

The provision of the Practice Learning Qualification Stage 2 (PLQ2) in the North of Scotland

**Report of a feasibility study for Scottish Social
Services Learning Network North**

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Executive Summary

In 2004 the Scottish Executive set out new approach to workplace learning that emphasised practice learning is “*everybody’s business*” in the social services workforce in Scotland. The Practice Learning Qualifications (PLQ(SS) and PLQ) provide a staged framework developed to support the learning of the social services workforce in Scotland. This report summarises the findings of a study commissioned by Scottish Social Services Learning Network North to determine the feasibility of offering a pilot of the PLQ Stage 2 award in the north of Scotland in 2009/10.

The feasibility study used a range of methods, including desk research, interviews, and a survey to access the views of the diverse organisations offering both care and training services in the north of Scotland. 31 organisations in the north of Scotland responded to an invitation to participate in the study, representing an overall response rate of about 22%. The participating organisations reported a wide range of ways in which learning was supported in their workplaces, including supervision, staff induction, SVQ assessment and verification, and through providing practice learning opportunities for social work students.

Key Findings

- There were mixed views expressed about the nature and value of PLQ2. Potential candidates for the Award interviewed for this study were enthusiastic about accessing this qualification, as were a number of larger care providers, but some providers were doubtful about its benefits to their workforce.
- The perceived benefits of PLQ2 included the development of a stronger organisational learning culture, increasing the confidence and competence of practice educators, and improving the experience of students and other learners. The PLQ2 was also perceived to fit well with changing models in social work practice learning with increased use of long arm practice teachers and greater numbers of link supervisors in a range of practice settings
- Disadvantages of PLQ cited by participants included the financial costs of the award, difficulties in releasing staff for training, staff not meeting the eligibility criteria for the qualification and lack of perceived relevance to the workforce
- There was cautious interest in putting forward candidates for the award from both statutory and independent sector organisations. It was suggested that 21 potential candidates for PLQ2 from 9 organisations, mostly local authorities, may be interested in undertaking a pilot PLQ2 in 2009/10.
- Uncertainty about funding for learning and development was a major issue for many participants, especially those representing voluntary sector agencies

- The cost of the PLQ2 is a significant concern for interested organisations, and some agencies would require external funding to enable staff to access the award. In house assessment was seen as a way of reducing costs, but not all organisations would have the capacity to provide practice assessors for PLQ2 candidates.

- Potential candidates come from a wide range of social work and social care specialisms. There was most interest in using PLQ2 to support the learning of social work degree programme link supervisors and workplace mentors for the B.A. in Childhood Practice. Interest was also displayed by other potential candidates with different backgrounds, especially those supporting learners undertaking SVQ care and management awards.

- The importance of ensuring that a wide range of learners can access the award, including service users and carers, and learners in rural areas, was emphasised

- The preferred delivery method for PLQ2 was blended learning: a mixture of distance and face to face methods. Although opinions varied about the pattern of delivery, day release of staff for learning was favoured over block and evening release.

- Seven organisations expressed an interest in developing and providing PLQ2 in the north of Scotland, mostly in partnership with another organisation

- There is a lack of familiarity with the practice learning qualifications in the north of Scotland, especially in the independent care sector. The importance of promoting exchange of knowledge and shared ownership of PLQ2 and other practice learning initiatives in the north of Scotland was stressed

- Response rates were very low in this study so that there is still work to be done to establish the full extent of interest in both providing and accessing PLQ2 in the north of Scotland.

Key Recommendations

- A small pilot presentation of PLQ2 in the north of Scotland in 2009-10 is offered subject to confirmation of interest and capacity from a suitable provider (or partnership of providers) and from potential participants

- That the Learning Network North and its partners undertake a range of activities to inform and promote discussion about workplace learning, the PLQ framework, and PLQ2 with and between learning and social care providers in the north of Scotland with the aim of increasing the accessibility and sustainability of PLQ2 in the north.

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1. Introduction

The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) has developed a staged framework of Practice Learning Qualifications (PLQ) to support the learning of the social services workforce in Scotland. In September 2008 the Learning Network North hosted a consultation workshop to explore the potential for and interest in developing the Stage 2 Award of the PLQ in the North of Scotland. The response to this event was positive and it was agreed to set up a Steering Group to assess the potential for a pilot presentation of PLQ Stage 2 in 2009/10. In December 2008 the Steering Group commissioned Anita Parker and Jean Gordon to conduct a feasibility study to explore the potential interest in both developing and accessing PLQ2 in the North of Scotland. This report summarises the results of the feasibility study.

2. Background to the Practice Learning Qualifications

In 2004 the Scottish Executive set out new approach to workplace learning that emphasised practice learning as “everybody’s business” in the social services workforce in Scotland. The new qualifications, developed by the Scottish Institute for Social Work Education (now the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services), are intended to promote “*a competent, confident, flexible and diverse*” workforce (SIESWE, 2006), and are aligned closely both to aspirations for reform of social work in Scotland in the 21st Century (Scottish Executive, 2006) and workforce planning initiatives in the social care sector (Scottish Executive, 2005). This commitment to the learning of the whole social services workforce throughout their working lives has been reinforced by the launch of the Continuous Learning Framework for the Social Services in Scotland (SSSC, 2008), in December 2008. This framework sets out what social services staff need to enable them to do their job well and aims to improve approaches to learning and development, career pathways, and standards of practice.

The Practice Learning Qualifications are available to people working in social services and related professions who support practice learning in the workplace. The four stage modular framework of qualifications is designed to enable a wide range of people with roles and responsibilities in supporting learning to access the qualifications. The Practice Learning Qualification (Social Services) [PLQ(SS)] is designed for people working in social services who are eligible for registration with the SSSC. There is also a PLQ2 qualification available to people working in related professions, service users and carers who have roles and responsibilities in practice learning. Since the two awards are almost identical this report will use the term PLQ2 to refer to both qualifications at Stage 2.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) has developed Stages 1, 2, and 3 of the Awards as Professional Development Awards (PDAs) which can be delivered across

Scotland by accredited centres. There are currently 5 SSSC approved PLQ(SS) programmes in Scotland: 4 at Stage 3 (South East Scotland, West of Scotland, RGU, and the University of Highlands and Islands (UHI), and one at Stage 4 (Glasgow Caledonian University). In the South East of Scotland a partnership between Stevenson College, City of Edinburgh Council, and the SSS Learning Network South East is currently piloting PLQ2.

