



# **Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Social Services Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) pilot**

## **Evaluation report- phase two**

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# **SCQF/Social Services Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) Pilot Evaluation**

## **Summary**

This report summarises the outcomes of the second evaluation phase of The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Social Services Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) Pilot project.

The purpose of second evaluation stage was to:

- review the effectiveness of the RPL process as a means of increasing learner self-confidence; accelerating the achievement of vocational qualifications; improving the quality of the learning experience; evaluating and enhancing practice
- identify the means of integrating an RPL process within existing organisational systems of workforce development, from the recruitment and induction stage onwards

Organisations taking part in the pilot were:

Stage one:

- ORCHA (Organisation of Residential Care Homes Angus)
- Inclusion Glasgow
- Crossreach.

Stage two

- Viewpoint
- Glasgow City Council
- Inclusion Glasgow and C-change
- Perth & Kinross Council.

The key findings were as follows.

The value of the RPL process in terms of increasing learner confidence and motivation has been confirmed. RPL promotes a positive view of learning, which is based on an enhancement, rather than a deficit model: it values and builds on existing knowledge, strengths and skills.

RPL can be used to support a preparatory, formative recognition process for a wide range of qualifications at all levels. RPL provides a useful preparation in learning how to think and write reflectively and can lessen the fear of undertaking a formal programme of learning or a qualification.

The usefulness of the profiling tool for demystifying Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ) systems and language was emphasised. It translates SVQ

jargon into everyday language, by enabling learners to see how they can meet the standards in their everyday life and then transfer the skills across to their social services practice.

Learners and mentors reported that greater self-confidence generated through the identification of strengths and skills developed through prior experiences and their relevance to their current work roles has led to greater self-confidence within the workplace itself.

The impact on service delivery is difficult to quantify. However, in qualitative terms both learners and their mentors considered that their increased confidence and levels of enthusiasm and enhanced critical evaluation of their own and others practice had had a positive impact on their practice. By developing a more reflective, analytical approach to their practice learners can become more aware of what they are doing, and why.

RPL was viewed as a means of refreshing practice, by encouraging learners to question their own assumptions and behaviors as well as of those around them ie colleagues and service users. RPL is therefore a useful exercise for more experienced staff as part of a continuing professional development process, as well as for staff new to a social services role.

Feedback endorsed the value and relevance of integrating an RPL process into the achievement of qualifications, recruitment, induction, CPD and training, and performance review.

The challenge now is to communicate the benefits of RPL across the sector at all levels, discuss and agree strategies for integrating the process within workforce development strategies and engage staff in dialogue about the way the RPL Social Services guidance and resources can be used to support that process.

# **SCQF/Social Services Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) Pilot Evaluation**

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 This report summarises the outcomes of the second evaluation phase of the SCQF Social Services Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) Pilot project.

1.2 The purpose of second evaluation stage was to:

- review the effectiveness of the RPL process as a means of increasing learner self-confidence; accelerating the achievement of vocational qualifications; improving the quality of the learning experience; evaluating and enhancing practice
- identify the means of integrating an RPL process within existing organisational systems of workforce development, from the recruitment and induction stage onwards, and within existing systems for SVQ assessment.

1.3 The Evaluation Report is structured as follows:

- purpose of the SCQF Social Services Recognition of Prior informal learning (RPL) project
- phase one pilot (April 06- March 07)
- phase two pilot (June 07-March 08)
- learner feedback
- mentor feedback
- Scottish Network of Internal Verifiers (SNIV) group feedback
- SCQF Social Services Working with Colleges Group Feedback
- workshop participant feedback: PEPE International conference, January 2008
- conclusions.

## **2. Purpose of the SCQF Social Services Recognition of Prior informal Learning (RPL) project**

2.1 The purpose of the SCQF Social Services RPL project was to:

- engage social services workers who lack confidence as learners and/or are reluctant to undertake formal learning

- speed up and streamline the process of RPL for credit towards qualifications, such as the SVQ Health and Social Care for social services workers.

## 2.2 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.

2.3 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

## 2.4 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 benchmarking of learning within the context of the SCQF
- supporting the transition between informal and formal learning
- preparation for the process of RPL for credit.

## 2.5 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> This has to be done by a credit rating body such as the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), HEI or College

## **2.6 The RPL Social Services guidance and resources**

2.6.1 An RPL Resource Pack, Profiling Tool, Mentor Guidance Pack and the mapping exercise 'Links to SVQ3 Unit HSC33- Reflect on and develop your practice' have been developed through the project to support the RPL process within the Social Services sector.

2.6.2 The RPL Social Services guidance and resources have 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 RPL Working Group comprised of experts in social services training and development. For membership of the group, please see Appendix 1. 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)<sup>2</sup>. This project involved eight European countries and was coordinated by Glasgow Caledonian University.

2.6.3 These materials have been piloted largely with learners who are working towards achievement of the SVQ Health and Social Care but its generic aspects have broad applicability within the social services sector for workers at all levels. 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 undertaking RPL at any time but then going on to undertake individual awards at different levels.

2.6.4 RPL profiling helps learners to identify:

- the key learning experiences through which they may be able to demonstrate the elements for each unit
- the reflective evidence of their learning
- further action they need to undertake 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.

2.6.5 The Resource Pack supports this process through:

- introducing the learners to RPL

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<sup>2</sup> For details of the Valex project (2003-2005) and to obtain copies of the support materials and other documentation please go to the project website [www.valex-apel.com](http://www.valex-apel.com)

- building their confidence as learners through identifying their strengths and skills
- helping them to develop the skills of reflective thinking and writing
- preparing them to undertake the profiling tool.

2.6.6 The pack is designed to be used by mentors who are working with a group of learners. A mentor may be a line manager or supervisor or a trainer or an assessor. The pack contains suggested activities and handouts which can underpin group preparatory sessions with participants. The activities and handouts are intended to be used flexibly by the mentors to meet the needs and goals of their learner group.

2.6.7 The RPL profiling tool supports learners in identifying the extent to which they have achieved the elements of the 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 process is designed to support learners in their achievement of a qualification. The profiling tool developed for the pilot was in relation to the core units of SVQ 3 Health and Social Care.

2.6.8 The pilot evaluation and subsequent, and growing use, of the resources within the pilot organisations indicates that the RPL process supported by the Resource 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 promotion posts, by helping individuals to reflect on particular examples, where for example, have challenged poor practice; consider the outcomes of their own or other's actions and think about how they might have dealt with a situation differently, for example.

### **3. Phase one pilot (April 06 – March 07)**

3.1 The purpose of the SCQF/Social Services Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) Pilot in phase one was to:

- test out the usefulness and applicability of the RPL process for learners (formative, preparatory sessions and profiling tool)
- test out the ease of use by mentors
- enable the refinement of the Resource Pack and profiling tool
- identify ways in which the process can be integrated within existing operational strategies for SVQ achievement.

3.2 The focus of the evaluation was whether the RPL model and materials that have been developed support a process of formative recognition: confidence building; identification of knowledge and skills through a reflective process; planning further learning and development; preparation for summative recognition (eg the assessment of prior informal learning as part of qualification achievement).

3.3 The Project Working Group coordinated the piloting of the Resource Pack and profiling tool. Fifteen learners across three organisations participated in group sessions facilitated by a Mentor from within the organisation to undertake the formative process of recognition prior to undertaking the profiling tool. The mentor in each organisation decided how to utilise the preparatory session material within the Resource Pack.

3.4 The three organisations were: Orcha (Organisation of Residential Care Homes Angus) (five learners) Inclusion Glasgow, Altrum (eight learners) Crossreach (two learners).

3.5 Learners completed and submitted evaluation questionnaires to the project team. Mentor feedback was provided at the meeting of the RPL Working Group in August 2006. The working group discussed the outcomes of the pilot, in terms of mentor and learner feedback, and agreed revisions to the Resource Pack and the profiling tool.

3.6 A refined version of the Resource Pack and profiling tool was produced and further piloting of the revised material took place.

3.7 The outcomes of the first evaluation phase clearly indicate that the RPL model that has been developed in this project can effectively support a formative process of recognition: confidence-building; an understanding of the reflective process; identification of existing skills and knowledge and preparation for the summative stage of recognition.

