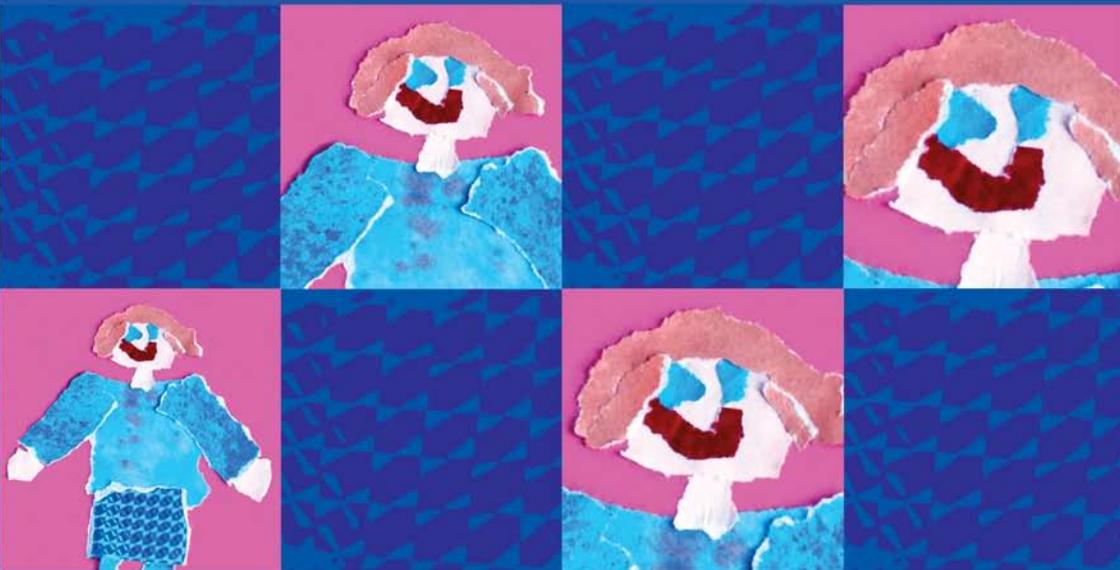


SCOTTISH INSTITUTE
FOR EXCELLENCE IN
SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION



Developing People

Case-studies illustrating how vocational qualifications have made a positive difference to individuals, the organisation and service delivery



Foreword

Perth & Kinross Council welcome the collaboration with the Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education (SIESWE) to identify key aspects of learning in the workplace. This was achieved by working with two groups of staff who charted their experiences of successfully completing Vocational Qualifications (VQs) with a focus on personal, professional and organisational gains.

The Council are pleased to endorse the publication of this study which recognises the growing status and value of VQs to the creation of a skilled workforce, and applauds the effort made by staff to achieve these qualifications. Drawing on a wide range of resources, Perth & Kinross Council have invested heavily in the development of their staff to meet a variety of demands including registration requirements, best practice imperatives and demographic forecasts.

In relation to underpinning the development of VQs, this can be clearly seen through the creation of a robust infrastructure with an aim to support candidates through the learning process. This publication highlights the value of VQ qualifications both to the individual and the organisation in terms of improved performance. For individuals, this is shown from the examples of staff, post VQ, feeling more confident, both in their ability to learn and in their capacity to understand more fully why they do what they do. Individual staff have greater confidence in representing service user and carer needs and more able to adapt services to client need.

For the organisation, the benefits are associated with improvements in service delivery through the development of staff who feel supported in their learning to become more confident, competent workers. Encouraging this culture of learning is a strong contributory factor towards the creation of a learning organisation. Learning Organisations are those organisations that seek to provide environments where learning is valued and staff are provided with a wide range of opportunities to learn and improve their knowledge and skills within the workplace. The views of the staff within this study rightly highlight

many benefits experienced within the VQ process, from protection of time to study to supportive assessors and assessment processes. Equally they were able to pinpoint additional mechanisms, not available when they studied, which could be considered for future candidates.

The Council, SIESWE and more importantly the staff involved in this study, commend this publication to you as a guide and inspiration to both individuals and organisations who might have embarked or are thinking of embarking on a VQ route. It includes real life fears, experiences and achievements in relation to learning and emphasises the importance of clear organisational support for learning, coupled with an environment where staff can be empowered to learn how to learn.

David Burke

Chief Social Work Officer, Perth & Kinross Council

Acknowledgements

This booklet could not have been produced without the co-operation of individuals within Perth & Kinross Council who willingly shared their experiences of learning whilst studying for their Vocational Qualifications. Their stories are the essence of this publication which is designed to offer support and motivation to others following similar journeys.

Acknowledgment too has to go specifically to Susan Strang, Training Officer, who saw the value of and instigated the work and to Karl Stern, Learning and Organisational Development Manager, for his determination to see it come to fruition.

The illustrations within this work are reproduced with kind permission from:

Perth Association for Mental Health (PAMH): pages 2, 18, 30.

Lorraine Nicholson, service user: pages 4 and 6.

Morven Ballantyne: pages 8, 12, 16, 20, 26.

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Introduction

Welcome to this guide, the aims of which are to:

- Share experiences of 2 groups of staff learning to learn within the workplace
- Give examples of how their new learning changed and improved their practice
- Provide indicators of support for learning in the workplace

The guide is written for staff within an organisation who might be thinking about embarking, or who are required to embark, on new learning. It is also useful for anyone within an organisation who has an interest in formal and informal learning within the workplace and the process of learning to learn.