3. The Practice Learning Qualification Stage 2

PLQ 2 is set at Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 9, and provides successful candidates with 48 CATS (Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme) points. The purpose of the award is to equip individuals with the skills, knowledge and understanding required to provide practice learning opportunities for others and to give appropriate support, feedback and assessment, by developing candidates' abilities and competence to:

- Support and guide individual and collective learning using a range of methods
- Support the development of learning cultures within and across organisations
- Provide and facilitate practice learning opportunities
- Give feedback and assess the learning of others at an appropriate level

Further information about the PDA standards can be obtained on the SQA website (<http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/32326.html>).

The entry requirement for PLQ2 is a qualification at SCQF Level 8 (or equivalent) or above with a minimum of one years relevant experience in a social services or other relevant setting. Holders of SVQ Assessor and Verifier Awards with a minimum of one year's experience of assessing and verifying at SVQ level 3 and above are required to demonstrate that they can practice and communicate at SCQF Level 8 before undertaking the award.

4. Aims of the feasibility study

The aim of the feasibility study is to “*explore the potential for the PLQ2 Award and to establish if development of an Award is a viable delivery option in the North of Scotland*” (Learning Network North, 29.10.08). The consultants were asked to consider two aspects of PLQ2 delivery: potential candidates and potential providers. More specifically the project would answer the following questions:

Potential PLQ2 candidates:

- Who are the potential candidates for the award? Who are they employed by and where are they located?
- Which organisations in the North of Scotland would engage or support employees to gain PLQ2?
- What delivery modes and release options would organisations support?

Potential PLQ2 providers:

- Who are the potential providers for the award, and who would be interested in developing and delivering the award in the north?
- What would the delivery costs be, and how many candidates would be required to make delivery viable in financial terms?
- What delivery options would potential providers be able to offer?
- What geographic area would the provider support candidates from?

5. Methods

The methods used in the study were designed to ensure that a very wide range of organisations had the opportunity to find out about PLQ2 and to contribute their opinions about the feasibility of offering the qualification in the North of Scotland. Three methods were used to obtain feedback from organisations and individuals in the north of Scotland:

1. Questionnaires for potential providers and candidates' employers

Since the study was carried out over a very short time scale it was decided to use a questionnaire to reach as many potential providers and employers of potential candidates as possible. A list of potentially interested organisations, including public and independent sector (private and voluntary bodies), was compiled with assistance from Learning Network North (LNN). This included a range of organisations from all geographical areas covered by LNN: Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City, Highland, Moray, Orkney, Shetland, and the Western Isles. A number of national organisations that offer services across the north of Scotland were also included. A questionnaire was sent to all organisations apart from larger employers and potential providers (see 2.).

The questionnaire addressed the key questions of the study (see Aims above), and included an option for respondents to have a more detailed telephone discussion with one of the consultants if they wished to do so (see Appendix 2). Respondents could respond in several different ways, by completing questionnaires online (using SurveyMonkey™), returning the questionnaire as an e mail attachment, or printing off an attachment and sending the questionnaire by post.

2. Telephone Interviews with potential providers and candidates' employers

A topic guide was developed which included questions relating to both potential candidates for and provision of PLQ2 (See Appendix 3). Twenty individuals representing potential providers and major employers of social services staff were approached to request a short telephone interview to explore the feasibility of

offering PLQ2 in the north of Scotland. These included all local authorities and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) in the area, NHS Boards in the North of Scotland, and 4 independent (voluntary and private sector) organisations. Notes were taken during the interviews and written up afterwards.

3.Face to face interviews with potential candidates

We were also concerned to access the views of potential candidates for PLQ2 in the North of Scotland. Due to time constraints it was agreed to approach a small but varied sample of possible candidates in a single area within the LNN area, Aberdeen City. A topic guide was devised to explore the potential interest of candidates with varying educational and employment backgrounds and motivations for undertaking PLQ2 (see Appendix 4). Six potential candidates for PLQ2 from two Aberdeen social services organisations took part in face to face interviews.

4.Desk research

A variety of existing sources of information was used to inform the feasibility study, including relevant policy and research literature, and notes taken of the proceedings of the PLQ2 consultation event in the North of Scotland.

5.Contact with learning organisations in the rest of Scotland

An update on developments in the delivery of a pilot presentation of PLQ2 in the South East was obtained through discussion with the South East Scotland Learning Network Manager. We also discussed issues relating to private sector interest in PLQ with the Development Manager of the Workforce Initiative.

The feasibility study was conducted during December 2008 and January 2009.

6. Analysis

6.1 Response from study participants

Response rates to both the questionnaires and invitations to take part in interviews representatives from organisations in the North of Scotland were generally poor. 116 questionnaires were sent out but only 25 were returned, representing 21 organisations providing services in the north of Scotland. The response rate for the questionnaire was therefore only 22%. A range of providers was represented, including housing and health services as well as providers of care to older people, younger adults, children and early years service users with a variety of different needs. One service user-led group was also represented. The geographical spread was less broad, with the majority of responses from the major population centres of Inverness and Aberdeen, and no responses at all from organisations in the Western Isles.

Nine of the 20 planned interviews with organisations took place, and 4 organisations chose to complete a survey or respond by e mail rather than take part in an interview. The interviews involved representatives from local authorities (4 out of a possible 7 authorities), training providers (4 of 9 Colleges, Universities, and independent sector providers), one large voluntary organisation and NHS representatives (2 of 3 representatives approached). The remaining interviews – with 6 potential candidates, the Learning Network South East, and the Workforce Initiative took place as planned. The study’s respondents are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: All organisations that participated in the feasibility study

	Type of organisation	Methods	No. approached	No. participated
Health and Social Care Providers	Local Authorities	Interviews (4) Survey/ Email (2)	7	6
	Independent (voluntary and private) sector	Survey (all) Interview (0)	117	19
	National Health Service	Interviews	3	2
Training Providers	Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)	Interviews	5	2
	Independent sector training organisations	Interview (1) Survey (1)	4	2
Learning and development agencies	Learning Network South East Workforce Initiative	Telephone discussions	2	2
Total			138	33

A total of 27 care providers, and 4 training providers took part in this feasibility study. The reasons for this low response rate are explored in this report’s discussion (see Chapter 8).

Profile of the North of Scotland care provider participants

The 27 care provider organisations in the North of Scotland that participated in this study employed a wide range of staff. Nearly all employed registered managers, and about two thirds employed social care, support, and senior social care workers.