3.8 The working group considered that the formative process may accelerate the process of SVQ achievement by enabling learners to achieve a greater understanding of their learning and how to engage in reflection prior to the SVQ assessment planning stage. Learners would enter this stage with greater self-confidence and a greater awareness of the nature of evidence they will need to provide for SVQ achievement. The SVQ assessor should therefore need to spend less time with the candidate due to the generic group support provided through the RPL process. This issue was explored in the second evaluation phase.

3.9 Mentors themselves can use the experience of acting as a Mentor as a source of learning as part of their own continuing professional development. By helping learners to reflect, mentors are enhancing their own reflective skills. It may also generate evidence, for example, towards such qualifications as the Practice Learning Qualification. It was agreed following the phase one evaluation that supplementary guidance to Mentors should be developed.

3.10 The Resource Pack and profiling tool were revised, following the Phase 1 evaluation, to address the need to clarify the link between the formative and summative stages of the process ie the link between the use of the profiling tool and SVQ assessment and achievement. This connection was not explicit enough to either mentors or learners in the piloted versions of the materials. In recognition of the wider applicability of the RPL process to support workforce development in the Social Services sector, the Resource Pack was developed as generic guidance. It can therefore be used to support RPL at all levels in different contexts, ie the gaining of credit towards a range of qualifications, but also in relation to recruitment, induction, career development/appraisal and training needs analysis.

3.11 The Mentor Guidance Pack was developed to provide greater support to mentors who are supporting an RPL process. The additional resource 'Links to SVQ3 Unit HSC33- Reflect on and develop your practice' was also developed by the RPL working group. This is a mapping exercise which enables learners to generate evidence through RPL to demonstrate achievement of the unit. This resource has been externally verified by Care Scotland.

3.12 For more details of the process and outcomes of the Phase 1 Evaluation, please see the report: Whittaker, R (2007) **SCQF Social Services Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) pilot. Evaluation Report. Stage One** (SSSC)

## **4. Phase two pilot (June 07-March 08)**

4.1 The purpose of the second evaluation stage was to:

- Review the effectiveness of the RPL process as a means of increasing learner self-confidence; accelerating the achievement of vocational qualifications; improving the quality of the learning experience; evaluating and enhancing practice.
- Identify the means of integrating an RPL process within existing organisational systems of workforce development, from the recruitment and induction stage onwards, and within existing systems for SVQ assessment.

4.2 The Pilot organisations were

- Viewpoint
- Glasgow City Council
- Inclusion Glasgow and C-change
- Perth & Kinross Council

4.3 The organisations utilised the revised process and material for the formative stage as a preparation for summative assessment towards qualifications, as well as within the context of induction. Focus group discussions with learners and mentors were carried out to explore key aspects of the RPL process and its impact in terms of personal and professional development, as well as on practice. Additionally questionnaire responses from learners were gathered. The second evaluation phase was completed in March 2008. A summary of the outcomes of the focus group discussions with learners and mentors are provided in sections 5 and 6 respectively.

4.4 The organisations predominantly used the profiling tool in their pilots, but mentors reviewed the Resource Pack as part of the evaluation process and

considered its potential use within their organisations within the context of recruitment, induction, supervision, and training and performance appraisal. Other organisations represented in the RPL working group are also engaged in active discussions about integrating the use of the Resource Pack within their existing learning and training provision. These include the Workers Educational Association, within the context of Return to Learn provision and the Scottish Camphill organisations which are piloting its use with classroom assistants for children with learning disabilities.

**4.5 Viewpoint** - Viewpoint Housing Association is a provider of supported housing and care services for older people in Edinburgh, the Lothians and Fife. Viewpoint are integrating the use of the Resource Pack and profiling tool into its recruitment, induction and training processes, to ensure that the skills and knowledge that individuals bring with them into the organisation are identified, valued and built on through induction and subsequent training and development. Two learners and two mentors engaged in the focus group discussions.

**4.6 Glasgow City Council (GCC)** - GCC provide a range of services which cover all care sectors: older people, fieldwork, child care and families, criminal justice, physical and learning disabilities, and residential and day care. GCC is an SVQ assessment centre and has incorporated the use of the profiling tool within its SVQ candidate induction programme. GCC is planning to use the resources for SVQ4 and Assessor and Verifier training. GCC is also considering the use of the Resource Pack by Line Managers and Supervisors as a developmental tool. The Mentors that worked with the Profiling tool as part of the pilot are SVQ Assessors and Verifiers. A focus group discussion was held with one Learner and nine Mentors. Additionally evaluation questionnaires were completed by 48 Learners who had undertaken the profiling tool as part of their SVQ induction (see appendix). A large majority of the learners provided highly positive feedback in terms of the tool's usefulness.

**4.7 Inclusion Glasgow and C-Change** - Inclusion Glasgow and its sister organisation C-Change are Supported Living organisations working in and around Glasgow, supporting adults with learning difficulties and/or mental health issues to live in their homes. Support workers are matched to individual service users and all undertake a core learning and development programme within the first six months of joining the organisation. This comprises of 13 mandatory modules. The profiling tool was piloted with 12 participants as part of the values module. The RPL process commences at the interview stage and its outcomes are recorded. The Interview sheet is then included in the Support Worker's packs as the starting point for their training. Five Service Managers who are undertaking the Diploma Institute of Leadership Management (ILM) are also using the resources to support an RPL process. One Mentor took part in the

focus group discussion and the other mentor provided feedback through the RPL working group.

**4.8 Perth & Kinross Council (PKC)** - Perth & Kinross Council used the pack as part of delivery of Unit 23 for SVQ2 in Health and Social Care within the Health and Social Care (HSC) Academy. The HSC Academy targets long term unemployed people and aims to support routes into employment for which no initial qualification is required. The course was delivered in Perth College. The use of the pack in this context therefore had a different focus since it was being used by learners not yet in employment. The RPL process supported by the pack was used to provide evidence for Unit 23. Questionnaires were completed by HSC Academy students who had undertaken the RPL process. The resource materials were also considered by the PKC SVQ assessment centre at a standardisation meeting. Participants considered the materials to be highly useful within the context of induction to make learners more conscious of the concepts and principles of learning and also as part of supervision in terms of looking at issues around competency. The strength of the materials is that they can be used by individuals working towards a range of different qualifications, such as SVQs, and Practice Learning Qualifications by learners with little prior experience as well as those with significant experience.

#### **4.9 Evaluation of the pilot**

The pilot was evaluated through the following means:

- focus group discussions with learners and mentors involved in the pilots
- questionnaires completed by learners on the use of the profiling tool
- discussion by Scottish Network of Internal Verifiers (SNIV) group
- discussion by the SCQF Social Services Working with Colleges group
- workshop discussion at the PEPE International Conference, January 2008.

Discussion by the RPL working group during the project has also informed the conclusions of this report

### **5. Learner feedback**

Summary reports of the outcomes of the learner focus groups and questionnaires for each pilot organisation are included as appendices. The feedback below summarises the key points which emerged during the discussions.

### **The usefulness of the RPL process:**

- **The building of self esteem** through the identification of what has been learned in previous jobs and how these skills have been put into practice in the learners' current roles. The Profiling tool assisted learners in thinking more deeply about the job they are doing, and the skills they have developed.
- **RPL provides a good 'springboard' into a qualification**, such as an SVQ. It provides a useful preparation in learning how to think and write reflectively and lessens the fear of undertaking a qualification. RPL recognises a 'stepping stones' approach to skills development and enables people to recognise their own potential as learners through understanding the way in which they learn. The exercises and examples provided in the Resource Pack, and the staged approach used in the Profiling tool to build up to producing the reflective account for the SVQ supports the development of reflective writing skills.
- **RPL has a clear impact on practice.** Reflecting on practice, even on mundane tasks, enables learners to recognise good practice. Refreshing practice helps in working with service users; enhances confidence within a team and increases awareness of the nature of the job and the way in which individuals carry out their roles.

### **Advice learners would give others includes:**

- RPL should be considered by everyone at some point to gain self-confidence
  - aspects of an individual's role that are seemingly small should not be overlooked. They can accumulate to become significant features of an RPL process
  - the Profiling tool should be used to help gain the skills of reflective writing that are needed for SVQs and other qualifications
  - people think of themselves as 'working in bubbles' and have never thought of combining them before. RPL helps to make the connections between previous and current experiences and roles in all aspects of an individual's life
- the Profiling tool enables learners to draw upon a wealth of skills and knowledge from previous jobs
- people who are willing to volunteer first to undertake RPL within an organisation are needed to act as pioneers. These people will then become RPL champions and encourage others to engage in the process.

