



Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL)

Mentor Guidance Pack

Background to the RPL resources

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Social Services Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) Mentor Guidance Pack is part of a set of resources that have been developed by the SCQF Social Services RPL working group.

The other resources are:

- SCQF Social Services Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) Resource Pack
- SCQF Social Services Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) Profiling tool for SVQ Health and Social Care (level 3)
- SCQF Social Services Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) Links to SVQ3 Unit HSC 33 - Reflect on and develop your practice

The Mentor Guidance Pack provides guidance to individuals acting as mentors as part of an RPL process for social services staff. The RPL Resource Pack contains guidance and resources to support the mentors and learners. The Profiling tool is designed for learners to identify skills and knowledge achieved through their life and work experience. Links have been identified between the SCQF Recognition of Prior Informal Learning Pack and Profiling tool and the requirements for the SVQ3 Unit HSC33 and these are identified in Links to SVQ3 Unit HSC 33 - Reflect on and develop your practice.

The Information Handouts and Activity Handouts in the RPL Resource pack and the blank Profiling tool form, Reflective Exercises and Evidence Gathering form in the RPL Profiling tool can be copied for learners.

The Mentor Guidance Pack and the Resource Pack provide generic guidance for RPL within the Social Services sector. The profiling tool has been designed specifically for SVQ3 in Health and Social Care, but this approach can be developed to support the achievement of other qualifications.

Scottish Social Services Council

Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

Lo-call: 0845 60 30 891
Tel: 01382 207 101
Fax: 01382 207 215
Email: enquiries@sssc.uk.com
Web: www.sssc.uk.com

If you would like to request this document in another format or language, please contact the SSSC on 0845 60 30 891.

Contents	Page
1. Purpose of the Pack	1
Part 1	
2. What do we mean by a 'mentor'?	1
3. What is RPL?	3
• What does RPL mean?	
• What are the outcomes of RPL?	
• Who can use RPL?	
• What are the benefits for learners?	
• What are the benefits to organisations?	
• How can RPL be used within the social services sector?	
• What does RPL involve?	
4. Understanding how people learn from experience	8
• How do we learn from experience?	
• What types of experience can we learn from?	
5. Understanding reflection	12
• How do we reflect?	
• Trying out reflection (reflective exercise)	
• Supporting reflective writing	
Part 2	
6. The role of the mentor in supporting learners in an RPL process	17
• What kind of support will a mentor provide?	
• What are the key principles and objectives of mentoring?	
• What are the qualities a mentor needs?	
• What activities will you carry out as a mentor?	
7. Value of the mentor role in terms of your own CPD and routes to qualifications	20
8. Using the SCQF SSSC RPL Resource Pack to support the mentoring role	21
• Use of pack to support learners	
• Use of pack within an RPL process	
9. References and further resources	25
Appendix 1 SCQF Core Principles of RPL	28
Appendix 2 Reflective writing- handout developed by Jenny Moon, University of Bournemouth	30
Appendix 3 Mentoring Agreement Example	38
Appendix 4 The SCQF Social Services RPL Working Group Members	40

1. Purpose of the pack

The purpose of this pack is to provide guidance to individuals who will be acting as mentors as part of an RPL process for social services staff.

The first part of the pack introduces you to:

- the role of a mentor, and how it differs from other roles you may have
- the RPL process, its purpose, possible outcomes, who can use it, its benefits for learners and organisations, its possible outcomes, the use of RPL within the social services sector what it involves
- how people learn from experience
- how the reflective process can be supported.

The second part of the pack focuses on:

- the role of the mentor in supporting learners in an RPL process
- the value of the mentor role in terms of your own CPD and routes to qualifications
- using the SCQF Social Services RPL Resource Pack to support the mentoring role.

Part 1

2. What do we mean by a 'mentor'?

A mentor 'provides support, advice and guidance in a relationship which is confidential, open and non-judgmental and where the mentor listens and asks questions which promote the mentee to reflect on their own development. Mentoring is not about championing the mentee's cause, or solving their problems, or telling them what to do. Mentoring must be separate from the roles of line manager and assessor. Coaching and counseling should not play any significant role within mentoring'. (Morton, 2003) ¹

While the mentoring role is different from the role of line manager and assessor, an individual may in fact carry out more than one role. A mentor may therefore also be a line manager, supervisor, trainer, or SVQ Assessor. It is clearly important in managing these different roles to recognise the differences in your goals and in your relationship with the learner.

¹ Morton, A. 2003. *Continuing Professional Development series No. 2 Mentoring*. Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) Generic Centre

Figure 1: The Manager, Assessor and Mentor may have similar interests, but the desired endpoint is different (Morton, 2003) ²

Manager	Assessor	Mentor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sets objectives • Identifies performance problems • Promotes development opportunities via career review process • Achieves task result today • Concerned with standards, deadlines • Monitors for control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tests objectives have been met • Assesses performance • Assesses results • Assesses against standards • Monitors for quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advises on goals • Promotes development opportunities to improve performance • Aims to get job done better tomorrow • Concerned with career aspirations and needs • Monitors for progress
Getting Things Done	Assessing Performance	Helping The Learner

It is also important to understand the differences and similarities between mentoring and coaching.

When coaching you:

- allow the learners to be more in control of the pace
- guide people, and together work out a solution or methods
- rely on the strength of the personal relationship
- tailor your help and style to suit the needs of individuals and/or the group
- encourage people to transfer what they learn to a variety of situations
- actively involve those being coached in the process
- encourage a range of alternative methods to try out
- use mistakes as an opportunity to learn
- pose problems and discuss the learner’s needs
- encourage others to assess their own progress.

Coaching is the process by which the coach creates relationships with others that make it easier for them to learn.

Mentoring is about helping people to realise their potential and can combine elements of giving advice, counselling and coaching.

In order to act as a mentor as part of an RPL process, you will be supporting learners in:

- understanding the skills, competences and values required within the social services sector, such as the national occupational standards for health and social care, and the ways in which these can be demonstrated through practice

² Morton, A. 2003. *Continuing Professional Development series No. 2 Mentoring*. Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) Generic Centre

- understanding the ways in which people can learn through their experience and the RPL process
- engaging in the reflective process and personal and professional development planning through exploratory questioning and discussion.

A mentor therefore:

- helps the mentee to learn, develop and move forward
- helps the mentee to understand situations and supports how the situation is handled
- helps/supports the mentee to learn (Morton,2003).

You will encourage learners to make links between learning and their work practice, help learners with any practical or conceptual difficulties with the RPL process, and encourage the learner to take responsibility for their own learning and help to build their confidence.

Good interpersonal skills are essential for a mentor to carry out their role effectively. It is also important that all parties understand and agree what the role of the mentor is at the beginning of the process.

The next few sections aim to provide you with a better understanding of the RPL process itself, what it involves, how people learn from experience, and how people use reflection. The pack will then provide you with guidance on how to carry out your role as mentor in supporting this process.

3. What is RPL? ³

In order to support learners in an RPL process, a mentor clearly needs to understand the process itself, what learners are required to do as part of the process, what support they should receive and how their informal learning will be recognised.

What does RPL mean?

The Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) is about recognising learning which has its source in experience. This includes knowledge and skills gained outside formal learning situations through life and work experiences. It can also include learning gained through non-formal learning and training programmes in the workplace, the community or voluntary sector. RPL can help people who have no formal qualifications to value and build on the learning they have gained informally and to use this recognition as a means of meeting their goals in terms of further learning and development.

The Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) enables the use of **RPL for personal and career development**, or **formative recognition**, and **RPL for credit**, or **summative recognition**.

Formative recognition can be carried out within the context of personal/career development and educational guidance. Its purpose is to build learner confidence, recognise skills and knowledge gained through experience, and identify ways in which these skills and knowledge can be developed through further learning opportunities.

³ Whittaker, R. 2006. GCU

The outcome of this process can be an action plan or personal development plan.

Formative recognition may be a preparatory stage to summative recognition, or RPL for credit.

RPL for credit, or Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), is the process of **summative recognition**. It involves assessing and then credit-rating learning gained through experience which occurred before a learner enters a formal programme of learning or embarks on a qualification, but where that experience was not previously formally assessed and credit-rated. The outcome of a claim for RPL for credit may be the award of specific credit within a qualification or within a programme of learning, or entry to a programme of study as an alternative to normal entry requirements.

What are the outcomes of RPL?

As a result of RPL people may:

- **Plan a learning pathway, personal/career development plan, or personal learning plan which will build on their prior learning.** This may include a mapping or 'notional levelling' of their learning onto the SCQF to help identify their starting point and their future direction. This form of recognition is described as RPL for Personal/Career Development, or formative recognition.
- **Identify core, and other, skills which they have already gained through their life and work experiences which will help them to study or train effectively** in a college, university or other learning and training provider. This form of RPL focuses on building learner confidence and easing the transition between informal and more formal learning situations.
- **Gain entry to a programme** at a college, university or other learning and training provider as an alternative to the normal entry requirements if they can demonstrate knowledge and skills which are equivalent to the entry requirements. This form of recognition can be described as RPL for entry and will involve some form of assessment, which may be written or oral, such as an interview.
- **Gain credit within a programme, or towards a qualification**, at a college, university or other learning and training provider. Credit can either be for particular units or modules or for entire levels of a programme or qualification. This form of recognition is described as RPL for Credit, or summative recognition. It involves a formal assessment of the learning as part of the credit-rating process.