Social work services must develop a learning culture that commits all individuals and organisations to lifelong learning and development

(Scottish Executive 2006)



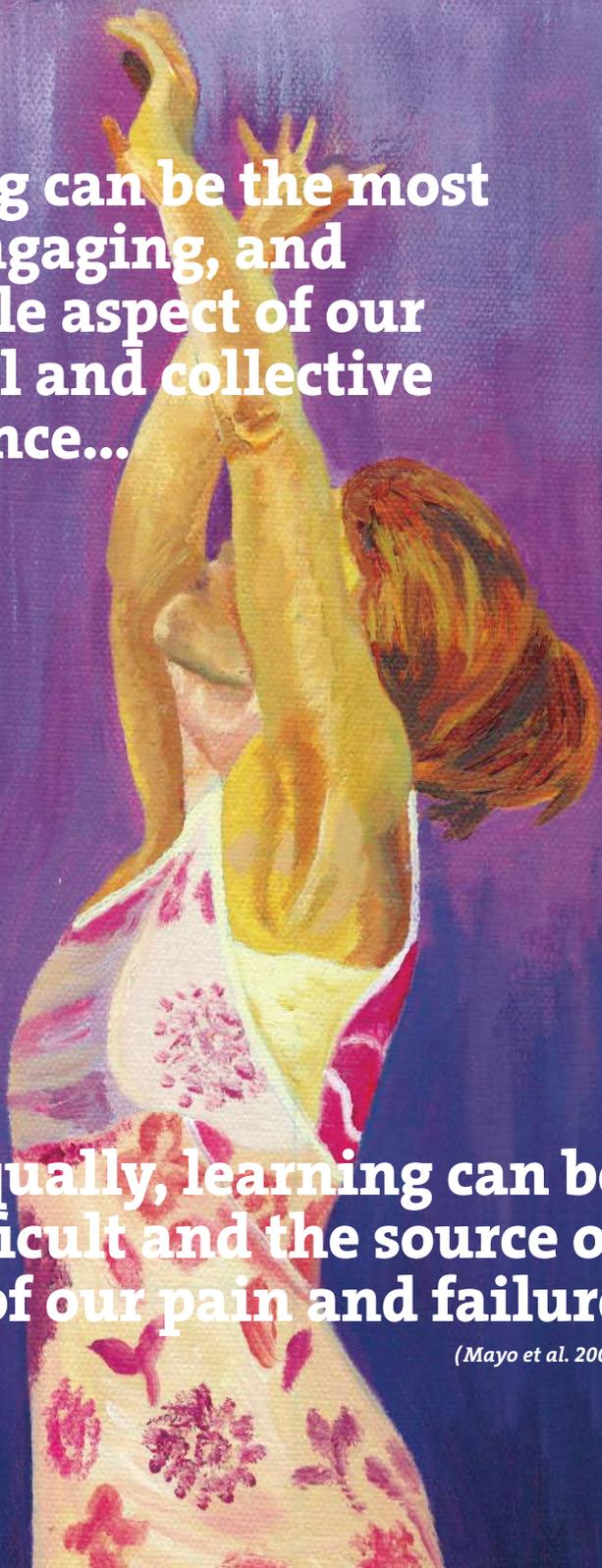
Learning to Learn

- Learning to learn is the most fundamental learning of all
- Learning can be the most vital, engaging, and enjoyable aspect of our personal and collective experience
- Equally, learning can be difficult and the source of much of our pain and failure
- The ability to learn about learning and to harness the learning process, is the key to our ability to survive in a complex and unpredictable world

Learning can be the most vital, engaging, and enjoyable aspect of our personal and collective experience...

...equally, learning can be difficult and the source of much of our pain and failure

(Mayo et al. 2000)



Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to encourage and support others to embrace learning within the workplace in the same way as two groups of staff within Perth & Kinross Council have done. The experiences of the staff telling their story are unique and cannot be replicated in exactly the same way elsewhere. However, the groups have learnt many lessons from their experiences and hope that, by sharing these, they may support and even inspire others to embrace learning more fully.

This guide has been published with the agreement of all those involved, and it is thanks to these people that this project has so effectively been completed. Individuals in these groups started their journey with all the initial reservations associated with starting something new:

“I was initially resentful of being asked to do SVQ3 for Registration when I felt I had relevant qualifications to do the job already.”

“I didn’t know how to use a computer and didn’t own one but was being asked to type up my work.”

“I felt scared coming back to learning after such a long time.”

“I had lots of ideas but didn’t know how to get them down on paper.”

These same staff, both individually and collectively, have now gained their new qualifications and want to share their enthusiasm for learning and their continued thirst for knowledge with others. When asked what they think about the process of learning now, these were some of their responses:

“Really enthusiastic”

“I’d like to do some more [formal learning]”

“Learning is happening all the time now”

These staff have truly *learnt how to learn*.



**“Learning is happening all
the time now”**

(SVO3 Candidate quote)

Introduction to Case Studies

One example of Formal Learning in the workplace was the introduction of the Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) in 1981. These provided a platform for staff in the workplace to gain recognition for the work they were doing, gain new skills to improve their practice and an underpinning knowledge to understand more clearly why they were doing it. Since their inception, SVQs have continually been developed and improved so that currently they have the potential to provide candidates with robust learning opportunities. Realising this potential seems to rely on many factors such as:

- candidate motivation
- support mechanisms within the workplace
- recognising and reducing barriers to learning
- improving outcomes

It is against these headings that we want to further explore learning in two workplace settings by using case-studies which provide a snapshot of how groups of learners harnessed the art of learning, and became motivated to learn more.

Learning has never been more important in our society than it is now

(Scottish Executive 2003)



Case Study 1

The group of staff within this case-study all successfully completed their SVQ3 Children and Young People over a period of 3 years, although not all working to complete the qualification at the same time. The group all work in the Early Years Resource Team with a combined total of 54+ years experience in the care sector. They all had previous qualifications (NNEB, HNC) prior to embarking on their SVQ and described themselves as confident in their work practices.

