

Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL)

Resource Pack

Background to the RPL resources

The Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Social Services Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) Resource 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) Mentor Guidance 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.

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Contents

Introduction to RPL Resource Pack	1
Stage 1: Introduction to learning from experience	9
Stage 2: Identifying learning from life and work experiences	51
Stage 3: Preparation for RPL profiling	67
NB: profiling tool available as separate document	
Glossary of terms	89
Appendix 1 Kolb's Learning Style Inventory	91
Appendix 2 The SCQF social services RPL Working Group Members	95

Materials for Learners

Information Handouts for Learners

Introductory Handout	13
1. What is RPL?	23
2. How do you learn best?	29
3. What is informal or experiential learning?	37
4. Social roles in my life and identifying skills and knowledge	39
5. Core and other skills	41
6. What is reflection?	45
7. Reflecting on events in my life	47
8. Keeping a reflective diary	65
9. Introduction to RPL profiling tool	73
10. Producing evidence of your learning	81
11. Action Plans	85

Activity Handouts for Learners

1. Positive and negative experiences of learning	27
2. Identifying learning	49
3. Reflective exercise	57
4. Critical incident analysis	63

Introduction to RPL Resource Pack

1. Purpose of the SCQF Social Services Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) Programme

- To engage social services workers who lack confidence as learners and/or are reluctant to undertake formal learning, such as SVQs.
- To speed up the process of RPL for credit towards qualifications, for example SVQ Health and Social Care.

2. Purpose of the Resource Pack

The purpose of this pack is to support the process of recognising the prior informal learning of workers within the social services sector. The process supported by this pack is not a direct route to qualification achievement. It is about **preparing** learners to gain credit towards qualifications through confidence building and developing the skills of reflection.

Working with a group of learners

The pack is designed to be used by mentors who are working with a group of learners. A mentor may be a line manager, supervisor, tutor, trainer or SVQ Assessor.

Guidance on carrying out the role of mentor as part of an RPL process is provided in the **SCQF Social Services Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) Mentor Guidance Pack**. The Mentor pack is designed to be referred to by mentors before working through the Resource Pack with learners.

The mentor should select from the material contained within the Resource Pack. The material, and approach, should ideally complement the existing training and professional development programmes being used within the organisation.

The advantage of the RPL process is that it does not predict the outcome for individual learners. This process can be used to identify the learning needs of the individual. There could, for example, be a number of people in a group using RPL at any time but then going on to undertake individual awards at different levels.

Working with an individual learner

The Resource Pack can also be used with an individual learner. The exercises can be completed by a learner either independently (prior to and/or following a meeting with his/her mentor) or through discussion with the mentor. As above, the mentor should select from the material contained within the pack, and can tailor the activities as appropriate to meet the needs and preferred learning style of the individual.

The pack is also designed to prepare learners to use **RPL profiling**. RPL profiling supports learners in identifying the extent to which they have achieved the elements of core units 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 profiling tool which has been developed so far is in relation to the SVQ level 3 Health and Social Care. However, the profiling model could also be applied to other qualifications such as the Practice Learning Qualifications (PLQ) (Social Services).

RPL profiling helps learners to identify:

- the key learning experiences through which they may be able to demonstrate the elements for each unit
- the evidence of their learning
- further action they need to take to fully achieve or demonstrate the elements. This further action might be in terms of further training, learning and development or in relation to the production, gathering and selection of evidence to enable assessment towards the qualification.

The Resource Pack supports this process through:

- introducing the learners to RPL
- building their confidence as learners through identifying their strengths and skills
- preparing them to use RPL profiling.

The RPL process supported by this pack can be used within the social services sector to support all aspects of workforce development including:

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

Gaining of qualifications: RPL can be used to support social services workers who lack confidence as learners and/or are reluctant to undertake formal learning. It can also accelerate the process of achieving qualifications, such as the SVQ Health and Social Care 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, for example.

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

The pack contains suggested activities and handouts which can underpin group preparatory sessions with participants. The activities and handouts should be used flexibly by the mentors to meet the needs and goals of their learner group. As indicated above, it is also possible to adapt and use the activities and handouts with a learner on an individual basis. The material is directed at the learner, but may require explanation and clarification by the mentor in the session.

In order to act as a mentor, you do not need to be a qualified assessor but you do need to be able to support learners in:

- understanding the requirements of the qualifications for which the learners will be seeking credit, or the competences required for a particular role, and the ways in which these can be demonstrated through practice
- 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.

Carrying out the role of mentor can contribute to your own continuing professional development and can generate evidence for further professional qualifications,¹ 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. 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 through an RPL process as part of your own development goals.

3. Development of the pack

The pack has been developed by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) as part of the development work to support the implementation of the SCQF within the social services sector. The work was carried out in consultation with an expert working group in social services training. The activities and handouts within the pack have been produced primarily through adapting learner support materials developed through the EU-funded Socrates Valuing Learning through Experience Project (Valex)². This project involved eight European countries and was coordinated by Glasgow Caledonian University.

A parallel SCQF project has been run in the area of Community Learning and Development. This utilised the same approach to RPL in terms of a preparatory, formative stage and an RPL profiling tool.

4. What do we mean by prior informal learning and RPL?

The term prior informal learning can also be described as prior experiential learning. It covers all prior learning which has not previously been assessed or credit-rated. This includes prior learning achieved through life and work experiences (paid and voluntary), as well as prior learning gained in non-formal contexts through community-based learning; workplace learning and training; continuing professional development and independent learning.

The SCQF can support the process of recognising prior informal learning (RPL) in two ways:

- RPL for personal/career development or formative recognition
- RPL for credit, or summative recognition

¹ Addressed within PLQ(SS) RPL materials

² For details of the Vallex project (2003-2005) and to obtain copies of the support materials and other documentation please go to the project website www.valex-apel.com

What is RPL for Personal/Career Development or Formative Recognition?

This focuses on recognising prior informal learning within the context of further learning and development. This process can be linked to:

- confidence-building
- identifying individual learning pathways or personal or professional development plans
- a notional levelling of learning within the context of the SCQF
- supporting the transition between informal and formal learning
- preparation for the process of RPL for credit.

What is RPL for Credit or summative recognition?

This is a process of assessing prior informal learning which is recognised, if appropriate, for academic or vocational purposes.³ RPL can enable a learner to:

- gain credit towards an academic or vocational qualification
- gain entry to a programme of formal learning, at a college or university for example, if the outcomes of their prior informal learning are judged as comparable to the entry requirements to the programme
- gain credit within a programme of formal learning if the outcomes of his/her prior informal learning are judged as comparable to the outcomes of the programme to which he/she is seeking credit.

5. How to use the pack

This pack forms the first part of a six step process which can be linked to both formative and 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 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, 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 as an alternative to normal entry requirements.

³ This has to be done by a credit rating body such as the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), HEI or College

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

Step 2: Learner use RPL profiling process (use of profiling tool if developed)

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 for qualification

Step 1 Preparatory support provided by mentor

This has been divided into 3 stages:

Stage 1: Introduction to learning from experience

Stage 2: Identifying learning from life and work experiences

Stage 3: Identifying learning from social care, and other relevant, experience in preparation for the profiling process.

This Resource Pack can be used by mentors to underpin Step 1 of the process: preparatory support. Activities and handouts are provided to support each of the three stages and can be used flexibly by the mentor. The activities are designed to be used by a group of learners, although support can also be provided on an individual basis. The advantage of a group approach is that of peer group support provided by other learners, which can enhance the learning experience and the confidence-building process.

Step 2 RPL Profiling

The learner will use RPL profiling for the units, or elements of the qualification they are seeking, which have been agreed by the Mentor. As part of the profiling process, the learner will write two reflective exercises: one in relation to a life experience and one in relation to a recent practice-based experience. A follow up meeting with the mentor will be arranged to discuss the outcomes of the profiling exercise.

Step 3 Professional discussion with mentor

This is a reflective discussion in which the mentor will encourage the learner to explore, in more depth, the experiences they have identified in the profiling tool; the learning which has resulted; and the evidence which the learner can use to demonstrate this learning. This will include the production a reflective account as evidence, based on the two reflective exercises used as part of the profiling process.

The mentor and learner will agree what other action needs to be taken to meet the learner's particular goals in terms of further learning, training or development to prepare them to use RPL for credit in relation to the qualification. If this is the case, the mentor will discuss with the learner the ways in which the scope and performance or assessment criteria of the qualification can be met. The mentor and learner will agree timescales for the action identified.

Step 4 Production of reflective evidence and updating of profile

As a result of the discussion with the mentor, the learner produces the reflective account and updates his or her Profile in relation to experiences/evidence /action and timescales.

Step 5 Undertaking other agreed action

The learner will take agreed action. A follow-up review meeting with the mentor should take place to discuss progress at an appropriate point. When the learner is ready to seek credit for their prior informal learning in relation to the qualification, an assessment planning meeting will be arranged with an assessor.