Who can use RPL? ⁴

RPL can be used by a wide range of learners to help them either re-enter learning or as a contribution towards a programme of learning, including:

- adults returning to education

⁴ SCQF RPL Guidelines. 2005. www.scqf.org.uk

- unemployed people seeking recognition for skills gained through informal learning
- people wanting to improve upon existing qualifications
- those wanting to re-train or change careers
- students at colleges and Higher Education Institutes (HEI)
- people who have taken non-formal learning or training in the workplace or through community-based learning
- people who have gained a range of skills and knowledge through volunteering or through activities or projects within their community
- people who have been out of the education system for a long time and who may lack formal qualifications, or who may lack self-confidence as learners
- people who have disabilities of some kind
- minority ethnic groups, travelers, refugees and asylum seekers
- school-aged students who have been involved in significant extra-curricular activities.

What are the benefits to learners? ⁵

- **Increased self-confidence**

The process of reflection that the recognition of prior informal learning involves, as well as the valuing of learning by oneself and by others, often leads to increased self-confidence as a learner. This can motivate a learner to continue learning.

- **Preparation/planning for further learning and personal/career development**

The process of RPL for personal/career development, or formative recognition, helps learners to:

- think about what they have achieved so far through their experiences in terms of strengths and skills
- map their learning onto the SCQF to identify a notional level
- think about their goals and what they need to do to achieve them, (for example join a vocational or academic programme at a college or HEI, do a training course, apply for or change jobs)
- consider their options and make decisions about the direction they wish to take in terms of further learning opportunities or career development
- ease the transition from informal to formal learning by enabling both them and others to value their achievements and to recognise the importance of their learning through experience
- develop their analytical and learning skills through the process of using the RPL process itself
- prepare them to make an RPL claim for credit to gain entry to, or credit within a programme of learning at a college or university or in the workplace.

- **Gaining credit for prior informal learning**

The process of RPL for credit, or summative recognition can help learners to:

- gain general credit which is not related to a particular formal learning programme;
- gain entry to a programme of learning at a college or university or training provider (if they do not have the normal entry qualifications)

⁵ SCQF RPL Guidelines. 2005. www.scqf.org.uk

- gain credit towards a qualification or programme of learning and so allow them to join at a later level, shortening the period of study or training
- gain credit within a qualification or a programme of learning they have already started.

What are the benefits to organisations? ⁶

RPL can support training and staff development strategies of employers and voluntary organisations by:

- increasing motivation and interest in workplace practice on the part of the employee/learner
- reducing the amount of time needed to complete a qualification and therefore requiring less time away from the workplace
- generating new ideas and developments in the workplace as a result of process of reflection on practice by employee/learner
- improve employee retention and reduce recruitment and training costs.

How can RPL be used within the social services sector?

RPL can be used within the social services sector to support all aspects of workforce development:

Gaining of qualifications: RPL can be used to support social services workers who lack confidence as learners and/or are reluctant to engage in formal learning, such as SVQs. It can also accelerate the process of achieving qualifications, such as the SVQ Health and Social Care and the Practice Learning Qualifications PLQs (Social Services) through the recognition and award of credit for prior informal learning.

Recruitment: by incorporating an RPL process into interviewing an individual, the applicant can be helped to reflect on their achievements, prior work and life experiences and leisure pursuits to identify and demonstrate the strengths, skills and values that they will need to successfully undertake the post.

Induction: Information gained in the interview through reflecting on prior experiences can be used as part of the induction process. Candidates should be supported in building on what they have already gained in terms of core and other skills relevant to the job.

Supervision and appraisal: RPL used as part of supervision and appraisal can encourage the reflective process to help an individual review their performance, identify particular areas for further personal and professional development and challenge poor practice.

Performance interviewing: RPL can support the process of application for promoted posts, by helping individuals to reflect on particular examples, where for example, they have challenged poor practice, considered the outcomes of their own or another's action, thought about how they might have dealt with a situation differently.

⁶ SCQF RPL Guidelines. 2005. www.scqf.org.uk

What does RPL involve?

To some extent this will depend on the type of RPL being used by the person. All forms of RPL will involve the learner in:

- reflecting on experiences
- identifying the learning within these experiences
- providing evidence of the learning claimed.

Experience is only valuable, in this context, as a source of learning. It is what the person has learned that is important not what they have done.

Supporting learners

People who are using the RPL process need guidance and support. This can be provided through a variety of different means such as:

- written or e-learning materials, such as student handbooks or self-assessment packs
- individual meetings or tutorials, where the advisor or tutor can provide focussed guidance to a person about their individual RPL claim
- group sessions, which can be informal opportunities for peer group support or can be highly structured, task-based and mentor-led, possibly as part of a wider programme of learning
- electronic communication such as email, on-line discussion fora, audio and video conferencing. This communication can be between the learners and advisors or between learners themselves
- collaborative arrangements for support can be agreed between learning providers, employers and voluntary organisations.

Staff involved in guiding people through the RPL process need to be trained and supported. Their organisation needs to be able to provide adequate resources to enable them to carry out this role effectively.

Providing evidence of learning

The type of evidence people need to provide to demonstrate their learning will depend on the purpose for which they are using RPL. People using RPL to help them identify a learning or career development pathway, or plan, or to build their confidence before applying to or embarking on, a formal programme at a college or university will not require the same type or amount of evidence as someone using RPL to gain credit within a programme or towards a qualification.

There are a range of different ways of collecting and presenting evidence. These can include reflective accounts, project work, professional discussion or structured interview, observation of practice, Europass CV⁷, existing workplace practices in evaluation and assessment, profiling, record of volunteer learning and experience or a portfolio.

The key point is that the evidence should be appropriate, in terms of type, level and breadth, to the RPL process being used and should be as streamlined as possible.

⁷ Details of the Europass CV can be found on the Europass website: <http://europass.cedefop.eu.int>

Assessing learning

If the learner is seeking formal recognition of their learning, their RPL claim will be assessed by an expert(s) at the college, university, or SQA approved centre to confirm the learning claims made.

If the assessor is satisfied that the learner already has the knowledge and skills either to gain entry to a programme or the knowledge and skills that would be gained from successfully completing a qualification, programme or unit the learner would be awarded entry or credit accordingly by that organisation.

If a person is using the RPL process to seek entry to or credit within a programme or qualification at a college, university or other learning and training provider, the claim will be assessed by staff at that institution or organisation. Credit can only be awarded if a formal assessment takes place by an institution or organisation that delivers SCQF-credit-rated provision, or by an approved SVQ Assessor.

Ensuring quality

All RPL processes whether for personal/career development or for entry and credit, should be quality-assured to make sure there is consistency, transparency and accessibility. The core principles which should underpin all RPL provision are provided in Appendix 1 and contained in the 'SCQF RPL Core Principles and Key Features' and the 'SCQF Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL)' which are available on the SCQF website: www.scqf.org.uk.

The Guidelines also provide further information and guidance on RPL within the context of the SCQF.

4. Understanding how people learn through experience⁸

RPL is based on the principle that people can and do learn throughout their lives in a variety of settings.

People can gain a range of strengths and skills through:

- family life (home-making, caring, domestic organisation)
- work (paid or unpaid)
- community, voluntary or leisure activities
- key experiences and events in life

We call this informal or experiential learning, or learning from experience. Learning from experience, or 'informal learning' is different from 'formal learning'. It is largely unstructured, it is more personal, more individualised and is often unconsciously gained.

The SCQF Guidelines on RPL (2005) refer to the EU definition of the different types of learning to explain the differences:

- **formal learning** takes place within the context of programmes delivered by learning and training providers, is assessed and credit-rated, and leads to recognised qualifications

⁸ SCQF Social Services RPL Resource Pack Information Sheet for Mentors 1

- **non-formal learning** takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training. It may be assessed but does not typically lead to formal certification, for example, learning and training activities taken in the workplace, voluntary sector or trade union and through community-based learning
- **informal learning** can be defined as experiential learning and takes place through life and work experiences. It is often unintentional learning. The learner may not recognise at the time of the experience that it contributed to the development of their skills and knowledge. This recognition may only happen retrospectively through the RPL process, unless the experiences take place as part of a planned experiential or work-based learning, programme⁹.

While it is useful to understand the differences between these different types of learning, it is likely that an individual's learning experience will have a combination of formal, non-formal and informal aspects.

Engaging in RPL allows people to systematically look at their own experiences, reflect on them and perhaps look at them in a different or new way. In some situations a learner may have learned poor practice which he or she may need to question. This is also a valuable learning experience. Through informal or experiential learning people are constantly acquiring and renewing their skills and knowledge and RPL enables people to take stock and reflect on how these have developed and changed.

How do we learn from experience? ¹⁰

Most people learn a great deal from doing something (or seeing someone else do something), experiencing (or seeing) the consequences of that action, and so 'learning a lesson' from it.¹¹

People may often learn more from the experience of doing something than from reading books or from listening to a trainer or lecturer. Learning can be an individual or a shared experience, as part of a group. The key to identifying what we have learnt through our experience is generally considered to be reflection.