From the outset, although they were not averse to learning, most were reluctant to do SVQ3, seeing it only as a requirement for Registration. It initially held no financial reward and was seen as providing benefit to organisational requirements rather than enhancing their own practice.

Through the process of successfully achieving their SVQ3, this group have dramatically reversed their thinking. They now advocate the benefits, not only of achieving an award, but more importantly of learning how to learn within the workplace. How this new skill and 'thirst for learning' was achieved is the journey highlighted within this case-study with key messages aimed at supporting others learning within and across other settings.

Case Study 2

The small team within this case-study all successfully completed their SVQ3 'Promoting Independence', between 2000-2006, two completing it within a year. The third member of the team started his qualification with one employer, making little progress over a long period but completed within six months when he changed organisations. One reason for this might be that the former employer had little experience of helping people undertake SVQs and a poor infrastructure to support their needs, whereas his current employer has supported many staff over many years and has a robust infrastructure to support staff development needs.

The staff in this case-study are all community support workers and form part of a community mental health team with over 30 years collective experience within the care profession. One person had an HNC in Social Care gained in 1998 with the other two holding no formal qualifications.

Their motivation to do the SVQ came both from a personal desire to learn coupled with a push from their organisation to gain a qualification. There was also a secondary push for one person who felt that if everyone else had their SVQ they wanted to be part of that too.

One final driver, particular to this community mental health team, was that due to initial disquiet from some professionals about unqualified staff being employed within the team, they were not always afforded due recognition for their skills and experience. The SVQ route was both a way of not only gaining a qualification for these staff but also a way for them to acquire new knowledge, expertise and credibility to work alongside other disciplines within this specialist field.

Post SVQ, this team have developed their own learning using both formal and informal means and improved their practice, which can be seen through the illustrative examples later on in this study. More formal learning has taken place in the form of two Open University modules and a return to learning course being successfully completed.

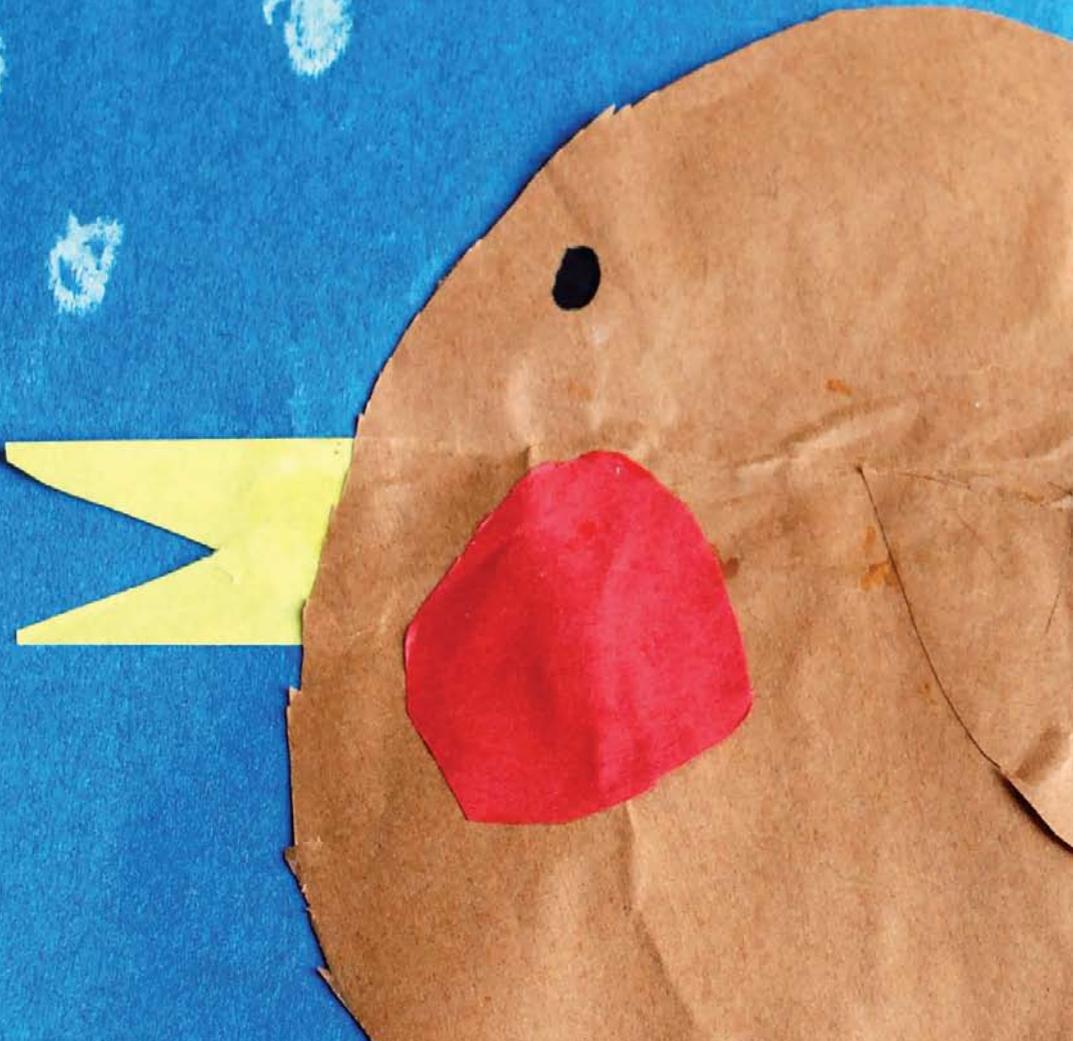
What Can Be Learned From The Case Studies?

