

Appreciating Medical Appraisals: using evidence to optimise the power of appraisals

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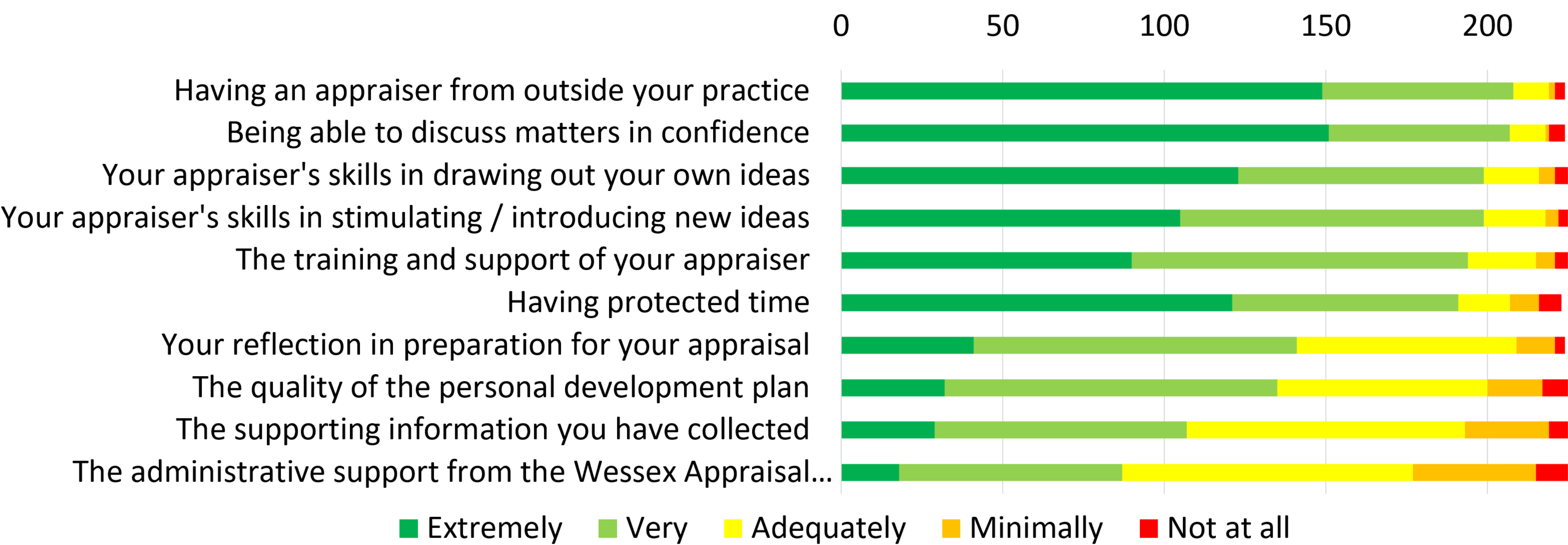
Abstract: An appreciative enquiry into the benefits of medical appraisal for revalidation, as facilitated by the Wessex Appraisal Service, sought to identify the “best of what is” in Wessex, and set it in the context of what is already known about the benefits of appraisal. Factors that contribute to a peak appraisal experience include: the skills of the appraiser, the attitude of the appraisee, building a positive relationship between the two and creating a safe space for the appraisal. The best appraisals can be transformative in supporting quality improvements in practice and better patient care.

Medical appraisal is ...
‘A process of facilitated self-review supported by information gathered from the full scope of a doctor’s work.’¹
“A supportive, confidential process that is for the individual to improve themselves medically [and] as an individual.”²

Aim: ‘We owe it to patients and all other stakeholders to demonstrate that a process that impinges on time devoted to actual patient care is of value and can fulfil the aims of the appraisal process to promote the development of [doctors].’³

Method: ‘Self-assessment is needed ... to highlight good practice as cultural improvements should build on “doing what you do better”.’⁴ This is the simple principle that underpins appreciative enquiry - which is an innovative participatory approach to research based on affirmation, appreciation and positive dialogue.⁵ This research surveyed all 1234 GPs in Wessex who said in their post-appraisal feedback in 2017-18 that their recent appraisal had promoted quality improvements in their practice. From the 226 respondents (18.7%), it brought together two focus groups of doctors who self-identified as being interested in good practice in appraisal and having stories to share.