About half the organisations represented employed qualified social workers, and a similar proportion employed Care at Home workers. The diversity of the workforce is illustrated by the significant numbers of staff employed from other professional backgrounds, including nursing, teaching, housing and occupational therapy. This diversity was also evident in the variety of qualifications that employers offered their staff. The incidence of the most frequently mentioned qualifications is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Qualifications offered to staff of agencies providing social care services

Qualifications offered	% agencies	Qualifications offered	% agencies
SVQ Assessor Awards	87	HNC Social Care	32
SVQ3 Health and Social Care	84	Early Years qualifications	34
Management in Care Awards	76	Mental Health Social Work Award	23
SVQ2 Health and Social Care	74	Practice Learning Qualification Stage 3	21
SVQ Verifier Awards	61	Other SVQs	18
Social Work degree	34	Non social care qualifications	14

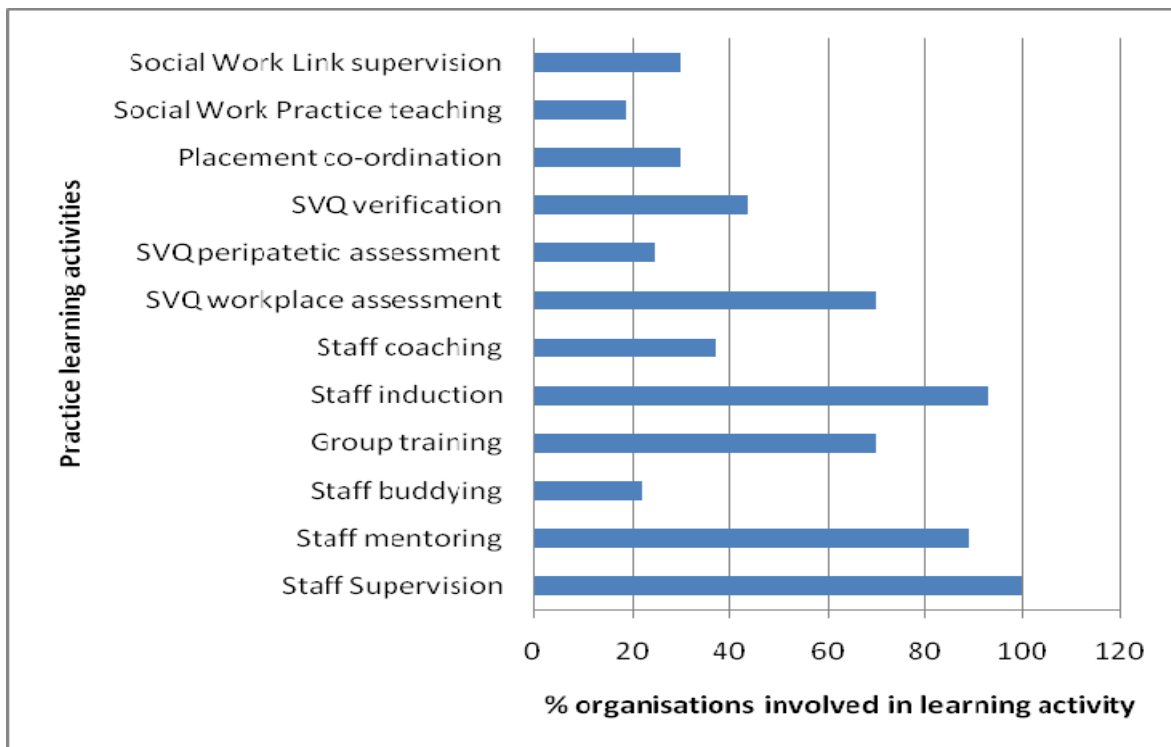
Number of organisations that responded to this question: 27

The agencies also reported staff taking on a wide range of practice learning roles with the most frequently mentioned being staff supervision, mentoring, coaching group training and a range of roles associated with staff induction (See Table 2). Nine care provider organisations were SVQ Centres (and a further 3 training providers also acted as SVQ Centres)

As suggested by the list of qualifications in Table 2, SVQ assessment and verification represented significant aspects of practice learning, with lower numbers involved in supporting the practice learning of social work students.

Most of the agencies reported that they had staff that were eligible to undertake PLQ2, although one did not, and 5 were unsure about this. However, 5 respondents skipped this question which may also indicate doubt about the relevance of PLQ2 to their organisations.

Table 3: Practice learning roles identified by north of Scotland care organisations that responded to both the survey and interviews



Number of responses to this question: 28

6.2 Profile of the potential candidates for the PLQ

The interviewed employees came from two organisations, Voluntary Service Aberdeen (3 individuals) and Aberdeen City Council (3). They had a range of backgrounds, including Social Work (2), Nursing (1) and Social Care (3). All were involved in supporting the learning of others in a number of ways, including acting as a link supervisor to social work students, assessing and verifying SVQ candidates, direct supervision and appraisal of staff members, placement co-ordination, mentoring, and involvement in the practice learning of nursing and occupational therapy students.

6.3 Data Analysis

The data from interviews and the survey has been analysed using quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis. The findings from the study are summarised below. However, the very low response rate means that the findings should be regarded with some caution as they may not be representative of the overall picture in relation to the many organisations that are involved in social services practice learning in the north of Scotland.

7. Findings

7.1 Potential candidates' interest in accessing the PLQ2 Award

The participating organisations were asked whether their employees had an interest in offering PLQ2. Nine of the organisations approached were aware that some of their staff would be interested in accessing PLQ2. The greatest interest reported came from local authorities (5 of the 6 authorities that contributed to this survey), but there was also employee interest from the private sector (3 responses) and 2 voluntary agencies. Interest was spread across different social care specialisms, and included interest from staff employed by a private social care training organisation.

The interviews with practitioners also provided some information about potential candidates' motivation for undertaking PLQ2. PLQ2 was viewed positively by all six employees, as an achievable option for staff who are committed to the learning and development of others but do not want to undertake the PLQ3 Award at SCQF Level 10. It was also seen to be important for experience and skills in supporting others' learning to be acknowledged; undertaking PLQ2 would, it was thought, give added credibility to roles such as link supervision to social work students, SVQ assessment, and staff supervision. This included staff from non social care disciplines, for example with nursing qualifications, who do not require to be registered with the SSSC but who are active in supporting learners in social care. The opportunity to undertake PLQ rather than PLQ(SS) was viewed positively by these staff.

7.2 Organisations' interest in accessing the PLQ award

Sixteen of the 23 organisations that answered a question about their interest in supporting employees to undertake this award, either now, or at some point in the future, gave a positive answer. Six organisations were unsure whether this would be the case. The organisations had a similar profile to those described above, with the main interest coming from statutory organisations, but also some interest from independent sector organisations in city, rural and island locations.

7.3 The benefits of PLQ2

A number of benefits to undertaking PLQ2 were highlighted by the participating organisations in the interviews and surveys:

- The PLQ2 qualification was seen as an opportunity to contribute to the organisational learning culture, supporting the continuing professional development of employees (13 respondents).
- PLQ2 was regarded as offering opportunities for career development (1)

- Undertaking PLQ2 would make link supervisors more confident and competent in their role, and so better at supporting learners (5). For example, one respondent said,

“Overall PLQ2 would help people to be better at their job, understanding what it is learners need to succeed.”

