FACILITATING THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING: TOOLKIT

scqf®

scottish credit and
qualifications framework

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Recognition of Prior Learning Toolkit was developed by the SCQF Partnership as part of the work to further implement the recognition of prior learning (RPL) using the SCQF.

INTRODUCTION

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the process for recognising learning that has its source in experience and/or previous formal, non-formal and informal[1] learning contexts. This includes knowledge and skills gained within school, college and university and outside formal learning situations such as through life and work experiences.

The focus of this RPL Toolkit is on recognising learning that is gained from experience rather than from formal learning. Learning from experience is different from formal learning: it is largely unstructured, it is more personal and more individualised and is often unconsciously gained. It is, however, just as real as learning acquired in a formal academic setting. In addition, it can be more permanent as it is not readily forgotten or lost.

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Partnership, in collaboration with the SCQF RPL Network and other stakeholders, has developed this RPL Toolkit for use by learning and training providers, employers and human resource personnel. It contains a detailed explanation of RPL, how it fits with the SCQF, explains the process for organisations and provides a number of activities to support facilitators working with learners. Annexes 2 and 3 contain handouts and activities that can be copied for learners.

Learners might want to map their prior learning against a particular job requirement or particular qualification or learning programme. As a learning provider or employer you will need to be aware of the wide range of learning provision that is available in the relevant field or sector.

Some learners might be aiming to undertake a formal programme of learning at a college or university or as part of workplace learning and might therefore be seeking SCQF credit. Others might want to benchmark their skills and learning gained through experience as part of their personal development or for career planning. Whatever the reason for embarking on the RPL process, this generic RPL Toolkit can be used by all organisations to support learners or employees in the recognition of their prior learning. You are free to adapt and tailor the activities and the exercises in Annexes 2 and 3 to suit the particular needs and goals of your learners and the purpose of the RPL activity.

[1]See Annex 1 for definitions of formal, non-formal and informal learning

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SECTION 1: WHAT IS THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL)?

WHAT DOES RPL MEAN?

RPL is the process for recognising learning that has its source in experience and/or previous formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts[2]. The focus for this RPL Toolkit is for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Learners may already have SCQF Credit Points from formal learning. In some cases it may be possible to transfer SCQF Credit Points that have previously been awarded to another qualification or learning programme. Information on SCQF Credit Transfer can be found in the SCQF Handbook: User Guide.

Using RPL for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning involves a review of past experiences. Learners reflect on their experience in order to discover and then express what these experiences have taught them. RPL is a process through which learning gained from experience can be recognised and used. It also includes learning gained through non-formal learning and training programmes in the workplace, in the community and in the voluntary sector. People can gain a range of knowledge and skills through:

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

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

The RPL process can help people to value and build on the learning they have gained informally. RPL enables learners to realise what they have learnt through their experiences and to demonstrate this to others. It reveals the learner's potential and capacity to learn from future experiences.

This recognition may allow individuals to go on to do more study or training if they choose. It may also help someone if they are, for example:

- planning their career
- planning their personal development
- wanting to take a more active part in their community.

[2]See Annex 1 for definitions of formal, non-formal and informal learning

RPL – BENEFITS FOR INDIVIDUALS

RPL can be used by a wide range of people either to help them re-enter learning or to contribute towards a programme of learning. Through RPL it may be possible to make a claim for SCQF Credit Points which can reduce the amount of time needed to achieve the required learning programme or qualification. Those who might benefit include:

- people who have been out of the education system for a long time and/or who may lack formal qualifications and/or confidence as learners
- adults returning to education
- unemployed people looking for a way to demonstrate their learning to prospective employers
- people wanting to improve upon existing qualifications
- those wanting to re-train or change careers
- students at colleges, higher education institutions (HEIs) and other learning and training providers
- people who have taken non-formal learning or training in the workplace or through community-based learning
- people who have gained a range of skills and knowledge through volunteering or through activities or projects within their community
- school students who have been involved in extra-curricular activities.

People wishing to claim RPL may not have a strong academic education - but they do need to be keen to learn from and about their own experiences and about themselves. It is important to stress that recognition is given for what has been learned from experience and not for the experience itself.