How important do you think the following factors are in making your appraisal valuable?



What makes a peak appraisal experience?

Good communication skills	Good agenda setting
	Empathy
	Listening
	Use of silence
	Curiosity
Providing a safe space to reflect	Picking up on cues
	Calibration
	Time and encouragement to reflect
	Confidentiality, a safe space to deal with issues
Knowledge and understanding	Meeting the needs of the appraisee
	Signposting resources or new ideas
Knowing when and how to support	Support
	Reassurance
	Affirmation and recognition
	Empowerment
Knowing when and how to challenge	Adding Value
	Challenge
	Taking a risk
	Cathartic moments
	Transformation

“I’ve always felt [appraisal] is completely confidential and I’ve been able to talk about stuff that I wouldn’t have discussed with my colleagues.”²

“[Appraisers] can make a difference to somebody even if it is not every appraisal.”²

“Wessex has created a culture of excellence – through simple steps such as superb administrative efficiency; good communications; regular training, meetings & annual conference.”²

“The value is overwhelmingly dependent on the quality of the appraiser’s skills and training, and the ethos in which they work.”²

Next Steps:

- alter the post-appraisal feedback to assess the degree to which appraisal has promoted quality improvements and better patient care
- identify and support every doctor showing ‘red-flag’ signs of struggling to engage with their appraisal
- offer doctors the opportunity to request approval for an additional appraisal with the same appraiser
- offer doctors the opportunity to move their appraisal month (permanently) to one that suits them better
- strengthen the appraiser support groups to calibrate ideas of professional judgement
- pilot setting up an action learning set around appraisees supporting each other, facilitated by an appraiser
- promote supportive and challenging appraisal underpinned by the minimum of documentation
- continue to facilitate high standards of appraiser training and support, including in appreciative enquiry

Wessex appraisals promote quality improvements and better patient care by:

- avoiding appraisals becoming “tick-box” exercises
- offering high-quality, well-trained, supported appraisers, who are credible and bring an external viewpoint
- creating a safe space for discussion with sufficient protected time and confidentiality
- ensuring a good balance between appropriate support and adequate challenge
- encouraging appraisee engagement

Conclusion: It is essential to create an environment in which excellence in appraisal can flourish. This study demonstrates how appreciative enquiry can support a learning culture and positive organisational change in a health education setting. By continually asking what peak appraisal experiences are like, and making incremental changes to enable more appraisals to reach those heights, we can facilitate the reflection and insight of doctors. Ultimately, these are the keys to better patient care. *‘The last 12 months of my career have exploded as a result of my appraiser’s comments and encouragement last year. His preparation for my appraisal and advice is incredibly enabling and makes the whole process a complete joy.’* - appraisee feedback (Wessex Appraisal Service, 2018)

¹Revalidation Support Team (2014a) Medical Appraisal Guide. London <https://www.england.nhs.uk/revalidation/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2014/02/rst-medical-app-guide-2013.pdf> (accessed on 18.11.2018)

²Quotations taken from “Why is appraisal like chocolate? An appreciative enquiry into medical appraisal” Caesar 2018

³Colthart, I., Cameron, N., McKinstry, B., et al; What do doctors really think about the relevance and impact of GP appraisal 3 Br J Gen Pract. 2008 Feb;58(547):82-7

⁴Schein, E. (1985) Organisational culture and leadership 1st Edition San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

⁵Cooperrider, D. L. (1986). Appreciative inquiry: Toward a methodology for understanding and enhancing organizational innovation. Cleveland, OH: Western Reserve University.