This section explores these Case Studies in relation to:

- Candidate motivation
- Support mechanisms for candidates within the workplace
- Recognising and reducing barriers to learning
- Improved outcomes—examples of the effectiveness of the learning to individuals, the organisation and ultimately, and most importantly, to improving practice

People have an interest in learning in order to acquire new skills to further their careers or to benefit their lives in other ways

(Scottish Executive 2003)



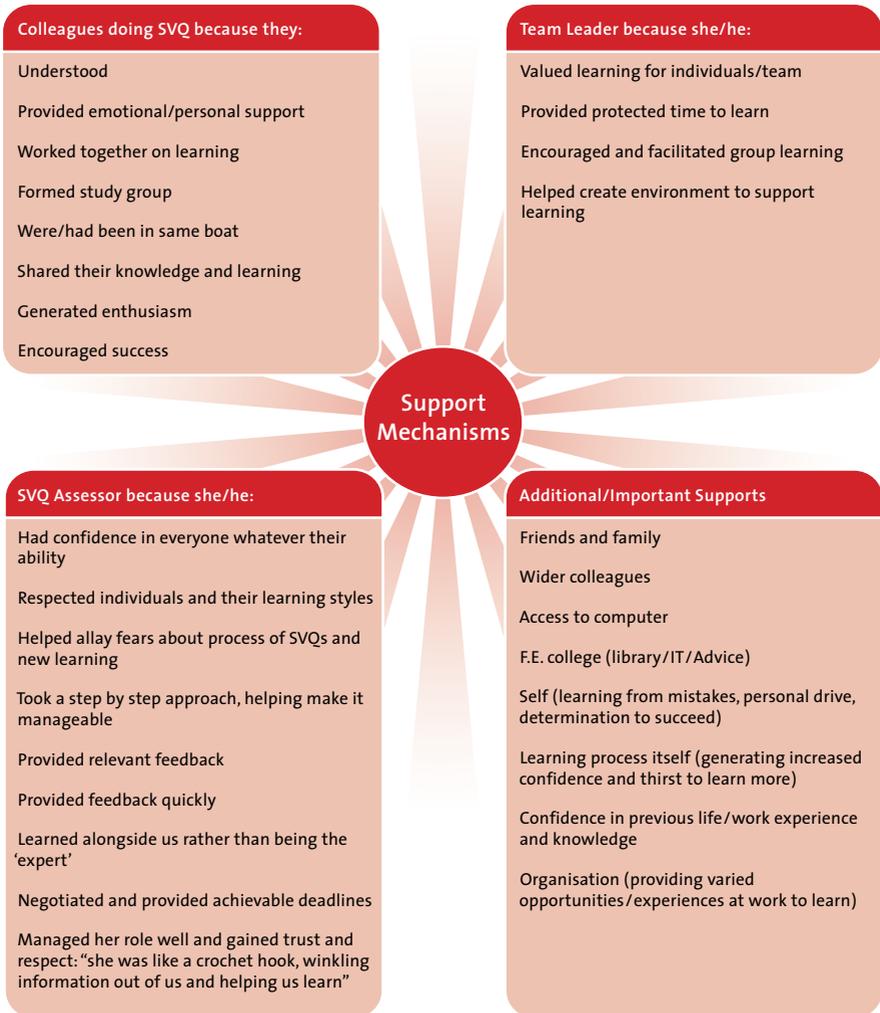
Candidate Motivation

Although motivation to achieve their SVQ3 varied initially for each candidate, all candidates achieved a **high** motivation to learn by the end of the process.

Initial candidate motivation was low due to:	Motivation throughout the process improved due to:	Final candidate motivation was high due to:
<p>Resentment at being required to do SVQ for Registration</p> <p>No initial link seen with effort involved in doing SVQ and improved practice</p> <p>Fears at returning to learn</p> <p>Fears at committing work to paper</p> <p>Fear of failure</p> <p>Doing it because it was expected or colleagues had previously done so</p>	<p>Realisation materials/ required learning was work related and relevant</p> <p>Confirmation throughout process of “doing a good job” and that increased learning could only enhance this</p> <p>Value and recognition given to prior learning and experience boosted confidence and therefore motivation</p> <p>Ability to work with others and gain group support</p> <p>Charting and recognising progress incrementally</p> <p>Strong support from assessor</p> <p>‘Feeling’ positive about learning enhanced motivation</p> <p>Doggedness—“I’ve started so I’ll finish”</p>	<p>Confidence in new learning</p> <p>Pride in gaining qualification</p> <p>Having achievement recognised by organisation</p> <p>Recognising improvements in practice</p> <p>Success from this learning instigating further learning</p> <p>Gaining satisfaction from improved practice</p> <p>Having improved practice recognised by organisation</p>

Support Mechanisms for Candidates Within The Workplace

These came from a variety of sources and were experienced differently by each individual during their learning experience.



Recognising and Reducing Barriers to Learning

Within this study the groups identified clearly what they felt might have enhanced their learning.