RPL can be used where learners can demonstrate that through their experience, they have already gained the relevant knowledge and skills required for particular units of a learning programme or qualification or for a particular job role.

RPL reinforces the concept of lifelong learning as it helps individuals to:

- think about the learning they have already achieved and plan how to build on this learning to meet their personal and career goals
- get a place on a programme at a college or university or learning and training provider, if they don't have the normal entry qualifications but can show that they have the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding
- gain credit towards a qualification to shorten the normal period of learning by evidencing that they already have the knowledge, skills and understanding needed for particular parts of the programme or qualification (e.g. units or modules)
- increase their self esteem by recognising their achievements in learning
- plan their career development and educational path
- identify areas of competence and areas requiring further study.

RPL can help people to consider their options and make decisions about the direction they want to take. The experience of using RPL benefits learners in the following ways:

- learners will have the opportunity to reflect on what they have achieved so far through their experiences in terms of their learning and skills
- learners will think about their goals and what they need to do in order to achieve them: e.g. do a training course, pursue a vocational award, join an educational programme at college or university or other learning and training provider, apply for, or change, jobs
- it also helps to build confidence - it enables learners to identify the learning they have gained through experience, recognise their strengths and value their achievements. This can motivate a learner to continue learning.

BENEFITS FOR LEARNING AND TRAINING PROVIDERS

RPL benefits learning and training providers in a range of ways as it can:

- enable greater retention of learners
- widen access to a range of learners
- increase participation of learners from non-traditional learning backgrounds.

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYERS:

RPL can support employers by:

- helping to identify employees' skills effectively
- helping to identify skills gaps in organisations
- helping to identify appropriate training opportunities
- reducing the time required in employee training due to minimised duplication of learning
- increasing motivation and interest in workplace activities on the part of the employee/learner
- generating new ideas and developments for the organisation as a result of the employee/learner reflecting on work activities.

As a result, employers may find that RPL can lead to increased employee retention and reduced recruitment and training costs.

HOW CAN RPL BE USED IN THE WORKPLACE?

Employers can use RPL to support all aspects of workforce development:

Recruitment: By the incorporation of an RPL process into the interview, an 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 they are applying for.

Induction: Information gained in the interview through reflecting on prior experiences can be used as part of the induction process. By using RPL within induction processes new employees can 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 work practice.

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

Gaining qualifications: RPL can be used to support workers to recognise their learning, including those who lack confidence as learners and/or who are reluctant to engage in formal learning. It can also accelerate the process of achieving qualifications through the recognition and award of SCQF Credit Points for prior informal or non-formal learning.

WHO TAKES THE LEARNER THROUGH THE RPL PROCESS?

Whether they are using RPL for personal development purposes or for SCQF Credit Points, learners and employees are likely to be more effective in recognising their prior learning if they are given support to identify how their previous learning links with the requirements for the job role or the qualification or learning programme against which they are seeking recognition.

It is recommended that learning providers and employers implementing RPL identify appropriate facilitators who can support learners to gain recognition of their learning. In particular, those making a claim for credit will need to understand exactly how the evidence of learning which they provide will be assessed against the qualification or programme of learning for which they are seeking credit.

Section 4 in the RPL Toolkit provides information on supporting learners in the RPL process and handouts and activities are contained in Annex 2 and Annex 3. The Toolkit provides resources to support those involved in helping learners or employees to recognise their learning from experience. Further details on the recognition of prior learning are available in the SCQF Handbook: User Guide.

SCQF Levels	SQA Qualifications				Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions	Scottish Vocational Qualifications
12					DOCTORAL DEGREE	
11					INTEGRATED MASTERS DEGREE / MASTERS DEGREE POST GRADUATE DIPLOMA POST GRADUATE CERTIFICATE	SVQ5
10					HONOURS DEGREE GRADUATE DIPLOMA GRADUATE CERTIFICATE	
9			PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AWARD		BACHELORS / ORDINARY DEGREE GRADUATE DIPLOMA GRADUATE CERTIFICATE	SVQ4
8		HIGHER NATIONAL DIPLOMA			DIPLOMA OF HIGHER EDUCATION	
7	ADVANCED HIGHER SCOTTISH BACCALAUREATE	HIGHER NATIONAL CERTIFICATE			CERTIFICATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION	SVQ3
6	HIGHER					
5	INTERMEDIATE 2 CREDIT STANDARD GRADE					SVQ2
4	INTERMEDIATE 1 GENERAL STANDARD GRADE	NATIONAL CERTIFICATE	NATIONAL PROGRESSION AWARD			SVQ1
3	ACCESS 3 FOUNDATION STANDARD GRADE					
2	ACCESS 2					
1	ACCESS 1					

