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**Title: Learning lessons from implementing Enabling Environments within  
Prison and Probation: separating standards from process.**

**Running head:** EE as organizational change

**Authors:** Jason Davies<sup>a,b</sup>, Charlotte Pitt<sup>a,b</sup> & Aisling O'Meara<sup>a,b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Psychology, College of Human and Health Sciences, Vivian Tower,  
Swansea University, Swansea, SA2 8PP

<sup>b</sup> Offender Personality Disorder Pathway-Cymru

### **Corresponding Author**

Jason Davies; Department of Psychology, College of Human and Health Sciences,  
Vivian Tower, Swansea University, Swansea, SA2 8PP.

Jason.davies@swansea.ac.uk

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## **Abstract**

The probation and prison services within England and Wales are undergoing change which is argued will enhance rehabilitation. One aspect of this change is the introduction of the Enabling Environments standards into Approved Premises and many prison establishments. This paper examines the progress towards this goal across seven sites (four Approved Premises and three prisons) all of which are currently included in a multi-site longitudinal study examining the impact of Enabling Environments. With only one service having gained the award in the last two years, the majority of sites are behind the expected schedule with four re-launching the EE programme. It is argued that embedding the Enabling Environments standards should be seen as an organization change process. Drawing on organizational research and learning, this paper presents four learning points that might be implemented to overcome the difficulties experienced and assist with realizing the change being promoted.

**Key words:** Transforming rehabilitation; enabling environments, leadership, implementation, organizational change

Over the past 5 years, the probation service within the UK has been subject to major restructuring through the introduction of the Transforming Rehabilitation (TR) agenda by the UK government. This has resulted in major structural and operational changes to probation service delivery (Annison, Burke, & Senior, 2014), most notably through the creation of two services: the National Probation Service (NPS) and Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRC). The consequences of these proposals, described as a 'revolution in the way we manage offenders' by the Ministry of Justice (2013), are expected to be "driving down the rate of reoffending and delivering better value for the taxpayer" (p3). However, research suggests that early experiences of TR by staff were "overwhelmingly negative" (Kirtton & Guillaume, 2015; p21) which appears to build upon a sense that the "values of the organisation . . . had been under pressure for some time" (Deering & Feilzer, 2017; p165). Studies of those working within CRC have found that staff are working through a process of adjustment and service fragmentation which could lead to the loss of a 'collective probation ethos' (Burke et al., 2017; p205). Indeed, it has been suggested that TR is experienced as leading to poor prospects for both NPS and CRC in relation to professional practice and staff morale (Deering & Feilzer, 2017). Staff within CRC have been concerned about it being seen as a 'second class probation' service (Robinson et al., 2016; p173) which is reflected in part by CRC staff experiencing a lack of facilities and resources with which to do their job (McDermott, 2016). For staff within NPS, research suggests that whilst working solely with high risk cases has some benefits (e.g. stability and challenge within the caseload), there are a range of negative impacts such as increased pressure and struggling to cope with the volume of high risk clients (Phillips et al., 2016).

Within this broader TR context, the Approved Premises (AP) element of probation, which provides “a credible way of managing the transition from custody to the community for many of the most dangerous offenders in England and Wales” (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2017; p3), has also been subject to significant change. Although AP services are viewed as performing well (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2017) a new operating model entitled E3 (Effective. Efficient. Excellent.) is being implemented (NPS, 2016). Historically, each premises has operated according to its own model; E3 aims to offer a consistent framework for AP operation with the expectation that this will enhance AP performance and outcomes. As part of the E3 framework, all AP are expected to achieve the Royal College of Psychiatrists’ (RCP) Enabling Environments (EE) award. In parallel, significant reforms to prisons which underline the importance of rehabilitation within custody (Lidington, 2017) mean that many UK prisons are also pursuing EE to demonstrate their enabling and rehabilitative foundations.