Learning might have been easier if they'd had:

1. Easy access to computers and the internet at work; training in IT skills relevant to the task.
2. Real opportunities to bring colleagues from across the organisation together to learn collectively. One group expressed the view that being part of an extended group might have been intimidating and they valued doing their SVQ3 more independently with the support of the assessor/internal verifier. It was recognised that a range of individual learning styles had to be accommodated within the overall process.
3. More opportunities for joint learning with the assessor (in two or threes); permission to network informally across the organisation with a focus on learning.
4. More accessible materials—SVQ materials were hard to navigate and a barrier to learning at the beginning. It was like having to learn a whole new language which, when you were not part of, you felt excluded from—having help both verbally and in writing to help make this more accessible would have been useful (such as Council's Launch Packs which are now available and are designed to demystify the process).
5. More support when returning to learning following a time gap, especially around initially getting thoughts down in writing.
6. Recognition of Prior Learning by SVQ system.
7. More protected time and value placed on learning by the organisation with financial recognition linked to achievement.
8. Requirements of SVQs being more consistent and transparent.

The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write but those who cannot learn, unlearn and re-learn

(Alvin Toffler cited in Scottish Executive 2003)

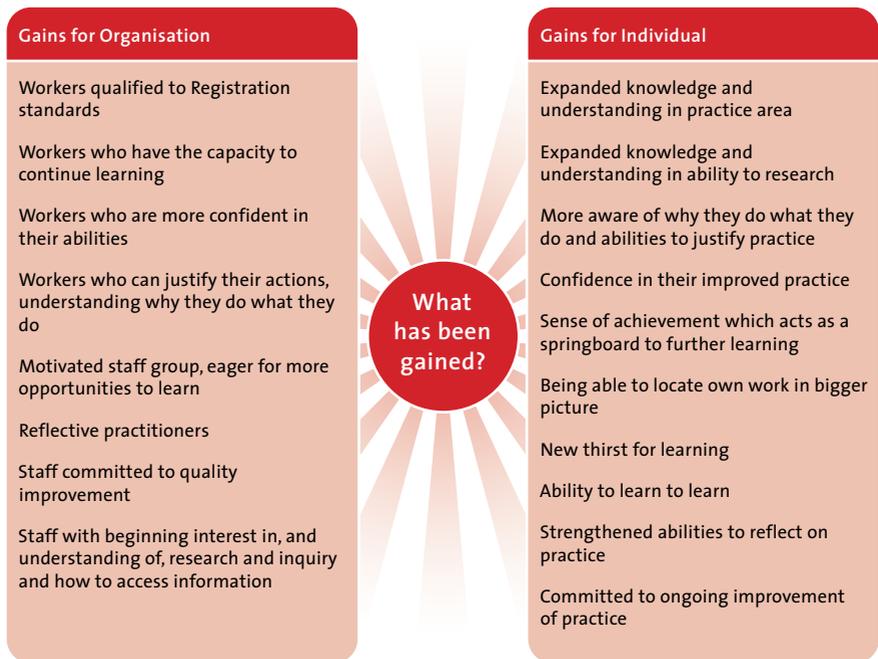


Improved Outcomes

Successful learning by an individual within the workplace has the potential to have positive effects on:

- Individuals — their personal achievement, increased confidence and level of knowledge and understanding and ability to do a good job
- Organisations — by providing a better more competent, confident worker better equipped to produce improved practice which can be shared across organisations
- Services — which are delivered by the enhanced skills and expertise of the worker providing a more informed, competent service

In relation to positive outcomes for individuals and the organisation, the following illustration depicts some of the views expressed from this study.



A close-up photograph of a hand painting a face on a wooden board. The hand is holding a green pencil and is in the process of painting the mouth area. The face is painted in shades of pink, white, and blue. The background shows a wooden surface and a black and white checkered pattern.

**Investment in knowledge
and skills brings direct
economic returns to
individuals and collective
economic returns to society**

(Scottish Executive 2003)

Examples of Improved Outcomes

The following examples provide evidence of how practice within the team began to change as a result of new learning. The groups wanted to emphasise that learning is a process and although their practice has improved, they recognise that they can always improve it further.

Learning to Learn has taught them that there is always something new to learn from every situation as long as they remain open to new learning and strive to continually improve practice.

Names within these examples have been anonymised to protect confidentiality.



Case Study 1 – Example 1

Extract from Early Years Resource Team After School Group Notes — March 2006:

At the house the boys were taken to see the pups first. They all enjoyed seeing the puppies and were keen to pat and cuddle them. Paul had to be watched, as he was apt to tease the puppies by hitting them on the head with a piece of straw.

The boys were then taken to snack, where they ate well and there appeared to be none of the ‘carry on’ that normally happens at snack-time — possibly because they were in an unfamiliar environment.

Extract from Early Years Resource Team After School Group Notes — June 2006:

Paul — Arrived and settled quite quickly at the Child and Family Centre. During snack he began to be a little silly. We had given the boys the choice of sitting at the table or in the tent. We felt Paul was unable to cope with this choice. Paul was drawn into the situation at the frame — he participated with Matthew in not allowing Lewis into the frame and also verbally and physically attacked Lewis.

Paul’s behaviour did not escalate in the same way as Matthew’s and he was able to remove himself from the situation, appearing to have no need to follow Matthew’s lead. He got himself ready for going home and quietly waited for Amanda.

Paul has an older brother who has special needs and can be quite a chaotic household. We are aware that Paul (we feel) uses his sense of humour as a coping mechanism, which during sessions can lead to the silly behaviour we observe. Paul’s behaviour towards Lewis was unexpected, as the boys have been friends since the age of 3. Amanda spoke to Linda about the session and Paul’s behaviour. Linda told Amanda that she and Pauline (Lewis’ mum) have fallen out and she thinks it is possible that Paul is behaving like this because he is aware the mums are not talking.

ANALYSIS

This example draws a comparison between the style and content of two reports written (pre and post a new piece of learning) by the same member of staff about the same group of children.

The first report was shorter, more descriptive and focused on the observed activities of the children. It provided little in the way of reflection on the behaviour of the children nor did it provide any analysis of their interactions or thought about future direction or action to be taken by the staff member.