Varied attempts have been made to describe the process of experiential learning but it is often described as a learning cycle.¹²

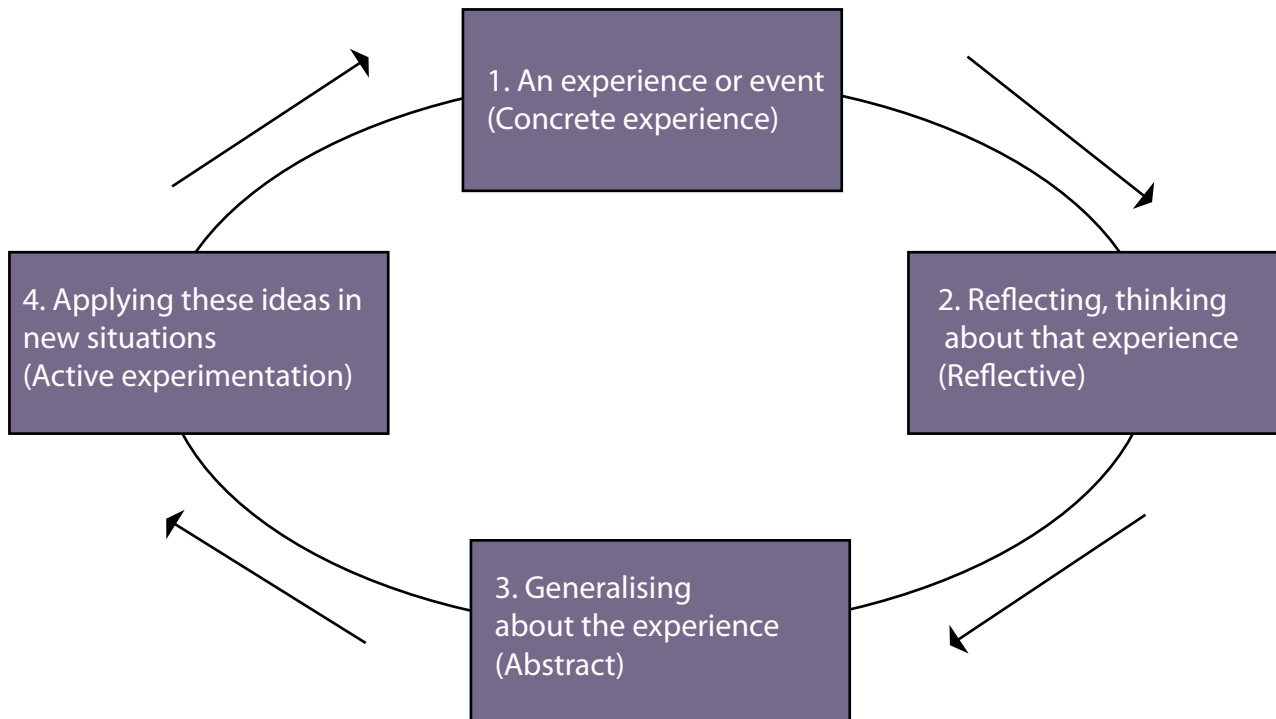
⁹ SCQF RPL Guidelines www.scqf.org.uk

¹⁰ Drawn from SCQF Social Services RPL Resource Pack, Information Handout 3

¹¹ Some of the material in this section is drawn from Learning from Experience Trust. 1988. *A Learner's Introduction to Building on your Experience*.

¹² Kolb, D. 1984. *Experiential Learning*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall. An evaluation of Kolb by the CLD sector can be found on the informal education website:

<http://www.infed.org/biblio/b-explrn.htm>



According to this cycle:

- **Stage 1**

Learning begins with a real experience - this can be any experience or 'event'. It may be a specific experience or a series of related tasks/experiences (such as a job we have done, bringing up a child, learning to drive, the experience of being unemployed or homeless, or some type of event that we observe).

- **Stage 2**

The experience or event may 'make us think'. If we do, we move into Stage 2 of the cycle.

- **Stage 3**

Thinking about the experience may make us realise that 'there is more to it than meets the eye', that the experience is simply one example of a pattern of things. We may begin to make connections (with previous experiences or theories of practice) to form ideas or theories about what that pattern is. We may make generalisations about the experience. We may, of course, then confirm those ideas by repeating similar experiences and maybe observing similar results.

- **Stage 4**

However, we may go on to apply those ideas to new or different situations in order to test them out. If our ideas are borne out in practice then we are likely to apply them in future situations/experiences, and so the cycle may be repeated.

Of course, we may never learn from an experience because we never get beyond the experience itself. It is at Stage 3 that we make the connections. Without these, the experience remains something to be talked about but from which we may not have learnt anything.

The experiential learning cycle does therefore not just involve doing, but also reflecting, processing, thinking and further understanding. The outcome of experiential learning is action or learning or more learning. Kolb's cycle of experiential

learning illustrates the idea of perpetuation – that the learning leads to the action, that is in fact experimentation, which leads to more experience and reflection. (Moon, 2000) Your role as mentor will be to support learners as they move through each stage of the cycle, through listening and exploratory questioning.

It is important to realise that we are not all equally effective in each stage of the cycle. Some individuals are stronger at generalising, expressing themselves in theory, while others are more effective in putting into practice what they have actually learned. Different individuals have different learning styles¹³. As a mentor you should be sensitive to the fact that your learners may find different aspects of the learning cycle more challenging than others.

An understanding of experiential learning is necessary to support various learning and teaching approaches: work-based learning, placement learning, laboratory and practical work, action learning, role play, group work and project work, as well as, of course, RPL.

What types of experience can we learn from?

We can learn from any experience we have had or some event we have observed which was significant for us in some way. Any experience/event will do. It could be from our work, home, leisure - anything at all, as long as we feel it was significant.

It might be significant because:

- it was enjoyable
- it affected us deeply eg the death of a relative, personal injury, some accident we observed but were not directly involved in
- it changed our outlook on life
- we feel it taught us a great deal
- it had successful outcomes
- it was an experience we never want to repeat!
- it gave us a sense of achievement
- it earned us respect and recognition from others
- it involved a major investment of time, energy or effort
- it changed the way we did things

Examples of types of learning experience include:

- a particular piece of work, task or project that we undertook at work, or through community or voluntary work, or through independent study
- the experience of doing a particular job (paid or unpaid) over a period a time
- an educational or training course that we attended, which may have been assessed, but not credit-rated by an academic institution
- the experience of training or teaching others, either formally or informally.

¹³ For more information about different learning styles, please see the SCQF Social Services RPL Resource Pack Information Handout 2 and Appendix for Kolb's Learning Inventory

5. Understanding reflection ¹⁴

Learning through reflection is a skill that involves thinking about our own experiences from the past, thinking about our feelings about those experiences and drawing out some of the lessons that we have learned from those experiences. Reflection enables us to integrate new experiences and understanding with previous or existing knowledge and skills. It can therefore be a transformative process. It can help us develop new skills, knowledge, perceptions and behaviors.

Reflection can be done in a number of ways - for example, it might be an activity that you do thinking by yourself. Or it might occur in a more social setting - for example as part of a group learning situation where you talk about and reflect on your experiences and share these thoughts with other people.

Reflection helps us to think about ourselves, about our past and about how we feel about things now. It helps us to organise our beliefs and attitudes and might alter the way that we see or think about things.

Reflection is something that we often do as part of our day-to-day activities - in other words, we often reflect as we are doing things and sometimes change the way that we do things according to that reflection. At other times, reflection is used long after an event or activity has been completed. In both cases, reflection can help us learn from ourselves and our experiences.

How do we reflect?

One way to reflect is to simply think about things from the start of an event to the completion of that event. Another way to reflect is to ask ourselves questions about things - for example, to think about a work, community or social role that we play or have played in the past.

We might ask:

- What did I do in that role?
- What were my main responsibilities and tasks?
- How easy or difficult did I find that role?
- What were some of the challenges I faced playing that role?
- What have I learned from playing that role?

Questions like these force us to think about our experiences and tease out some of the ideas we have about ourselves and what we have done. This may help us to understand the kind of person we have become and may help us decide what type of person we want to become in the future.

When we reflect on our experiences or personal events we need to be able to describe to other people what happened during that event, when it happened where it happened, who was involved, what the outcome of the event was, how long it lasted, etc - in other words we need to be able to describe the event very clearly.

¹⁴ Drawn from SCQF Social Services Resource Pack Information Handouts 6 and 7

We also need to be able to identify the skills and knowledge that we used or learned during that event. For example, if someone chooses to talk about their experience of a divorce they might say that they needed:

- skills of patience (to be able to listen to their partner/parent etc talking about how they felt)
- good communication (being able to share conversations with them and help them to talk about their feelings)
- social and interpersonal skills (listening, talking, being supportive)
- information gathering skills (for example, to find out about lawyers, counseling organisations, other help agencies)
- problem-solving skills (to be able to work through difficulties that they encountered during the divorce)
- knowledge about procedures and processes for taking action during the divorce, etc.

Sometimes it can be difficult to talk in an unemotional way about the events in our lives because some of those events have been quite traumatic. But one of the ways to do this and to see the positive side of most experiences is to focus your thoughts on the skills and knowledge that you used or learned - ie ask yourself:

- What did I have to be able to do?
- What did I have to know to be able to do that?