**Ways in which RPL can be built into organisations' existing systems**

- RPL is a useful tool in the recruitment of new staff. It highlights to potential staff that learning and development opportunities are not out of reach because the starting point is their existing and prior experience. It can help to sell an organisation to potential employees because it is viewed as using innovative forms of learning and CPD
- RPL can be used in team training days with all staff to introduce them to the process. It is not just linked to doing SVQs. Even people who have been carers for a long time may benefit from the process, particularly those who may have become set in their ways
- RPL can help organisations focus on 'learning' rather than 'training' because it supports people in reflecting critically on their own practice and promotes continuous learning and development.

**Barriers to RPL include:**

- Fear and lack of confidence, particularly in relation to written skills. Mentor support is crucial in terms of building confidence and the skills required for recording learning and writing reflectively.
- Looking back at past experience or a current situation can be a painful process.
- A group process can be initially daunting. The value of a buddy system at beginning of process was highlighted.

## 6. Mentor feedback

Summary reports of the outcomes of the focus group discussions with mentors within the pilot organisations are included as appendices. The feedback below summarises the key points which emerged during the discussions.

### **The usefulness of the RPL process**

- Learning to think in a reflective way: RPL helps individuals to see the importance of prior experience and helps to bridge the gap between a previous and a new job. It is useful in getting people to think about what they had learned through their previous experiences and how this is relevant to the role they are now undertaking. RPL therefore enables people to 'de-compartmentalise jobs', to see things more holistically.
- Learners reflect not just on their prior knowledge but also on what they observe in the workplace and in service users' behaviour ie it helps people to 'think out of the box'. This can help learners' self-confidence in the workplace as well in completing their award.

### **RPL as a means of making it easier/quicker to gain a qualification**

- RPL can help individuals slide into a qualification if they lack confidence. RPL can accelerate the process of getting started on a qualification by making the journey easier.

### **The use of the profiling tool in supporting the achievement of SVQs**

- The profiling tool was viewed as a useful tool for some SVQ candidates in supporting them to achieve their SVQ. It is useful for demystifying SVQ language- it translates SVQ jargon into everyday language, by enabling learners to see how they can meet the standards in their everyday life and then transfer the skills across to their social care practice. This is helpful for learners who are struggling with the SVQ language.
- It is a useful means of enabling someone to take a step back from the SVQ and to think about their personal previous experience and then relate that back to their current role. When used in this way it can help learners progress quicker through the qualification.
- It is particularly useful for learners for whom English is a second language. Using examples from a learner's personal life is helpful in enabling the learner to understand what is required in terms of the SVQ.
- If assessors use the tool with candidates on a one-to one basis it improves their understanding of the process- it takes candidates out of SVQ induction which is focused on systems and enables them to focus on processes.



- Outwith the SVQ induction programme it can be used with candidates who are struggling with reflection and reflective writing. This use of the tool would be beneficial before a learner is introduced to the SVQ in induction.

### **Aspects of the profiling tool which are not so useful (in relation to SVQ assessment)**

- The profiling tool is based on knowledge requirements, rather than performance criteria.
- The profiling tool was introduced into SVQ3 and SVQ4 induction, but the fact that the tool was designed for SVQ3 was confusing for SVQ4 candidates. It was not possible to adapt the tool because it is in PDF format. If the tool, could be adapted electronically this would not have been a problem. This was therefore a practical problem, rather than a conceptual one.
- It was highlighted that if a candidate met the knowledge points it should not matter how they achieved the knowledge. Assessors should only be concerned about gathering sufficient evidence for knowledge.
- It is more meaningful to work through the tool with a learner on a one-to-one basis. It is easier to understand its use within a personal context when there is greater opportunity to tease out examples on an individual, rather than group, basis.
- Some SVQ candidates will benefit from using the tool, but others can identify relevant experience and evidence immediately.

### **Making the route to achieving a qualification a more positive experience**

- It helps to break down the 'fear factor'- learners feel more comfortable about what they are being asked to do in terms of reflection.
- If a learner's previous experience of learning has been negative, RPL can help to overcome this negativity by valuing and building on existing skills and knowledge gained throughout experience.

### **Helping learners to develop their practice**

- Learners can become much more analytical and reflective about what they are doing and why they are doing it.
- It is possible that it can make learners more conscious of what they are doing and why- but the question was raised of whether this can be attributed to RPL or to the SVQ.
- Past experience can be negative. The reflective process enables people to think about how they could have handled a situation better. It can 'free them from the bondage of feeling they failed' and see that everything is a part of learning and growing.

- RPL can help individuals challenge poorer practice through reflecting on their own practice and seeing how it has developed and could develop further.
- RPL can be used in performance interviewing, to enable individuals to reflect on what they have done in the past, what were the outcomes and how they might do it differently, for example within the context of 'managing change'.

### **Impact on learners practice**

- RPL can have a real impact on service delivery by enabling people to become more confident in the workplace and to critically reflect on their own, and others', practice. By reflecting on and valuing life experience, individuals can recognise they are comparable to people with more care experience/qualifications.
- Mentor support can help someone to put into practice a new approach or an idea within a team setting.
- If people reflect to see how far they have come, they want to go further. This is reinforced by a positive attitude from supervisors and teams.
- RPL helps learners to think about how they are supporting their clients or service users, for example in relation to issues such as communication and vulnerability and as such can improve their practice.

### **Ways in which RPL can be built into organisations' existing systems**

- RPL can be built into recruitment, induction and performance interviewing. It can be used in recruitment, particularly for people who have experience outwith social care, and can bring relevant transferable aspects of that experience to a social services role.
- There is a need to demonstrate the value of RPL within existing systems to justify investment in the process ie in terms of improved processes and improved practice.
- The profiling tool should be separated out from the SVQ as it is currently written in SVQ terms, but could be used as a stand alone resource for a range of different purposes. It is a process that can be used in any sector.
- Mentors need to have patience and be able to enable and encourage others.
- Mentors require support to carry this role in terms of:
  - Sufficient allocation of time.
  - Support of their management team i.e. enabling mentors to delegate other work and valuing the importance of the role and activity.
  - Specialist advice and support to mentors working with learners: resources, publications, contacts, peer support network, workshops on the use of the RPL materials etc.

### **Improving the process**

- **Supporting learners:** Mentors need to understand the process and sell it to the learner. An individual can only really understand what RPL is, and its value, once he or she has tried it out. It is important to support learners in building up their stories gradually, so that the process does not appear too daunting at the outset.
- **In relation to SVQ assessment:** As mentors' understanding of the RPL process increases they will be able to encourage candidates to make use of RPL as a method of identifying previous skills and knowledge that can contribute to SVQ assessment.

## **7. Scottish Network of Internal Verifiers (SNIV) group feedback**

Members of the **Scottish Network of Internal Verifiers (SNIV) group** were invited to consider the RPL package (resource pack, profiling tool and mentor guidance pack). The general view was that the package was very flexible, versatile and clearly written. A summary of their feedback is provided below.

- It is a flexible, versatile package that could be used for employee development reviews/appraisals. It is possible to identify with learners where their values came from through this process. The resources are very clearly written and in detail. It will take time to learn how to use the package. SNIV members liked the section on reflective thinking and writing. Good examples included the introduction to the meaning of reflection.
- The group liked the profiling tool and viewed this as a shell document that staff could use.
- It was considered to be a useful tool for pre SVQ assessment work with students.
- The package could be used to work with staff in groups.
- The information that individuals have and reflect on may well go back further than two years.
- It is possible to reflect back on prior learning for all levels of the VQ's and other awards.

- It could be used by foster care workers.
- It could be used for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for assessors where supervisors/assessors reflect back on what they have done and where they are going.

## **8. SCQF Social Services Working with Colleges Group feedback**

The SCQF Social Services Working with Colleges group thought that the RPL guidance and resources were well presented, clearly written and very useful. A summary of their feedback follows.

- The materials are extremely useful and could be used in a variety of ways such as supporting HNCs.
- There are excellent examples where previous skills can be linked to present employment.
- There is potential for application to the interview process where it is important to be reflective. Part of the pack could be used for this.
- Particular exercises and information sheets could be duplicated and shared with groups of students.
- These will be very useful to help SVQ candidates, such as SVQ2 and SVQ3 learners in care academies, and others to think and write reflectively as part of an induction process and to supplement assessment materials.