In contrast, the second report incorporated some good examples, not only of observation of the children's behaviour but comment about why this might be happening and a good example of action by the staff member to gather further information (from the child's mother) to help clarify the situation.

This provides a good example of how the staff member was seeking explanations as to why a child might be behaving in a particular way in order to understand the child more fully and attempt to be in a better position to offer support within the group. Extracts from both these reports focus on Paul's behaviour to illustrate the points made previously.

Case Study 1 – Example 2

Extract from Minutes of After School Group Planning Meeting—Jan 2004

Plan activities re following up children's interests and change the group to an art and craft group (all children have shown a particular interest in this and are wanting to do this every week).

Make up a snack menu plan until the Easter Holiday's taking into account multi cultural food. Copies of plans of activities and snack menus to be handed out to parents.

Make up a list of materials and resources required for art and craft activities to purchase.

Discuss transport arrangements and times.

Extract from Minutes of After School Group Planning Meeting—Jan 2006

Evaluation of October—December Term

Structured, organised session worked best for the five children. We acknowledge the change to the dynamics of the group when our original four became five and this had an effect on the behaviour of two of the children and limited their ability to listen and focus on specific activities.

The activities organised were to help build the children's confidence, develop their listening and concentration and focus on an activity.

The planned activities were flexible to meet the needs of the children and adapted to suit each child giving equality of access to all resources for children from different cultural, religious and gender background.

We have also noted that, though snack is a beneficial social occasion where we encourage self help skills, we have not put any time scale in place but felt there were occasions that we left little time to do the organised activity so we are to be more aware of this.

ANALYSIS

This example again draws a comparison between the style and content of two reports written (pre and post a new piece of learning) by the same member of staff about how to plan a series of after school group sessions.

The first report is short, descriptive and focused on action through planning activities with no reference to past experience with these children or lessons learnt. There is some reference to the needs and wants of the children but this is minimal.

The second report evidences a more systematic approach with the staff evaluating how well previous work with the group had gone in order to inform future planning. They discuss within their evaluation of past work, not only how they ran the group but why they chose to run it this way. There is a very strong emphasis on it being child focused rather than group focused, with each child being seen as unique yet the dynamics of how they interact as a group being addressed too.

Report 2 also shows evidence of critical reflection when they suggest they need in the future, to be more aware of issues to do with snack time. Report 2 illustrates a good start to documenting work—a key part of the process in positive planning for children.

Case Study 1 – Example 3

“I am working with a young dad who has irregular access to his five year old daughter dependent on her mum’s moods/needs. During a phone call he described how frustrated he was about the conditions his daughter was living in while with mum and said he felt like not giving her back.

Before doing SVQ I would not have been able to advise him in this situation as I didn’t have a clear understanding of his rights and would have referred him to my senior. Having completed my SVQ I was able to confidently advise him that unfortunately he had no legal grounds to withhold his daughter as they had never married, even though his name was on the birth certificate. I was also able to advise him to contact the Child Duty Team if he had any concerns when mum came to pick her up, and that he should think about contacting a solicitor.”

ANALYSIS

This first hand account illustrates the confidence felt by one member of staff, having gained new learning, to deal competently and appropriately with a parent’s query and to help avoid, what might have resulted in a crisis, had the father with-held the child. Prior to completing her SVQ3 this staff member felt she would not have known what to say in this circumstance. Although she might have referred the father on to the Child Duty Team, this might not have had the positive outcome it did due to her ignorance of the law and lack of confidence.



Case Study 1 – Example 4

“During an observation session by my SVQ assessor, I was working with the After School group.

The children were being encouraged to wash their hands after painting. As I always do, I became involved with the activity, talking about cosy water, the change of colour in the water—this I did unconsciously.

It was during feedback from my assessor that she pointed out how I had captivated the group’s attention and had enhanced their learning while doing a routine task.

Since doing my SVQ this has made me more aware of the subtleness of my practice, the effect it has on those I work alongside and to document it. That although a lot of my work practice is ingrained, to be aware of it in my work profession.”

ANALYSIS

This observation illustrates how a member of staff became more able to reflect on her own good practice through the process of learning. The comments of the assessor in this example were invaluable to highlight not only what the staff member was doing but why she was doing it and what the positives outcomes for the children were. Seemingly small incidents or activities can be crucial to learning if people are open to learning (reflect on and seek to understand) and the environment is conducive to learning (in this case the assessor observed and identified the learning opportunity). This further illustrates the point that working together with others, whether it be peers, colleagues, managers, assessors, tutors or service users and carers can enhance learning.

Case Study 1 – Example 5

Extract from account of her experience of SQV3 by member of staff.

“At the start of my SVQ I was a social care officer in a supportive role and I was a bit apprehensive, keen to get started and I felt a bit confused at the terminology and overwhelmed by the whole process. In undertaking SVQ, I felt through increased knowledge and my reflective accounts it gave me a better understanding of my work practice and procedures within my workplace. Monitoring and supporting families includes assessments against knowledge and an understanding of attachment.

Through research I am more aware and I have better understanding of our legal systems e.g. I now have a better understanding of a child being placed on a section 70 order. At the end of my SVQ I was confident to say at a case conference review that I wanted the children’s names removed from the register. I gave my reasons and followed it up by saying one of the children is already on a section 70 order. If the family moved away, social work has an obligation to continue support and work with the family. At the meeting I felt I understood the legality of this order and I had not been aware of this at the start of my SVQ. I certainly would not have felt confident to voice my opinion and did not have the knowledge and understanding of the systems to back up my decisions about the children’s registration.”

