT Network

Summary self-evaluation guide

1 Reflect: Look inwards; outwards and forwards		
2 Analyse the evidence: Triangulate quantitative data, qualitative data alongside people's views		
3 Choose focus themes		
Universal support	Whole family support	Building capacity
Relationships	Well-being	Listening
Inclusive practice	Support the workforce	Poverty
Language	Children's Rights	Participation
4 Ask challenge questions		
What is our capacity for improvement? How good is our Virtual School? How good is our educational support for care experienced learners?		
How good are we at the supporting our care experienced learners and their families?	How well do we support those that live with, teach and support care experienced learners?	How good is our leadership in ensuring care experienced learners are systematically supported?
5 Report findings		
6 Evaluate impact		
Embed	6	Excellent
Sustain	5	Very Good
	4	Good
Maximise	3	Satisfactory
Prioritise	2	Weak
	1	Unsatisfactory

Challenge questions

The questions in the table are suggestions and not to be regarded as the only ones that can be asked. This section is intended as a guide for those at all levels, some questions may not be relevant. It is for individual evaluators to map out the appropriate questions for their unique context.

1. How well do we support our care experienced learners and their families?

- How well do we support our children and young people to access their right to an education?
- Do we have mechanisms in place to gather the voice of our children and young people?
- How well do we advocate for children and young people?
- How well do we support children and young people to maintain relationships with trusted adults in education?
- How well do we support schools to improve their universal offer/support and remove all barriers to engagement in learning for care experienced children and young people?
- How good are we at providing opportunities for children and young people to engage in wider achievement?
- Do our procedures and protocols reflect a trauma informed and attachment aware way of working?
- Are there clear procedures in place for children and families to access support from the Virtual School?

2. How well do we support those that live with, teach and support care experienced learners?

- Are we fulfilling our statutory duties, meeting legislative requirements, and following appropriate codes of practice?
- How well do we support schools / partners to adhere to and understand local authority education policies relating care experienced children and young people?
- How well do we work with wider partners to support transitions to positive destinations?
- How well do we work with stakeholders to support them to consider educational needs of children and young people?
- Are we actively involved in working groups, influencing national practice, or collaborating with others to share learning and innovative practice? (Local, regional, national, and international)

3. How good is our leadership in ensuring care experienced learners are systematically supported?

- How good are we at ensuring all plans are of a suitable quality and being reviewed regularly?
- Is there a robust system in place for tracking attendance, exclusions and attainment of care experienced children and young people?
- Is there a robust system in place to track participation, engagement and wider achievement of our care experienced children and young people?
- Do we have robust processes and procedures in place for measuring impact of interventions?

- Is there a professional learning programme in place that meets the needs of staff?

Evaluation examples

Virtual Schools may wish to use the [HGIOS](#) six-point scale (p. 62) as an approach to self-evaluation.

An evaluation of **excellent** means that this aspect of the Virtual School's work is outstanding and sector leading.

An evaluation of **very good** means that there are major strengths in this aspect of the Virtual School's work.

An evaluation of **good** means that there are important strengths within the Virtual School's work yet there remain some aspects which require improvement.

An evaluation of **satisfactory** means that the strengths within this aspect of the Virtual School's work just outweigh the weaknesses.

An evaluation of **weak** means that there are important weaknesses within this aspect of the Virtual School's work.

An evaluation of **unsatisfactory** means there are major weaknesses within this aspect of the Virtual School's work.

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About CELCIS

CELCIS is a leading improvement and innovation centre in Scotland. We improve children's lives by supporting people and organisations to drive long-lasting change in the services they need, and the practices used by people responsible for their care.

For more information

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