## **9. Workshop participant feedback: Practical Experiences in Professional Education (PEPE) International conference, January 2008**

The preliminary outcomes of the evaluation were presented and discussed at a workshop at the PEPE international conference in January 2008. A summary of workshop participant discussion is provided below:

### **1. In what ways do you think the RPL process and materials could be helpful within the context of workforce development?**

- Qualifications, recruitment, induction, continuous professional

development and training, performance review.

- There should be an endeavour to get service user feedback to engage in dialogue about what difference the knowledge and understanding developed by worker has made to the service user and add this to the materials. Service user feedback should become part of the learning process for candidates. This fits in with the new inspection process which requires evidence of service user involvement and could therefore provide an incentive for this.

## **2. In what ways could RPL be integrated within the process of qualification achievement?**

- Transcribe 'learning conversations' to illustrate how to translate from the oral to the written. This would be useful support for learners as it demystifies the reflective process.
- There is flexibility in how the components of the pack can be used- it should be used to support individuals in understanding that how you do something as part of a learning process becomes part of what you do normally in your work role.
- The quality of mentor's learning, and their understanding of their own learning, is crucial. The line manager is not necessarily the best person to be a mentor. The quality of support the mentor provides will underpin the quality of learning/RPL process. Mentors need training in how to help to facilitate learning of others.

## **3. In what ways could an RPL process be integrated within existing organisational systems of workforce development?**

- Audio-portfolio - which enables learners to speak their answers- link to transcription idea above.
- Link to idea of paperless SVQ. The acceptance of documentation other than written evidence. Langside College is using this approach successfully.
- PEBBLE portfolio tool- stories, photos online, recorded dialogue, providing an example of two people engaged in reflective discussion/professional discussion. It can provide structures for 'learning conversations'. Learners own their portfolios as they are in the learner's own space.
- A mentor needs to be someone with a good understanding of the work setting, as well as someone who can act as catalyst for development in the organisation.
- Mentors need time to take on this role. If they are not allocated time they will not be able to carry it out effectively. It would be helpful if they could attach their own CPD to the role.
- There is a need to involve supervisors, if using RPL from the beginning ie within induction.

- Encourage peer-mentoring to establish peer relationship/support.
- Build into a process of continuous employee development- the experience of being mentor can be used as part of that process. RPL can be built into normal working life eg critical incident analysis (CIA), reflective discussion, so that it becomes part of what the organisation does and is viewed as an internalized (rather than externally imposed) system of professional development, which is not just linked to the achievement of qualifications.

## 10. Conclusions

**10.1** The SCQF Social Services RPL project has generated enthusiasm and momentum for the wider applicability of the RPL process within the sector as part of workforce development strategies. Since commencing the second pilot phase, additional organisations have begun to use elements of the RPL social services guidance and resources to support induction and training processes.

### **10.2 Increasing learners' self confidence and their motivation to undertake further learning and development**

The value of the RPL process in terms of increasing learner confidence and motivation has been confirmed through the pilot evaluations. RPL promotes a positive view of learning, which is based on an enhancement, rather than a deficit model: it values and builds on existing knowledge, strengths and skills. Moreover, the group model encourages a peer support process. This was highlighted in the Viewpoint and Inclusion Glasgow pilots in particular. By utilising a group approach to developing reflective and writing skills and developing learner self awareness of their skills prior to embarking on a formal programme, the process of gaining a qualification can be streamlined and accelerated. As a result of undertaking a formative RPL process, learners will embark on a formal qualification with greater self-confidence and a greater understanding of how they learn and how to express and demonstrate that learning.

However in order to promote an effective learning environment the group approach to RPL needs to be allocated sufficient time. The GCC pilot example integrated the use of the profiling tool within a one or two day SVQ candidate induction programme. Mentors considered that there was too little time in the induction programme to support candidates on a sufficiently personal basis. The RPL profiling tool was just one component of the intensive induction programme. Mentor feedback emphasised the benefits of using the profiling tool as part of a one-to-one approach which gave the learners more time to tease out the skills and knowledge gained through their prior experiences and

relate this to their current role. Their use of the profiling tool outwith induction on an individual basis was therefore more helpful to candidates.

### **10.3 Accelerating the achievement of qualifications**

The view was expressed that RPL can provide a good springboard into a qualification, for example SVQ/3. This reflects learner and mentor feedback in all of the pilot organisations. RPL provides a useful preparation in learning how to think and write reflectively and can lessen the fear of undertaking a formal programme of learning or a qualification

It was highlighted that RPL can help someone slide into a qualification more easily if they lack confidence and as such can make the journey easier. This view was particularly expressed in relation to developing learner confidence through the validation of existing skills and knowledge; to developing the skills of reflective writing and a better understanding of the learning process itself. The Resource Pack can be used to support a preparatory, formative recognition process for a wide range of qualifications at all levels, such as the new Practice Learning Qualifications. The profiling tool was viewed by the SNIV group as a useful shell document which could be adapted for other SVQ levels and other qualifications. The Resource Pack, in a generic or tailored form, could usefully support RPL across a range of different sector areas. The SCQF social services working with colleges group viewed the materials as extremely useful and considered that they could be used in a variety of ways such as supporting HNCs, admissions interviewing and guidance.

In terms of developing the resources further, the application of on-line technology was suggested. This includes audio portfolios, which enable learners to speak their answers, and could be linked to the idea of transcribing 'learning conversations' to illustrate how to translate from the oral to the written. This would be useful support for learners in terms of understanding the reflective process. The PEBBLE portfolio tool was suggested as a useful means of providing structures for learning conversations, and enabling a range of alternative types of evidence to be gathered, such as photographs and recorded dialogue.

### **10.4 Integrating the use of RPL within SVQ assessment systems**

The usefulness of the profiling tool for demystifying SVQ systems and language was emphasised. It translates SVQ jargon into everyday language, by enabling learners to see how they can meet the standards in their everyday life and then transfer the skills across to their social services practice. It is a useful means of enabling someone to take a step back from the SVQ if they are struggling. It provides the time and space to enable learners to think about their personal previous experience and then relate that back to their current role. When used

in this way it was considered that RPL can help learners progress quicker through the qualification.

The SVQ Assessors and Verifiers who acted as mentors for the GCC pilot considered the profiling tool to be highly valuable as a developmental tool. RPL should be viewed as part of a learning and development process which supports assessment. RPL then becomes a means of helping learners to identify evidence which has developed as a result of their prior informal learning.

### **10.5 Evaluating and enhancing practice**

The focus group discussions with learners and mentors suggests that the greater self-confidence generated through the identification of strengths and skills developed through prior experiences and their relevance to their current work roles has led to greater self-confidence within the workplace itself. Impact on service delivery is difficult to quantify. However, in qualitative terms both learners and their mentors considered that their increased confidence and levels of enthusiasm and enhanced critical evaluation of their own and others practice had had a positive impact on their practice. By developing a more reflective, analytical approach to their practice learners can become more aware of what they are doing, and why. RPL was viewed as a means of refreshing practice, by encouraging learners to question their own assumptions and behaviors as well as of those around them ie colleagues and service users. RPL is therefore a useful exercise for more experienced staff as part of a continuing professional development process, as well as for staff new to a social services role.

It has been highlighted by the discussion of the RPL Working Group and by participants in the PEPE conference workshop that there should be an endeavour to obtain service user feedback in terms of impact on practice. Engaging in dialogue about what difference the knowledge and understanding developed by the worker has made to the service user should become part of the learning process.

### **10.6 Integrating an RPL process within existing organisational systems of workforce development, from the recruitment and induction stage onwards**

Feedback from mentors, learners, the SNIV group and workshop participants and the RPL working group endorses the value and relevance of integrating an RPL process into the achievement of qualifications, recruitment, induction, CPD and training, and performance review.

The idea of building RPL into a process of continuous employee development was raised by workshop participants at the PEPE conference. RPL can be integrated into normal working life, for example Critical Incident Analysis (CIA)



and reflective discussion, so that it becomes part of what the organisation does and is viewed as an internalised (rather than externally imposed) system of professional development, which is not just linked to the achievement of qualifications.