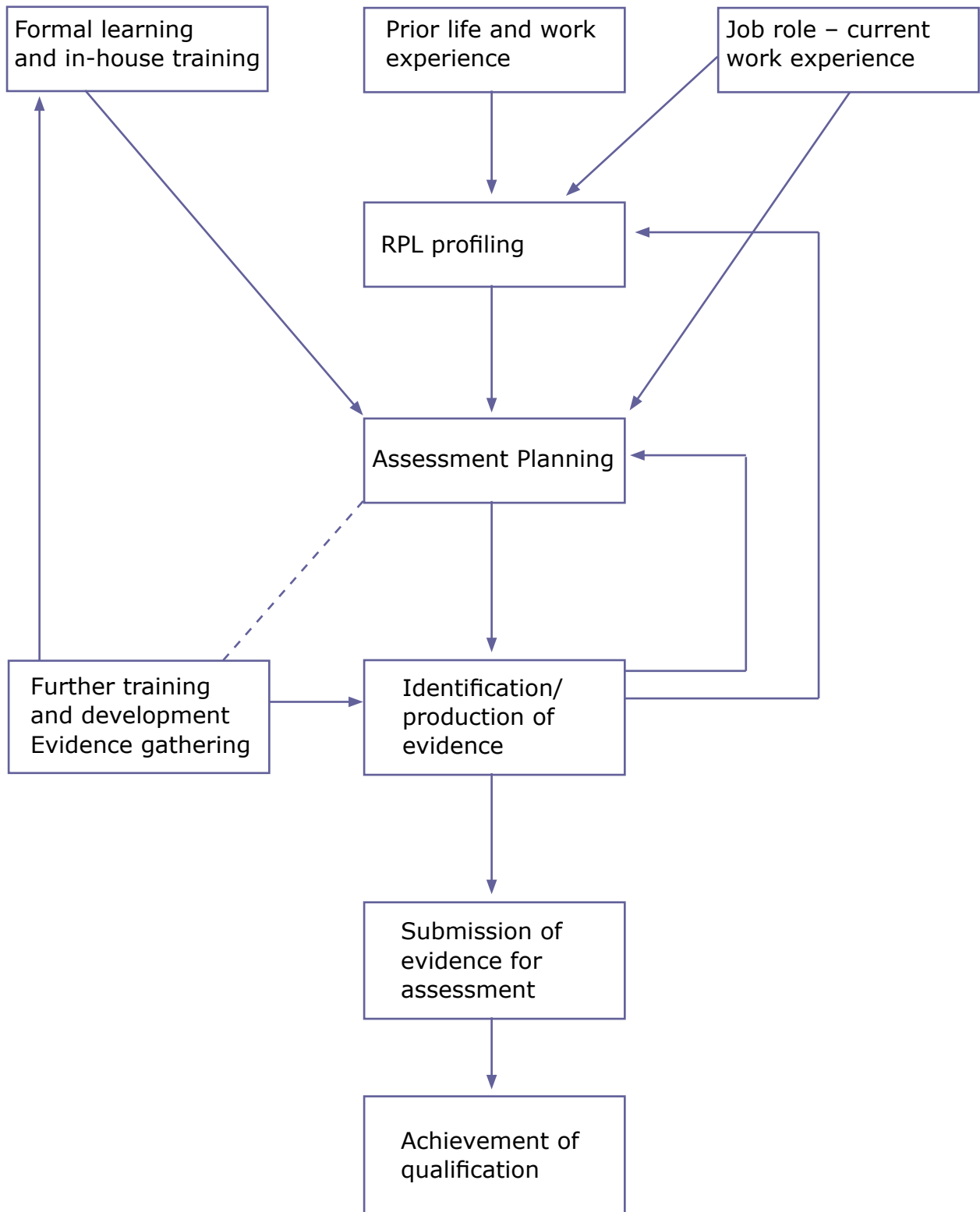
Step 6 Gaining RPL credit

Through the assessment process, credit can be sought for the prior informal learning identified through the profiling process, for example towards an SVQ in Health and Social Care.⁴

The flowchart on the next page shows how the RPL process can be used as part of the process of gaining a qualification.

⁴ In the example of the SVQ3 Health and Social Care this has to be an SQA approved SVQ assessor. This takes place within the context of SQA assessment processes for SVQ awards.

How RPL can be used towards the achievement of a qualification



6. Structure of the pack

The Resource Pack is divided into the 3 stages of Step 1. For each stage the following material is provided:

- aims
- outline of activities
- information sheets for mentors where appropriate, to supplement information contained in the handouts for learners
- handouts for learners.

7. Getting started

The activities described in the pack should be adapted, or added to, as appropriate by the mentor in response to the particular needs and goals of their learner group.

At the beginning of Stage 1, discuss the purpose of the preparatory sessions and RPL profiling, using the Introductory Handout. Confirm that the discussions that the learners will have about their experiences will be conducted in a safe environment. Agree ground rules for discussion with the group.

It might be useful to ask the group to rate their current awareness and understanding of learning from experience and RPL, on a scale from one to five. This will enable you to pitch this introductory session at the appropriate level.

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 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.

Emphasise that this process is about **valuing** the learning that the participants have gained from their life experiences, (and is not about emphasising the gaps in their learning). It is also about helping them to identify the action they can take which will enable them to meet their goals.

Stage One

**Introduction to
learning from
experience**

Stage 1: Introduction to learning from experience

Time required: approx 2.5 hours

Aims:

- to begin discussing learning and introduce participants to group work
- to find out about participants' previous experiences of learning
- to raise awareness of the skills, talents, abilities participants have and to recognise each other's skills
- to introduce reflection
- to enable participants to start to identify what they have learned through particular roles/events.

Stage 1 activities

- **Introduction**
 - Introductory Handout for Learners
- **Activity 1: What is RPL?**
 - Information sheet for Mentors 1: What is RPL?
 - Information Handout for Learners 1: What is RPL?
- **Activity 2: What contributes to positive and negative experiences of learning?**
 - Activity Handout 1: Positive and Negative Experiences of Learning
 - Information Handout for Learners 2: How do you learn best?
- **Activity 3: Personal recognition of current skills and recognition of the skills of others**
 - Information sheet for Mentors 2: What is informal or experiential learning?
 - Information Handout 3 for Learners: What is informal or experiential learning?
 - Information Handout 4 for Learners: Social roles in my life and identifying skills and knowledge
 - Information Handout 5 for Learners: Core and other skills
- **Activity 4: Introduction to reflection and identifying examples of learning**
 - Information Handout 6 for Learners: What is reflection?
 - Information Handout 7 for Learners : Reflecting on events in my life
 - Activity Handout 2: Identifying Learning

Introduction:

Discuss purpose of preparatory sessions and RPL profiling.

Use and discuss Introductory Handout. Allow about 20 minutes for this.

Introductory Handout

SCQF/Social Services: Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL)

1. Purpose of RPL Profiling

RPL can help you get recognition for the learning you have gained through your life and work experiences in relation to the qualification you are seeking. The RPL process which you will use as part of this programme will not directly lead to achieving the qualification, but should help to **prepare** you for achievement. It will do this through building your confidence as learners and developing your skills of reflection.

You will carry out activities with your mentor to prepare you to do **RPL profiling**. This profiling will support you in thinking about the extent to which you have achieved the elements of the qualification you are seeking through your life and work experiences.

Profiling will help you to identify:

- the key learning experiences which have helped you to achieve the elements of the qualification
- the evidence of your learning
- further action you need to take to fully achieve or demonstrate the elements. This further action might include further training, learning and development or producing, gathering and selecting evidence to enable assessment towards the qualification.

The pack supports you in this through:

- introducing you to RPL
- building your confidence as learners through identifying your strengths and skills
- preparing you to use RPL profiling.

The pack contains suggested activities and handouts which may be used as part of group or individual sessions with your mentor.

Case study:

Mike Green is a senior care worker at a residential home in Glasgow. Previously he had a long career on the oil rigs and in catering. He moved into his present career without much planning. He first did some voluntary work in day centre for older people and then applied for a job as a care worker in the care home where he now works. At first Mike did not have much confidence but was soon able to see that he had gained a huge range of skills and knowledge through his earlier career. He worked through the RPL materials and RPL profiling with the support of his mentor, the care home manager.

He realised that many of the core skills which he had used while working on oil rigs and then as a chef were similar to skills he needed in the care home. These

included listening to people, dealing with problems or complaints, negotiation, and team working. Mike was also able to draw from his hobby of gardening where he recognised the importance of planning. He says that being part of the SSSC SCQF RPL project helped his confidence. "I realised that I knew more and was much more skilled than I had thought." Mike now leads a team of care workers and successfully applied for a senior care worker's position. He has also recently gained his SVQ3.

The care home manager hopes that Mike's experience will encourage other staff members in their professional development. "Recognising prior learning is a great way of supporting staff to become more confident and to make it easier for them to gain qualifications and to plan their careers."

2. What do we mean by prior informal learning and RPL?

Prior informal learning is learning based on experience. It includes all learning which you have done up to this point which has not already been assessed or credit-rated. This includes prior learning gained through life and work experiences (paid and voluntary), as well as prior learning gained through community-based learning, workplace learning and training, continuing professional development and independent learning.

The **Recognition of Prior informal Learning (RPL)** is a process through which the learning you have gained from experience can be counted.

RPL can help you to:

- think about the learning you have already achieved and help you plan how to build on this learning to meet your goals
- get a place on a programme at college or university or training provider , if you don't have the normal entry qualifications but can show that you have the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding
- gain credit towards a qualification to shorten the normal period of learning by showing that you already have knowledge , skills and understanding needed for particular parts of the programme or qualification (eg units or modules).

It is important to stress that recognition or credit is not given for the experience itself. It is what you have learned from experience that counts.

3. How to use the pack

This pack supports Step 1 of a six step process.

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

Step 2: Learner use RPL profiling process (use of profiling tool if developed)

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 for qualification

Step 1 Preparatory support provided by mentor

This has been divided into 3 stages:

Stage 1: Introduction to learning from experience

Stage 2: Identifying learning from life and work experiences

Stage 3: Identifying learning from social care experience in preparation for profiling process.

This pack is used to underpin Step 1: preparatory support. Activities and handouts are provided to support each of the three stages and can be used flexibly. The activities are designed to be carried out by a group of learners, although support can also be provided on an individual basis. The advantage of a group approach is the support provided by other learners.

Step 2 RPL Profiling

You will use RPL profiling for the units, or elements of the qualification, which have been agreed by your mentor. As part of the profiling process, you will do two reflective exercises: one in relation to a life experience and one in relation to a work experience. A follow up meeting with your mentor will be arranged to discuss the outcomes of the profiling exercise.

Step 3 Professional Discussion with Mentor

This is a reflective discussion in which your mentor will encourage you to explore, in more depth, the experiences you have identified in the profiling tool, the learning which has resulted, and the evidence which you can use to demonstrate this learning. This will include the production a reflective account as evidence, based on the two reflective exercises used as part of the profiling process.

You and your mentor will agree what other action needs to be taken to meet your particular goals in terms of further learning, training or development to prepare you to use RPL for credit in relation to the qualification you are working towards. Your mentor will discuss with you the ways in which the scope and performance or assessment criteria of the qualification can be met. You and your mentor will agree timescales for the action identified.

Step 4 Production of Reflective Account and updating of Profile

As a result of the discussion with your mentor, you will produce your reflective account and update your Profile in relation to experiences/evidence/action and timescales.

Step 5 Undertaking other agreed action

You will take any other agreed action. A follow-up review meeting with your mentor should take place to discuss progress at an appropriate point. When you are ready, an assessment planning meeting will be arranged with an assessor.

Step 6 Gaining RPL credit

Through the assessment process, you can seek credit for the prior informal learning you have identified through the RPL profiling towards the qualification, such as an SVQ in Health and Social Care.

Activity 1: What is RPL?