### **The nature of EE and the EE Award Process**

The EE award is based on a set of standards which, it is argued, form a common foundation for “creating and sustaining a positive and effective environment” which in turn can “foster productive relationships and promote good mental health” (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2013, p3). The concept of EE is argued to be relevant to a wide array of settings and service types including schools, social care and voluntary sector organizations. To obtain this UK nationally recognised quality mark from the Royal College of Psychiatrists, services develop and submit a site-specific portfolio of evidence demonstrating good practice in each of the core standards. These 10 standards are Belonging; Boundaries; Communication; Development; Empowerment;

Involvement; Leadership; Openness; Safety (encompassing support and supervision) and Structure. Each of these have a number of descriptors which provide information about the standard and how it might be met (see Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2015 for details of the standards and the descriptors). Whilst the initial basis for EE was a drive to apply the relational focus of Therapeutic Community (TC) principles to other settings, Johnson & Haigh (2011) argue that EE was developed “afresh, with discussions of first principles based partly on practitioners’ knowledge of ‘what works’” (p19). As a result, caution must be exercised when seeking to evidence EE by drawing on research relating to the impact and outcomes from extant TC research.

Whilst there is growing interest in the role played by the environment in which rehabilitation takes place (e.g., Akerman et al., 2017) the evidence base for the impact of EE is yet to be established (Davies & O'Meara, 2017). To address this, a multi-site repeated measures cross-sectional evaluation was established across seven sites to enable the impact of EE to be examined. It was expected that the majority of study sites, would achieve the award in the two year period from October 2015 to September 2017, however only one service submitted a detailed portfolio and achieved the award in this timeframe. The purpose of this paper is to examine possible reasons for the limited progress made in relation to achieving the award in the vast majority of sites.

## **Method**

### *The nature of the study sites*

The seven sites comprise all the Approved Premises (n=4; two in urban and two in semi-rural locations) and prison settings (n=3; two public sector and one privately

run) engaged with the EE process within Wales, UK. There are two further prison sites within Wales which were not registered for the EE award. The AP are of similar size (24-26 residents) with residency typically lasting between 10 and 16 weeks. Two of the prisons (one public one private) are seeking the EE award within a single unit / wing, with one prison embarking on the EE award at an institutional level. The prison sites vary in terms of security (category B and C) and in their overall size (from circa 250 to in excess of 1000 inmates). Six of the seven sites were registered through the National Enabling Environments Prisons and Probation Project (NEEPPP) and all received support through an Enabling Environment Lead (EEL) provided by the awarding body.

### *Data collection & analysis*

Data were collected as part of a larger EE impact study across the service sites. Three sources of data were drawn on, namely: 1) researcher observations and discussions with staff made during a total of 52 site visits; 2) feedback from services (obtained through the nine steering and nine operational group meetings set up to oversee EE implementation across Wales) and 3) AP and prison resident responses to open ended questions (included as part of a larger questionnaire). Written responses were extracted and analysed using a theoretical thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

### **Findings**

The findings are presented in two parts; the first examines the nature of EE, drawing on researcher site visit observations and discussions and minutes from the steering and operational groups. Building on these findings, part 2 considers how models of

organisational change could be applied to understand the limited progress experienced across the project as a whole.

## Part 1: The nature of EE in practice

### *The multifaceted EE process*

The Royal College of Psychiatrists (2015) describe three main phases relating to the EE award, detailed as eight stages. The timescale suggested within their guidance indicates that a portfolio of evidence would normally be developed and submitted within 6-8 months of joining the scheme and feedback on this received within a further 3 months. From the experience of services seeking to obtain the award reported through the steering and operational group meetings, the process might be more accurately conceived as comprised of 11 distinct steps as shown in Figure 1. Although depicted as a linear process, the stages are fluid with steps sometimes being revisited following feedback and as new actions or challenges arise.

## **Figure 1**

### **About here**

In addition, although there is no sequencing or weighting of the 10 standards within the EE documentation, it could be argued that some standards may be foundational and thus necessary for successful implementation of others. For example, leadership is likely to be critical for how the EE award is approached and managed, and itself may lay the foundations for other standards (e.g., the approach to communication and boundaries). In addition, some of the components (e.g., 'continuity of staff') may be an observable consequence of other standards being in



place. Thus, for services starting out on the process, careful thought is needed about what standards to prioritise to successfully work through the process.

### *Recognising EE as an organization change process*

Initial expectations within services and in meetings with EE specialists were that achieving the EE award process would be largely an evidence collecting exercise with services documenting and collating evidence based on existing practice.