The mentor role is crucial in terms of the quality of the learner experience. Mentors need to be given sufficient time, training and continuing support to carry out this role effectively. Building in opportunities for the mentors to use this role as means of achieving their own professional development goals is important both in terms of explicitly valuing this role within organisations and providing staff with the motivation to undertake it. The experience of acting as a mentor is a source of learning which may be used to generate evidence, for example, towards such qualifications as the Practice Learning Qualification.

In considering ways in which to integrate RPL processes within existing systems, relating to recruitment, induction, training and performance interviewing, for example, organisations need to be convinced of its value, in terms of improved processes and improved practice, to justify investment. The role of the SCQF Employers Forum was highlighted by the RPL working group as a useful mechanism for engaging employers in this dialogue. Following the SCQF Social Services RPL project, further work will be required to demonstrate this value to a broader range of organisations within the sector. This should focus on encouraging the wider use of the RPL resources with the support of the growing number of 'RPL Champions' that have emerged through the work of this project. These champions include not just the mentors that have participated in the pilots, but the learners themselves. It has been suggested by members of the RPL working group that it would be useful to develop examples of how some of the materials could be used to provide an idea of the breadth of their application. These examples could be provided by the range of agencies that have used the materials and included in the RPL social services guidance and resources to illustrate their relevance to all in the sector.

At the SCQF Social Services project event on 14 March 2008, Professor Alex McLennan, Chair of the SCQF Quality Committee highlighted the widely held view that the social services sector is currently ahead of other sectors in using the SCQF and particularly so in relation to RPL. RPL figures significantly in the new Skills Strategy for Scotland and is a priority area of future work for the SCQF Partnership.

The challenge now is to communicate the benefits of RPL across the sector at all levels, discuss and agree strategies for integrating the process within workforce development strategies and engage staff in dialogue about the way the RPL Social Services guidance and resources can be used to support that process.

## Appendix 1: SCQF Social Services RPL Working Group

Member	Organisation
Alison Harold (Chair)	Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC)
Craig Brown	Workers Educational Association (WEA) Scotland
Margaret Cameron	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
Carla Findlay	CORA
Joyce Fortune	Borders Council
Alan Keir	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 & Kinross Council
Eleanor Ramsay	Scottish Qualifications Authority(SQA) Care Scotland
Sheila Scott	Inclusion Glasgow
Pat Sinclair	Viewpoint
Sam Sinclair	Camphill Scotland
Caroline Sturgeon	Voluntary Sector Social Services Workforce Unit
Audrey Thomson	Perth & Kinross Council
Ruth Whittaker	RPL Consultant/Glasgow Caledonian University

## Appendix 2

### SSSC SCQF RPL Evaluation Phase 2

**Focus Group Mentors: Viewpoint  
29 October 2007**

#### **1. To what extent has the RPL pilot been a satisfactory/useful experience?**

**Both from your perspective as a mentor and from the perspective of the learner you worked with:**

- a. What were the useful aspects of the experience?**
- b. What was not so useful about the experience?**

##### **a. Useful aspects**

- **From a learner perspective:** We were thinking about skills we already had as supervisors, in terms of how to encourage/advise people to do something better. There has been a major restructure at Viewpoint. In applying for posts applicants need to think about specific areas of work they are competent in; for example team leaders need to think about how they managed change or managed conflict. RPL helps to demystify the process and the maze of words used in this context-people can be 'mesmerised by words'. RPL starts from the point at which the person is at and what they are familiar with, then asks people to think about what they were good at in the last job they did and explain what they mean by this – for example how they solved problems without realising they were 'problem-solving'. The language/terminology used in different work settings can be a barrier. RPL provides tools for people to use their own language.
- **From Mentor perspective:** There is a satisfaction and 'buzz' from helping someone achieve - helping them to look at learning already achieved and how it can help them in their current job. It's about giving them confidence and ensuring that that confidence continues to grow.

##### **b. Not so useful aspects**

- It takes time - it requires time and patience on part of the mentor. The mentor needs to keep making learners believe they can achieve. Mentors need specific skills – patience, enabler, encouraging others. Unless you've been mentored yourself it may not be easy to be a good mentor.
- Reflecting back on what they did before can actually encourage people

to become over confident, then it becomes difficult to rein them back in.

- Meaningful feedback on assessment is important to support a continuing learning process, rather than closing or ending the learning process.
- The mentor also needs to be able to assess knowledge and skills to see that the required learning has been achieved.
- There's value in everyone having a mentor or buddy for example within the context of cross- cultural communication issues such as the inappropriate use of endearments rather than the service user's preferred name – the buddy can help with this.

## **2. What do you think the learners gained from the process?**

- Learning to think in a reflective way- giving examples of what they have done and relate that to the work they are doing now. Reflect on training courses and experience and analyse what happened and how this was carried out. By thinking in a reflective way you can see the importance of prior experience and can bridge the gap between the old and new job. RPL enables people to 'decompartmentalise jobs'- to see things more holistically and recognise the interrelationship and value of previous jobs. People through RPL need to reflect not just on prior knowledge but also on what they are observing in the workplace and in service users' behaviour and so on. It helps people 'think outside the box'.
- People can help others to learn in this way if they themselves have learned and can help others to improve practice as well. If you can take the group along, to get the group thinking in a reflective way, it can be very powerful.
- RPL 'just works'.
- The activity which looks at jobs people have done for example making jewellery and then they write down all skills and knowledge needed – an amazing range of skills and knowledge is identified through that process. This was the use of the profiling tool in a workshop.

## **3. In what ways could the process be improved?**

- There is a lot to read to understand RPL process. The mentor needs to understand the process and sell it to the learner, to start with activity and then go into an explanation of what this is and what it involves. You can only really understand what RPL is and its value once you have tried it out. You need to build up the story gradually- write down what you did, then question what you did, to illustrate links to theory and policy - 'plant seeds that will grow'.

#### **4. What support do you need as a mentor?**

- Time is required.
- Support – your own management team need to be supportive of the role; enabling mentors to delegate other work; to value the importance of the role and activity.
- The course book 'bridging the gap' – encourages people who have not been active in writing by moving them into thinking about writing. This eases people back into writing and valuing themselves as people. Using RPL as part of this 'bridging the gap'.
- Need willing people and people hungry to learn.
- Contacts- to provide specialist advice and support to mentors working with learners.
- Knowledge of books, resources, publications –'back up'- knowing how to access books on practice and the learning process.
- Encourage mentors to meet up, share stories, peer support network for example the SNIV group. This is a 'safe environment' to share information.
- Workshops- to look at how to use RPL materials and mentoring.

#### **5. To what extent do you think is RPL a useful process for:**

##### **a Increasing learners' self confidence in terms of learning**

- This is a major aim of RPL and it is effective at achieving this.

##### **b Making it easier/quicker to gain a qualification**

- If they can make the link early on, staff can see how RPL can help gain qualifications; it can help someone to slide into working on the qualification if they lack confidence.
- RPL as part of the induction process- this is an important bridge between what they learned and did before and the induction for new job.
- It stops people doing things in silos - they see it as part of ongoing learning. Without RPL it can take a person longer to get started in a qualification – it makes the journey easier.

##### **c. Making the route to achieving a qualification a more positive experience**

- Yes - if they build confidence and then move into a qualification they're bound to be more positive.

##### **d. Thinking about the way life and work experience can help to develop the skills and knowledge needed in a care role**

- Yes.

**e. Thinking about ways in which learners have developed, or could develop their practice.**

- Yes - past experience could be negative or seen as something they did wrong. The RPL reflective process enables people to think how they could have handled a situation better. It frees them up from the bondage of feeling failed and see that everything is part of learning and growing.
- Challenging poorer practice- reflect on their own practice and see how it has developed. The mentor can use themselves as an example. Channeling experience from the past and taking it forward.
- Used in performance interviewing for example how did you 'manage change' or 'manage conflict'- reflect on what they've done in the past, what were the outcomes and how to do it differently.

**f. Helping learners to write about their reflective practice**

- Yes- and then in record keeping, writing skills. This gives them something to look back on- the value of a reflective diary.

