Questions from the Appraiser Refresher Day, 1st October 2009

Mentoring

- How will mentors be selected?
- What training will be provided?
- How will the process be quality assured?
- What support will be provided for the mentors?
- Is it independent of the PSU or the same?

Please look at the NESC website and head to appraisal service to find all the background documentation on the mentoring pilot: [NESC Mentoring Pilot Project](#)

This mentoring pilot is entirely within the NESC appraisal service and entirely independent of the proposals for the professional support unit, to be called Wessex Insight, which is planned by the Deanery and Wessex LMCs. We hope that, if successful, the support offered through the pilot may be extended by mainstreaming mentoring provision.

Appraisals

How can we help our appraisees share some of the outcomes of appraisal with their practices to enable change to occur?

Perhaps this is an issue that could be brainstormed in your small groups?

Ideas include:

- Encourage the introduction of an idea in practice based education time
- Setting up in house education with the support of the GP Tutor if it does not already exist
- Verbal feedback of outcomes of appraisal to key members of the practice team
- Written feedback of outcomes of appraisal to the practice intranet where others may pick them up
Could you produce a list of suggested/expected evidence for the appraisee every year to accompany their letter?

Please see the summary list from the RCGP guide to revalidation for general practitioners Aug 2009 (by Dr Eileen Gorrod) in the packs for today and on the NESC appraisal service website: Revalidation and Enhanced Appraisal

Is there a list of useful resources for appraisers to pass to their appraisees?

This is up to you and to your appraiser support groups to develop suitable local resources and supports – and share it with us to get it up on the website.

Some useful resources, especially websites and phone numbers, are up there already: Websites and E-learning

Looking at them individually or in your small groups might be a worthwhile exercise.

Concerned about the amount of information required for appraisal and when will this be required?

The emphasis has to be increasingly on quality not quantity and part of the appraiser role is to help individuals see when they are doing too much. There is a strong national message that the effort required to revalidate must be proportionate.

However, 50 hours or “RCGP credits” of CPD seems likely to be essential for all GPs!

The evidence should be being collected (according to the RCGP guide) from April 2009, with improved collection from April 2010. But, the proposed evidence set is not yet nationally accepted as the RCGP are way ahead of some of the other colleges and there is an overriding requirement for all doctors to be required to meet the same standards (with moderation yet to be defined).

Is there any advice for appraisers when appraising sessional doctors who work very part time and who give minimal evidence or who have attended very few hours of educational events?
All doctors will have a clearly defined set of supporting documentation that will be defined in such a way that it is possible for sessional doctors to gather it too. There are several levels of pilots looking at ensuring that sessional doctors are able to do this. When the evidence is defined, NESC appraisers will be trained to help the sessional doctors gather it. Until now there were no sanctions for those who only just engaged; soon there will be essential evidence and the appraisal will not go ahead without it (or the appraiser will be making a statement that there is insufficient evidence and the appraisee is not on the right trajectory to be able to revalidate).

Working very part time is not going to be an acceptable excuse for not meeting the CPD requirements. Indeed, arguably, those who work very part time need more CPD to keep up to date and fit to practise as they have less experiential learning to draw on.

I have concern about the huge amount of paperwork we are faced with to document everything we do for our appraisal and revalidation. Is there a tool we can use (apart from the appraisal form)?

With training we anticipate the amount of paperwork stabilising at a manageable amount. The national guidance is that the effort required to revalidate must be proportionate, and it is intended that there should be one portfolio to meet the needs of revalidation and appraisal.

Sometimes there is an enormous issue in an appraisee’s life either to do with the practice or at home. I think this needs to be addressed with them but it can result in them not having more than resolving that issue on their PDP. Is this reasonable?

In general, the feeling between appraisers has been that it is important to keep the PDP objectives SMART (Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Relevant and Timed) or SMARTIES (add Interesting, Economic –in terms of time and effort as well as money - and Shared Successes). While one issue may dominate the PDP in terms of time and effort to address, there may well be a couple of small objectives that will be easy to address alongside it. It is more often hard to negotiate with an appraisee about not putting too many PDP objectives down, or making them too ambitious to achieve in a year. Try to break a big area into “bite sized” chunks. The bottom line is that this is a matter for agreement between the appraiser and appraisee and we will support what you consider justifiable.

In terms of revalidation, it is likely that the whole five year’s worth will be looked at to see if the spread was reasonable, so something big dominating a whole year should not be an issue.

How acceptable is it for appraisees not to be using the toolkit?
It is strongly encouraged that appraisees use the NHS Toolkit but it is not compulsory. This is because there will need to be a new electronic platform for revalidation and there seems little point in pushing too hard for all to use a tool that is about to be updated.

However, we do insist that all the official Forms and the PDP are typed as this is a level of professionalism (and legibility!) that is essential.

I was sent a list of appraisees and have only had contact from a few. What happens to the others?