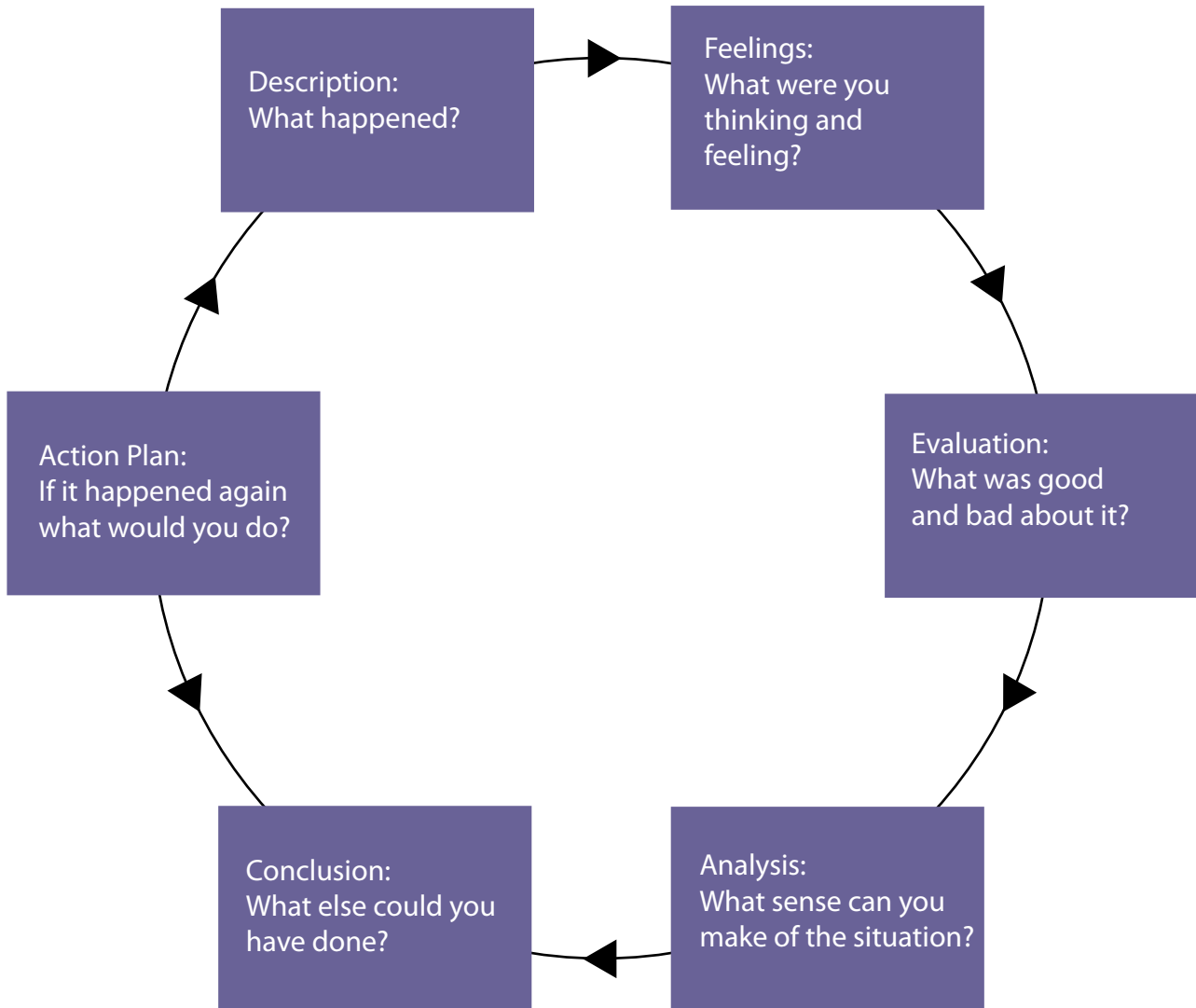
Trying out reflection

The best way to understand reflection is to try it out for yourself. Use the following exercise to work through the process. This is the same exercise that you will be using with the learners you will be mentoring¹⁵. The process of reflection in the diagram is adapted from the model developed by Gibbs (1988)¹⁶ and is based upon the cycle of stages described by Kolb (1984)¹⁷

¹⁵ SCQF Social Services RPL Resource Pack, Activity Handout 3

¹⁶ Gibbs, G. 1988. *Learning by Doing - a Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*. Oxford: Further Education Unit

¹⁷ Kolb, D. 1984. *Experiential Learning*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall



Think of a particular experience which you think helped you learn something and ask yourself the questions in the cycle, starting with 'What happened?' When you have done this complete the Reflective Exercise thinking of responses to each of the questions on the sheet.

Reflective Exercise

Experience: Describe the experience, what happened? What did you do in reaction to the experience?

Knowledge: What do you know now that you did not know before you had the experience?

Skills: What can you do now that you could not do before you had the experience, or can do better now because of the experience?

Reflections: What were your feelings and thoughts? What did you do well? What would you do differently? What values did you use?

Application: Think of a different situation in which you could apply what you have learned.

How difficult or easy did you find that process? Think about the aspects which might prove to be particularly challenging to the learners you are mentoring. In what ways can you support them?

As a mentor you will create situations for your learners which will require them to reflect. This can be done through strategies such as asking them questions, encouraging self-assessment (Boud,1995), encouraging them to write diaries (Boud, Keogh and Walker,1985), using critical incident analysis and asking them to analyse and critique ideas and practice in less structured ways (Brown et al 2003).

Supporting reflective writing

One of the major difficulties that learners experience is how to write reflectively. Through individual and group discussion, learners enjoy discussing their experiences and drawing out how and what they have learned, but are often less confident about writing about what they have learnt.

Producing reflective accounts is an important part of the evidence gathering process for RPL. Supporting learners to produce reflective evidence will be a key part of your role.

Reflective evidence demonstrates the learner's understanding of his or her role, of principles and practice and the purpose of social care, how he or she has dealt with particular issues, or incidents. These may be experiences that went well or badly. The important thing is to demonstrate what the learner has learnt from them.

Reflective evidence can be provided in the form of a written account, or case study eg reflective account, critical incident analysis, reflective diary/learning log extracts or through a 'professional discussion' or structured interview. Guidance on how to produce a critical incident analysis and writing a reflective diary is contained in the SCQF Social Services RPL Resource Pack (Activity Handout 4 and Information Handout 8). An example of how a reflective account as evidence for the SVQ Level 3 in Health and Social Care has been developed is provided in the SCQF Social Services RPL Profiling Tool.

Jenny Moon has produced some useful resources which illustrate examples of reflective writing. Have a look at one of the exercises she has produced (Appendix 2). By understanding the key aspects of reflective writing, you will be able to provide learners with the support they will need in the reflective writing process.

Part 2

6. The role of the mentor in supporting learners in an RPL process

What kind of support will a mentor provide?

As a mentor you will be supporting learners as they go through the RPL process. You may be a line manager, supervisor, trainer, or an SVQ Assessor. You may be a member of staff of the same organisation as the learner(s) or you may be an individual acting as a mentor for a number of learners within different organisations.

The role you will play in supporting learners will involve:

- providing initial guidance on the RPL process
- supporting learners in the reflective process, identifying learning through experience (skills, knowledge and understanding), selecting and producing evidence of that learning, identifying areas for further learning)
- supporting learners in the assessment process through providing guidance on the gathering and presenting of evidence of learning. This will involve you in working with the Assessor and understanding the requirements for assessment so that you can guide the learner appropriately. The Assessor will undertake the assessment process itself.

What are the key principles and objectives of mentoring?

In doing this support role, the mentor should endeavor to achieve the following objectives:

- adopt a professional approach to the role and separate the role of line manager, supervisor, assessor from that of the mentor
- have some supervisory skills in order to be able to facilitate opportunities for the learner's further learning and development
- have a clear knowledge of the social services sector and the interpersonal and communication skills to convey that knowledge effectively to the learners
- provide unbiased constructive criticism, guidance and feedback
- be able to see the 'bigger picture' and adopt a holistic view
- have good planning skills so that the process not too daunting in terms of being too speedy a process, but also that it is not too lengthy which would be equally demotivating
- have an awareness of the setting in which the learner works
- be honest - if the mentor openly shares information while acknowledging that he or she does not have all the answers, trust develops. As a result, communication between the mentor and learner becomes far more open and constructive
- provide a comfortable, non-threatening learning environment for people who lack confidence in their learning ability, as is the case with many adult learners
- avoid or be prepared to explain academic jargon.
- share control of the learning or professional development process: allow learner(s) to discuss and take part in the decision-making about their own learning methods and support materials, either individually or as part of a group

- make sure that any support materials used are relevant to the individual/ groups' daily lives thereby prompting thought, reflection and/or discussion about personal/group experiences.
- encourage learners not to be afraid or embarrassed about making mistakes, and to learn from their mistakes
- have the ability to question, interpret and explain.

What are the qualities a mentor needs?

These have been identified as the desirable qualities of a mentor¹⁸

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • approachable • accessible • flexible • responsive • confident • knowledgeable • good communicator/listener • willing to be a mentor • able to build interpersonal relationships • motivator • interested and committed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • experienced practitioner • competent • have a common goal with the learner • respect (two way) • supportive • non judgmental • gives constructive feedback • good role model • empathetic • non-threatening
--	--

What activities will you carry out as a mentor?

Your support role will include meeting with the learner(s) on an individual basis and/ or a group basis to provide initial guidance and discuss progress. You will also support the learner in their reflection on their prior experiences in order to identify their learning and potential evidence of this learning. While you will give guidance on the production of evidence and preparation for assessment, you should not, for example, be involved in the actual writing of the learner's reflective accounts.

Key activities in these meetings will include:

- clarifying the task set
- identifying stages/steps to take
- identifying difficulties and helping learners decide the action they need to take
- identifying areas of strength and how to use them
- reflecting on what went well, as well as what did not and what can be learnt from this
- discussing evidence that can demonstrate the individual's learning
- deciding action/short term goals
- positive listening and feedback
- building confidence.