**6. To what extent has participating in the RPL process had an impact on the learners' practice?**

- It has a real impact on service delivery- people are more confident. They do not feel intimidated by the person next to them who has achieved qualifications. They can value life experience and reflect on that and recognise this is comparable to people with more care experience and qualifications.
- Without a mentor someone would never put into practice a new approach or idea on their own. As part of the team you can't put something into practice on your own- you need mentor support. For example using something learnt in a training course particularly if rest of team are 'tired and jaded'. Psychologically if people reflect to see how far they have come they want to go further- go for excellence. This is reinforced by positive feedback from supervisors or the team. If you are regarded as an asset to the team due to attitude, this can inspire others and you can be trusted with a job to see it through.
- Reflective practice- unless it is written down and recorded it's difficult to prove the impact on practice or their career. Personal recognition is important but personal authority is more important- the ability to have an influence on others' lives. This needs social recognition, recognition by others. This will encourage people to continually progress, to get more out of themselves. RPL needs to be built into long term learning programme for the individual.

**7. To what extent has the RPL process helped learners to think about the way they would like to develop in their care role and in their career?**

- RPL is about you as an individual, not just your career. RPL prepares someone for the next challenge and it helps others to achieve and overcome their own challenges.

**8. In what ways do you think that RPL could be built into your organisation's existing systems for recruitment, induction, training, mentoring, SVQ assessment, and professional development and progression? What are the barriers to this and in what ways could they be overcome?**

- RPL can be built into recruitment and performance interviewing. Need to demonstrate the value of RPL within existing systems to organisations- to justify their investment in the process, in integrating RPL within existing systems for example improved processes and improved practice.
- Mentor support- there's a need to share outcomes regarding the difference RPL has made in the end. Use and try out the materials in workshop contexts.

## **Appendix 3**

### **SSSC SCQF RPL Evaluation Phase 2**

#### **Focus Group Learners: Viewpoint**

#### **6 December 2007**

Two Learners: for one, this is their first experience of care role, joined Viewpoint in June 2006

The other has seven years experience in care role at Crossreach, joined Viewpoint in October 2007, and has SVQ3 already.

They used the profiling tool

#### **1. To what extent has the RPL pilot been a satisfactory/useful experience?**

***Both from your perspective as a mentor and from the perspective of the learner you worked with:***

- a. What were the useful aspects of the experience?**
- b. What was not so useful about the experience?**

##### **a. Useful aspects**

- It enables you to focus on a particular job and recall the different skills that you have developed in relatively mundane jobs and realise that these are also ones that you are using in your current job. I used my placement experience in Alzheimers Scotland as basis of reflection and then thought about the job at Crossreach and then Viewpoint. I recognised this as stepping stones approach to skills development. I also drew upon experience as a counter assistant in a deli. It was good to do this to see the different skills and different areas of knowledge that had been developed. I drew upon accountancy skills, working with stock etc. It builds self esteem to identify what you have learnt and how you have put your skills into practice.
- You do not think about what you do everyday as a skill, but the profiling tool helps you recognise that these are skills that you are using in your job today. For example as Assistant Manager in Thorntons I organised staff rotas, as a care worker in a team, I also organise staff rotas. Communication skills were developed in Thorntons by giving talks to different groups of people and I am now using that skill in communicating with residents and relatives. Health and safety was a big issue in previous job- a need to ensure staff are trained to use equipment in the café, and clearly there is a major issue in a care setting.
- We found the profiling tool beneficial in that it helped us to think



more deeply about the job we are actually doing, the skills we have achieved and how we can pass these skills onto others.

- The profiling tool is very relevant to someone doing SVQ3- it provides a good springboard into SVQ/3.
- The profiling tool could be adapted to match to the activity coordinator role. As part of CPD, beyond SVQ/3 you could pick a skill set and work through it.
- You can use the mentoring role for your own development- mentors could use PT to recognise mentoring skills sets
- The profiling tool is well written- clear language, easy to understand and avoids jargon associated with SVQs.

#### **b. Not so useful aspects**

- There were no aspects of the RPL pilot which were not useful

## **2. What have you learned about yourself during the process?**

- As a learner I had done more than I thought I had done and had learned a lot but hadn't really thought about it before. Looking back at old jobs makes you realise that you are in the job you should be doing now, and how you have grown into the job. Previously I felt too young to do this job but now I'm at the right stage to go into this. You need some life experience before you go into a job like care. When people come into care with different life experiences, and if they have traveled a lot, it is very valuable. It is easier to talk to residents and have a mutual exchange and understanding of different life experiences.
- When you start to reflect, people do not like it at first, but it makes you realise that you've got more potential than you realize and helps you to learn about yourself. It helps you understand the way in which you have learned to make adjustments and changes to the way you deal with people and situations. It helps you realise a deeper knowledge about yourself as a person.
- You need to put aside false modesty, but also make a fair assessment of yourself- need to get the balance right. It is not natural to promote yourself, the only time you tend to do so is when you are defending yourself. RPL can give you a quiet confidence about yourself once you've reflected on your achievements.
- It helps to make you surer of yourself and your abilities, but you need to take the time to reflect.

## **3. What have you gained from the process**

- I gained a deeper awareness of myself and my capabilities.

#### **4. What advice would you give others going through the experience?**

- Everyone should do this at some point to help gain confidence. It is good for boosting people who lack self-confidence. In terms of self-esteem, some people need more encouragement and this is a good way of doing this.
- Do not overlook things that are seemingly small focus on these because they accumulate to become huge things. For example making a cup of tea is linked to issues such as residents' choice, health and safety, communication skills.
- Some staff are quite apprehensive - they want to study but do not rate RPL as a way of doing it. But you can win people over by hearing about others' experiences of the process and seeing the end product. You need people who are willing to volunteer first, to act as pioneers. RPL champions can come from within the learner group as well as mentor group. Then the learners can become mentors.
- You can use the profiling tool to help gain the skills of reflective writing that you need for SVQs.
- People think of themselves as working in bubbles and have never thought of combining the bubbles before. RPL helps to make these connections.

#### **5. In what ways could the process be improved?**

- The paper based tool encourages and stimulates conversation, discussion, memories and so on. There is a danger that if you use an on-line tool the human personal dimension will be lost. Interaction with others is an important part of the process. It depends on someone's work setting whether on-line version is better than paper-based. The bouncing of ideas and experience in a peer group setting is very important.

#### **6. To what extent do you think is RPL a useful process for:**

- **Increasing your self confidence in terms of learning**
- You do not normally think about the things you have learnt. It increases your self-confidence, helps you realise your own abilities and achievements and then you can pass that on to other people, which in turn further increases your self-confidence.
- **Making it easier/quicker to gain a qualification**
- Use RPL as a springboard - preparing the ground for your qualification. You are going to have to do all of this in more depth

when you are doing the SVQ so this is a good preparation for example in learning how to think and write reflectively.

- Thinking about the things and courses you have done in the past makes you realize the need to update your knowledge and undertake further learning and CPD - it is not just about gaining a qualification.

**a. Making the route to achieving a qualification a more positive experience**

- If an SVQ candidate is given this tool to use, it makes the process more enjoyable and lessens the fear of undertaking a qualification.
- It will encourage others to do it as a route into a qualification
- For social services workers the thought of SVQs can be daunting, which is not a reflection of where they are academically, just in terms of their confidence levels and written skills.
- This does not involve them in anything they do not already know - they are recalling the things they have done.

**b. Thinking about the way your life and work experience can help to develop the skills and knowledge needed in a care role**

- Previous examples illustrate this.

**c. Thinking about ways in which you have developed, or could develop their practice.**

- It refreshes practice- by thinking again even about mundane tasks it makes you reflect on practice, and in doing so recognise good practice.

**d. Helping you to write about your reflective practice**

- It is useful reading someone else's work before you start writing
- Some of the other material in the resource pack might be helpful in supporting reflective writing.
- It is good to have an example- your confidence grows when you see something and recognise where you are going with this
- It will be useful in HNC, in terms of writing reflectively for that
- The staged approach used in the profiling tool to build up to the reflective account for SVQ works well.

**7. To what extent has participating in the RPL process had an impact on your practice, in terms of your everyday role?**

- By refreshing your good practice it will help in working with service users.

- It keeps you sharp.

**8. To what extent has the RPL process helped you to think about the way you would like to develop in your care role and in your career?**

- I would like more training.
- You are constantly learning in your job if you are new to a care role and need more training.
- Being able to pass on your knowledge to others- you do not want to hold on to everything, but pass your knowledge on to help others and help the home and residents.
- It is a good tool for mentors to use to encourage people and making them feel valued and worth something, it helps them move on - which is good for residents and staff.
- Learning is more important than training - when you start to want to learn, you read more and become thirsty for knowledge. Workshops are better than formal training courses because they provide you with the opportunity to share experiences and views. It is a better vehicle for driving people ahead to learn more and when they feel confident then they want to share with others and this generates excitement and enthusiasm.