Ask the group the rate their current awareness and understanding of learning from experience and RPL, on a scale from 1-5. This will enable you to pitch this introductory session at the appropriate level.

Use and discuss Information Handout 1 for Learners: What is RPL?

Allow about 30 minutes for this.

NB before this activity look at Information Sheet 1 for Mentors: What is RPL? : this provides a bit more information than is contained in learner information handout.

Information Sheet 1 for mentors

What is RPL?

The term RPL stands for the Recognition of Prior Informal Learning and 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. Often the skills, knowledge and abilities that are gained through this type of learning can be equal to those gained by students following traditional routes through formal education.

Learning from experience is different from 'formal learning': it is largely unstructured, it is more personal, more individualised and is often unconsciously gained. It is, however, just as real as learning which is gained in a formal academic setting. What is more, it is usually more permanent: it is not readily forgotten or lost.

RPL is a process that can give people of all ages and backgrounds the opportunity to obtain recognition for achievements they have gained outside the 'classroom'. This learning can result from a variety of different experiences in life.

What does RPL involve?

Before a learner goes through the process of RPL there is an important guiding principle that he or she should know about:

It is what you have learned that is being recognised, not what you have done.

So, for example, two people might have the same experience through doing identical jobs but one might have learned much more from the task(s) involved than the other. You may have said about someone, 'They never learned any lessons from'. People who have learned something are able to use that learning to help them in other related situations. Again you will have heard it said, 'They used all their experience to overcome the problem'. So you need to demonstrate what you have learned from your experiences, not just describe what you've done.

The process of using RPL involves a study of past experiences. No one but the learner can reflect on his or her experiences in order to discover what they have taught him or her it is for the learner to discover, through reflection, his or her significant learning experiences and then express what he or she has learnt.

The learner needs to provide evidence of what he or she has learned. That evidence is then assessed – for example, by a college or a university or a community or private training provider. Once assessed and once it is decided that the evidence meets the

performance criteria the learner can be granted some form of recognition – perhaps in the form of a vocational or academic qualification or by being granted entry to another programme of learning.

Reflecting on experience

In order to provide this evidence, the learner will have to demonstrate either verbally or through written work or both that he or she has gained skills and knowledge through his or her experiences. This involves reflecting on those experiences and drawing out from them what he or she has learned, then writing this down or talking about it with someone like a mentor. The writing or the talk will provide the evidence.

There is no restriction on the type of experience that can provide someone with knowledge and skills – even negative experiences might have led someone to learn something about themselves. RPL is about recognising that all experiences can provide a basis for learning.

Learners should be encouraged to value their personal experience as a way of helping them to make choices and prepare for moving on to further opportunities in education or work.

What can RPL do for people?

The Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) is the process that enables learning from experience to be counted. If, as a result of RPL, a learner's informal learning is formally recognised by a college, SQA approved centre or university, it can be used:

- to gain credit towards a qualification (credit is the currency used in education and training which indicates how much learning has been achieved at a given level)
- to gain entry to a programme of learning offered by an institution or training organisation (if the learner does not have the normal entry qualifications) and also
- to gain credit towards a programme of learning and so allow you to join at a later level.

If a learner can demonstrate that he or she has already gained particular skills and knowledge through his or her experience which are required for particular parts or units of a programme of learning or a qualification he or she can claim credit for it through RPL. This reduces the amount of time needed to complete the programme or gain the qualification.

The experience of using RPL can have other advantages too:

- learners will think about what they have achieved so far through their experiences in terms of strengths and skills
- learners will think about their goals and what they need to do in order to achieve them: eg do a training course, pursue a vocational award, join an educational programme at college, or other learning and training provider, or university, apply for, or change, jobs
- RPL can help people consider their options and make decisions about the direction they want to take
- it also helps to build confidence - it enables both the learner and others to value his or her achievements and to recognise the importance of his or her learning through experience.

RPL is about transforming personal experience into 'learning'. Through RPL people can gain recognition for the skills and knowledge their personal experiences have taught

them. This recognition can allow them to go on to do more study or training if they want to, it will also help someone if they are looking for a job, or if they simply want to take a more active part in their community.

RPL can help learners because it shows other people (and themselves) that they have learned significant things from their experiences and that they are capable of learning more from future experiences.

All kinds of people can use RPL - young and older people, men and women, people of all ethnic backgrounds, employed or unemployed people, people with some qualifications and people with no qualifications. People do not need to have a good academic education - but they do need to be keen to learn from and about their own experiences and about themselves.

Information Handout 1 for learners

What is RPL?

People can gain a range of strengths and skills through:

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

We call this informal learning. It includes all learning which you have done up to this point which has not already been assessed or credit-rated.

The **Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL)** is a process through which the learning you have gained from your experiences can be counted.

RPL can help you to:

- think about the learning you have already achieved and help you plan how to build on this learning to meet your goals
- get a place on a programme at college or university or training provider, if you don't have the normal entry qualifications but can show that you have the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding
- gain credit towards a qualification to shorten the normal period of study by showing that you already have knowledge, skills and understanding needed for particular parts of the programme or qualification (eg units or modules) 'Credit' is the currency used in education which indicates how much learning has been achieved at a given level.

What does RPL involve?

Before you go through the process of RPL there is an important guiding principle you should know about:

It is what you have learned that is being recognised, not what you have done.

So, for example, two people might have the same experience through doing identical jobs but one might have learned much more from the task(s) involved than the other. You may have said about someone, 'They never learned any lessons from'. People who have learned something are able to use that learning to help them in other related situations. Again you will have heard it said, 'They used all their experience to overcome the problem'. So you need to show what you have learned from your experiences, not just describe what you've done.

You need to provide evidence of what you have learned. This involves reflecting on your experiences and drawing out from them what you have learned, then writing this down or talking about it with your mentor. The writing or the talk will provide your evidence. That evidence is then assessed – for example, by a college or a university or a community or private training provider. Once assessed and once it is decided that your evidence meets the performance or assessment criteria you can be

awarded credit towards a vocational or academic qualification or gain entry to another programme of learning

By going through an RPL process you will be encouraged to value your personal experience as a way of helping you to make choices and prepare for moving on to further opportunities in education or work.

RPL can help you because it shows other people (and yourself) that you have learned significant things from your experiences and that you are capable of learning more from future experiences.

In summary then, RPL can be useful to you in the following ways:

- access to further learning at all levels
- confidence-building
- gaining credit within vocational or academic programmes or towards qualifications
- personal/self development
- improve your learning skills
- professional development
- valuing life experiences.

Activity 2: What contributes to positive and negative experiences of learning?

Learners to work in a small group. First focus on positive experiences of learning, and then, on negative.

Record the outcomes of discussion: **Use Activity Handout 1: Positive and negative experiences of learning.**

Ask the group to spend 10 minutes on this and then share their thoughts with the rest of the group. A flip chart should be used to record points.

Ask the group to compare positive experiences of learning with negative.
Use and discuss Information Handout 2 for Learners: How Do You Learn Best?

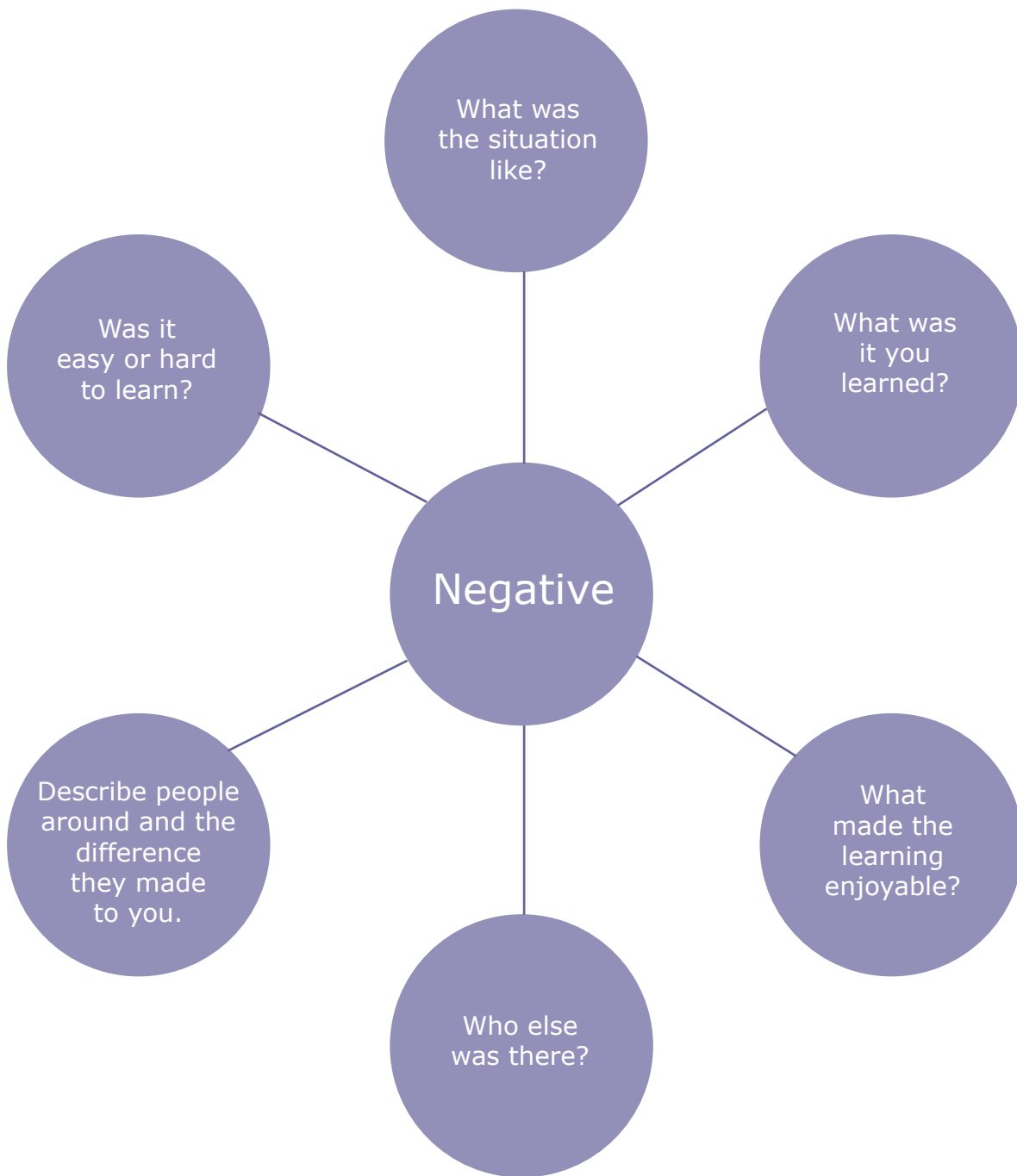
Allow about 30-40 minutes for this.