These activities might take place within the context of individual meetings, mentor-led group sessions as part of professional development or RPL programme, or through professional discussion.

¹⁸ Benbow, W. Jordan, G. Cooper, K. Jonckheer, P. *Developing New Supervisors and Assessors of Practice Learning: a profiling tool for registered practitioners*

www.practicebasedlearning.org/resources/materials/docs/WendyBenbowV3.pdf

Your meetings with learners should be timetabled to take place at appropriate points in the RPL process. You should keep the content of these discussions confidential. You and the learner(s) should agree a method of keeping records of your meetings. This will include a written record of the dates of meetings, the issues being discussed and any plan/follow up action taken.

It is important for you to discuss your role with the learner at the beginning of the process to make sure there is a mutual understanding of your respective roles. 'There must be clarity as to the purpose of mentoring and what it is intended to achieve. All parties involved in the process must be clear about the intended outcomes' (Morton, 2003).¹⁹

A 'mentoring agreement' is a useful way of ensuring that all parties understand and adhere to their respective roles in the process. An example of a Mentoring Agreement is provided in Appendix 3. An agreement will specify the responsibilities of the mentor and the responsibilities of the learner, including the frequency of meetings. The agreement is discussed and signed by both parties. Such an agreement also allows an organisation to monitor the fulfillment of the agreement as a part of its quality management processes. All aspects of the RPL and Mentoring process should be monitored and evaluated, both to make sure the process is working effectively and to reassure senior management that the investment in time is worthwhile²⁰. The mentoring process should also operate within a clear organisational structure so that you have access to support and guidance if difficulties arise.

The establishment of networks or a community of practice for mentors, such as on-line discussion groups, regular meetings or action learning sets on an organisational, consortium, regional, or sector wide basis can provide a valuable source of peer support for mentors. An example of such a support network is the SNIV group (Scottish Network of Internal Verifiers). This provides the opportunity for discussion of issues and approaches. This has an evaluative, quality enhancement function as well as supporting your own continuing professional development in terms of your mentoring role.

7. Value of the mentor role in terms of your own CPD and routes to qualifications

Carrying out the role of Mentor can contribute to your own continuing professional development and can generate evidence for further professional qualifications, such as the Practice Learning Qualifications (Social Services) and Learning and Development Awards. By helping your learners to reflect, you will further develop your own skills of reflection. Your reflection may focus on the development of your own practice within your broader workplace and social services role, or it may be specifically within the context of supporting the learning and development of others. In other words, through supporting the RPL process of the learners you are mentoring you may be able to gain credit for the learning you gain from this as part of your own development goals.

It is therefore important to maintain records of the activities you carry out as a mentor. This may include support materials you have developed and used or reports you have produced as part of an evaluation or monitoring process or as part of a performance appraisal process. You should also keep a reflective diary or log recording your reflections on your experiences as a mentor. This will assist you in the production of reflective evidence.

You may be able to gain credit for the learning you have achieved in your mentoring role through an RPL process for the qualification you are taking, or planning to take. Alternatively, you could include your mentoring experience within a planned programme of learning towards a particular award. This is particularly appropriate if the qualification you are taking is predominantly a work-based learning programme.

You should seek guidance from your organisation on the ways in which the mentoring experience could contribute to your own professional development goals.

¹⁹ Morton, A. 2003. *Continuing Professional Development series No 2. Mentoring*. Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) Generic Centre

²⁰ Morton, A. 2003. *Continuing Professional Development series No 2. Mentoring*. Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) Generic Centre

8. Using the SCQF Social Services RPL Resource Pack to support the mentoring role

Use of the pack to support learners

The SCQF Social Services RPL Resource Pack is designed to be used by mentors who are working with a group of learners. The pack however can also be used with an individual learner. The mentor should select from the material contained within the pack. The material and approach should ideally complement the existing training and professional development programmes being used within the organisation.

The Resource Pack:

- introduces the learners to RPL
- builds their confidence as learners through identifying their strengths and skills
- prepares them to use an RPL profiling process.

The profiling tool which has been developed so far is in relation to the SVQ level 3 Health and Social Care. However, the profiling model can also be applied to other qualifications such as the Practice Learning Qualifications (PLQs) (Social Services)²¹ .

RPL profiling supports learners in identifying the extent to which they have achieved the elements of the units, or elements of the qualification they are seeking, through their life and work experiences. It aims to help learners recognise the ways in which they have applied, and built on, the skills and knowledge they have gained through these experiences to their current social care practice. The process is designed to support learners in their achievement of a qualification.

The RPL process supported this pack can be used to support

- the gaining of credit towards qualifications
- recruitment
- induction
- supervision and appraisal
- performance interviewing.

The activities described in the pack should be adapted, or added to, as appropriate in response to the particular needs and goals of your learner group and the purpose of the RPL activity.²²

Try and establish through the first activities which involve writing if any of the group have difficulties with writing, or lack confidence in this area, so that you can deal with this through appropriate support early on. Some learners may face barriers which require specialist support such as dyslexia, English as a second language, or come from cultural or ethnic backgrounds with different conceptual understanding of some of the issues or experiences discussed in the group.

You may need to explain some of the terminology used in the activities eg critical incident analysis.

It is important to manage the sharing of life experiences by the group so that the session does not become a counselling session rather than a discussion about what

²¹ Addressed within PLQ(SS) RPL materials

²² SCQF Social Services RPL Resource Pack, Introduction

has been learned through experience. Highlight that receiving constructive feedback from you, the mentor, and other learners is a valuable part of the learning process and should be used by the learner to support them in their reflective thinking.

Use of the pack within an RPL process

The Resource Pack forms the first part of a six step process which can be linked to both formative and summative recognition.²³

Formative recognition can be carried out within the context of personal/career development and educational guidance. Its purpose is to build learner confidence, recognise skills and knowledge gained through experience, and identify ways in which these skills and knowledge can be further developed through further learning opportunities.

Summative recognition involves assessing and then credit-rating learning gained through experience which occurred before a learner enters a formal programme of learning or embarks on a qualification. This is for experience that has not previously been formally assessed and credit-rated. The outcome of a claim for RPL that may be the award of specific credit within a qualification or within a programme of learning, or entry to a programme as an alternative to normal entry requirements.

²³ Further explanation of these steps is contained in the SCQF Social Services RPL Resource Pack

Step 1: Preparatory support provided by Mentor in group or individual sessions: Resource Pack

Step 2: Learner to use RPL profiling tool

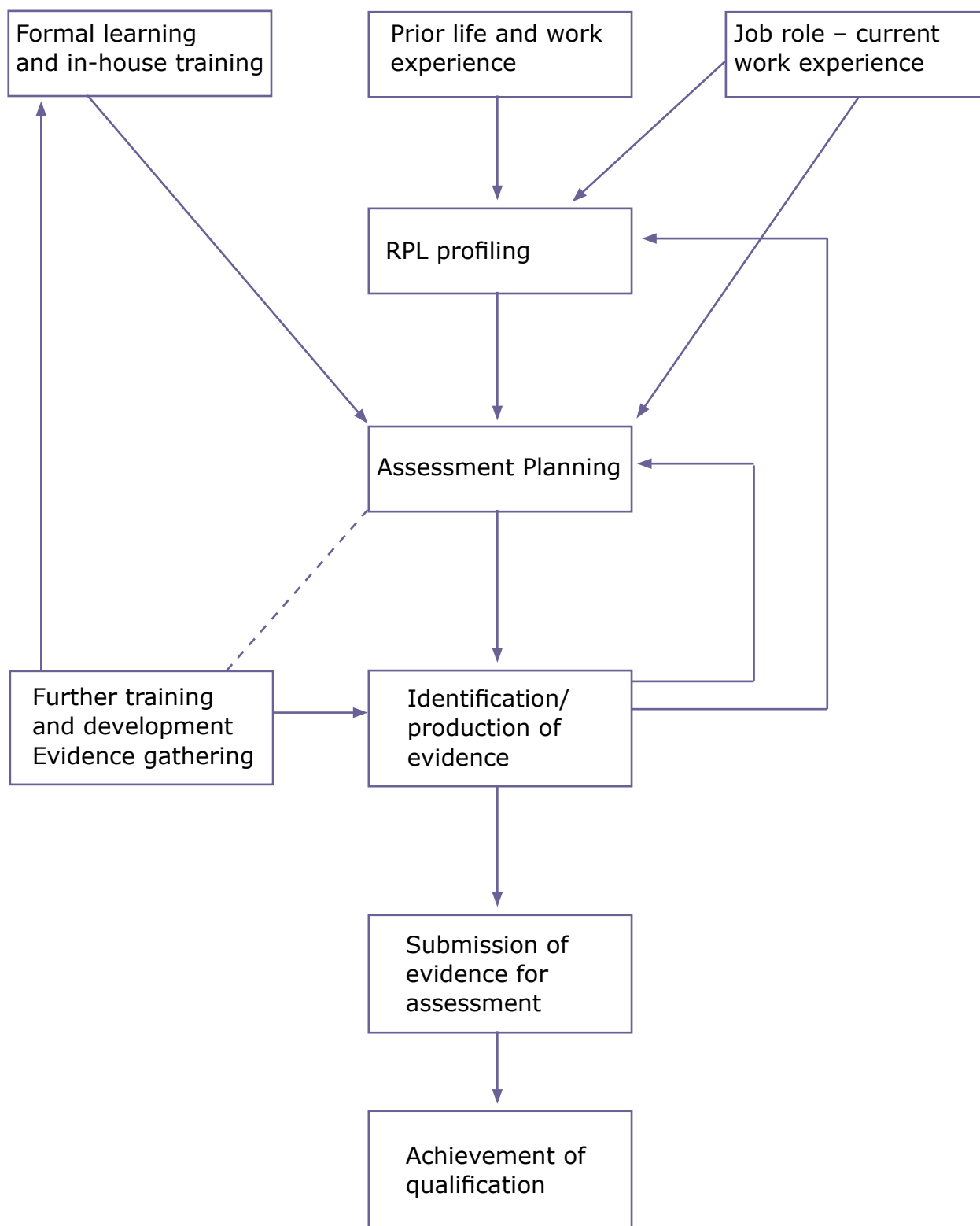
Step 3: Learner to have professional discussion with Mentor to discuss profile