- More specifically, PLQ2 was seen to offer an opportunity to train staff to take on the role of link supervisors to social work students, and to recognise the role of staff already acting as link supervisors (4)

- Improving the standard of service (1)

- Widening access to practice learning qualifications in the north of Scotland e.g. to service users, foster carers (1)

Whilst the service delivery organisations were able to identify benefits to offering PLQ2 several respondents skipped this question, and others commented on their lack of knowledge about PLQ2, and the need to be convinced about the value of the qualification to their staff:

“I remain unclear what the benefits are to our staff team; I would need to be persuaded of the benefits before committing staff to PLQ2.”

The interviews with practitioners provided further insight into the perceived benefits to potential candidates of undertaking PLQ2 and, in some cases, their responses overlapped with organisational responses. The personal benefits highlighted were:

- Keeping up to date with knowledge and skills for the job

- Being able to make a more informed contribution to student assessment and supervision

- Offering a better service to students, including less able students. One practitioner commented that the qualification could *“make the difference between students passing and failing”*

- Increased confidence

- Opportunities for reflection on practice and supporting learners

- Validation of the work practitioners are already doing to support and promote practice learning, and recognition of skills and knowledge in this area

- Gaining a qualification/ development opportunity

Workers also commented on some of the organisational benefits they thought would accrue from offering PLQ2 to staff. These broadly overlapped with organisational

responses above but also included improved recruitment through enhancement of the student experience in practice learning agencies, saving organisations money through promoting staff development, promoting the organisation itself, and increasing the number of both students and staff with qualifications in the agency.

Interviews with both organisational representatives and individual staff brought out some helpful information about the context of practice learning in the north of Scotland. In particular, responses suggested that there is an increasing demand for skilled workplace-based support for students undertaking social work and other professional training. It was noted that there was a growth in the number of link supervisors requiring training. This growth seemed to have a number of causes, including increasing use of 'long arm' practice teachers (see Discussion).

7.4 The disadvantages of PLQ2

Twenty participating organisations also offered a commentary on the potential disadvantages of offering PLQ2. The main disadvantages cited were:

- Lack of perceived relevance of the award to the workforce (5)
- The financial costs of PLQ2 and future funding uncertainties (5)
- Costs in terms of staff time and replacement costs (3)
- Lack of eligibility to undertake the award. Some organisations had few or no staff who were sufficiently qualified to undertake PLQ2. Examples of staff groups that could benefit but who in most cases would not meet the entry criteria for PLQ as they stand included foster carers and social care workers with SVQ2 qualifications (3)
- Resistance from some staff not interested in learning (1)
- Potential difficulties for island authorities if PLQ2 were to be delivered on the mainland (2)
- There are enough practice learning qualifications already (1)
- For NHS contributors, PLQ2 was not seen as an organisational priority and did not fit the current drive to meet the requirements of the Knowledge and Skills Framework (2). One NHS contributor also commented that the Practice Learning Qualifications were seen as *"too social worky"* for health settings so that a *"major selling job"* would be required to stimulate interest.

Several contributors to this study acknowledged the challenges involved in introducing and sustaining PLQ2. For example one HEI respondent said,

“I don’t think that anyone would argue in theory with the need for this qualification, but it may be harder to actually make this happen.”

The interviews with practitioners highlighted some similar concerns, especially about the time required to undertake the award, and consequent knock on effects to the potential participant’s job and overall workload, and the financial cost to the organisation. Responses placed these demands in the context of increasing pressures on practitioners, “*stretched resources*”, competing priorities for training (mostly linked to the registration agenda) and, in some cases, potential closure of services and loss of jobs. It was also noted by 2 practitioners that undertaking the award might result in being “*bombarded*” with students. Finally one respondent stressed that PLQ2 might not be the right route for everyone, and suggested that it was important not to impose a single model of practice learning development.

7.5 Delivery methods for PLQ2

Study participants were asked about mode of delivery for the PLQ2 award. There was strong support for a blended learning approach, involving a mixture of distance and face to face learning. Two respondents stressed the importance of a face to face component to the learning due to its skill based nature. It was also emphasised that online delivery would only be effective if the systems used were user friendly and there was sufficient technical support. Practitioners were also generally in favour of a blended approach.

Views about release options were more mixed, but the most favoured option was of day release, although there was also support for block release, especially from more rural areas where travel time is likely to be significant. The least favoured release option was evening classes, although one rural education provider highlighted a recent positive experience of offering HNC/ SVQ3 through evening classes over a 2 year period. The importance of ensuring that staff are provided with some opportunities for self-directed study within their working hours was also highlighted by one local authority.

7.6 Piloting PLQ2 in 2009/10

The study aimed to gain some more specific and precise information about whether health and social care agencies in the north of Scotland wished to consider participating in a pilot presentation of the PLQ2 award. Fifteen organisations were interested in participating. They comprised 5 local authorities, 4 private agencies, and 6 voluntary sector organisations. Of these agencies, 8 were based in the Aberdeen area, and the remainder in Orkney, Highland, Moray, and Shetland. Four further organisations had an interest in accessing PLQ2 but were not sure whether they would be able to take part in a pilot in 2009/10.

Nine organisations were able to give a more detailed breakdown of potential numbers of candidates (see Table 4). It is important to remember that the numbers given by agencies (and 6 agencies, nearly all in the voluntary sector, were unable to suggest indicative numbers) were provisional and contingent on sufficient funding in the next financial year. For example one voluntary sector questionnaire respondent wrote, “Current funding for learning and development is very tight. We are waiting for clarification about if/ how we access accredited training with this sort of cost.”

Table 4: Provisional numbers of candidates for a pilot PLQ2 award by sector and geographical location

Sector	No. candidates *	Geographical area (including all social services sectors)	No. candidates *
Local authority service providers	13	Aberdeen	8
Voluntary sector service providers	2	Highland	8
Private sector service providers	3	Moray	2
Private sector training providers	3	Shetland	3
All sectors	21	All areas	21

**Where a range of numbers (e.g.3-4) is given the lower number of candidates is given

A range of staff groups in different work settings were seen as potential candidates for PLQ2. The most frequently mentioned groups were:

- Team (and assistant team) leaders and managers
- Senior support, day centre, and social care staff
- Childcare Development Officers
- Training staff
- Social Workers
- SVQ Assessors and Verifiers
- Link Supervisors for social work students

- Mentors for the BA in Childhood Practice (currently going through accreditation processes in several parts of Scotland)

Some staff groups, such as Care Attendants, were also mentioned some of whom seem to be less likely to meet the eligibility criteria for PLQ2.