ANALYSIS

This member of staff was the first of the group to undertake SVQ training and was a strong support & motivator to the others in the group.

This example, based on self assessment, illustrates how this member of staff became more confident in her practice through gaining new knowledge. These together allowed her to speak out, offering her opinion at a case conference review based on the more informed assessment she made because she had more knowledge and understanding.

Case Study 2 – Example 1

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Within SVQ3 Promoting Independence unit CU7, one candidate was asked to reflect on how his earlier life experiences had impacted on his current practice. His account drew on a range of experiences including parental influences, schooling and earlier work opportunities to show how he had been shaped as a person and to illustrate some of the reasons why he acted and thought as he did within the workplace.

Through later study, after completing his SVQ3, he returned to the theme of reflection and the importance of reflective practice. He was asked again to think about the key influences in his life that shape his work—why does he think the things he thinks and hold the beliefs he does. For example, he believes that a healthy body and a healthy mind are linked and therefore supports the use of exercise and healthy eating in his life and promotes this in his work. He values independence for himself and others and therefore works hard to find ways to support the safe independence of those he works with. He also learnt, through the process of reflecting on his upbringing, that he had some negative ways of reacting which he could do something about now he had identified what they were. These included such things as finding it difficult to challenge people in a positive way to achieve the best results. He knew that in his work this was an essential skill, and once identified, he was able to seek support to improve his skills and design strategies for use in his work.

Returning to the theme of reflective practice, this team member realised that the work he did on the SVQ was highly relevant to his later, more advanced study. Building on his earlier study has made this later study more relevant and interesting. He now has the confidence to believe he can study at increasingly higher levels.

ANALYSIS

This example illustrates how learning can be incremental and interlinked. Once someone starts on a journey of learning, they can build on this through both formal and informal opportunities and in turn, improve their thinking and their practice.



... have given creative...
... confident enough to...
... should have had...

Case Study 2 – Example 2

TEAM LEADER OBSERVATIONS

The team leader in case-study 2 observed and commented on the team's practice pre and post completion of SVQ3.

Before completion of SVQ3	After completion of SVQ3
Team members felt disempowered by other disciplines, seemingly more qualified and experienced	Team members engaged with other disciplines on more equal basis
Team members not confident in their own abilities to work in a specialist team	Team more confident about their work as they feel they can justify why they do what they do
Team appeared isolated compared to other disciplines working across and with the team	Team now integrated and engaged with the wider inter-disciplinary team
Team leader often had to engage in tasks on behalf of the team with other disciplines due to lack of confidence within the team	Team leader rarely engages with others on behalf of the team and when this is the case it is within an appropriate role boundary

Case Study 2 – Example 3

Risk Assessment / Inter-disciplinary working:

“I became more aware of the risks that had to be taken when visiting clients in their own home. It (the SVQ3) made me aware of where I sat in their house and if the occasion arose where I felt I had to make a quick exit, could do so.

Letting other team members know where you were by writing appointments in a diary, which is kept in the office so that contact can be made in an emergency or if you are needed.

By working alongside other services, to assist the promotion of independence of the client. By working along at the client's pace rather than your own and acknowledging the client's view and needs.

Recording all contacts with clients (factual and opinion material) and making a clear distinction between the two.”

ANALYSIS

The above comments illustrate how, for one staff member, the SVQ3 was a catalyst towards safer practices in the workplace, working collaboratively with others to promote the welfare of the individual clients and the importance of accurate recording.

These concepts are vital for effective, ethical practice which values the individual and places them centre stage in any practice situation. The 21st Century Review: Changing Lives Report (2006) supports the notion of the autonomous worker, who develops personalised, individual services for clients, takes responsibility for their actions and yet is accountable to the wider organisation within which they work. In this example, the staff member was seeking to provide a personalised service to clients by working at their pace and collaboratively with other services; was taking responsibility for their own safety whilst interacting with clients and finally was being accountable to the organisation — and the client — by recording events accurately and honestly.

Case Study 2 – Example 4

When is a cup of coffee not a cup of coffee? — summary of a group discussion about learning gained from SVQ3:

“When I first started in this job I would go out with the clients for a cuppa as a way of helping them to pass their day. I realised that I was helping them get out the house and for some this was a big step.

However, it was only when I did my SVQ3 that I had to sit down and really think why I was doing what I was doing. Before this, friends would say—and some still do—you have a “braw” job going out for walks and drinking coffee all day. Before the SVQ experience, I wouldn’t have been able to answer them in any meaningful way because I did think I had a good job and I thought it was worthwhile but I wasn’t sure what it was all about in the wider scheme of things.

Learning for the SVQ has made me consider this wider picture and I’m now much more aware that:

- I am working with individuals who all have a unique life and I am there to support their independence, their inclusion into society, their needs*
- I have to go at their pace, which might be one step forwards and three steps back but it is their pace*
- I have to accept them as valued individuals*
- Sometimes steps will be very small—it might take weeks and months for someone to venture out of their house*
- It might take months and years for someone to feel well enough, able enough or strong enough to walk into a shop or cafe*
- Therefore a cup of coffee within these circumstances is such a huge achievement, it will seem for some like winning the lottery.”*

ANALYSIS

To be part of this road to recovery in someone's life requires many skills that the SVQ has helped this team to realise they have. It has also helped them realise that others have complimentary skills which, if everyone works together to support individuals and groups, the sum of the whole can be far more effective than the individual parts.