Step 4: Learner to produce reflective account and update profile

Step 5: Learner to take other agreed action in preparation for RPL for credit

Step 6: Assessment

How RPL can be used towards the achievement of a qualification²⁴



²⁴ SCQF Social Services RPL Resource Pack, Introduction

9. References and further resources

RPL process and reflective practice

Boud, D. Keogh, R. and Walker, D. 1985. *Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning*. London: Kogan Page (Chapter 1)

Boud, D. Cohen, R. and Walker, D. eds. 1993. *Using Experience for Learning*. Buckingham: SRHE and OU Press

Brown, M. Fry, H. & Marshall, S. Reflective Practice in Fry, H. Ketteridge, S. and Marshall, S. eds. 2003. *A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, Enhancing Academic Practice*. London: Kogan Page 2nd Edition

Eraut, M, 1994. *Developing Professional Knowledge and Competence*. London: Falmer Press

Gibbs, G. 1988. *Learning by Doing – a Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*. Further Education Unit, Oxford

Kolb, D. 1984. *Experiential Learning*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall

Learning from Experience Trust. 1988. *A Learner's Introduction to Building on your Experience*

Moon, J. 2000. *Reflection in Learning and Professional Development*. London: Kogan Page. Chapter 3

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. 2004. *Guidelines on the Accreditation of Prior Learning*

Schön, D. 1987. *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: towards a new design for teaching and learning in the professions*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass Inc. Chapter 2

SCQF. Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework. 2005. *Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior informal Learning (RPL)*

SCQF. Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework. 2005. *Recognition of Prior informal Learning (RPL) Core Principles and Key Features*

SCQF. Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework. 2006. *Recognition of Prior informal Learning (RPL) Resource Pack*

SCQF. Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework. 2004. *Guidelines for Credit Transfer*

Scottish Social Services Council. 2007. *SCQF Social Services RPL Resource Pack and Profiling tool*

Warner Weil, S. and McGill, I. eds. 1989. *Making Sense of Experiential Learning. Diversity in Theory and Practice*. Buckingham: SRHE and OU Press

Whittaker, R. 2006. *Introduction to RPL for Staff*. (Glasgow Caledonian University)

Other useful references for RPL and reflective practice

Anderson, P. & Harris, J. ed. 2006. *Re-theorising the Recognition of Prior Learning*. NIACE

Argyris, C. and Schön, D. 1974. *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Brennan, J. and Little, B. 1996. *A Review of Work-based Learning in Higher Education*. London: Quality Support Centre and OU Press

Brookfield, S. 1993. Through the Lens of Learning: How the Visceral Experience of Learning Reframes Teaching in Boud, D. Cohen, R. and Walker, D. *Using Experience for Learning. Chapter 1*. Buckingham: SRHE and OU Press.

Boud, D. Keogh, R. and Walker D. eds. 1985. *Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning*. London: Kogan Page

Boud, D. 1995. *Enhancing Learning through Self-assessment*. London: Kogan Page

Boud, D. and Walker, D. 1998. Promoting Reflection in Professional Courses: the challenge of context. *Studies in Higher Education*. Vol. 23. No. 2

Brown, A. 1992. *Valuing Skills: Recognition of Prior Learning*. North Melbourne, Australia: Victorian Education Foundation. 2nd Edition

Dewey, J. 1938 *Experience and Education*. London: Collier Macmillan

Eraut, M. 1995. Schön Shock: a case for reframing reflection-in-action? *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice*. Vol. 1. No. 1.

Evans, N. 2000. *Assessing Experiential Learning around the World: employability and the global economy*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Johnson, B. 2002. *Models of APEL and Quality Assurance*, SEEC. Brentwood: South East England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SEEC)

Gibbs, G. 1992. *Improving the Quality of Student Learning*. Bristol: Technical and Educational Services Ltd. Chapter 2

Jarvis, P. 1995. *Adult and Continuing Education*. 2nd edition. London: Routledge

Merrifield, J. McIntyre, D. and Osaigbovo, R. 2000. *Mapping APEL: Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning in English Higher Education*. London: Learning from Experience Trust

Nyatanga, L. Forman, D. Fox, J. 1998. *Good Practice in the Accreditation of Prior Learning*. London: Cassell

SEEC, South East England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer. 2003. *Revised SEEC Code of Practice for the Assessment of Prior (Experiential) Learning*

Simosko, S. 1991. *APL. A Practical Guide for Professionals*. London: Kogan Page.

Schön, D. 1983. *The Reflective Practitioner: how professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books

Wailey, T. and Simpson, R. 2000. Juggling between Learning and Work: AP(E)L in the UK. *Lifelong Learning in Europe* 5 no 2 pp. 83-89

Walker Weil, S. & McGill, I. 1989. A Framework for Making Sense of Experiential Learning in *Making Sense of Experiential Learning*. Buckingham: SRHE/OUP

Mentoring

Benbow, W. Jordan, G. Cooper, K. and Jonckheer, P. *Developing New Supervisors and Assessors of Practice Learning: a profiling tool for registered practitioners*.
<http://www.practicebasedlearning.org/resources/materials/docs/WendyBenbowV3.pdf>

Morton, A. 2003. *Continuing Professional Development series No 2. Mentoring*. Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) Generic Centre

Morton-Cooper, A. and Palmer, A. 2000. *Mentoring, Preceptorship and Clinical Supervision: A guide to professional roles in clinical practice*. Oxford: Blackwell Science. 2nd edition

Queen Margaret University College. 2002. HEC in Person Centred Approaches for Social Care Workers. Mentoring General

The following references are cited in Morton 2003

Clutterbuck, D. 1994. Business Mentoring in Evolution. *Mentoring & Tutoring*. 19-22

Fletcher, S. 1997. From Mentor to Mentored. *Mentoring and Tutoring*. 48-55

Gardiner, C. 1998. Mentoring: Towards a Professional Relationship. *Mentoring & Tutoring*. 77-84

Garvey, B. 1999 Mentoring and the Changing Paradigm. *Mentoring & Tutoring*. 41-54

Garvey, B. and Alfred, G. 2000 Educating Mentors. *Mentoring and Tutoring*. 113-126.

Hay, J. 1997 *Action Mentoring. Creating your own Developmental Alliance*. Watford: Sherwood Publishing

Hay, J. 1999. *Transformational Mentoring. Creating Developmental Alliances for Changing Organisational Cultures*. Watford: Sherwood Publishing

Holloway, A., Whyte, C. and Kennington, R. 1994. *Mentoring. The Definitive Handbook*. Manchester: Development Processes Publications.

Roberts, A. 2000. *Mentoring Revisited: a Phenomenological Reading of the Literature*. *Mentoring & Tutoring*. pp. 145-170.

The Industrial Society. 1995. *Managing Best Practice: Mentoring*. London: The Industrial Society

Wiggins, J. 1995. Essential Conversations. in. *Mentoring. Final Project Report, Volume II, Issues and Debates in Mentoring*. Leeds: Leeds Metropolitan University

Appendix 1

SCQF Core principles of RPL ²⁵

A variety of different approaches to RPL can be developed and used by learning providers to meet the needs and goals of learner groups across the different sectors.

All RPL provision, however, whether for personal/career development or for credit, should be underpinned by the following core principles. The aim of the core principles is to make sure that there is effective, quality-assured practice that will enable all users of the SCQF to have confidence in the outcomes of RPL. By identifying core principles as the parameters within which all RPL provision within the context of the SCQF should operate consistency will be more feasibly achieved.

1. Learner-focussed

RPL should be a gateway, and not a barrier, to learning. RPL should promote the positive aspects of an individual's learning experience (as opposed to its deficiency). RPL should be a voluntary activity on the part of the learner. The learner's needs and reasons for recognition should be paramount.

2. Accessibility

RPL should be an accessible and inclusive process, applicable to all learners at all levels. Accessibility can be facilitated through:

- initial information and advice (awareness raising)
- manageable systems in terms of time and money from the perspective of both learner and learning provider
- easy to understand and easy to implement processes
- embedding of RPL in the programme design stage in order to become an integral part of the provision of colleges SQA-approved centres and HEIs, rather than an 'add-on', marginal activity.

3. Flexibility

A range of different approaches to RPL in terms of both support and assessment should be encouraged to address the diversity of learner needs, goals and experiences across the different sectors.

4. Reliability, transparency & consistency in managing RPL processes are necessary to make sure there is confidence in the outcomes.

5. Clarity of role definition

The roles and responsibilities of learner, learning provider, and receiving institution should be clearly defined. Staff involved in managing and supporting the RPL process should be provided with appropriate training and support.