The 6 practitioners interviewed all saw themselves as potential candidates for PLQ2. They also thought that there were other potential candidates for the award in their agencies, including, in one organisation, unit managers (who have recently been asked to supervise social work students). They also highlighted the importance of being able to offer a range of practice learning qualifications to staff in their organisations to meet their different learning needs. Overall these practitioners demonstrated a very high level of enthusiasm for PLQ2 and hoped that it would be possible for their employers to support them to undertake the qualification.

7.7 Developing and providing the PLQ2

Seven organisations expressed an interest in developing and providing the PLQ2 award in the North of Scotland. These included 2 local authorities, 3 voluntary agencies, a private sector organisation, and a training provider. Most organisations would see themselves collaborating with another organisation to deliver the PLQ2, generally either an HEI or an independent sector organisation, although two saw themselves as potential singleton providers. The numbers of interested organisations may be somewhat lower than suggested from interview responses, some of which appeared not to be based on a full understanding of the implications of taking on the development and provision of a new qualification.

7.8 Costing PLQ2

Although it is by no means clear what the costs of PLQ2 are likely to be, respondents to the survey and to the interviews were provided with information about indicative costs for PLQ3 (suggested by Learning Network North to be £750 - 900 per candidate). A substantial number of responding organisations that answered this question thought that this would be excessive for them (5 out of 18), and 9 organisations responded that they did not know. Only 4 organisations were sure that this was a realistic sum. Several organisations told us that these figures were high for a Level 9 award and wanted more information about what they would get for this kind of outlay. It was also pointed out by respondents that travelling times would add to the cost of accessing the award, especially in more rural areas, such as the Scottish islands. Questions were also raised about the availability of funding to support candidates to access PLQ2. Finally, it was pointed out that assessment arrangements would impact on costs; if assessment was done in house then costs appeared likely to be lower than sourcing this from an approved SVQ Centre.

8. Discussion

The level of interest in PLQ2 in the North of Scotland

The purpose of the feasibility study was to determine whether there is sufficient interest in the North of Scotland to develop, provide, and make use of the PLQ2 qualification. This study has found a very mixed picture in relation to interest in and commitment to the award. On the one hand, we interviewed potential candidates for the award who were extremely enthusiastic about PLQ2, seeing the qualification as an opportunity for recognition of their skills and knowledge in supporting a wide range of learners, for personal development and for improving the service to student learners. Their comments about enhancing staff recruitment through provision of quality practice learning opportunities are also well supported by emerging research about the links between practice learning and recruitment of social workers (Parker et al., 2006).

The local authorities and larger voluntary agencies in the north that participated in this research also gave a cautiously positive response to the PLQ2 initiative, whilst acknowledging constraints on funding and time, as well as competing training priorities. However, despite considerable work to engage as many North of Scotland providers of health and social care as possible in the feasibility study, the response rate was extremely low. This was particularly true of the voluntary and private sector providers, but also applied to some local authorities that were approached to take part in this study. The responses received from the voluntary sector, and, to a lesser extent, the private sector, reflected considerable pressures on staff resources and uncertainty about future funding, linked, in some cases, to the current economic downturn. Therefore, even when these organisations expressed a very positive view of the potential for PLQ2, it appeared to be difficult or impossible at the time of the study to make even provisional commitments to funding staff to undertake the award.

Who are the potential candidates for PLQ2?

The surveys and interviews presented a positive picture of workplace practice learning, with most organisations actively involved in a range of activities, including staff supervision and induction as well as support to students and candidates undertaking a range of qualifications. We encountered a range of ideas about the most suitable candidates for PLQ2. For some organisations PLQ2 seems to be seen as synonymous with training for link supervisors of social work students, and this certainly appears to be an important constituency for the award. The information we received suggests an increasing demand for link supervisor support and training in the north of Scotland. This seems to be partly related to service reconfigurations with new post holders, such as senior social workers, acquiring new responsibilities for social work practice learning. This growth also appears to be associated with changes in the ways in which practice learning for social work degree students is

being delivered. We heard from some practitioners and organisational representatives that it is increasingly common for practice teachers to act as 'long arm' educators, co-ordinating and taking responsibility for the overall assessment of practice learning opportunities for students. Often they may be working with a number of link supervisors who have the main face to face contact with the student. Increasing diversity in practice learning arrangements, and greater use of link supervisors in a range of different settings is also evident in other areas of Scotland and the rest of the UK (Doel et al., 2007, Spiers, 2008, Gordon et al., 2009 – forthcoming).

At the same time it is important to remember that the Practice Learning Qualifications were established to support a much more fundamental shift towards making practice learning accessible to the whole social services workforce, as well as service users and carers. We suggest that any PLQ2 initiative should, therefore, endeavour to make itself accessible to a wide range of practitioners and managers. For example, SVQ assessment and verification formed a significant part of the reported practice learning activity of most of the care providers that participated in this study, and assessors and verifiers might appear to be prime candidates for PLQ2. However, it seems less clear what would encourage these practitioners, or their employers, to undertake PLQ2, particularly when they are also required to undertake SQA qualifications to carry out their assessment role. There are also issues around the eligibility of individuals to undertake PLQ2 which is set at a SCQF level that some potential candidates suggested by respondents in this study, such as foster carers, may be unable to meet.

Finally, this study suggests a potentially important group of candidates arising from the need to train and support mentors for the BA Childhood Practice (see below).

The potential for a pilot presentation of PLQ2

The figures we have been given for numbers of staff who may be able to undertake a pilot PLQ2 award, though low, would, at 21, appear to be sufficient to offer the qualification in the north of Scotland on a trial basis. The data we have received suggests that the majority of these candidates would be likely to come from local authorities. It may be more possible for voluntary agencies to make decisions about commitments to training after the end of this financial year. The other major source of candidates suggested by this study was Highland and Moray Accredited Training Services (HiMATS) which has a particular interest in using PLQ2 to enable their staff to mentor students undertaking practice learning as part of the BA in Childhood Practice, a new degree that is aimed at meeting the developing professional needs of the Early Years and Childcare workforce. Their needs may be well met by PLQ2, although there are some unknowns, including predicted student numbers for this award, and a reported view that mentors should be trained at SCQF Level 11 in order to mentor BA students who will ultimately be studying at SCQF Level 10.

The most popular delivery option appeared to be a blend of face to face learning and distance learning. It was stressed by respondents that the delivery methods used must meet the needs of staff in rural and remote locations without incurring large additional costs in terms of finances and staff time to attend learning events. There were divided views about structuring the award, with most interest in day release, although, if more remote candidates are to participate it may be necessary to consider, for example, fewer and longer face to face learning opportunities.