However, site observations suggest that, whilst this may be the case for a small number of the standards, the work involved in operationalizing and developing evidence for the standards is demanding and resource-intensive and may be transformational in nature. It might be expected that the self-assessment conducted at step 2 (of figure 1) would elucidate the level of change necessary to meet the standards. However, the nature and degree of possible changes appear to have gone unnoticed or, if recognized, unappreciated in terms of the scale of the task. Coupled with this, multiple changes and challenges were faced by all six services who did not achieve the award in the timeframe expected (see table 1). In providing guidance on the process of gaining the award, the RCP could provide more support and / or guidance to services at this point in the process to consider how sites that are divergent from the EE ethos or who will need major service changes to align themselves with these standards can develop a realistic action plan and timeline.

### **Table 1**

**About here**

The EE standards require a whole system approach to implementation (e.g. reflected in the Involvement standard); thus everyone within the site (both resident and staff) needs to be engaged as active participants. Evident across sites is that there is limited guidance for overcoming common challenges or detail that might inform how the standards might be achieved in a planned and meaningful way. This reflects a major challenge experienced during many organizational change and service redesign processes - there is emphasis on 'what needs to be demonstrated' with much less support and guidance on how to undertake this. Indeed, this is implicit within the EE award process; each site will produce a unique portfolio of evidence to demonstrate their competence in the areas assessed (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2015). Although this has many strengths, this requires clear support for, and strong leadership by, those tasked with implementing the process.

**Learning point 1:** EE is a set of principles and is not a mechanism of change i.e., it identifies aspects of the 'what' but provides little if any information about the 'how' or the 'who' necessary to operate according to the standards. Therefore in order to achieve the EE standards it is essential to bring in methods drawn from organizational change to sit alongside and provide the method by which ways of working akin to the standards might be achieved.

## **Part 2: Embedding organizational change principles alongside EE**

From part 1, it would appear that the management of change and models drawn from the organizational change literature could be usefully deployed to support the implementation of service redesign such as EE. In this section, qualitative data from staff and residents was examined to determine the extent to which principles from

commonly used organizational change models such as those outlined by Fernandez and Rainey (2006) and Kotter (1995) could be supported. These models suggest a number of steps or factors that might be necessary for successful change. In both models there are several stages described which precede the implementation of the change process. It is argued that this helps to ensure adequate groundwork has been undertaken to maximize the likelihood of the change being implemented and embedded successfully. It is these foundational elements that were examined using theoretical thematic analysis.

### *Ensuring need and establishing urgency*

The starting points for a successful change process are to ensure the need for change and to establish a sense of urgency (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006; Kotter, 1995). However, according to Kotter (1995), up to 50% of change initiatives fail at this stage. It is argued that such components are required before a vision or plan can be created and communicated. Whilst the need for change has been acknowledged at the highest levels (e.g., within the E3 agenda for the reconfiguration of AP; NPS, 2016) there is less evidence that this is shared by all staff working within the services. As with many innovations and changes, service revisions within prison and probation settings are generally ‘top down’ and are seen within a context of financial savings and a loss of skills and resources (Fitzgibbon & Lea, 2014; McNeill, 2013). This might be particularly so for the AP sites where EE is one part of a wider service restructuring of probation, potentially compounding the challenge of EE implementation.

Some of the complex issues and the scale of these wider changes have been outlined elsewhere (Ludlow, 2014). However, in their study of probation staff in

relation to a previous service reorganization, Robinson & Burnett (2007) suggested that “indeterminate change is the norm: it is a defining characteristic of their [probation workers] professional existence” (p332). They found a significant level of ‘change fatigue’ amongst staff indicated by reports of individuals being ‘wary of change’ or feeling ‘overwhelmed’. This is important context in which to view this current change process.

With respect to EE it would appear that there may have been a rush to action without the necessary time to establish the benefits of implementing the standards. Perhaps this is unsurprising given that the initial view was that EE would be largely about recording existing practices. The following quote shows a perception shared by a number of staff that EE is merely a new term being applied to existing work and therefore the apparent lack of distinctiveness seen in relation to EE:

*I’ve seen many schemes come and go. The underlying way that I’ve always tried to adopt is to work in an enabling way, if we’re using that term now, or a pro-social way we’ve used in the past. (AP Staff)*

Further to this, many sites report EE as ‘being on the backburner’ whilst other operational issues are addressed. Many of these operational issues could have been, but were not viewed within the framework of EE. This suggests that EE and core operational service aspects are seen as separate and distinct, with EE being of lower priority than other issues. Together the evidence from the services suggests that the need for the EE standards being implemented has not been adequately communicated and embedded.