6. Quality

RPL should be underpinned by Quality Assurance mechanisms. Moderation of RPL for personal and career development should focus on ensuring that the standards of notional leveling are consistently applied. Moderation of RPL for credit should be integrated within existing quality assurance processes and should be available

²⁵ SCQF RPL Guidelines. 2005. www.scqf.org.uk

for scrutiny for appropriate external quality assurance, for example by an external auditing body.

Collaboration between sectors should be encouraged in order to meet the needs of the learner more effectively. Links should be encouraged between learning providers and receiving institutions, and between these and organisations such as Careers Scotland, in supporting learners and potential learners to gain recognition for their prior informal learning within the context of the SCQF. Collaboration should extend to the sharing of case studies, examples of good practice, and approaches to support and assessment.

Appendix 2

Reflective Writing

Handout developed by Jenny Moon, University of Bournemouth

Instructions for using The Park

The aim of this exercise is to enable participants to see what reflective writing looks like, to recognise that reflection can vary in depth and that there is more potential for learning from deeper rather than superficial reflection. The exercise is developed in response to the observation that students, who are asked to reflect, firstly often have difficulty in writing reflectively and then, when they manage to write reflectively, tend to reflect rather superficially. In the exercise there are three accounts of an incident or experience. The accounts are written at different depths of reflection.

Instructions for use of the exercise The procedure for the exercise is described as a group process, though it can be used individually. The process works best when it has a facilitator, who is not engaged in the exercise. It takes around an hour. It is important that the pages are not leafed through in advance, other than as instructed - and the exercise works better when people follow the instructions. In particular, they should not begin the discussions until everyone has read the relevant account. The facilitator needs to control this. The groups can be told that there are three accounts of an incident, and that they will be reading them one after the other, with time after each session of reading for discussion about the reflective content of the account.

- The exercise is introduced as means to demonstrate that there are different depths in reflection and that deeper reflection probably equates with better learning.
- Small groups are formed (no more than six in each).
- The groups are told to turn to the first account and read it quietly to themselves considering what features that they think are reflective.
- When it is evident that most people have read the first account, the groups are invited to discuss the account and identify where and how it is reflective. They are given about seven minutes for each discussion session. They may need less time for the earlier accounts.
- After the discussion session, the participants are asked to read the next account in the sequence (and they are reminded not to turn pages beyond the account in hand).
- After the last account has been read and discussed, groups are asked to go back through all of the accounts and to identify features of the reflection that progressively change through the accounts. For example, the accounts change from being 'story' to focusing on issues in the incident. In the later accounts there is more recognition that there are multiple perspectives etc. The groups are asked to list (eg on flip chart paper) the ways in which the accounts 'deepen'.
- In a plenary, the groups share their lists (as above) and discuss the whole exercise.

The Park - an exercise in reflective writing

Introduction

This is an account of an incident in a park. It is recounted by 'Annie' who was involved in the incident herself. It is written in different versions that demonstrate different levels of reflective writing. At the end of the accounts, there are notes on the criteria for the levels of reflection that each account portrays. You may not be given the notes until you have discussed your responses to the material.

The Park (1) I went through the park the other day. The sun shone sometimes but large clouds floated across the sky in a breeze. It reminded me of a time that I was walking on St David's Head in Wales – when there was a hard and bright light and anything I looked at was bright. It was really quite hot – so much nicer than the day before, which was rainy. I went over to the children's playing field. I had not been there for a while and wanted to see the improvements. There were several children there and one, in particular, I noticed, was in too many clothes for the heat. The children were running about and this child became red in the face and began to slow down and then he sat. He must have been about 10. Some of the others called him up again and he got to his feet. He stumbled into the game for a few moments, tripping once or twice. It seemed to me that he had just not got the energy to lift his feet. Eventually he stumbled down and did not get up but he was still moving and he shuffled into a half sitting and half lying position watching the other children and I think he was calling out to them. I don't know.

Anyway, I had to get on to get to the shop to buy some meat for the chilli that my children had asked for their party. The twins had invited many friends round for an end-of-term celebration of the beginning of the summer holidays. They might think that they have cause to celebrate but it makes a lot more work for me when they are home. I find that their holiday time makes a lot more work.

It was the next day when the paper came through the door – in it there was a report of a child who had been taken seriously ill in the park the previous day. He was fighting for his life in hospital and they said that the seriousness of the situation was due to the delay before he was brought to hospital. The report commented on the fact that he had been lying unattended for half an hour before someone saw him. By then the other children had gone. It said that that several passers-by might have seen him looking ill and even on the ground and the report went on to ask why passers-by do not take action when they see that something is wrong. The article was headed 'Why do they 'Walk on by'? I have been terribly upset since then. James says I should not worry – it is just a headline.

The Park (2) I went to the park the other day. I was going to the supermarket to get some meat to make the chilli that I had promised the children. They were having one of their end-of-term celebrations with friends. I wonder what drew me to the playground and why I ended up standing and watching those children playing with a rough old football. I am not sure as I don't usually look at other people's children – I just did. Anyway there were a number of kids there. I noticed, in particular, one child who seemed to be very overdressed for the weather. I try now to recall what he looked like - his face was red. He was a boy of around 10 – not unlike Charlie was at that age – maybe that is why I noticed him to start with when he was running around with the others. But then he was beginning to look distressed. I felt uneasy about him – sort of maternal but I did not do anything. What could I have done? I remember thinking, I had little time and the supermarket would get crowded. What a strange way of thinking, in the circumstances!

In retrospect I wish I had acted. I ask myself what stopped me - but I don't know what I might have done at that point. Anyway he sat down, looking absolutely exhausted and as if he had no energy to do anything. A few moments later, the other children called him up to run about again. I felt more uneasy and watched as he got up and tried to run, then fell, ran again and fell and half sat and half lay. Still I did nothing more than look – what was going on with me?

Eventually I went on I tell myself now that it was really important to get to the shops. It was the next day when the paper came through the door that I had a real shock. In the paper there was a report of a child who had been taken seriously ill in the park the previous day. He was fighting for his life in the hospital and the situation was much more serious because there had been such a delay in getting help. The report commented on the fact that he had been lying, unattended, for half an hour or more. At first, I wondered why the other children had not been more responsible. The article went on to say that several passers-by might have seen him playing and looking ill and the report questioned why passers-by do not take action when they see that something is wrong.

The event has affected me for some days but I do not know where to go or whom to tell. I do want to own up to my part in it to someone though.

The Park (3) The incident happened in Ingle Park and it is very much still on my mind. There was a child playing with others. He looked hot and unfit and kept sitting down but the other children kept on getting him back up and making him play with them. I was on my way to the shop and only watched the children for a while before I walked on. Next day it was reported in the paper that the child had been taken to hospital seriously ill – very seriously ill. The report said that there were several passers-by in the park who had seen the child looking ill and who had done nothing. It was a scathing report about those who do not take action in such situations.

Reading the report, I felt dreadful and it has been very difficult to shift the feelings. I did not stop to see to the child because I told myself that I was on my way to the shops to buy food for a meal that I had to cook for the children's party – what do I mean that I had to cook it? Though I saw that the child was ill, I didn't do anything. It is hard to say what I was really thinking at the time – to what degree I was determined to go on with my day in the way I had planned it (the party really was not that important was it?). Or did I genuinely not think that the boy was ill – but just over-dressed and a bit tired? To what extent did I try to make convenient excuses and to what extent was my action based on an attempt to really understand the situation? Looking back, I could have cut through my excuses at the time – rather than now.

I did not go over to the child and ask what was wrong but I should have done. I could have talked to the other children - and even got one of the other children to call for help. I am not sure if the help would have been ambulance or doctor at that stage – but it does not matter now. If he had been given help then, he might not be fighting for his life.

It would be helpful to me if I could work out what I was really thinking and why I acted as I did. This event has really shaken me to my roots – more than I would have expected. It made me feel really guilty. I do not usually do wrong, in fact I think of myself as a good person. This event is also making me think about actions in all sorts of areas of my life. It reminds me of some things in the past as when my uncle died – but then again I don't really think that that is relevant - he was going to die anyway. My bad feelings then were due to sheer sadness and some irrational regrets that I did not visit him on the day before. Strangely it also reminds me of how bad I felt when Charlie was ill while we went on that anniversary weekend away. As I think more about Charlie being ill, I recognise that there are commonalities in the situations. I also keep wondering if I knew that boy....

The Park (4) It happened in Ingle Park and this event is very much still on my mind. It feels significant. There was a child playing with others. He looked hot and unfit and kept sitting down but the other children kept on getting him back up and making him play with them. I was on my way to the shop and only watched the children for a while before I walked on. Next day it was reported in the paper that the child had been taken to hospital seriously ill – very seriously ill. The report said that there were several passers-by in the park who had seen the child looking ill and who had done nothing. It was a scathing report about those who do not take action in such situation.

It was the report initially that made me think more deeply. It kept coming back in my mind and over the next few days - I began to think of the situation in lots of different ways. Initially I considered my urge to get to the shop – regardless of the state of the boy. That was an easy way of excusing myself – to say that I had to get to the shop. Then I began to go through all of the agonising as to whether I could have mis-read the situation and really thought that the boy was simply over-dressed or perhaps play-acting or trying to gain sympathy from me or the others. Could I have believed that the situation was all right? All of that thinking, I now notice, would also have let me off the hook – made it not my fault that I did not take action at the time.