SECTION 2: USING THE SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK IN THE RPL PROCESS

A variety of approaches to RPL can be developed and used by learning providers or employers to meet the needs and goals of learner groups in different sectors. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and its Core Principles for RPL provide tools which help learning providers and employers to achieve consistency in the recognition of prior learning.

WHAT IS THE SCQF?

The SCQF is Scotland's lifelong learning framework. It provides a shared context for learning in Scotland. Within the overall context of lifelong learning the aims of the SCQF are to:

- help people of all ages and circumstances to access appropriate education and training over their lifetime to fulfill their personal, social and economic potential;
- enable employers, learners and the public in general to understand the full range of Scottish qualifications, how the qualifications relate to each other, and how different types of qualifications can contribute to improving the skills of the workforce.

The SCQF provides a way of comparing qualifications in Scotland. It starts with level 1, which indicates basic learning, and goes up to level 12 which indicates very complex learning. The levels are defined by the SCQF Level Descriptors which show how the learning gets more demanding as the level of the learning rises.

The SCQF helps to show how different qualifications and learning programmes relate to each other. This allows learners to identify progression routes between qualifications, and helps to make credit transfer opportunities more visible. Mainstream Scottish qualifications such as, for example, Standard Grade, Highers, Higher National Certificates and Diplomas, Degrees and Doctorates, have SCQF Levels and SCQF Credit Points assigned to them.

THE ROLE OF THE SCQF FOR RPL

It is possible to use the SCQF for RPL. Recognising prior learning in the context of the SCQF helps the learner, under the guidance of their learning provider or employer to:

- reflect on and express their learning from experience
- identify how that learning maps to the levels set out in the SCQF Level Descriptors.

Learners can compare the evidence of their learning with the SCQF Level Descriptors which have 5 characteristics. These provide a way to compare the level of an individual's learning in areas of:

- Knowledge and understanding;
- Practice: applied knowledge and understanding;
- Generic cognitive skills;
- Communication, ICT and numeracy skills; and
- Autonomy, accountability and working with others.

SCQF RPL CORE PRINCIPLES

RPL can be used for personal and career development, to gain entry to a qualification or learning programme or for the award of SCQF Credit Points. However, all RPL provision whether for personal/career development or for credit, should be underpinned by the SCQF RPL Core Principles, which are that RPL should be:

- learner focused
- accessible
- flexible
- reliable, transparent and consistent
- quality assured.

The aim of the SCQF RPL Core Principles is to make sure that there is effective, quality-assured practice that will enable all users of the SCQF to have confidence in the outcomes of RPL.

LEARNER FOCUSED

Learners may have acquired skills and knowledge through previous work, volunteering, or training that is comparable to that required for a particular job role, or learning programme. If they can evidence the learning then RPL might be a good option for them. RPL should be a gateway and not a barrier to learning. It should promote the positive aspects of an individual's learning experience, not its deficiency. RPL should be a voluntary activity on the part of the learner and the learner's needs and reasons for recognition should be paramount.

ACCESSIBLE

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

- the availability of appropriate initial information and advice (awareness raising)
- the development of systems which are affordable and time-efficient for the learner and for the learning provider or employer
- processes which are easy to understand and implement
- embedding RPL in the design stage of a learning programme in order for it to become an integral part of the learning provision.

FLEXIBLE

The approach taken to RPL by the learning provider or employer needs to be flexible enough to accommodate the range of learning needs, goals and experiences of the learners with whom they are working.

RELIABLE, TRANSPARENT & CONSISTENT

In managing RPL processes, reliability, transparency and consistency are necessary to make sure there is confidence in the outcomes.

QUALITY ASSURED

RPL should be underpinned by quality assurance mechanisms. Verification of RPL for personal and career development should focus on ensuring that the use of the SCQF Level Descriptors is consistently applied.