A major issue for organisations, given the very evident pressures on staff time, may be the need for practice assessment. It was suggested that providing assessment of practice learning activity 'in house' is likely to be cheaper than buying assessment from an accredited centre, although in the South East of Scotland many employers struggled to find staff with capacity to undertake assessment of candidates, and this may well prove to be an issue in the north of Scotland as well. Stevenson College has now employed a peripatetic assessor for 13 of the 18 South East Scotland PLQ2 candidates to meet this gap.

Development and delivery of PLQ2

There is a level of interest in developing and delivering a pilot presentation of PLQ2 from voluntary, private and statutory care sectors as well as training organisations. However, due to the lack of response from some potential providers of the award, we do not consider we have sufficient information to gain a clear picture of the range of providers who may be able to develop a pilot award. In particular we did not have an opportunity to interview representatives from those HEIs who already have experience in the provision of PLQ3 in the north. Further work is required to build on the contacts we have made, to make further approaches to HEIs and to determine who is best placed to deliver a pilot. The information we received suggests that a partnership between organisations (e.g. an HEI or other training provider and a local authority or independent sector organisation) is the most likely option, although a single provider was favoured by some interested organisations.

Costs for PLQ2

A strong message from the study was that the indicative costs (£750 – 900) quoted by Learning Network North were considered too high for an SCQF Level 9 course. Costs for the PLQ2 in the South East were lower than this, at £595 per candidate, and include candidate assessment in many cases, although it is possible that this award has been costed too low. Cost is likely to be a significant issue for all organisations, but particularly so for the voluntary sector organisations that took part in this study, and further work needs to be done to assess realistic costs. Some organisations would not be able to put forward candidates without additional external funding. This financial year there has been some SSSC funding available to promote practice learning in the private care sector, although it is not known if this will continue beyond March 2009. The potential for attracting funding to support the

involvement of the public sector in any north of Scotland initiatives is an area that is worth further exploration.

Low response to the feasibility study

The very low response rate to this study raises some concerns about the generalisability of the results, as well as potential inaccuracy in predicted numbers for a PLQ2 pilot. Although we are not entirely clear why so few organisations responded to the survey and interview invitations, our discussions with respondents suggest that there may be a number of overlapping reasons for such low participation in this study:

- Data collection took place between mid December and late January, and many organisations were closed for two or more weeks during this time
- It was evident that many organisations, including providers of social care and learning services, found themselves overstretched and lacked time to take part in interviews.
- Some organisations may not have completed the survey because they were not interested in providing or accessing PLQ2
- There was an apparent lack of knowledge about the practice learning qualifications generally, and PLQ2 specifically, which may have impacted on people's interest in participating in the survey, despite the provision of information about the qualification with the survey. This important theme is picked up in the next section.

Promotion and Partnership

Organisational responses to this study have revealed both a lack of knowledge about the award, as well as understandable concern to ensure that undertaking the PLQ2 would be of value to their staff and the organisation before making any commitment of staff time and finances to training. Several organisations, especially in the independent sectors, were doubtful of the benefits of PLQ2 and did not see this as a current priority. Feedback from Care Scotland, which has been working closely with the SSSC to promote practice learning in independent sector care homes, also suggests that there are particular doubts in this sector about the “added value” of the PLQ2, particularly when there is existing, but much shorter and cheaper training, already available, such as link supervision training for staff supervising social work students, and nurse mentorship for trained nurses.

Experience in the South East of Scotland, which has just started its pilot presentation of PLQ2, has underlined the importance of work to inform organisations about PLQ2 and to understand how undertaking the qualification will benefit individual staff members and the organisation as a whole. Wendy Paterson, Learning Network Co-

ordinator, described a need to “*push PLQs out*”, informing and promoting the award before local social services agencies can begin to “*own*” the initiative and build interest in and commitment to making use of PLQ2. Work in the South East has also stressed the importance of the role of a PLQ2 steering group which is comprised of an active partnership of local care and training providers; this partnership is seen as being “*crucial*” to planning and implementation of PLQ2. This view is supported by contributor feedback at the PLQ2 North of Scotland Consultation Workshop on Practice Learning (September 2008).

The experience of undertaking this feasibility study suggests that many organisations in the north, particularly in the voluntary and private sectors, have little understanding of PLQ and find it hard to visualise which staff it might benefit or why they might want to add this to the range of qualifications on offer to their staff. There is a need for more proactive work to inform organisations in the north of Scotland about PLQ2. This is not just about disseminating information, but about having an ongoing dialogue with care and learning providers and their staff in the north of Scotland within the context of social services practice learning in the broadest sense, as well as finding ways to convey what the PLQ2 and its outcomes will ‘look like’ in practice.

9. Recommendations

This feasibility study suggests that there may be sufficient interest in accessing PLQ2 to consider offering a small pilot presentation of the award in the north of Scotland in 2009/10. However, the limited response to this feasibility study and the difficulties that agencies, especially in the independent sector, reported to us in predicting funding availability for the next financial year will make it important to confirm the numbers of interested candidates before embarking on any planning for a pilot. Actions required to support a pilot presentation of PLQ2 are summarised below.

The context for the development of PLQ2 in the north

This study suggests that it will be very important to ensure that any pilot is not seen as a ‘one off’ project but set in the broader context of promoting “*a learning culture that commits all individuals and organisations to lifelong learning and development*” (Scottish Executive, 2006) in the north of Scotland. We suggest that introducing PLQ2 to the north is only likely to be successful if supported by work to ensure that the approach used is inclusive of the interests of a wide range of learners and learning organisations, and is sustainable beyond the pilot stage. We therefore recommend that any work to establish a potential pilot is supported by:

- Work by the Learning Network North and its partners to inform and promote discussion about practice learning, the PLQ framework, and PLQ2 with and between learning and social care providers in the north of Scotland

- Review of the membership of the steering group with the aim of ensuring that the group represents a wide range of interests in the north of Scotland, including the independent sector and non-social services organisations, such as health and/or education, and service user and carer groups, so helping to generate a wider understanding and sense of local ownership of the award.

- Developing ways to illustrate how PLQ2 can support a diverse range of learners in different settings. For example, the Learning Network could work with its partners to create a small number of case studies (using written materials and/ or podcasts) illustrating how PLQ2 could support the learning of SVQ assessors/ verifiers or mentors, as well as the more generally understood benefits to link supervisors of social work students

- Work to assist employers of social services staff to gain an understanding of the links between quality practice learning experiences for students and recruitment of qualified practitioners

- Activity to establish whether funding may be available to support candidates in settings where financing PLQ2 may be problematic e.g. small independent sector agencies.