Activity Handout 1

Positive and Negative Experiences of Learning

Work in small groups. Some of you focus on positive experiences of learning, others on negative. Record the outcomes of this discussion in relation to the following:





Spend 10 minutes on this and then share your thoughts with the rest of the group. Use a flip chart to record points.

Compare positive experiences of learning with negative.

What contributes to positive and negative learning experiences?

Information Handout 2 for Learners

How do you learn best?

Introduction

There is no right or wrong way to learn - everybody is different and everybody learns in different ways. For example, some people learn well in groups, while others learn best on their own. Some people learn better from listening and talking than from writing and watching. And sometimes people learn from all of these approaches, but may learn different things from each of them.

The important thing for you as a learner is to find the things that work best for you. To do this, you need to spend some time thinking about types of learning experiences you like, and types of learning experiences that you don't like. You also need to think about the skills that you have which are useful for learning - for example, reading, writing, listening, watching, taking notes, discussing ideas with others, explaining your ideas to others, etc.

Different styles of learning

Adults are likely to learn in different ways than children and are likely to have different reasons for wanting to learn. It has also been suggested that men and women might learn in different ways. Learning is a process which involves gaining knowledge, processing information and making connections between different bits of knowledge.

How do we learn? Sometimes we learn by experience. Over time we do things repeatedly and improve how we do things (ie through learning to get better at it) or we watch others doing things and learn from observation. We also learn by reflecting and thinking about things, going over in our minds how we did something, how we might do it better next time, what was good about what we did and what could be better. Sometimes we also create theories about why things are done the way they are done or we theorise about why someone behaved in a certain way. Theorising is also a form of learning.

So there are different types of learner – these can also be described as Activist, or Reflector, or Theorist or Pragmatist (Kolb). The following example illustrates the different styles⁵

Learning to ride a bicycle

- **Reflectors** - thinking about riding and watching another person ride a bike.
- **Theorists** - understanding the theory and having a clear grasp of the biking concept.
- **Pragmatists** - Receiving practical tips and techniques from a biking expert.
- **Activists** - Leaping on the bike and have a go at it.

For more information on Kolb's learning styles, please see Appendix 1

⁵ This example is from this website which also provides a fuller explanation of Kolb's Learning styles <http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/styles.html#kolb>

Activity 3: Personal recognition of current skills and recognition of the skills of others

Ask the learners to pick something that they do eg family responsibilities, interests, hobbies, paid or voluntary work and list the skills and knowledge they have in order to do this well. Provide a few examples of what we mean by 'skills' and 'knowledge'. You can use the examples of core and 'soft skills' in Information Handout 5 for Learners: Core and Soft Skills Learners to work in pairs to compare their answers. Each partner can contribute to the lists prepared and add skills they identify as being necessary for the task outlined. Compare this again in the larger group to further build up the skills, talents identified within each others lists.

Use and discuss Information Handout 3 for Learners: What is Informal or Experiential Learning? Information Handout 4 for Learners: Social roles in my life and identifying skills and knowledge and Information Handout 5 for Learners: Core and Other Skills.

Allow about 30-40 minutes for this

NB before this activity look at Information Sheet 2 for Mentors: What is Informal or Experiential Learning? This provides a bit more information than is contained in learner information handout.

Information Sheet 2 for Mentors:

What is Informal or Experiential Learning?

Learning can take many different forms and, in particular, can be either **formal** or **informal**. Formal learning often takes place in an educational setting such as a school, college, university or training organisation. Informal learning can take place anywhere - in community settings, in the workplace, at home, and might be said to be happening all the time and all around us. So what is informal or experiential learning?⁶

Experiential learning is literally the learning that we gain from our own personal and social experiences. So for example, we may learn things from being a parent, or from running a home. Or we can learn from being involved in our communities - for example, being part of a social care organisation or housing or residents association, or a local interest group, or a local political group, etc. We can learn from being in a particular work role- for example we might be a social worker or nurse or engineer or business manager. All these experiences teach us things.

We can also learn from bad experiences - for example, we may learn from our experience of being unemployed or drug misuse or going through a divorce or being an asylum seeker who has fled persecution. Both good and bad experiences teach us things.

The key to informal or experiential learning is being able to reflect on our experiences and draw useful information from them - for example, being able to identify some of the main skills and knowledge that we have acquired as a result of those experiences.

We can do this in a number of ways. For example, we might start by looking at major events in our life - perhaps a life-changing event, but also less significant events. For example, a divorce that we have experienced or a family death or the experience of achieving a qualification. These events may have changed the way that we look at things or the way that we approach life. Most of all, we are interested in how such events have taught us things.

Another way to think about our experiences is to consider some of the main social roles that we have played in our life - for example, we may be a parent or a worker or a student or a daughter or a carer. All these roles involve taking on certain responsibilities and tasks and from these experiences we can learn new skills and knowledge.

Sometimes we underestimate the importance of our experiences, especially those experiences that we often take for granted. 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 you might learn poor practice which you may feel you need to question. This is also a valuable learning experience. Through informal or experiential learning we are constantly acquiring and renewing our skills and knowledge and that it is important sometimes to take stock and reflect on how these have developed and changed.

⁶ Some of the material in this handout is derived from Learning from Experience Trust. 1988. *A Learner's Introduction to Building on your Experience.*

One of the aims of RPL is to allow people to take stock of their experiences.

How do you learn from experience?

Most people:

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

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.

Varied attempts have been made to describe the process of learning but it is often described as a learning cycle.⁷

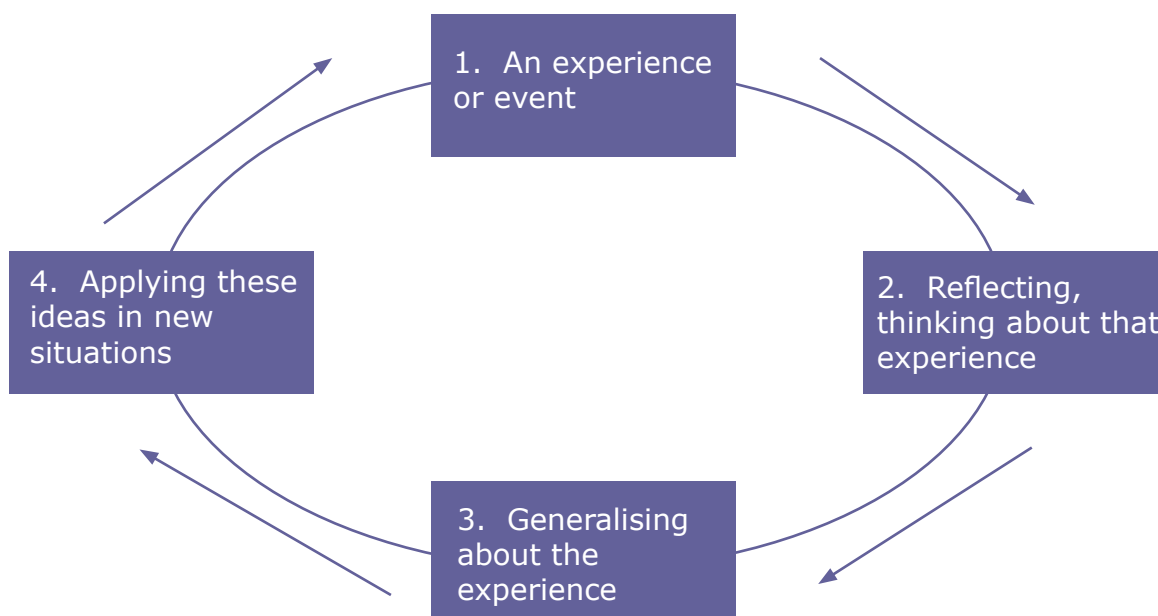
According to this cycle:

• Stage 1

Learning begins with a real experience - this can be any experience or 'event'. It maybe 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 you realize that 'there is more to it than meets the eye', that the experience is simply one example of a pattern of things. You may begin to make connections to form ideas or theories about what that pattern is. We may make generalisations about the experience.

⁷ 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>

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 the 'lesson has been truly learnt' and is likely to be applied 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.

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 styles.

What types of experience can you learn from?

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

It might be significant because:

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

Examples of types of learning experience you could consider include:

- a particular piece of work, task or project that you 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 you 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.

You can learn from any experience or event which is significant to you in some way.

Information Handout 3 for Learners: What is Informal or Experiential Learning?

Informal learning can take place anywhere - in the community, in the workplace, at home, and might be said to be happening all the time and all around us. So what is informal or experiential learning?⁸

It is the learning that we gain from our own personal and social experiences. So for example, we may learn things from being a parent, or from running a home. Or we can learn from being involved in our communities - for example, being part of a social care organisation or housing or residents' association, or a local interest group, or a local political group, etc. We can learn from being in a particular work role- for example we might be a social worker or nurse or engineer or business manager. All these experiences teach us things.

The key to informal or experiential learning is being able to reflect on our experiences and draw useful information from them - for example, being able to identify some of the main skills and knowledge that we have gained as a result of those experiences.

We can do this in a number of ways. For example, we might start by looking at major events in our life – such a divorce or a family death or the experience of achieving a qualification. These events may have changed the way that we look at things or the way that we approach life. Most of all, we are interested in how such events have taught us things.

Another way to think about our experiences is to consider some of the main roles that we have played in our life - for example, we may be a parent or a worker or a student or a daughter or a carer. All these roles involve taking on certain responsibilities and tasks and from these experiences we can learn new skills and knowledge. Sometimes we underestimate the importance of our experiences, especially those experiences that we often take for granted. RPL allows us to look at them in a different or new way. In some situations you might learn poor practice which you may feel you need to question. This is also a valuable learning experience.

How do you learn from experience?