RPL for the award of SCQF Credit Points must be integrated within a learning provider's existing quality assurance processes and must be available for scrutiny by appropriate external quality assurance, for example by an awarding body or an external auditing body.

In order to provide their evidence, learners will have to demonstrate orally and/or through written work that they have gained skills and knowledge through their experiences. This involves reflecting on those experiences, drawing out from them what has been learned then writing this down or talking about it with the facilitator. The writing and the discussion with the facilitator will help to provide the evidence needed. The role of the facilitator is described in greater detail in section 4 – Supporting Learners in the RPL Process.

SECTION 3: HOW CAN RPL BE USED?

RPL can be used for personal or career development, to gain entry to a qualification as an alternative to the normal entry requirements or for the award of SCQF Credit Points towards a qualification or learning programme.

RPL FOR PERSONAL/CAREER DEVELOPMENT - OR FORMATIVE RECOGNITION

RPL for personal/career development or formative recognition focuses on recognising prior informal or non-formal learning as part of further learning and development. Its purpose is to build a learner's confidence, recognise skills and knowledge gained through experience, map these to the SCQF Level Descriptors to identify ways in which these can be developed through further learning or career opportunities. The outcome of this process can be an action plan or personal or career development plan. For some people this may be the first stage of an RPL claim for SCQF Credit Points but it can also be an end in itself.

RPL TO GAIN ENTRY TO A LEARNING PROGRAMME

Colleges, universities and other learning and training providers generally give guidance on normal entry requirements for programmes. However, learners may be able to use RPL as an alternative to the stated requirements. In these cases, learners would have to demonstrate that they have the knowledge and skills which are comparable to the entry requirements. This form of recognition can be described as RPL for entry and will involve some form of assessment, which may be written and/or oral.

RPL FOR THE AWARD OF SCQF CREDIT POINTS - OR SUMMATIVE RECOGNITION

RPL for the award of SCQF Credit Points is a process of assessing prior informal or non-formal learning such as that gained through life and work experience. This learning will have taken place before a learner enters a formal learning programme or embarks on a qualification and it will not previously have been formally credit rated for the SCQF.

An RPL claim for credit involves the comparison of the individual's learning to the aims and/or learning outcomes of the qualification or learning programme for which credit is being sought. The RPL process for the award of SCQF Credit Points will determine the SCQF Level and the number of SCQF Credit Points that can be awarded.

The outcome of an RPL claim for credit may be the award of SCQF Credit Points within a qualification or learning programme, or for entry to a programme of study, possibly at an advanced level.

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

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

WHAT DOES RPL INVOLVE?

All forms of RPL, whether for career or personal development or for the award of SCQF Credit Points, will involve the learner in:

- reflecting on experiences
- identifying the learning gained from these experiences
- providing evidence of the learning.

The type of evidence people need to provide in order to demonstrate their learning will vary depending on the purpose for which they are using RPL. Those who are using RPL to help them identify a learning or career development pathway or to build their confidence before applying for a formal learning programme will not need to supply the same type or amount of evidence as those using RPL to gain SCQF Credit Points within a programme or towards a qualification.

Evidence of learning can be gathered in a number of different ways and learners should be provided with guidance on the method to be used. Learners should be supported in the gathering or production of this evidence. Although not an exhaustive list, the following examples are a range of approaches that could be adopted:

- reflective accounts;
- project work;
- professional discussion or oral assessment;
- assessment on demand;
- observation of practice or simulation;
- benchmarking;
- existing work based learning practices in evaluation and assessment;
- profiling;
- record of volunteer learning and experience;
- Europass CV (ECV);
- portfolio;
- structured interview.

The main points to keep in mind are that the evidence should be appropriate, in terms of type, level and breadth, to the RPL process being used and should be as streamlined as possible.

ASSESSMENT OF RPL FOR CREDIT

If a learner is seeking recognition of his or her learning to gain entry to a programme or course at a college, university, or learning and training provider, the RPL claim will be assessed by an expert at the relevant organisation. The purpose of this assessment will be to confirm that the RPL claim is an appropriate alternative to the normal entry requirements. If the assessor is satisfied that the learner has the knowledge and skills for the learning claimed, the learner would be awarded entry to the relevant programme or course.