**Learning point 2:** Prior to implementing change (in this case EE) it is essential for those leading services and new initiatives to engage with staff on the ground to demonstrate why the change is necessary and should be pursued at this point in time. This is especially important when such changes are part of wider service reorganization.

### **Communicating the vision and plan, and fostering commitment**

Establishing and communicating the benefits of implementing change for individuals, as well as the service, is essential. This includes ensuring that relief and temporary staff and those new to the service (staff and residents) are also included. There is little evidence from most of the sites that clarity about the nature of EE and its anticipated benefits have been widely shared, understood and embedded, with standards not seen as relevant to the pressing issues experienced by those within services.

*It's good that issues appear to be being addressed but most people I've spoken to see the enabling environments as papering over the cracks. Please look at our conditions, actuality vs. what should occur. No screens around toilets, the overcrowded dark cells. Unsuitability of people sharing. . . . There is [sic] no meaningful discussions with staff the only interaction I have is when they open or close my cell. I've met (briefly) with my P.O. once in six months, no idea how I am getting on here. (Prisoner)*

This individual highlights several issues, some of which could be linked to EE standards (e.g. Communication and Involvement). However, dignity, respect and service conditions are not explicit standards within the EE framework.

*Enabling environments is very poorly advertised and explained to prisoners. It should involve weekly events - new prisoners arrive every week and get left out. The last event was advertised a week before - but no information or explanations were given. I also feel like I was bullied into attending as work was cancelled and everything felt poorly planned and executed. (Prisoner)*

Whilst the above partly reflects the absence of key actions which could be encompassed within the Belonging standard of EE, the elements of respect and autonomy do not directly map against EE standards.

*we face verbal and physical threats a lot and it's easy to become demotivated and burnt out by that process because it's very intense. Also at the moment, we have no clinical supervision ourselves (AP staff)*

*alongside this process being enabling for the people we work with, support needs to be given to frontline staff who are dealing with difficult situations with difficult people and that we don't get at the moment. There is no clinical supervision for staff despite how long we have worked in an AP and are confronted by these situations and individuals. (AP staff)*

Such statements highlight pressing issues for staff, such as the need for practice based supervision, something which has also been emphasized by others (Davies, 2015). Although supervision is directly contained within the Safety standard, these staff did not link this area of need and the EE standard. This again suggests that the standards and their purpose may not have been adequately communicated and are not embedded.

The nature of the standards and process of the EE award has challenged the values and attitudes held by some. This includes global views which are intrinsically linked to beliefs about the purpose and functioning of the service and how these are best achieved. As one staff member working in an Approved Premises stated:

*I feel I am driven to work in an enabling way, but some colleagues might not be and so often that can present as a split to the offender or to the resident in an AP. (AP staff).*

EE also challenges aspects of the nature of prison and the expected roles of staff and prisoners:

*I find the idea of inmates having say in the way a prison is run odd, as there are laws about how a prison should be run and at the end of the day we are here to serve a sentence not on holiday. (Prisoner)*

Fernandez and Rainey (2006) stress the importance of a clear and specific implementation strategy. Given that EE has 10 standards which are currently presented as having equal relevance, status, importance and impact, developing and delivering a plan requires localized decision making and prioritizing. However the following indicates that this could be difficult to achieve:

*I think some departments work at rehabilitation more than other departments. There is no communication in this establishment though and there is no organization between staff and this can be extremely frustrating that no-one can make one decision regarding things. (Prison staff)*

Statements from those working or living within the services demonstrate limited, inaccurate or superficial awareness of EE, its goals and purpose. The level of commitment and 'buy in' to EE varies between individuals and sites, with many people skeptical about the EE initiative:

*I do not think EE has worked here at all, more so officers have bad attitudes towards inmates. . . . The officers attitudes are not right for EE (Prisoner)*

*It seem things got worse as soon as the EE project was launched. So there is a lot of cynicism about the whole thing. (Prisoner)*

*This EE thing has been going for years now and there has been no change at all. It's known as a joke in the prison. Staff need to be the focus of EE not inmates, until they buy into it, nothing will happen. (Prisoner)*

*most of the staff here are very good, helpful and will do what they can to help. BUT there are those who haven't really got the time of day for the prisoners and would rather sit in the office on the wings or centre and do nothing (Prisoner)*

These statements from prisoners suggest that ownership and understanding of EE has not yet been achieved.