The development and delivery of a PLQ2 pilot

The findings also provide some information about how a pilot PLQ might be offered in 2009/10. A number of organisations in all sectors, including both care providers and training organisations indicated an interest in providing the award, and have indicated their willingness to be involved in further discussions about a pilot version of PLQ2. There are also some potential providers of PLQ2, some with prior experience of PLQ3 delivery, which have not participated in this study, and should be involved in any further discussions about suitable providers. Both partnerships and single providers should be considered, although it is probable that partnership arrangements would be likely to have benefits in terms of promoting and sustaining wider ownership of the award.

It is clearly crucial that the award is developed with close attention to the Guiding Principles for Providers of the Practice Learning Qualifications. These include the requirement that any provider will need to develop and deliver an accessible and flexible framework that enables “*comprehensive access and participation across Scotland, including by distance learning*” (SIESWE, 2006: 10). In particular it is recommended that:

- The pilot is delivered in such a way that more rural and remote candidates are enabled to participate. This would be best supported by a blended learning method with arrangements for face to face learning that minimise travelling times and expenses.

- The development and delivery of the pilot is undertaken with a view to involving a wide range of learners, including service users and carers. This consideration will influence the design of learning programmes to ensure that accessibility is maximised.

- The availability of in-house assessors is explored with potential participating employers to establish whether they have the capacity to make available suitably qualified practitioners to assess candidates for the award.

- Arrangements for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) are discussed and agreed to ensure that the award is accessible to a wide range of learners. There is potential for building on current local development opportunities (e.g. link supervisor and SVQ assessor training) in the north to enable potential candidates who do not meet the eligibility criteria to test out their interest and gain further experience in supporting practice learning before contemplating PLQ2.

- Indicative costs for PLQ2 are closely examined and reviewed to ensure that these are realistic and take account of the costs of candidate assessment

- Numbers for the pilot presentation are kept small (10 – 12 candidates). Until it is clear which organisation(s) may act as provider(s) it is not possible to judge whether the pilot should take place in a particular geographical area or across the whole of the Learning Network North area

- Plans for evaluation of any pilot against the objectives of PLQ2 should be embedded in the development and delivery of the award

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Appendix 1

We are very grateful to the following organisations which have participated in the study through interviews and completion of questionnaires.

Abacus Nursery, Aberdeen

Aberdeen City Council

Aberdeen Foyer

Aberdeenshire Council

Aberlour Child Care Trust

Albyn Housing Society, Invergordon

Anderson's Care Home, Elgin

Banff-Buchan College

Barnardo's: Gemini Project, Peterhead and Home from Home, Aberdeen

Beannachar Camphill Community

Carolton Care, Nairn

Crossroads (Orkney)

Highland Council

Highland Home Carers

Highland Users Group

Highland and Moray Accredited Training Services (HiMATS)

Inverness Women's Aid

Laurandy Day Care Centre, Wick

Moray Council

NHS Grampian

NHS Highland

Orkney Islands Council

The Open University in Scotland

Richmond Fellowship Scotland

Riverside House Care Home, Wick

SACRO

Shetlands Islands Council

Target Training Aberdeen

Turning Point Scotland

Voluntary Service Aberdeen

Appendix 2: Questionnaire for employing organisations

Feasibility Study into the provision of the Practice Learning Qualification Stage 2 (PLQ2) in the North of Scotland

The Learning Network North is one of four learning networks funded by the Scottish Government to contribute to the ongoing development and learning of the Social Services workforce in Scotland. The Network has identified a potential interest in offering and accessing PLQ2 in the North of Scotland and has commissioned a feasibility study to establish whether development and provision of the Award in 2009/10 is a viable option. You can find out more about PLQ2 from the attached information sheet.

You have been sent this questionnaire because your organisation may have employees who are eligible and interested in undertaking PLQ2 and/or may have an interest in offering PLQ2 in the North of Scotland. We would be very grateful if you could complete this questionnaire which is designed to assess the potential for a pilot presentation of PLQ2 in the North in 2009/10. If you are not in a position to provide the requested information, please pass it on to an appropriate colleague. The information you provide for this survey will solely be used for the purpose to informing decision making about the provision of PLQ2 in the North of Scotland. Many thanks for contributing your time to this project.

1.Details of you and your organisation

Name:		
Job Title:		
Name of organisation		
Address of organisation		
Telephone Number:		
E mail address:		
Nature of service provided (e.g. Care at Home services for older people)		
Is your organisation a registered training provider (e.g. SVQ Centre)?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/> **

****If you are completing this questionnaire on your computer screen, you can check boxes by double clicking on the box: . Then click on 'checked' in the options that come up, and your box will look like this:**

2. Who works for your organisation?

Which of the following groups of staff work in your organisation? <i>Please tick all that apply, and add any roles not listed below.</i>					
Registered Managers	<input type="checkbox"/>	Occupational Therapists	<input type="checkbox"/>	Senior Care at Home staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Senior Social Care Workers	<input type="checkbox"/>	Social Workers	<input type="checkbox"/>	Housing Officers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Care Workers	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nurses	<input type="checkbox"/>	Support Workers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Care at Home staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	Health Care Assistants	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Other (<i>please detail</i>)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Other (<i>please detail</i>)	<input type="checkbox"/>				

3. Qualifications that your staff are undertaking

Which (if any) of the following qualification are available to staff in your organisation? <i>Please tick all that apply, and add any qualifications not listed below.</i>					
Social Work Degree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Occupational Therapy Qualifications	<input type="checkbox"/>	SVQ3 in Health and Social Care	<input type="checkbox"/>
HNC Social Care	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nursing qualifications	<input type="checkbox"/>	Management in Care Awards	<input type="checkbox"/>
MHO Award	<input type="checkbox"/>	Housing qualifications	<input type="checkbox"/>	Non Health and Social Care SVQs (e.g. Administration)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Practice Learning Qualification (Social Services) Stage 3 (PLQ(SS)3)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Early Years qualifications	<input type="checkbox"/>	SVQ Assessor Awards	<input type="checkbox"/>
Practice Learning Qualification Stage 3 (PLQ3)		SVQ2 in Health and Social Care	<input type="checkbox"/>	SVQ Verifier Awards	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (<i>please detail</i>)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Other (<i>please detail</i>)	<input type="checkbox"/>				

4. Practice Learning in your organisation

Which of the following practice learning roles do staff in your organisation undertake on a regular basis? <i>Please tick all that apply, and add any roles not listed below.</i>			
Staff supervision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff coaching	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff mentoring	<input type="checkbox"/>	Group training of staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Practice teaching (Social Work)	<input type="checkbox"/>	SVQ Verification	<input type="checkbox"/>
Link Supervision (Social Work)	<input type="checkbox"/>	SVQ Workplace Assessment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Placement co-ordination	<input type="checkbox"/>	SVQ Peripatetic Assessment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff buddying	<input type="checkbox"/>	Induction of new staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (<i>please detail</i>)	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Other (<i>please detail</i>)	<input type="checkbox"/>		