Most people:

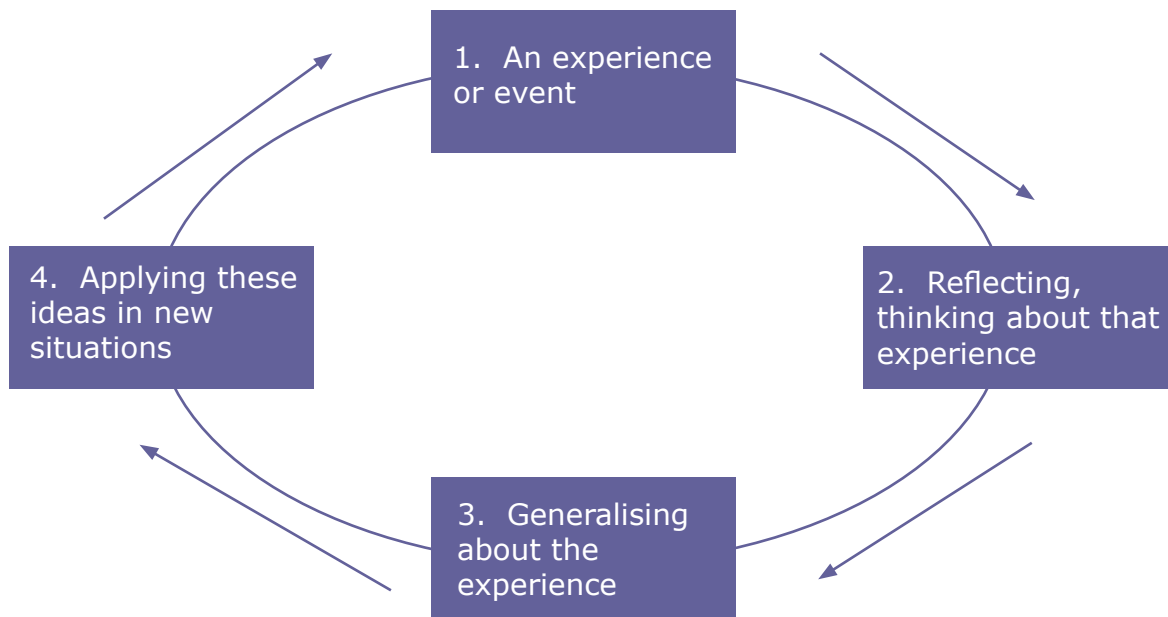
- learn a great deal from doing something (or seeing someone else do something)
- and experiencing (or seeing) the consequences of that action
- and so 'learning a lesson' from it.

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.

This process of learning is often described as a learning cycle.⁹

⁸ Some of the material in this handout is drawn from Learning from Experience Trust. 1988. *A Learner's Introduction to Building on your Experience*

⁹ Kolb, D. 1984. *Experiential Learning*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall



What types of experience can you learn from?

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Examples of types of learning experience you could consider include:

- a particular piece of work, task or project that you 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 you 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.

You can learn from any experience or event which is significant to you in some way.

Information Handout 4 for Learners: Social roles in my life and identifying skills and knowledge

Throughout our lives all of us play different social roles at different times - in any one day we might take on several different roles.

For example, we might say that we have a role as a woman, as a mother, as a daughter, as a worker, as a customer, as a patient, as a volunteer or as a student.

The social role that we take on at any one time depends on the social context we are in at that time and what we are doing.

For example, in the home, we may take on the roles of housewife and mother - these roles are defined by where we are (context) and what we are doing (eg managing the home, caring for children, etc). In a different setting - for example, a hospital - we might take on a different role. For example, we might be a patient being treated, or we could be a worker - a nurse or a doctor or a domestic assistant/cleaner. In a training and education setting, we might take on the role of student or learner or teacher, depending on what our responsibilities are and what is expected of us.

When we take on a social role there are always expectations of what type of activities we will carry out, how we will behave, how we might dress etc. These are influenced by what are called **social norms** - ie the things which are customary in a certain culture or country.

When you reflect on your experiences it might be helpful to think about your life in terms of the different social roles that you have played. Then you can describe them in detail - what were your responsibilities?, what was expected of you?, what skills did you need to have to act out that role? what knowledge did you need to have ?

For example, in the role of a patient in a hospital you have to have skills of patience (waiting to be treated), good communication (to tell doctors and nurses about your illness and symptoms) and knowledge about how the hospital systems work - for example, how to get yourself registered first, where to go to be seen, etc. All these things are things that you have learned to do in your role as patient at the hospital.

Another example might be in your role as learner. For this role you have to have skills in good communication (verbal and written skills), social and interpersonal skills (getting on well with other students and trainers or tutors), perhaps information technology skills if you are using a computer, problem-solving skills (to be able to work through the things you are being taught), group/team working skills if you are working with others, etc. Perhaps you can think of other examples.

The key to effective reflection is being able to identify the skills and knowledge that you use in different roles you have played.

Information Handout for Learners 5: Core and Other Skills

Core and Soft Skills¹⁰

A skill is anything you can learn to do competently, an aptitude or ability you have developed.

The Core Skills are:

- problem solving
- communication
- numeracy
- information technology
- working with others.

So how do I know which skills I have?

Verbal communication skills - talking to/dealing with people

For example:

- using the telephone
- answering enquiries
- selling
- organising people
- teaching
- ability to talk to people - such as elderly people or those in distress
- dealing with complaints
- explaining things
- listening to people
- understanding their difficulties
- counseling.

Written Communication Skills

For example:

- writing minutes
- reading
- writing or checking reports
- writing letters.

Skills dealing with Paperwork and Numbers

For example:

- keeping or organising records and files
- doing accounts
- budgeting
- dealing with letters

¹⁰ Source: Careers Scotland website www.careers-scotland.org.uk

- typing or keyboard skills
- using measurements.

Problem solving skills

For example:

- coming up with good ideas
- planning and organising things
- finding solutions to problems.

Practical and mechanical skills

For example:

- using your hands
- using tools
- fixing or repairing things
- cooking
- woodworking
- sewing
- building things
- maintaining machines
- handicrafts.

Information technology skills

For example:

- using office application packages - word processing, spreadsheets, databases
- internet skills - doing searches, using e-mail
- advanced computer skills - programming, hardware/software support.

Transferable skills

Skills you have learnt and developed in one situation, which you could use in a different situation, are referred to as 'Transferable Skills'. Core skills are transferable skills- you need them to be able to study and work effectively.

Additional skills

For example: driving, languages, first-aid. You will find that you have skills in some of these areas, but not necessarily in all.

Activity 4: Introduction to reflection and identifying examples of learning

Ask the learners to pick one of the examples produced in the previous activity listing all the things they have to do and the skills required to be able to do the task or activity highlighted. The group members should then identify what has been learned through this. All the learning that is identified should be recorded.

Ask participants to work in pairs to identify first the transferable learning gained through their own activities and then that of their partners and then present to the group.

Use and discuss **Information Handout 6 for Learners : What is reflection** and **Information Handout 7 for Learners : Reflecting on events in my life**

Use **Activity Handout 2: Identifying Learning**

Allow about 30-40 minutes for this.

Information Handout 6 for Learners

What is reflection?

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 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 done 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.

Information Handout 7 for Learners

Reflecting on events in my life

Another way to reflect on your life is to think about some important events in your life. For example, an important event might be giving birth or supporting a partner who is giving birth to your child; another "event" might be your experience of school or college or university or work or voluntary activity; another example might be an unhappy (negative) experience such as a divorce or an illness or an addiction or being unemployed, etc. All these things count as events in our lives.

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.

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, counselling organisations, other help agencies), problem-solving skills (to be able to work through difficulties that they encountered during the divorce) and 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?

Activity Handout 2: Identifying Learning

Please pick something that you have to do in relation to family responsibilities, interests, hobbies, paid or voluntary work.

Activity	What do you have to do?	What skills, talents and knowledge do you need for this?	What have you learned through doing this?	What have you learned that you can use in other situations in the future?

Stage Two

**Identifying learning
from life and work
experiences**

Stage 2: Identifying learning from life and work experiences

Time required: approx 2 hours

Aims

- to identify learning through reflection on life and work experiences
- to think about the skills that we gain through tackling problems
- to practice reflection through using different approaches

Stage 2 Activities

- **Activity 1 : Reflecting on experiences of learning in life**
 - Activity Handout 3: Reflective Exercise- this is the same exercise learners will do as part of RPL profiling.
- **Activity 2 : Problem-solving**
- **Activity 3: Trying out Reflection**
 - Activity Handout 4 :Critical Incident Analysis
 - Information Handout 8 for Learners : Keeping a reflective diary

Activity 1: Reflecting on experiences of learning in life

Ask the group to think about one or two events in their lives. As part of a group discussion, ask the learners to describe the event or role and what it involved (eg responsibilities/tasks). Then try to identify the skills and knowledge gained as a result. Again clarify what we mean by 'skills' and 'knowledge'- ask the group to provide examples of each.

As a group go through the reflective exercise to make sure people are clear about what they have to think about at each stage. You can do this by using an example of one of your own experiences.

Ask the learners to work in pairs and 'interview' each other in relation to each stage of the reflective process and complete the reflective exercise. This will be the same exercise they will do as part of the profiling tool.

Emphasise the importance of giving and receiving constructive feedback in helping people to reflect.