**Learning point 3:** Those involved in the proposed service development need to have sufficient knowledge and understanding to make links between their practice and the standards / goals. They also need to be able to 'buy into' the process. There



is also a need to examine the scope and content of the development (in this case EE) to be aware of any fundamental areas of practice not contained within the scheme.

### **Human factors – participation and leadership**

Human factors are reported to be one of the most common reasons for organizational change failures (Szabla, 2007). Although there is debate about the nature of effective leadership in different contexts and situations, the relationship between leadership and participation is clearly important. Research indicates that transformational leadership, characterized by vision, communication and empowering others, is associated with higher change commitment (Herold, Fedor, Caldwell, & Liu, 2008) and that leadership based on reasoning and / or facilitating involvement (rather than on power) is likely to produce the greatest support (Szabla, 2007). However, these leadership styles depend upon trust which takes time to develop (Herold et al., 2008).

Leadership problems have been evident across the sites. For example in the two years between October 2015 and September 2017, five of the seven sites have had changes in their operational and / or strategic lead responsible for EE. In some sites these reflect wider problems relating to staffing changes and shifts in management:

*Too many new bosses (governors and managers) changing things, sometimes not for the better. (Prisoner)*

Changes in leadership have contributed to a lack of accountability and continuity, and have had a significant effect on establishing an effective leadership strategy. This

has been coupled with staff turnover and service restructuring (see table 1). Together these foster inconsistency and an insecure platform on which to build change. For example, there remains a lack of certainty about the level of importance given to EE in some services and in the authority and resource available to the leaders in order to empower the implementation. Fragmented leadership has been shown in several service areas through strategic leadership without operational leadership; leadership only within middle-management or from ancillary staff rather than staff working and located in the service, and EE 'champions' without sufficient authority to make service changes. This is compounded by several tiers of management, all of whom need to have the same focus in order for change to be enacted. Where progress has been made towards EE there are individuals who have sufficient seniority to lead and can champion the process.

Success is likely to be achieved through a style of leadership that fosters collective involvement (Burnes, Hughes, & By, 2017). Individual reactions to change are very variable (Robinson & Burnett, 2016) and resistance to change is complex and multifaceted (Szabla, 2007). Indeed, in their review of the literature, Oreg, Vakola, and Armenakis (2011) identify a large number of possible factors which they summarize in a model containing explicit reactions to change (e.g., stress; involvement); what might contribute to these (e.g., individual characteristics; nature of the change) and the consequences of these (e.g., job satisfaction; withdrawal). They identify trust and involvement as important factors; both of which are likely to require a long term strategy to achieve. Involvement is also likely to reduce resistance to change (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006) – something commonly encountered when change is being pursued. Explicitly detailing the impact of change – specifically personal costs and benefits to individuals – at an early stage is also important (Oreg

et al., 2011). As EE has largely not been viewed as a change process these aspects have not been explicitly addressed even though some of the elements (e.g. Involvement) are explicit EE standards.

One solution could be drawing together leadership and involvement through a service change coalition (cf. the guiding coalition; Kotter, 1995) in each setting. It is likely that this would include all interested and involved parties - senior / strategic managers, operational managers, middle management, frontline staff and residents / service users. This could also help ensure that enough staff and residents are engaged in and committed to the process (the critical mass) in order for the change to become embedded, and for the service to avoid reverting to old practices when faced with changes in personnel and different organizational demands and priorities. The growing attention being paid to 'distributed leadership' could offer guidance for successfully 'integrating leadership with followership' (Chatwani, 2018; Harrison, 2018).

**Learning point 4:** Leadership, a guiding coalition and inclusive participation could offer protection against the impact of members leaving, promote consistency, maintain momentum and ensure that the responsibility for working towards the goal is not lost. Whilst Leadership and Involvement are two of the 10 EE standards, it appears that these might be considered foundation areas which are required as a platform onto which the other aspects of the process 'sit'.