If a learner is using the RPL process to seek credit within a programme or course at a college, university or learning and training provider, the claim and associated evidence will be considered by assessors at that institution. Credit can only be awarded if the claim is formally assessed via the organisation's assessment processes e.g. by an approved assessor for the qualification concerned.

The assessment criteria for RPL claims for credit require that the learning demonstrates:

- acceptability
- sufficiency
- authenticity
- currency.

ENSURING QUALITY

The RPL procedures whether for personal/career development, or for entry and credit, should meet the requirements set out in the SCQF Handbook: User Guide. They should be consistent, transparent and accessible.

For more information on these processes, and for details of the SCQF Level Descriptors, see the SCQF Handbook at www.scqf.org.uk/Resources

SECTION 4: SUPPORTING LEARNERS IN THE RPL PROCESS

Learners wishing to use RPL will usually require support to identify how their learning links with the SCQF level or programme of learning against which they are seeking recognition. In particular, those making a claim for SCQF Credit Points will need to understand exactly how the evidence of learning that they provide will be assessed against the qualification or programme of learning for which they are seeking credit. As a result, it is recommended that learning providers and employers who are implementing RPL identify appropriate facilitators who can support learners to gain recognition of their learning.

The facilitator's task in supporting learners is to make sure that learners have access to the relevant material and information about the qualification, or learning programme or job requirements concerned. Both the facilitator and the learner need to be aware of the requirements of the relevant qualification or learning programme, the awarding body and the learning outcomes. The facilitator should use this information to guide the learner and to help to keep their expectations realistic.

The first step in the RPL process is to seek evidence of how the learner's experiential learning links to the learning outcomes of the qualification or learning programme or particular job requirements.

If RPL is being used for entry to college or university or towards a qualification or learning programme, it is essential that formal contact is made at an early stage in the process with the college, university or learning and training provider where the learner's evidence of experiential learning will be assessed.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY FACILITATOR?

The facilitator is someone who supports the learner as s/he undertakes the RPL process. The facilitator could be a line manager, supervisor, mentor, experienced colleague, teacher or trainer. They could be a member of staff in the same organisation as the learner or might be an individual acting as a facilitator for a number of learners within different organisations.

In all cases, the facilitator needs to have the knowledge and skills required to ensure that the learner knows how to generate the evidence of learning required.

WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT WILL A FACILITATOR PROVIDE?

Whatever their other duties in relation to the learner, it is important to recognise that the facilitator role has additional and separate responsibilities. When acting as a facilitator for the RPL process they will be:

- providing learners with information and guidance on the RPL process
- helping learners to understanding the ways in which they can learn through their experience and the RPL process
- helping learners to understand and use the SCQF Level Descriptors and the learning outcomes of their required qualification/learning programme or the specific job requirements as the benchmarks against which their learning will be measured
- supporting learners to identify learning gained through experience, selecting and producing evidence of that learning, and identifying areas for further learning
- providing guidance on gathering and presenting evidence of learning
- where RPL is being used to claim credit, working with the assessor in order to understand the requirements for assessment so that the learner can be guided appropriately.

WHAT DOES THE FACILITATOR'S ROLE INVOLVE?

At the beginning of the process it is important for the facilitator to discuss with the learner their respective roles as well as the role of the assessor, to ensure a mutual understanding of, and agreement on, their respective roles and duties. One way of achieving this clarity of understanding is to develop a formal agreement between facilitator and learner, spelling out their individual responsibilities. Whilst this is not an essential requirement of the RPL process, it might be a useful way of ensuring that all parties understand and adhere to their respective roles in the process.

The support role of the facilitator will include meeting with the learner on an individual basis and/or with a group of learners both to provide initial guidance and to discuss progress. Meetings with the learner should include:

- clarifying the task set
- identifying stages/steps to take
- identifying problems and helping learners to find ways of dealing with these
- identifying areas of strength and how to use them
- reflecting on activities to identify what went well and not so well, and what can be learnt from this
- discussing evidence that can demonstrate the individual's learning
- deciding actions to be taken and identifying short-term goals
- providing feedback
- helping the learner to build confidence.