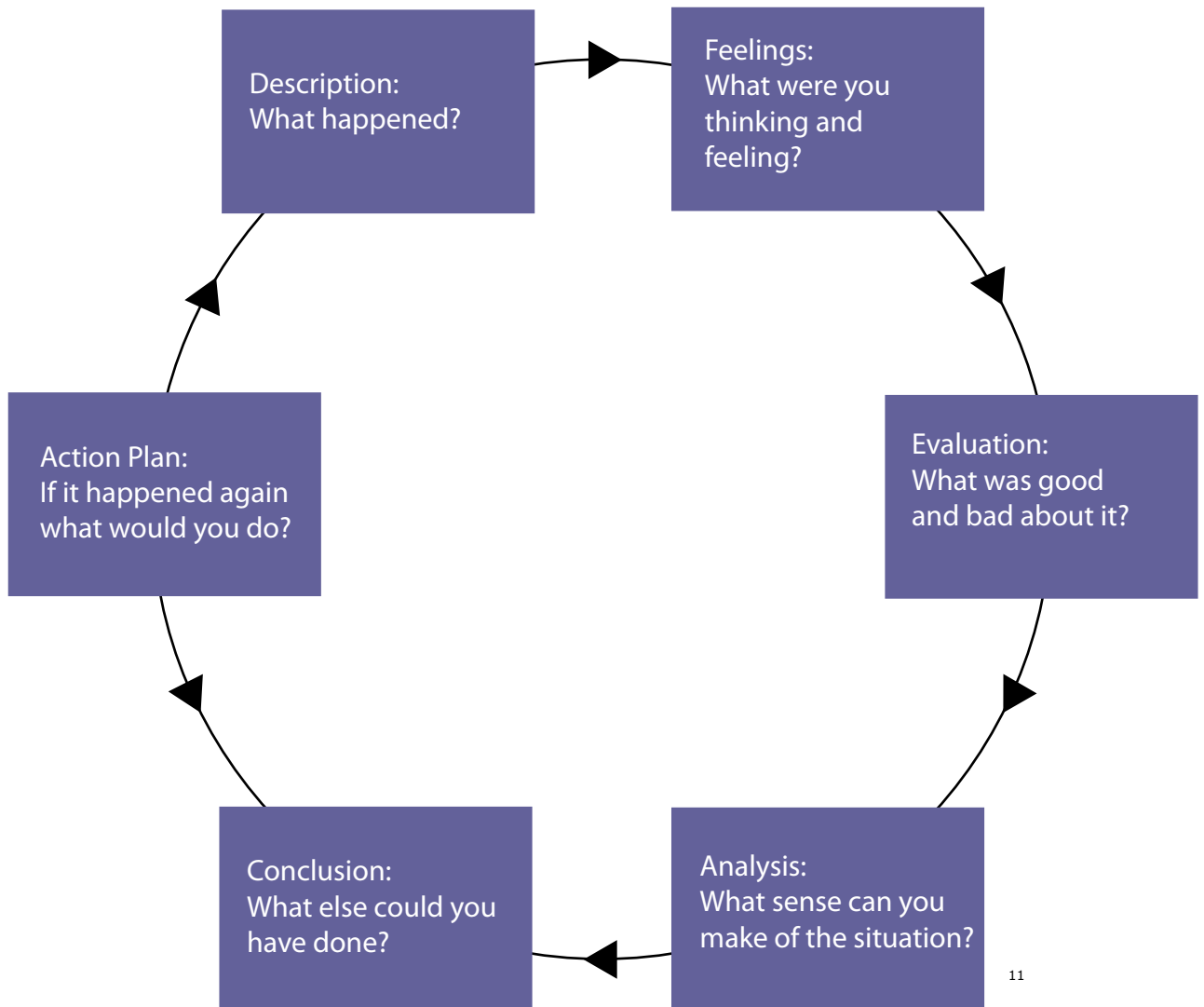
Explain to the learners that the reflective exercise is the same one they will do as part of RPL profiling.

Use Activity Handout 3: Reflective Exercise

Allow about 30-40 minutes for this

NB Prepare an example of one of your own experiences which you can share with the group before they do this exercise

Activity Handout 3 : Reflective Exercise



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. Working in pairs is a good way to do this at first. One person can interview the other using the questions and note down their responses on the sheet.

¹¹ Adapted from Gibbs, G. 1988. *Learning by Doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods*. Oxford Further Education Unit, Oxford Polytechnic.

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

Activity 2: Problem-solving

Introduce problem-solving and the importance of this as a transferable skill. Ask learners to 'pull out a hat' situations which you have provided. Each learner will read out the situation he or she has and start a discussion of how he or she would deal with the problem. Others in the group can then add their own thoughts. The problems should relate to the group's social care experience.

Allow about 30-40 minutes for this.

NB Prepare a range of problems/situations in advance of group session.

Activity 3: Trying out Reflection

Work as group to decide how to deal with a critical incident at work (supply a scenario which is relevant to your group) Group analyses the situation, devises a plan for dealing with the situation, considers the possible outcomes or implications of this strategy, thinks about the skills and knowledge required/ developed, thinks about the transferability of these skills i.e. how could be applied in different contexts, and identifies possible evidence of these skills.

Encourage the learners to try out a critical incident analysis on one of their own experiences at work, either in the session through small group discussion or in pairs, using the interview technique.

Explain the value of keeping a reflective diary, so they can get used to the idea of reflecting on what they do at work. This can also be a useful source of reflective evidence.

Use Activity Handout 4: Critical Incident Analysis

Use Information Handout 8 for Learners: Keeping a Reflective Diary

Allow about 40 minutes for this.

NB Prepare scenarios in advance of group session.

Activity Handout 4

Critical Incident Analysis

A Critical Incident Analysis can be an effective way of reflecting on how you dealt with a particular incident or problem and what you learnt from this.

What is a critical incident?

- an incident which you felt your involvement in really made a difference, either directly or indirectly
- an incident that went very well
- an incident which did not go as planned
- an incident that is very ordinary and typical
- an incident that was very demanding.

What to include in your analysis of a critical incident:

- **the context of the incident**, where and when did it happen?
- **a description of what happened**
- **why the incident is critical to you** - what feelings did you have about it?
- **what assumptions did you make** about people or situations? (for example about class, gender or culture)
- **your analysis of what took place**
- **what you learnt from this incident**
- **how you would deal with a similar incident in the future**
- **what can you use to support your analysis** (for example other experiences, practice, research or literature)?
- **who or what can verify or confirm your account?**

Information Handout 8 for Learners

Keeping a Reflective diary

You may find it helpful to keep a reflective diary to help you reflect on your experiences at work.

This is your own personal record. You do not need to share your reflective diary with your mentor or anyone else (unless you wish to). Therefore you can express yourself freely and write down impressions or thoughts which are not fully worked out yet.

Keeping a reflective diary will help you to make sense of situations and experiences at work so you can learn from them more easily. It will also be useful when you come to prepare the reflective evidence for assessment towards a qualification, such as an SVQ or the PLQ (Social Services). Extracts from your journal can be used as evidence.

There are various ways in which you can organise and write your diary. The following are two suggested ways.

Format 1 – Reflections on specific events which occurred during the week

1. **Topic** – main focus of this diary entry
2. **Sequence of events** – a short list of what happened
3. **Highlight one or two notable events** – select one or two situations that happened which were significant during the week, and describe in detail what happened.
4. **Analysis of the event** – This is the time for you to interpret what happened, and what you learned from the event.

Format 2 - Reflections on general thoughts, ideas and feelings which occurred during the week

Think about the following questions and write down your responses:

1. What things have I done at work this week that I think I went well?
2. What things have I done at work this week that I think did not go so well?
3. What are the thoughts and feelings I have had this week about my work?
4. What one important thing have I learned this week?

Stage Three

**Preparing for RPL
profiling**

Stage 3: Preparation for RPL profiling

Time required: approx 2 hours

Aims

- Introduce RPL profiling.
- Identify evidence of learning.
- Introduce action planning.

Stage 3 Activities

- **Activity 1: Introducing RPL Profiling**
 - o Information Handout 9 for Learners : Introduction to RPL profiling tool
- **Activity 2: Working through RPL profiling example**
 - o Profiling tool for mandatory/core units (available as separate document)
 - o Blank profiling template (available as separate document)
- **Activity 3: Identifying Evidence of learning**
 - o Information Handout 10 for Learners : Producing evidence of your learning
- **Activity 4: Action planning**
 - o Information Handout 11 for Learners : Action plans
- **Undertaking RPL profiling**

Activity 1: Introducing RPL Profiling

Use and discuss Information Handout 9 for Learners: Introduction to RPL Profiling Tool

As a group, look at an example of how the profiling tool works:

- identifying relevant life experiences
- identifying learning and skills gained
- identifying application of learning to current work practice
- identifying possible match with mandatory/core units
- identifying possible sources of evidence of learning, direct and reflective.

Discuss the example as a group.

Allow about 30 minutes for this.

Information Handout 9 for Learners

Introduction to RPL Profiling tool (for SVQ Health and Social Care Level 3)

The SVQ Mandatory/Core units which the profiling tool focuses on are:

- Unit HSC31 **Promote effective communication for and about individuals**
- Unit HSC32 **Promote monitor and maintain health, safety and security in the working environment**
- Unit HSC33 **Reflect on and develop your practice**
- Unit HSC34 **Promote the well-being and protection of children and young people**
- Unit HSC35 **Promote choice, well-being and the protection of all individuals.**

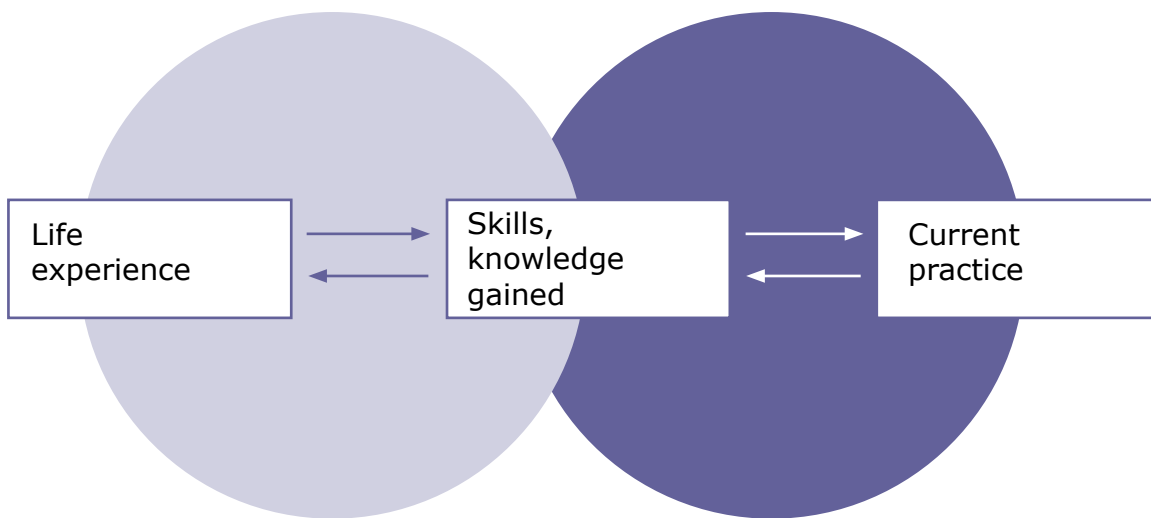
This profiling tool will help you think about the types of life and work experiences you have had in relation to the elements of these units.

The types of experiences which might have helped you to develop these skills might be:

- a particular event, task, project you carried out as part of your work role or within your home life or within your community
- the experience of carrying out a particular role for a period of time ie your daily practice
- participation in a training event, or 'on-the-job' training
- being supervised and mentored
- supporting, mentoring or training others.