Methods Used In This Study

1. DISCUSSION

Members of staff within this study engaged in discourse, together and with a facilitator to explore:

- What and Why they had learned
- What impact their learning had on their practice

To achieve this, each group met on between two and four occasions and used the following framework to focus their thinking around how and what they had learned when completing their SVQ3:

Background (description)	Analysis/Reflection
What did you do?	How did you do it?
When/timescales Who involved What was it you did? Who said you had to do it?	Emotional level e.g., overcome fears Intellectual level eg, heading Practical level eg, techniques used, supports Personal level eg, juggling life Professional level eg, juggling work
Rationale	Conclusions/Recommendations
Why did you do it?	What was the outcome?
Reasons for doing it	Benefits Emotional level eg, overcome fears How can you tell? Who says so? Immediately and in longer term? What were they?

2. REFLECTION

Individuals and the groups were encouraged to reflect on their learning within the sessions and within their own time. They used this reflection to draw conclusions about what barriers they had overcome, what helped their learning and what lessons they might want to share with others to support wider learning.

3. ACTION

The groups not only reflected on their learning but collated evidence to support claims they were making about the positive effects of their learning.

Everyone felt that through the process of learning new things their practice had been enhanced.

Everyone felt that by learning to learn, they had gained a really valuable asset which was the ability to 'do it again'. They felt they now had the confidence and ability to continue to learn both formally and informally.

Learning Theory

LEARNING IN THE WORKPLACE

Having a workplace where learning is encouraged and valued not only has the potential of stimulating individual growth but the added bonus of maximising collective learning to the benefit of all.

Within social service settings, where imperatives are to create a confident, competent workforce that provide quality services for service users and carers, having the capacity within the workforce to learn and continually improve practice is vital.

Mayo et al.'s (2000) *Declaration on Learning—A Call for Action* highlights the importance of learning to learn and sets out the responsibilities of governments, communities, organisations and individuals in this process. For the purposes of this document we have adapted some of this work to concentrate on organisational and individual responsibilities for learning.

WHAT IS LEARNING?

Learning can be looked upon as a process, for example questioning and reflecting and/or an outcome with a new skill or ability achieved and is defined in the following ways within the declaration:

1. Learning is not just about knowledge. It is about skills, insights, beliefs, values, attitudes, habits, feelings, wisdom, shared understandings and self awareness.
2. Learning outcomes can be incremental (building gradually on what has been learned) or transformational (changing ways of being, thinking, feeling and acting).
3. Transformational learning may be a struggle, take time and involve conflict over aims and outcomes.
4. By its very nature, learning is essentially individual but can also be collectively generated in groups and organisations.
5. There is no one right way to learn for everybody and for every situation.

6. We can learn from any experience—failure, success, having our expectations confirmed or having them confounded.
7. Learning processes can be conscious (which helps us exercise our control over the process) or unconscious or serendipitous.
8. Learning processes can be both planned and opportunistic. Combining the strengths of both can enhance learning effectiveness.
9. Learning outcomes can be desirable or undesirable for the learner and for others—therefore learning always has a moral dimension.
10. Learning both as a process and an outcome can be both a cause of change and a consequence of change. There is no learning without change although there can be change with insufficient learning.
11. Questioning, listening, challenging, enquiring and taking action are all crucial to effective learning.
12. The learning process occurs inside the person, but making the outcomes explicit, and sharing them with others, adds value to the learning.
13. When self-managed, learning becomes more effective.
14. Learning as a process can be subject to obstacles (eg social exclusion, lack of resources, confidence) but the desire and ability to learn is hard to suppress.
15. Wanting to learn, and seeing the point of learning, is often crucial and makes it more likely that unexpected opportunities to learn will be exploited.
16. Mood influences the quality of learning. While not a prerequisite, enjoyment of the learning process is a significant enabler.

Having defined learning, the declaration seeks not to impose ideas about learning on others but to point to the richness and diversity of approaches to learning as an indication of its potential to achieve desirable transformations. Recognising that learning can occur at any time and anywhere can stimulate thinking about harnessing opportunities and seeking new ways of learning.

INFORMAL AND FORMAL LEARNING

Formal learning here refers to any learning that is formalised within a training programme or a course leading to a qualification or achievement award.

Informal Learning here refers to all other ways of learning such as individual experience, an incident occurring, reading a book, watching a film or TV programme, talking to a friend or colleague, etc.

IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING

The Declaration highlights the importance of learning to enable sustainable development. Here we list the requirements of individuals and organisations to achieve that ongoing development through the embracement of learning.

As an individual learner you should:

- Take responsibility for yourself as a learner — both in terms of what you seek to learn, and how — by setting your own learning goals, actively seeking the conditions or experiences that will help to achieve the goals, making demands on the system, refusing to tolerate obstacles to effective learning
- Make your learning as explicit as possible. Routinely review whether you are making progress towards your learning goals
- Share your learning with others as an investment with a high return in terms of personal learning
- Learn to exploit everyday experiences as learning opportunities — experiment, try out alternatives, ask others, invite challenge
- Learn with and through others as a prime vehicle for learning
- Explore and consciously exploit the wide range of resources for learning (eg the internet, coaches, mentors and colleagues)
- Always seek and learn from feedback as well as inquiry

Leaders in organisations should:

- Commit to, proclaim and celebrate continual learning as one of the organisations most valuable capabilities
- Include the right to learn and develop continually in all contracts of employment
- Build into the agreed roles of all managers the primary need to focus on encouraging others to learn and reinforce this through personal support and coaching
- Be a role model for learning, by doing such things as asking questions you do not know the answers to, demonstrating how you have learned from your mistakes, articulating and sharing your own learning
- Have effective strategies to link individual and collective learning, both within and between groups and organisations
- Routinely encourage curiosity, inquiry and diversity of thought as the norm to ensure dialogue about strategy and decision making at all levels
- Encourage people to challenge, innovate and experiment

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