**9. In what ways do you think that RPL could be built into your organisation's existing systems for recruitment, induction, training, mentoring, SVQ assessment, and professional development and progression? What are the barriers to this and in what ways could they be overcome?**

- It is good for recruiting new staff - potential staff know training is available and that managers will encourage you to develop and progress and that this is not out of reach because the starting point is your existing and prior experience.
- Viewpoint will use RPL in performance interviewing and have people on the panel who understand the process.
- It could be used on team training days with all staff to introduce them to the process-it is not just linked to doing SVQs.
- RPL will play a big part in inductions.
- It sells Viewpoint as an organisation because it is using innovative forms of learning, training, CPD.
- Even people who have been carers for a long time may benefit from undertaking the profiling tool, particularly those who may have become set in their ways. It is not just useful for new staff.
- Some people have been on a lot of training courses but haven't moved on in their learning, because they haven't reflected on what they have

learnt. It helps organisations to move away from the spoon-fed approach to training, because it makes people think critically about their own practice.

- It helps someone sell themselves on paper then they believe it and never forget it and become excited about telling others about their practice.

**Barriers:**

- Fear or lack of confidence.
- Painful. It can be painful looking back at past jobs or your current situation.
- It can be difficult to sit in a group and talk about yourself, it helps to promote your social skills.
- The internet option may be better for some people.
- The one to one support provided by the buddy system may be the best way to start for some people who find the group process daunting initially.
- Writing skills. The fear of having to write things down. Start with bullet points first, then expand points further each time, then combine writing. Mentor support is crucial in terms of building confidence in recording learning and writing reflectively.

#### **Appendix 4**

#### **SCQF Social Care RPL Pilot - Participant Questionnaire on Profiling Tool**

48 participants in the Glasgow City Council (GCC) pilot completed this questionnaire

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
1. Generally, undertaking the RPL Profiling tool has been a satisfying experience.	<b>10</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>4</b>		
2. Information about the purpose of the profiling tool was clear.	<b>13</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>4</b>		
3. Guidance provided on how to undertake the profiling tool was helpful.	<b>15</b>	<b>33</b>			
4. The profiling tool helped me to identify the knowledge and skills I have gained through my life and work experiences.	<b>13</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>1</b>
5. The profiling tool helped me identify areas for further development.	<b>13</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>8</b>		<b>4</b>
6. As a result of completing the tool I have identified what action I need to take to undertake for my further development or to prepare me for assessment.	<b>13</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>3</b>
7. The process has boosted my confidence by making me more aware of my skills and abilities.	<b>10</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>6</b>		<b>3</b>
8. The process has helped to prepare me to seek formal of my learning towards my SVQ.	<b>13</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>5</b>		<b>2</b>

**Appendix 5**  
**SSSC SCQF RPL Evaluation Phase 2**

**Focus Group Learners: Glasgow City Council**  
3 March 2008

One Learner- Social Care Worker: older people and community care, working towards SVQ3. Took part in focus group discussion with mentors  
Used profiling tool as part of SVQ candidate induction programme.

**1. To what extent has the RPL pilot been a satisfactory/useful experience?**

- a. What were the useful aspects of the experience?**
- b. What was not so useful about the experience?**

**a. Useful aspects**

- Material and guidance were useful as part of the SVQ candidate induction programme

**b. Not so useful aspects**

- I needed more time - the induction programme was only one day.

**2. What have you gained from the process?**

- I had not done reflective writing before and was daunted when it came to induction, in terms of SVQ documentation and grids. The profiling tool gave me the basis to start with. A reflective process is very different from anything I had undertaken before, and reflective writing is very different from the way I normally records information. The profiling tool helped me get into it, but it was a lot to take in, in one day.

**3. What advice would you give others going through the experience?**

- Using RPL highlights a wealth of skills and knowledge from previous jobs which the profiling tool enables candidates to draw upon.

**4. To what extent do you think is RPL a useful process for :**

**a. Increasing your self confidence in terms of learning**

- Very Useful

**b. Making it easier/quicker to gain a qualification**

- We only used RPL within induction. It helped in understanding how to produce reflective accounts – which will make it easier to produce evidence for SVQ.

**c. Thinking about the way your life and work experience can help to develop the skills and knowledge needed in a care role**

- It makes you more aware. Reflective writing reminds you of why you do the job that you do. I hadn't really thought about it before, I just did it.

**d. Helping you to write about your reflective practice**

- Very helpful.

**5. To what extent has participating in the RPL process had an impact your practice, in terms of your everyday role?**

- It is difficult to distinguish between the RPL process and SVQ experience in terms of an impact on practice. However RPL has made me more aware and conscious of my job and why I do it.



## **Appendix 6**

### **SSSC SCQF RPL Evaluation Phase 2**

#### **Mentor Focus group: Glasgow City Council**

#### **3 March 2008**

Used Profiling tool as part of SVQ candidate induction programme (one or two days in duration). Also used with some candidates on a one to one basis. Nine Mentors, all of whom SVQ Assessors and Verifiers.

#### **1. To what extent has the RPL pilot been a satisfactory/useful experience?**

**Both from your perspective as a mentor and from the perspective of the learner you worked with:**

- a. What were the useful aspects of the experience?**
- b. What was not so useful about the experience?**

##### **a. Useful aspects**

- I used RPL with a candidate for whom English is a second language. The learner had difficulty in understanding the SVQ performance criteria. Using an example from her personal life, for example working with young children in her family, was helpful in enabling her to understand what was required in terms of the SVQ.
- It was useful in helping candidates think about learning.
- It was used with a candidate who had difficulty meeting the knowledge points within a housing context, but by identifying the knowledge and skills she had gained from her own experience of gaining housing, she was able to achieve the knowledge points.
- It is useful for demystifying SVQ jargon- it translates SVQ jargon into everyday language, by enabling learners to see how they can meet the standards in their everyday life and then transfer the skills across to their social care practice. This is helpful for learners who are struggling with the SVQ language.
- Outwith the induction programme it was used with candidates who were experiencing difficulties with reflection and reflective writing. This use of the tool would be beneficial before a learner is introduced to the SVQ in induction.
- HNC students on placement who took part in the pilot grasped the reflective process immediately. It might be due to the use of reflective learning in colleges.

**b. Not so useful aspects**

- The profiling tool is based on knowledge requirements rather than performance criteria
- The profiling tool was introduced for SVQ/3 and SVQ/4 induction, but the fact that the tool was designed for SVQ/3 was confusing for SVQ4 candidates. It was not possible to adapt the tool because it is in PDF format, rather than word. If the tool, could be adapted electronically this would not have been a problem. This was therefore a practical problem, rather than a conceptual one.
- It is more meaningful to work through the tool with a learner on a one-to-one basis. It is easier to understand its use within a personal context when there is greater opportunity to tease out examples on an individual, rather than group, basis.
- Some candidates will benefit from using the tool, but others can identify relevant experience and evidence immediately.

**2. What do you think learners gained from the process?**

- Engaging in analytical reflection to explore knowledge gained through experience.
- It validates learners knowledge.
- Helps to identify their skills.
- Forges initial link between looking at everyday experience and recognising that the skills and values gained are transferable to social care practice.
- Helps candidates' self-confidence in the workplace and in completing their award.
- Candidate feedback on the tool in induction was good - a few found it patronising.
- SVQ candidates want induction to be structured around what they need to do to get their SVQ, and if the profiling tool helps them to do that, it is worthwhile.

**3. In what ways could the process be improved?**

- If assessors use the profiling tool with candidates on a one to one basis it improves their understanding of the RPL process.
- If a candidate met the knowledge points it should not matter how they achieved the knowledge. Assessors should only be concerned about gathering sufficient evidence for knowledge.

**4. What support do you need as a mentor?**

- As mentors' understanding of the RPL process increases they will be able to encourage candidates to make use of RPL as a method of identifying previous skills and knowledge that can contribute to SVQ assessment.

## **5. To what extent do you think is RPL a useful process for :**

### **a. Increasing learners' self confidence in terms of learning**

- It is helpful in terms of validating their knowledge and supporting them to identify their skills.