How to use RPL profiling

1. Look at the first column in the profiling tool: **Examples of Life Experiences**. Ask yourself whether you have had these or similar experiences. Provide a specific illustration of each experience which is relevant to you ie a particular event/task/situation.
2. Look at the **Learning and skills gained** column. Think about whether these are the types of skills/knowledge that you learned, or developed further, through this experience and add further examples of what you learned.
3. The next column asks you to think about the **application of this learning to your current practice**. It is likely that you have used and built on the skills and knowledge that you have gained through your life experiences within your social services role.



4. The next column indicates the **mandatory/core units** which this learning could relate to.
5. The next stage of the profiling process is to provide **reflective evidence** of your learning through experience.

First all complete **Reflective Exercise 1** in relation to one of your life experiences. Now complete **Reflective Exercise 2** in relation to a recent experience in work which demonstrates the way in which you have used and built on these skills within your current social services practice.

These two exercises will be discussed with your mentor in the professional discussion. You will then produce a reflective account as reflective evidence for the SVQ Level 3 in Health and Social Care.

6. Before you complete your evidence you may need to discuss with your mentor what **action** you need to take in order:
 - to gain further experience in your care role,
 - to gather or produce the evidence you have identified.

You may need to do further learning and development in particular areas. If so, you will discuss with your mentor the ways in which you can do this.

If you are ready to gain credit for your prior informal learning through SVQ assessment, your Mentor will arrange for you to have an assessment planning meeting with an Assessor. In order to gain credit for the SVQ, your evidence will be assessed in relation to relevant units or elements of the units.

You can write up your reflective account on the **SQA Evidence Gathering Form**.

Worked examples of all of the forms highlighted above are provided in the Profiling Tool pack to help you.

The profiling tool aims to prepare you for the process of recognition by helping you make connections between the life experience you have gained, what you have learned from this experience, the ways in which you have applied this learning to your current work practice and can provide reflective evidence of this, and the ways in which you can plan to build on this learning through your care role to meet your particular goals.

Activity 2: Working through a RPL profiling example

Individually or in small groups, learners to work through profiling tool for one of the mandatory/core units and then give feedback.

For both activities use Profiling tools (available as separate documents):

- o profiling tools for SVQ units
- o blank profiling tool for completion.

Allow about 20-30 minutes for this.

Activity 3: Identifying evidence of learning

Discuss evidence which can be used to demonstrate learning.

Use Information Handout 10 for Learners : Producing evidence of your learning.

Allow about 20-30 minutes for this.

Information Handout 10 for Learners

Producing evidence of your learning

In order to get credit for your learning through experience towards a qualification, you need to show that you have achieved the skills and knowledge required for each element.

You will need to provide direct evidence and reflective evidence.

Direct evidence

Direct evidence demonstrates your practice. It is something you have produced while carrying out your social care role or something written about your practice by someone else eg your supervisor/mentor/colleague/service user.

Evidence which you have produced might include:

- letters
- accounts of relevant key work/practice experiences
- reports
- case notes and records
- care plans
- leaflets
- training material/study packs etc.

Evidence based on something someone else says about you and your strengths and skills might include:

- written testimony from mentors, supervisors
- feedback by others on a presentation or talk you have given, or a task you have carried out, etc.

Evidence can also be provided by an assessor directly observing your practice.

Reflective evidence

Reflective evidence demonstrates your understanding of your role, of principles and practice and the purpose of social care, how you have dealt with particular issues, or incidents. These may be experiences that went well or badly. The important thing is to demonstrate what you have learnt from them.

Reflective evidence can be provided in the form 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 with your assessor.

Activity 4: Action planning

Discuss action planning to meet goals in terms of further learning and development and/or seeking RPL credit towards a qualification

Use Information Handout 11 for Learners : Action plans.

Allow about 20-30 minutes for this.

Information Handout 11 for Learners

Action Plans

What is an Action Plan?

An Action Plan is a document that sets out your goals, ways to achieve your goals, time scales to achieve your goals, possible barriers to achieving your goals and ways to overcome those barriers. It is designed to help you plan for your future by setting realistic targets for you based on your own ideas and preferences and setting out time scales for you to follow. It helps you to decide what you want to do next in your life and within your work and how you are going to do it.

Designing and writing an Action Plan

An Action Plan can be structured in any way that you like and which means something to you - it has to be set out in a way that you can understand what it is saying and what it means. For example, an Action Plan might have headings that look something like this:

- name
- my personal goals and targets
- how I am going to achieve those goals and targets
- time scales during which I am going to achieve those goals and targets
- resources I will need to achieve those goals and targets
- barriers that might prevent me from achieving my goals and targets
- ways of overcoming those barriers.

It is important that before you start writing an Action Plan you have spent some time planning what your personal goals and targets are - you need to be clear about what you want to be doing in the future so that you can plan for it. This will help you to organise your life and allow you to set goals and then see how you can achieve those goals. Then over time you can monitor your progress by seeing when you achieve your goals.

Undertaking the Profiling process

Learners to use the profiling process for the particular units agreed by you.
Time required approx 2 hours.

Follow up meeting with you should be arranged for the professional discussion stage.
See summary of steps below.

Summary of steps

Step 1 Preparatory support provided by mentor

Step 2 Use RPL profiling

Step 3 Professional discussion with mentor

Step 4 Production of Reflective Account and updating of profiling tool

Step 5 Undertaking agreed action

Step 6 Gaining RPL credit

Glossary of terms¹²

Assessment: The process of collecting and interpreting evidence of a learner's performance

Assessor: The person who applies the assessment process to learners for their achievement of a qualification.

Colleges: Scotland's forty-three colleges (of further and higher education) offer a range of programmes to meet the needs of individuals, communities and employers. Provision includes SQA qualifications, other vocational and academic qualifications and non formal learning and training.

Credit: this is the currency used in education and training and within the SCQF which indicates how much learning has been achieved at a given level.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs): Scotland has fourteen universities, the Open University in Scotland, one college of higher education, two art schools, one conservatoire and the Scottish Agricultural College.

Learner: any individual who is engaged in any form of learning or training, whether non-formal or formal, or who is considering returning to learning.

Learning providers: all organisations across all education and training sectors which provide formal or non-formal learning and training.

Mentor: the person supporting the learner through the RPL process.

National Occupational Standards (NOS): have been developed in most sectors including the social services sector to describe best practice in particular areas of work. They bring together the knowledge, understanding, values and practical skills required to do the work, presented as statements of competence. The identification and development of NOS is driven by employers, government, service users, carers and education and training providers.

Outcomes: a statement of competences, including knowledge, skills and values, capable of being demonstrated at the end of a process of learning.

Personal/Professional Development Planning: a process of planning further learning and development within the context of a formal or non-formal programme of learning or training, or within the workplace, or as part of continuing professional development. The process normally involves reflection upon prior and current learning and development in order to facilitate the planning process.

SCQF: Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework: a 12 level credit-based framework which includes all national Scottish academic and vocational qualifications

SCQF credit-rating organisations: currently only SQA, HEIs and colleges can award SCQF credit. These organisations can award both general and specific credit for learning. SQA awards SCQF credit to learning through the delivery and assessment of its qualifications by SQA-approved centres.

¹² This glossary has been derived from the definitions provided in the SCQF RPL guidelines, by the SQA, Universities Scotland and SSSC.

SQA, Scottish Qualifications Authority: The SQA is the national body for Scotland with responsibility for the development, accreditation, assessment and certification of qualifications other than degrees. SQA approves centres to deliver and assess qualifications

SQA Approved Centres: organisations approved as SQA centres to offer specific qualifications. Centres can be private training providers whose sole purpose is the delivery of training and the assessment of candidates, private and public sector companies who offer training to their employees, as well as schools and colleges.

SVQs, Scottish Vocational Qualifications: SVQs are competence-based qualifications assessed in the workplace. They are made up of National Occupational Standards relevant to the particular job or function. SVQs give the opportunity to recognise an individual's achievement, skills and development in the workplace. They are nationally recognised qualifications at levels 2,3,4 and 5 including SVQs in Health and Social Care and reflect the complexity and responsibility of different workers' roles. SVQs are among the recognised occupational qualifications for the social service workforce in Scotland.

Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL): a process which acknowledges, and values publicly, learning which has been achieved outside formal education or training systems.

RPL for Personal/Career Development or formative recognition: a process of recognising learning achieved outside formal education or training systems within the context of further learning and development. This process can be linked to confidence-building, identifying individual learning pathways, a notional leveling of learning within the context of the SCQF, supporting the transition between informal, non-formal and formal learning, and preparation for the process of RPL for credit.

RPL for Credit, or summative recognition: a process of assessing learning achieved outside of formal education or training systems which is recognised, if appropriate, for academic or vocational purposes. This process is also known as APEL. This process can enable a learner to gain entry to a programme of formal learning if the outcomes of their prior informal learning are judged as equivalent to the entry requirements to the programme; to gain credit towards a qualification if the outcomes of his/her prior informal learning are judged as equivalent to the outcomes of the qualification for which he/she is seeking credit. Credit can be awarded for elements of the qualification, ie units or modules, or parts of a level, or for an entire level. Most programmes and qualifications have limits in the amount of credit that can be awarded through RPL.