## **Conclusions**

Research suggests that many organizational change projects fail, with some estimates being that the rate of success may be as low as 30 - 33% (Kotter 1995;

Szabla, 2007). Whilst the introduction of EE could simply fall into this statistic, it appears that the problems and delays experienced in these study sites might be the result of a number of key issues which could be overcome. First, those guiding and delivering the EE initiative appear to have underestimated the complexity and extent of the changes needed at some sites in order to progress further towards meeting the EE standards. Whilst the standards themselves might be appropriate and the portfolio evidence process within EE can be seen to follow many of the best practice ideas (e.g., Driessen, 2009), the scale of the changes needed to meet the EE standards is significant. This has been compounded by limited focus on the needs of the individuals within the process and the effort that is required to establish the distributed or inclusive leadership approach implicit in the framework. A lack of explicit focus on building trust, coupled with staff changes and turnover, have impacted on consistency and progress. Research from implementing change within Dutch ministerial departments suggests that building internal support is essential and that successful changes are typically incremental (Kickert, 2014). Consideration of how these might play a part in this change process will be needed.

With a bespoke award such as EE, those guiding the process of organizational change, in this case the RCP, have a responsibility to the sites subscribed to this service. In assessing the suitability of a site pursuing the award, it is suggested that a staged process to granting the award is taken. As identified above, Involvement and Leadership appear to be fundamental to sites successfully establishing as an EE. Setting a threshold of meeting at least these standards from the outset (or having these as initial targets) in order to be considered eligible to embark on the EE process may help prevent potential negative effects resultant from 'reaching too high' or facing very long pathways to achieving the award.

Whilst the human factors have received attention in this review, the nature and extent of the resources needed to deliver EE remain unclear. It is evident that compiling the portfolio of evidence takes time and effort however, given the degree of change needed to embed some of the standards, it is likely that additional resources (both new and redirecting existing) are likely to be required (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006). This needs to be determined by those involved in EE at each of the sites, and will be bespoke based on the current functioning of each of the services.

In addition to the longitudinal research at these sites designed to determine the impact of EE on various outcomes, future research could examine the nature of the standards and the award process itself. Given that many services are signed up, it may be possible to consider how the assessment of portfolio evidence is made (see Cook, Kuper, Hatala, & Ginsburg, 2016; Gadbury-Amyot et al., 2014 for studies in other areas) and whether the standards should be equally weighted; whether there is a logical sequence of hierarchy and if all of the standards and their indicators must be met in order a) to obtain the award and b) to obtain the possible benefits associated with the standards.

The impact of EE on services and outcomes remains an issue for research, however this paper highlights the likely effort, planning, resources and support that services may require for this award. Services seeking EE need to adopt an organizational change mindset and establish clear leadership and accountability if such changes are to be successful. The following steps are therefore necessary:

1. Recognise EE as an organizational change
2. Prioritise leadership and inclusion through a distributed leadership model
3. Ensure the reasons for introducing EE are shared and understood
4. Ensure a critical mass have a strong grasp of what is to be achieved

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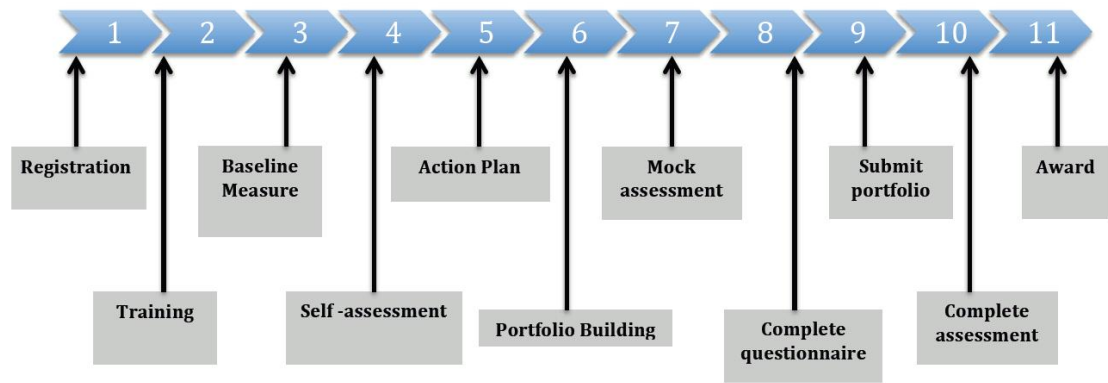
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Site	Change in management	Significant staff changes	Service restructure	EE 're-launched'
AP1		X	X	X
AP2	X	X	X	X
AP3	X	X	X	
P1			X	X
P2			X	
P3			X	X

Table 1: Significant events (shown by X) at each of the sites not completing their EE portfolio during the study period



**Figure 1: Outline of the EE award process.**