It was historically the responsibility of the appraisee to make contact with the appraiser to organise an appraisal. **THIS HAS CHANGED.** It is now a mutual responsibility – in order to allow appraisers to be proactive and give them more control over their appraisal work.

The contracts with the PCTs say that the NESC Appraisal Service will make three separate attempts to contact an appraisee before letting the PCT know that there is a communication / engagement issue.

We try to go further. The appraisal administrators will contact the appraisee centrally initially. We have to give at least two months notice of the appraisal being due. If the appraisee does not contact you first, we ask you as an appraiser to try on three different occasions by at least two different methods (from among e-mail and telephone, home or practice addresses as available). If, and only if, you feel another attempt would be appropriate (eg. the appraisee has been away) then you may on occasion try more than three times. However, there is no obligation that you should do so. If the appraisee has not returned your e-mails / calls, please refer the individual back to the appraisal administrator. We generate a standard second request to set an appraisal date. Sometimes the local lead even calls the practice manager to highlight the issue. If there is still no response, the final request is made by recorded delivery and the appraisee is informed that their appraisal will be referred back to the PCT if they do not respond within two weeks.

At this stage, we feel that we have made all reasonable attempts to engage with the appraisee.

What can you do?

Make your three attempts by two methods and if you are unsuccessful, let us know and we will take over. Many of you have taken on too great a personal responsibility and if our contact details are wrong then the sooner we find out, the better.

However, if at any point the appraisee does make contact we do ask you to let the appraisal administrator know as soon as possible to avoid embarrassing miscommunications.
Where should the appraisal take place?

It is the appraisee’s choice of venue for the appraisal, so please do not pre-empt their choice by asking them to travel to you, or implying that they should come to you, unless there is a very good reason and you can justify it in writing. Clearly, if they do not have a suitable practice base and ask if they can come to you because you can offer a suitable venue, then that is perfectly acceptable.

It is increasingly important that the venue is one that can be seen to be appropriate. Previously, some appraisals have been done in the home of either the appraiser or the appraisee (and I am sure that these have been very professional).

However, as I had to say at the conference, nationally there have anecdotally been instances where an appraisee has felt coerced into having an appraisal in their own home and felt obliged to spend the day before cleaning, or where an appraiser has felt vulnerable in the appraisee’s home.

The perception of a lay assessor will have to be considered and I suggested that it would not normally be thought acceptable to do an appraisal at home. In the rare circumstances where it may still be contemplated, prior written agreement from the Local Appraisal Lead should be sought.

We are negotiating with the commissioning PCTs to ensure that there is good access to suitable neutral venues if the appraisee does not have a practice base or feels that their practice base is unsuitable. A list of potential venues should soon be available on the website and we would appreciate your help in adding to this.

During discussion at the Refresher Event, it became clear that there were a large number of appraisals in some areas being done in private houses. There is likely to be national guidance that not doing this is a performance quality indicator. However, in the meantime, we have agreed to assess the scale of the issue.

Please let us know if you are going to do an appraisal at either your own, or the appraisee’s home, and also encourage the appraisee to fill in the feedback form, which will have some additional questions. We aim to ensure that the appraisee has been offered a choice of venue and has, as far as possible, been entirely comfortable with the venue chosen, particularly in circumstances where it took place in a private house.

We appreciate that this is a very contentious issue, especially after hearing the depth of feeling at the refresher event. In any area where it may have been the norm for some appraisals to have been done at home, the idea that any doctor could find it threatening or inappropriate is hard to accept.

Nevertheless, to protect both appraisees and appraisers, it is important that there is an explicit acknowledgement of the issue.
**Having been on an existing appraiser skills assessment day recently, when and how will I receive my personal feedback?**

The verbal feedback on the day is supplemented by written feedback from the course facilitators. They are external to NESC, commissioned from NAPCE, and the feedback is supposed to be back within 2/52.

Please let us know if there are any issues around getting your feedback.

**Has our job as an appraiser changed in view of revalidation, especially if the appraisal process is going to be used?**

The new element in strengthened medical appraisal is making explicit the judgements about evidence and the trajectory towards revalidation that was not included previously. There is therefore more preparatory work involved and a new skill set in benchmarking the ability to review evidence. When the guidance is clear, training will be offered with as much notice as we can give.

However, the core appraiser role of facilitating the personal and professional development of the appraisee remains the same!

**When is appraiser pay to be reviewed?**

Appraiser pay is reviewed annually prior to reissuing the Schedule attached to the contract. Any change would date from 1st April of any given year.

**Other issues**

Several scenarios around dealing with different types of difficult appraisees were submitted prior to the event. While these are core issues for all appraisers, the best forum for addressing them appears to be with the local appraisal leads or in the local support groups, so they have been forwarded to your local lead.

---

**Dr Susi Caesar**

NESC Appraisal and Revalidation Lead (Wessex)