Appendix 1

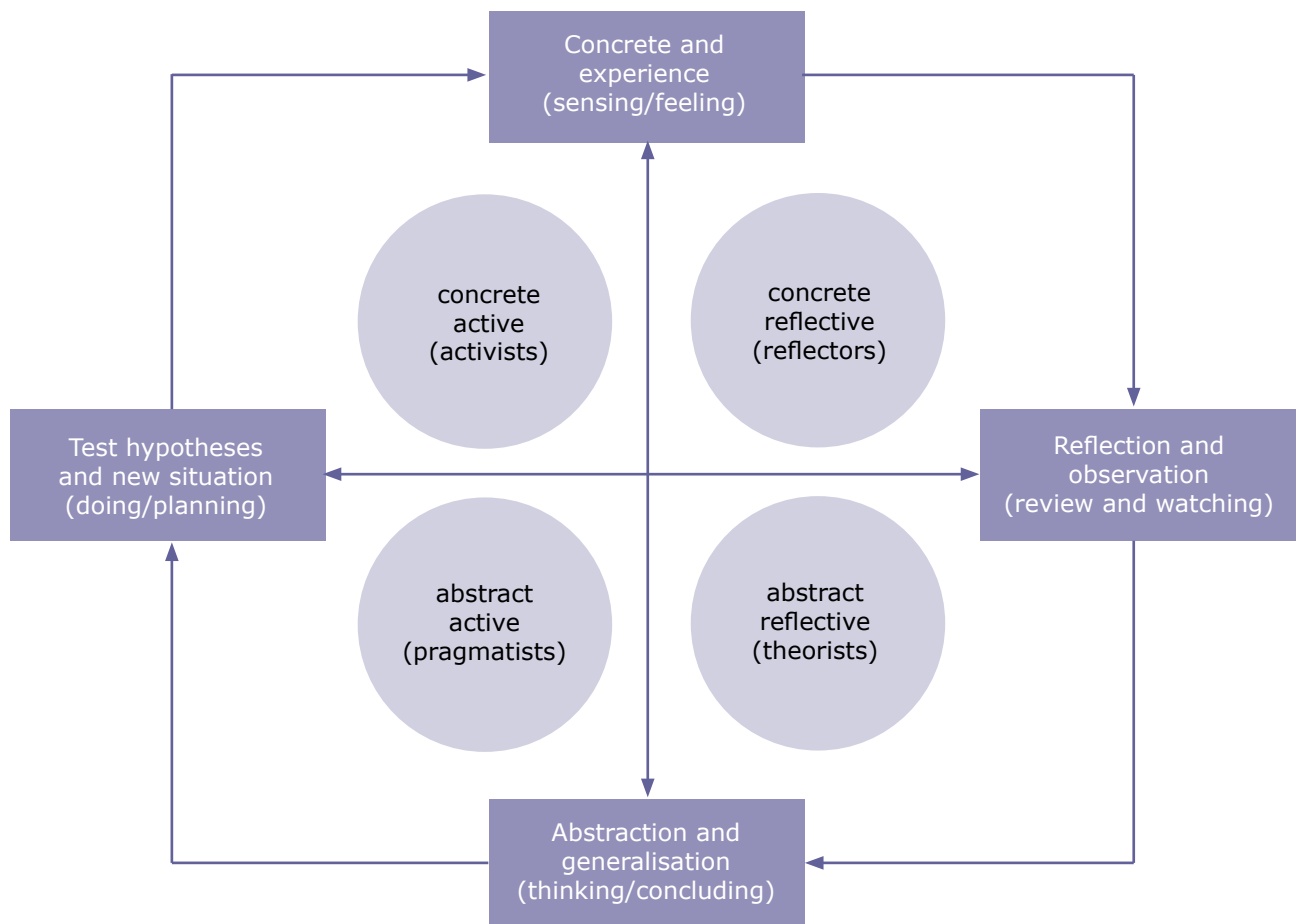
<http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/styles.html#kolb>

Kolb's Learning Style Inventory

Kolb's *Learning Style Inventory* (Kolb, D. A. 1984) is based on **John Dewey's** emphasis on the need for learning to be grounded in experience, **Kurt Lewin's**, work that stressed the importance of a person's being active in learning, and **Jean Piaget's** theory on intelligence as the result of the interaction of the person and the environment.

Kolb's four stage theory is based on a model with two dimensions. You can think of the first dimension, as shown in the model below, running horizontally and it is based on task. The left end of the dimension is doing the tasks (performing), while the right end is watching the task (observing). The second dimension runs vertically and is based upon our thought and emotional processes. The top of the dimension is feeling (responsive feelings - such as Henry David Thoreau), while the bottom of the dimension is thinking (controlled feelings - such as Mr. Spock of Star Trek).

Kolb's Experiential Learning Style



You might also think of the horizontal dimension as how we react to the environment around us (extroverts jump in and do it, introverts observe from the sidelines). While the vertical dimension is the soul or ego within us (the left side of the brain is logical, while the right side of the brain is creative and emotional). Notice that this is very similar to other two dimensional models, such as the Managerial Grid.

These four positions on the two dimensions describe a four-step learning process (note that each position is represented by a purple coloured box in the diagram on the previous page).

Feeling or Sensing (Concrete Experience) - perceive information. A high score in the concrete experience dimension represents a receptive experience based approach to learning that relies on feeling based judgments. Thus, people tend to be empathetic. They generally find theoretical approaches to be unhelpful and prefer to treat each situation as a unique case. They learn best from specific examples in which they can be involved. These learners tend to relate to peers, not authority (they are people persons - they want to get along with others, not be bossed around). Theoretical readings are not always helpful while group work and peer feedback often leads to success. Planned activities should apply learned skills. The instructor acts as coach/helper for this self-directed autonomous learner.

Watching (Reflective Observation) - reflect on how it will impact some aspect of our life. A high score in reflective observation indicates a tentative, impartial and reflective approach to learning. These individuals rely heavily on careful observation in making judgments. They prefer learning situations such as lectures that allow the role of impartial objective observers. These individuals tend to be introverts. Lectures are helpful to this learner (they are visual and auditory). This learner wants the instructor to provide expert interpretation. They look for an instructor who is both a taskmaster and a guide. This learner wants their performance to be measured by external criteria.

Thinking (Abstract Generalization or Conceptualization) - compare how it fits into our own experiences. A high score in abstract conceptualization indicates an analytical, conceptual approach to learning that relies heavily on logical thinking and rational evaluation. These individuals tend to be more oriented towards things and symbols, and less towards other people. They learn best in authority-directed, impersonal learning situations that emphasize theory and systematic analysis. They are frustrated by and gain little from unstructured "discovery learning" approaches such as exercises and simulations. Case studies, theoretical readings and reflective thinking exercises help this learner. Very little else helps this learner.

Doing (testing in new situation or Active Experimentation) - think about how this information offers new ways for us to act. A high score in active experimentation indicates an active "doing" orientation to learning that relies heavily on experimentation. These individuals learn best when they can engage in such things as projects, homework, or group discussions. They dislike passive learning situations such as lectures. These individuals tend to be extroverts. This learner wants to touch everything (kinesthetic or tactile). Problem solving, small group discussions or games, peer feedback, and self directed work assignments all help this learner. This learner likes to see everything and determine their own criteria for the relevance of the materials. These two lines intersect each other and form four quadrants (represented by the pink circles in the above diagram). These quadrants form the personal learning styles:

Theorists (or Assimilator) like to learn using abstract conceptualization and reflective observation (lecture, papers, analogies) and like to ask such questions as "How does this relate to that?" Training approach - case studies, theory readings, and thinking alone. Their strengths lie in their ability to create theoretical models. They tend to be less interested in people and less concerned with practical applications of knowledge. They are often more concerned with abstract concepts. Theorists are often found in research and planning departments. This learning style is more characteristic of basic science and mathematics than applied sciences.

Pragmatists (or Converger) like to learn using abstract conceptualization and active experimentation (laboratories, field work, observations). They ask "How can I apply this in practice?" Training approach - peer feedback; activities that apply skills; trainer is coach/helper for a self-directed autonomous learner. The pragmatist's greatest strength is in the practical application of idea. They tend to be relatively unemotional. They prefer to deal with things rather than people. They tend to have narrow technical interests and quite often choose to specialize in the physical sciences.

Activists (or accommodator) like to learn using concrete experience and active experimentation (simulations, case study, homework). They tell themselves "I'm game for anything." Training approach - practicing the skill, problem solving, small group discussions, peer feedback; trainer should be a model of a professional, leaving the learner to determine her own criteria for relevance of materials. Their strengths lie in doing things and involving themselves in new experiences. They are called accommodators because they excel in adapting to specific immediate circumstances. They tend to solve problems intuitively, relying on others for information. Accommodators are often found working in marketing and sales. The accommodator is at ease with people but is sometimes seen as impatient and pushy. This learner's educational background is often in technical or practical fields such as business.

Reflectors (or diverger) like to learn using reflective observation and concrete experience (logs, journals, brainstorming). They like time to think about the subject. Training approach - lectures with plenty of reflection time; trainer should provide expert interpretation - taskmaster/guide; judge performance by external criteria. Their strengths lie in an imaginative ability. They tend to be interested in people and emotional elements. People with this learning style tend to become counselors, organizational development specialists and personnel managers. They have broad cultural interests and tend to specialize in the arts. This style is characterizes individuals from humanities and liberal arts backgrounds.

A reminder that we learn from all four experiences (quadrants), but one of the four is our favorite. The ideal training environment would include each of the four processes. For example, the cycle might begin with the learner's personal involvement through concrete experiences; next, the learner reflects on this experience, looking for meaning; then the learner applies this meaning to form a logical conclusion; and finally, the learner experiments with similar problems, which result in new concrete experiences. The learning cycle might begin anew due to new and different experiences.

The training activities should be flexible so that each learner could spend additional time on his or her preferred learning style. Also, you can enter the learning cycle at any one of the four processes.

Examples

Learning to ride a bicycle:

- Reflectors - Thinking about riding and watching another person ride a bike.
- Theorists - Understanding the theory and having a clear grasp of the biking concept.
- Pragmatists - Receiving practical tips and techniques from a biking expert.
- Activists - Leaping on the bike and have a go at it.

Learning a software program:

- Activists - Jumping in and doing it.
- Reflectors - Thinking about what you just performed.
- Theorists - Reading the manual to get a clearer grasp on what was performed.
- Pragmatists - Using the help feature to get some expert tips.

Learning to coach:

- Pragmatists - Having a coach guide you in coaching someone else.
- Activists - Using your people skills with what you have learned to achieve your own coaching style.
- Reflectors - Observing how other people coach.
- Theorists - Reading articles to find out the pros and cons of different methods.

Learning algebra:

- Theorists - Listening to explanations on what it is.
- Pragmatists - Going step-by-step through an equation.
- Activists - Practicing.
- Reflectors - Recording your thoughts about algebraic equations in a learning log.

Notice that Kolbs model is actually two models in one:

A four step learning process:

1. Watching [introvert - reflection]
2. Thinking [mind]
3. Feeling [emotion]
4. Doing [extrovert - muscle]

Which then goes on to describe the four learning styles used within the learning process.

1. Reflectors
2. Theorists
3. Pragmatists
4. Activists

While Kolb's Learning Style Inventory uses a proprietary process, you can get an ideal of the method by taking the Learning Style Indicator.

Appendix 2

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
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	SSSC
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 and 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.



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