5. Potential Candidates for PLQ2

	Yes	No	Don't know
Does your organisation have eligible candidates for PLQ2? (<i>Please see PLQ2 fact sheet for more information about who entry requirements for the award</i>)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Please go to question 9	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there interest in undertaking PLQ2 in your current staff group?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Would your organisation be interested in supporting employees to undertake this award (either now or at some point in the future)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Please go to question 9	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please add any comments you have about potential candidates for PLQ2:

6.Delivery of PLQ2

What mode of delivery of PLQ2 would be most suitable for your staff group?	
Face to face learning	<input type="checkbox"/>
Distance learning (using online and other methods)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Blended learning (a mixture of distance and face to face learning)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please add any comments about preferred delivery modes:	
What release options for PLQ2 study would be feasible for your organisation and its staff? (Please tick all that apply)	
Day release	<input type="checkbox"/>
Block release (e.g. for 2-3 days at one time)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Evening classes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No release (staff would undertake study in own time)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>
Please add any comments about realistic release options:	

7. What would be the benefits and disadvantages of offering PLQ2 to your staff? (e.g. to your organisation, employees, service users/carers)

What would be the benefits (if any) of offering PLQ2 to staff in your organisation?
What would the disadvantages (if any) of offering PLQ2 to staff in your organisation?

8. Piloting PLQ2

If there is sufficient interest in the North of Scotland a pilot PLQ2 will be developed and offered in 2009/10.

If a pilot PLQ2 course is developed, would your organisation consider supporting candidates to undertake the award?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/> Please go to question 9	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
Costs for PLQ2 are not yet certain, but similar awards are currently costed at £750-900 per candidate. Would a comparable costing for a pilot presentation be realistic for your organisation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If yes, how many potential candidates may be able to undertake the pilot award?	No of candidates:		
What job role(s) do the potential candidates have?			

Please add any further comments you have about piloting PLQ2, including costs of the award:

9.Potential providers for PLQ2

<p>Does your organisation have an interest in developing and providing the PLQ2 award? <i>(Please see PLQ2 fact sheet for more information about the aims and content of the award)</i></p>	<p>Yes</p> <input type="checkbox"/>	<p>No</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Please go to Qu.10	<p>Don't know</p> <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>There is potential for PLQ2 to be developed and/or provided by a single organisation or a partnership of organisations. Which arrangements might your organisation be interested in pursuing? Please tick all that apply.</p>	<p>Single Provider</p> <p>Partnership with University/ College</p> <p>Partnership with Independent Sector</p> <p>Partnership with Statutory Sector</p> <p>Other</p>		<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Would you be interested in exploring issues relating to the development and provision of PLQ2 further?</p>	<p>Yes</p> <input type="checkbox"/> **	<p>No</p> <input type="checkbox"/>	
<p>** If you answer 'yes' to this question we will contact you to discuss this further. Please let us know how you would prefer to be contacted (tick both or either):</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> By phone</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> By e mail</p>			

10. Is there anything else you want to add?

Please add any additional comments here:

Thank you very much for contributing to this feasibility study.

[This survey was also made available in a slightly different format on Survey Monkey (TM)]

Appendix 3: Topic guide for interview of potential providers and employing organisations

Introduction:

Who you are

Purpose of the interview

Who they are (the appropriate person to provide the information)

Time – approximately how long will be required for the interview

What will happen to the information?

Interview

1. Provision of Background Information about PLQ2

2. Your organisation

- Who works for your organisation?
- Current practice learning qualifications within your organisation
- Roles of staff supporting practice learning

3. What might be the benefits of PLQ2 for your workforce?

4. What might be the disadvantages of PLQ2 for your workforce?

5. Potential providers

- Does your organisation have an interest in developing and providing the PLQ2 award?
- Would you be interested in exploring working in partnership with other organisations, e.g. University, College, SVQ Centre

6. Delivery

- What mode of delivery of PLQ2 would be most suitable for your staff group?
e.g. Face to face learning, Distance learning (using online and other methods), Blended learning (a mixture of distance and face to face learning)
- What release options for PLQ2 study would be possible for your organisation?
e.g. Day release, Block release (e.g. for 1-3 days at one time), Evening classes

6. Piloting PLQ2.

If there is sufficient interest in the North of Scotland a pilot PLQ2 may be developed and offered in 2009 / 10

- If a pilot PLQ2 course is developed, does your organisation have potential candidates for the award?
 - If yes, how many potential candidates would be able to undertake the pilot award?
 - What job role (s) do the potential candidates have?
 - The cost of PLQ2 may vary depending on the provider of the award however current figures for the delivery of a similar award are between, £750 - £900. Could you give an indication as to whether a comparable costing would be realistic for your organisation?
 - Do you have any other comments about piloting PLQ2?

7. Any other questions/ comments?

Appendix 4: Topic Guide for Potential Candidates for PLQ2

Introduction:

Who you are

Purpose of the interview

Who they are (the appropriate person to provide the information)

Time – approximately how long will be required for the interview

What will happen to the information?

1. Background Information:

- What is PLQ 2?
- A Practice Learning qualification to support the learning and development of staff and students
- Approved by SQA + SSSC
- Set at SCQF level 9
- Entry requirements / suitability of candidates

2. Your organisation:

- Who works for your organisation?
- Current practice learning opportunities within your organisation:
- Roles of staff in your organisation who are supporting workplace learning

3. Your role and responsibilities:

- What is your role
- What is your experience of supporting the learning and development of staff and / or students
e.g.

Social work students

Nursing students

SVQ candidates

A1 and V1 candidates

Other

4. Qualifications and Continued professional development:

- What are your current qualifications?
- What CPD opportunities are available to you in relation to practice learning?
- Would you view the PLQ2 award as an appropriate CPD opportunity?

5. Benefits and disadvantages:

- What might be the benefits of completing PLQ2 ?

You

Your organisation

- What might be the disadvantages of PLQ2?

You

Your organisation

6. Delivery:

- What mode of delivery would be most suitable for you e.g. Face to face learning, Distance learning (using online and other methods), Blended learning (a mixture of distance and face to face learning)
- What release options for PLQ2 study would be possible for you? E.g. Day release, Block release (e.g. for 1-3 days at one time). Evening classes?

7. Piloting PLQ2:

If there is sufficient interest in the North of Scotland, a pilot PLQ2 may be developed and offered in 2009/10

- If a pilot PLQ2 is developed would you view yourself as a potential candidate?

- Other potential candidates
- What job role (s) do potential candidates have?
- Do you have any other comments about piloting PLQ2 in the North of Scotland?

8. Any other questions / comments?.