### **b. Making it easier/quicker to gain a qualification**

- It is a useful means of enabling someone to take a step back from the SVQ if they are struggling and to think about their personal previous experience and then relate that back to their current role. When used in this way it can help learners progress quicker through the qualification. It is particularly useful for learners for whom English is a second language.
- If the concept of reflective evidence and account is nailed down for assessment it would make it easier.
- It will make it quicker for experienced workers to get through their SVQ.
- It is difficult to quantify data in terms of whether RPL has helped to speed up gaining of qualification.

### **c. Making the route to achieving a qualification a more positive experience**

- Yes
- It helps to break down the fear factor - learners feel more comfortable about what they are being asked to do in terms of reflection.
- If a learner's previous experience of learning has been negative, RPL can help to overcome this negativity by valuing and building on existing skills and knowledge gained throughout experience.
- There is a need to think about other ways to use RPL.
- Using the profiling tool as a stand alone tool to understand reflection and the learning process is valuable as part of the route of achieving a qualification.
- It is a better process on a one-to one basis than on a group basis.

### **d. Thinking about ways in which learners have developed, or could develop their practice.**

- Learners can become much more analytical and reflective about what they are doing and why they are doing it.
- This depends on the individual learner, and varying levels of consciousness of people - some find it easier to embrace reflective practice than others.

**e. Helping learners to write about their reflective practice**

- It can help learners to write reflectively- this is part of the SVQ process, but it is useful for learners who are experiencing difficulties with this aspect of SVQs.

**6. To what extent has participating in the RPL process had an impact learner's practice?**

- It is possible that it can make learners more conscious of what they are doing and why.

**7. To what extent has the RPL process helped learners to think about the way they would like to develop in their care role and in their career?**

- Too early.
- Any reflection is positive in this respect.
- Could potentially be used as part of Unit HSC 33 Reflect and Develop your Practice.
- It is a good precursory tool to develop the idea of reflection in induction and on a one-to-one basis - if it works for someone, then it is a good resource.

**8. In what ways do you think that RPL could be built into your organisation's existing systems for recruitment, induction, training, mentoring, SVQ assessment, and professional development and progression? What are the barriers to this and in what ways could they be overcome?**

- It can be used in recruitment, particularly for people who have experience outwith social services, and can bring relevant transferable aspects of that experience to a social services role.
- The profiling tool should be separated out from the SVQ- currently it is written in SVQ terms, but could be used for a range of different purposes.
- It is a process that can be used in any sector
- RPL is a useful tool in terms of supervision, ie reflecting on areas and situations

## Appendix 7

### SSSC SCQF RPL Evaluation Phase 2

**Mentor Feedback  
Inclusion Glasgow  
3 March 2008**

Used profiling tool as part of interview process and core training programme for support workers.

**1. To what extent has the RPL pilot been a satisfactory/useful experience?**

**Both from your perspective as a mentor and from the perspective of the learner you worked with:**

- a. What were the useful aspects of the experience?**
- b. What was not so useful about the experience?**

**a. Useful aspects**

- It was useful in getting people to think about what they had learned through their previous experiences and how this is relevant to the role they are now undertaking. You could see the relief in peoples' faces when they realised that they have got these skills, and are capable of doing this job because of other experiences, such as working in a supermarket. RPL helps to tease this out. RPL is commenced in the interview process, and recorded on an interview sheet which then forms the starting point for the learning and development pack when the support workers start.

**b. Not so useful aspects**

- None

**2. What do you think learners gained from the process?**

- Confidence in terms of being able to do their job.
- A completed profiling tool, having felt comfortable about doing it and understanding that this belongs to them and are responsible for updating it.

**3. In what ways could the process be improved?**

- Too early in the process too know - no one came up with anything that was problematic. When Service Managers start using the materials as part of the ILM Diploma other issues may emerge.

#### **4. What support do you need as a mentor?**

- You need to read through the information before you start - to familiarise yourself and ensure you are up to speed.

#### **5. To what extent do you think is RPL a useful process for :**

##### **a. Increasing learners' self confidence in terms of learning**

- Very useful.

##### **b. Making it easier/quicker to gain a qualification**

- If learners are going towards an SVQ with their core training, RPL will form a major part of that. It is hoped that the core training will be accredited in relation to the SVQ.

##### **c. Making the route to achieving a qualification a more positive experience**

- Inclusion Glasgow is a learning organisation which actively promotes learning and is open to new ideas. It is committed to giving people recognition for their skills and getting a qualification is part of this. What Inclusion Glasgow provides in its core training will contribute to this. The focus in training is encouraging people to learn and be reflective during their training.

##### **d. Thinking about the way life and work experience can help to develop the skills and knowledge needed in a care role**

- Very useful- Inclusion Glasgow recruits young people, for whom caring is their career of choice and who are highly enthusiastic. It also recruits older people who are bringing in life skills, experience of families etc.

##### **e. Thinking about ways in which learners have developed, or could develop their practice.**

- RPL helps them to think about how they are supporting their clients, for example in relation to issues such as communication and vulnerability in terms of giving people choices. It made them think about extent to which, and the ways in which, they offer choice to their clients and as such it has improved their practice. It also gets learners to think for themselves.

##### **f. Helping learners to write about their reflective practice**

- As part of their training, learners were given time to write reflective notes, based on thinking about an experience and how they felt it went. They also write reflective notes on how they felt the training

went. They are reminded that this is a living document and can be added to.

**6. To what extent has participating in the RPL process had an impact learner's practice?**

- Positive impact on practice for example avoiding assumptions about client choices, improving communication etc.

**7. To what extent has the RPL process helped learners to think about the way they would like to develop in their care role and in their career?**

- The majority of staff has been with Inclusion Glasgow for a long time. For newer starts and young people, working for IG is a vocation rather than a career. People want to learn, get qualifications and progress. Inclusion Glasgow is a small organisation so opportunities for promotion are not always available. Inclusion Glasgow is happy to take the risk and encourage learners to get qualifications and progress elsewhere.

**8. In what ways do you think that RPL could be built into your organisation's existing systems for recruitment, induction, training, mentoring, SVQ assessment, and professional development and progression? What are the barriers to this and in what ways could they be overcome?**

- Built into recruitment, induction and training and heading towards an SVQ.
- Professional development for Managers

**Barriers-**

- Explaining that RPL is beneficial and giving learners the help they need to get through it.
- Literacy is not a barrier because the organisation is used to supporting this. Further barriers may become apparent when it is used in more training.

**Appendix 8**  
**RPL Evaluation: Perth and Kinross**  
**Health and Social Care Academy Oct – Nov 2007**

**Student Evaluation**

What we liked:

- it was new
- it changed my outlook
- there was a lot of practical information
- the placements – would have liked more of them
- the relationship with mentor
- finding out about different types of jobs

What we did not like so much:

- sometimes the pace was too fast
- placements were not long enough
- we did not always know where we were going next
- it did not seem enough time

What has changed for you because of RPL:

- my outlook is different
- I'm better at getting information
- I found out what I do not know yet
- it made me ready to take on new things
- I've signed up for new courses because of it
- I've realized how important qualifications are for my future
- I want to go on and get more qualifications
- I'm using the library now
- I'm looking at work and other opportunities (eg more learning and voluntary work)

What would you like to see as improvements for the future:

- would like more placement experience
- more small group and individual work
- A slower pace



**RPL Evaluation: Perth & Kinross  
Health and Social Care Academy Oct – Nov 2007**

**Mentor/Assessor Evaluation**

To what extent has the RPL pilot been successful/useful:

The useful aspects were:

- increased confidence
- individualized recognition of previous learning

The not so useful aspects were:

- evidencing Unit HSC23
- time pressures

What do you think the learners gained:

- some of the learners have been enabled to take on new courses because of their experience

In what ways would the process be removed:

- No comments

What support do you need as a mentor:

- More time/opportunity to study the material
- Support in role

To what extent do you think RPL is a useful process:

- it increased confidence
- it gives a positive view of learning
- made learners more aware of different care roles
- made learners more aware of care providers
- helped develop some learners writing skills

To what extent has participating in the RPL process had an impact on the learner's practice:

- learners were better prepared for placement

To what extent has the RPL process helped learners to think about the way they would like to develop in their career role and career:

- in the context of placement it helped people decide what they did/did not want to do