I talked with Tom about my reflections on the event – on the incident, on my thinking about it at the time and then immediately after. He observed that my sense of myself as a 'good person who always lends a helping hand when others need help' was put in some jeopardy by it all. At the time and immediately after, it might have been easier to avoid shaking my view of myself than to admit that I had avoided facing up to the situation and admitting that I had not acted as 'a good person'. With this hindsight, I notice that I can probably find it more easy to admit that I am not always 'a good person' and that I made a mistake in retrospect than immediately after the event. I suspect that this may apply to other situations.

As I think about the situation now, I recall some more of the thoughts – or were they feelings mixed up with thoughts? I remember a sense at the time that this boy looked quite scruffy and reminded me of a child who used to play with Charlie. We did not feel happy during the brief period of their friendship because this boy was known as a bully and we were uneasy either that Charlie would end up being bullied, or that Charlie would learn to bully. Funnily enough we were talking about this boy – I now remember – at the dinner table the night before. The conversation had reminded me of all of the agonizing about the children's friends at the time. The fleeting thought/feeling was possibly something like this:– if this boy is like one I did not feel uncomfortable with – then maybe he deserves to get left in this way. Maybe he was a brother of the original child. I remember social psychology research along the lines of attributing blame to victims to justify their plight. Then it might not have been anything to do with Charlie's friend.

So I can see how I looked at that event and perhaps interpreted it in a manner that was consistent with my emotional frame of mind at the time. Seeing the same events without that dinner-time conversation might have led me to see the whole thing in an entirely different manner and I might have acted differently. The significance of this whole event is chilling when I realise that my lack of action nearly resulted in his death – and it might have been because of an attitude that was formed years ago in relation to a different situation.

This has all made me think about how we view things. The way I saw this event at the time was quite different to the way I see it now – even this few days later. Writing an account at the time would have been different to the account – or several accounts

that I would write now. I cannot know what 'story' is 'true'. The bullying story may be one that I have constructed retrospectively - fabricated. Interestingly I can believe that story completely.

The Park: comments on the quality of reflection

The Park (1)

This piece tells the story. Sometimes it mentions past experiences, sometimes anticipates the future but all in the context of the account of the story.

There might be references to emotional state, but the role of the emotions on action is not explored.

Ideas of others are mentioned but not elaborated or used to investigate the meaning of the events.

The account is written only from one point of view – that of Annie.

Generally ideas are presented in a sequence and are only linked by the story. They are not all relevant or focused

In fact – you could hardly deem this to be reflective at all. It is very descriptive. It could be a reasonably written account of an event that could serve as a basis on which reflection might start, though it hardly signals any material for reflection – other than the last few words

The Park (2)

In this account there is a description of the same events. There is very little addition of ideas from outside the event – reference to attitudes of others, comments.

The account is more than a story though. It is focused on the event as if there is a big question to be asked and answered.

In the questioning there is recognition of the worth of exploring the motives for behaviour – but it does not go very far. In other words, asking the questions makes it more than a descriptive account, but the lack of attempt to respond to the questions means that there is little actual analysis of the events.

Annie is critical of her actions and in her questions, signals this. The questioning of action does mean that Annie is standing back from the event to a small extent. There is a sense that she recognises that this is a significant incident, with learning to be gained – but the reflection does not go sufficiently deep to enable the learning to begin to occur.

The Park (3)

The description is succinct – just sufficient to raise the issues. Extraneous information is not added. It is not a story. The focus is on the attempt to reflect on the event and to learn from it. There is more of a sense of Annie standing back from the event in order to reflect better on her actions and in order to be more effectively critical.

There is more analysis of the situation and an evident understanding that it was not a simple situation – that there might be alternative explanations or actions that could be justified equally effectively.

The description could be said to be slightly narrow (see The Park (4)) as Annie is not acknowledging that there might be other ways of perceiving the situation – other points of view. She does not seem to be recognising that her reflection is affected by her frame of reference at the time or now. It is possible, for example, that her

experience with Charlie (last paragraph) – or her question about knowing the boy have influenced the manner in which she reacted. It might not just be a matter of linking up other events, but of going beyond and checking out the possibility that her frame of reference might have been affected by the prior experiences.

The Park (4)

The account is succinct and to the point. There is some deep reflection here that is self-critical and questions the basis of the beliefs and values on which the behaviour was based.

There is evidence of standing back from the event, of Annie treating herself as an object acting within the context.

There is also an internal dialogue – a conversation with herself in which she proposes and further reflects on alternative explanations.

She shows evidence of looking at the views of others (Tom) and of considering the alternative point of view, and learning from it.

She recognises the significance of the effect of passage of time on her reflection – eg that her personal frame of reference at the time may have influenced her actions and that a different frame of reference might have lead to different results.

She notices that the proximity of other, possibly unrelated events (the dinner-time conversation) have an effect either possibly on her actual behaviour and her subsequent reflection – or possibly on her reflective processes only. She notices that she can be said to be reconstructing the event in retrospect – creating a story around it that may not be 'true'.

She recognises that there may be no conclusion to this situation – but that there are still things to be learnt from it.

She has also been able to reflect on her own process of reflecting (acted metacognitively), recognising that her process influenced the outcome.

Exercise devised by Jenny Moon, University of Bournemouth.

Appendix 3

Mentoring Agreement example

Introduction

Theories of adult learning emphasise that experience is the best teacher. All genuine learning comes about through personal experience, but not all experiences are educational. For an experience to become a learning opportunity, it is crucial to take the time to reflect on, and evaluate, the experience.

The role of the mentor is to develop a relationship with the learner whereby the learner is encouraged and enabled to reflect on learning opportunities and most crucially, to make the links between learning and work practice.

The responsibilities of the mentor

1. The mentor will meet with the learner to discuss and agree how frequently they will need to have contact and what is realistic within the work context. A minimum of one meeting will be an individual session, and one meeting may involve other learners within the organisation, if mutually agreeable.
2. The mentor and learner will agree times when the mentor is available outwith these meetings.
3. If an agreed meeting has to be cancelled, it is the responsibility of the person cancelling the arrangement to let the other person know.
4. The mentor will keep confidential the content of individual discussions with the learner, sharing information with relevant others only with the prior consent of the learner.
5. The mentor will share responsibility with the learner for keeping a record of meetings.
6. There may be certain circumstances under which it may be necessary for the mentor and the learner to involve others (programme leader, tutor, line manager) in discussions.
7. While the mentor will give guidance, where required, on the evidence being produced by the learner to meet the requirements of the award or qualification, he or she will not be involved in the actual production of the evidence.

The responsibilities of the learner

1. The learner is responsible for her/his own learning, and will come to meetings, with the mentor or with the learner group, prepared to share and reflect on experiences within the programme and work practice.
2. The learner will make available to the mentor any feedback from relevant others such as line manager, tutor, assessor, in relation to progress and evidence.

3. The learner will request extra meeting(s) with the mentor should s/he feel this is necessary.
4. The learner will share with the mentor responsibility for keeping a record of meetings.
5. The learner is solely responsible for the content of evidence, and for submitting evidence on time .

Signed (Learner)
Signed (Mentor)
Date

Appendix 4

The SCQF Social Services RPL working group members are:

Alison Harold	Scottish Social Services Council
Craig Brown	Workers Educational Association
Margaret Cameron	Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework (SCQF)
Carla Findlay	Cora Learning
Joyce Fortune	Scottish Borders Council
Allan Keir	Organisation of Residential Care Homes Angus (ORCHA)
Pat Lavery	The Action Group
Irene Leitner	Crossreach
Tony Mackie	Glasgow City Council
Margaret McDonald	Glasgow City Council
Kathryn McTurk	Scottish Social Services Council
Fiona Murray	Perth and Kinross Council
Eleanor Ramsay	Scottish Qualifications Authority -Care Scotland
Sheila Scott	Inclusion Glasgow - Altrum
Pat Sinclair	Viewpoint
Sam Sinclair	Camphill Scotland
Caroline Sturgeon	Voluntary Sector Social Services Workforce Unit
Audrey Thompson	Perth & Kinross Council
Ruth Whittaker	SCQF Consultant

The **Scottish Social Services Council** (SSSC) The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) was established in October 2001 under the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act. Set up as part of a drive to raise standards in social services, our role is to increase protection of people who use social services, to raise standards of practice and to increase public confidence in the sector.

The **Scottish Qualifications Authority** (SQA) is committed to ensuring that candidate effort in relation to knowledge, skills and evidence requirements can be recognised without duplication of effort. In order to maintain the integrity of qualifications SQA was happy to participate in the project and in the development of materials.

The **Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework** (SCQF) is designed to support the culture of lifelong learning in Scotland. Through the SCQF, all mainstream qualifications in Scotland can be mapped and all learners can identify their current position and plan their future learning pathways. It also provides an extremely important tool through which learning in a wide variety of contexts can be recognised – for example, learning in the workplace or in the community.

The SCQF social services project is managed through the Scottish Social Services Council. Recognition of Prior Informal Learning is a key development in this project. The project works closely with a partnership of stakeholders through the SCQF Co-ordination group for Social Services. The SSSC supports the SCQF to facilitate the learning and development of the social services workforce.

For further copies of these materials please contact the SSSC.



Scottish Social Services Council

Compass House
11 Riverside Drive
Dundee
DD1 4NY

Lo-call: 0845 60 30 891
Tel: 01382 207 101
Fax: 01382 207 215
Email: enquiries@sssc.uk.com
Web: www.sssc.uk.com

If you would like to request this document in another format or language, please contact the SSSC on 0845 60 30 891.