It is suggested that meetings with learners should be timetabled to take place at appropriate points in the RPL process. The facilitator and the learner(s) will need to agree a method of keeping records of these meetings. The record should note:

- the dates of meetings
- the issues being discussed
- any follow up action - by whom and by what date.

The facilitator will also support the learners in their reflection on their prior experiences in order to identify their learning and the potential evidence of this learning. This can be done by completing an RPL profile of the learner and an example of an RPL Profiling Tool is given in Handout 8. Whilst the facilitator may give guidance on the production of evidence and preparation for assessment, they must not be involved in the actual development of that evidence. For example, the facilitator can help a learner to identify evidence of learning gained through experience but must not be involved in the actual writing of the learner's reflective accounts.

ANNEX 1

SUPPORTING INFORMATION FOR FACILITATORS

ANNEX 1: SUPPORTING INFORMATION FOR FACILITATORS

Annex 1 provides information on how people learn through experience. This is intended to help you to facilitate the learners' exercises and activities in the toolkit.

UNDERSTANDING HOW PEOPLE LEARN THROUGH EXPERIENCE

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

People can gain a range of strengths and skills through:

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

We use terms like informal or experiential learning, or learning from experience to describe this kind of learning. Whatever we call it, this kind of learning is different from 'formal learning'. It is largely unstructured, it is more personal, more individualised and is often unconsciously gained.
To explain the differences, the EU definition of the different types of learning are:

Formal learning takes place within the context of programmes delivered by learning and training providers, is assessed and leads to recognised qualifications.

Non-formal learning takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training. It may be assessed but does not typically lead to formal certification, for example, learning and training activities taken in the workplace, voluntary sector or trade union and through community-based learning.

Informal learning can be defined as experiential learning and takes place through life and work experiences. It is often unintentional learning. The learner may not recognise at the time of the experience that it contributed to the development of their skills and knowledge. This recognition may only happen retrospectively through the RPL process, unless the experiences take place as part of a planned experiential or work-based learning, programme.

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

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

HOW DO WE LEARN FROM EXPERIENCE?[1]

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

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

Various attempts have been made to describe the process of experiential learning but it is often described as a learning cycle.[2]
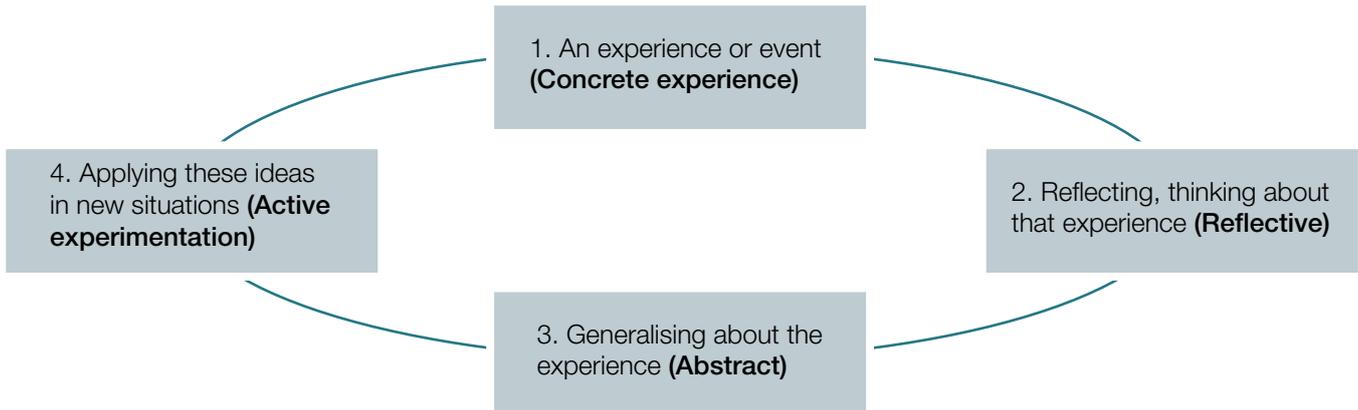
According to this cycle:

STAGE 1
Learning begins with a real experience - this can be any experience or 'event'. It may be a specific experience or a series of related tasks/experiences (such as a job we have done, bringing up a child, learning to drive, engaging in voluntary or community activities, or some type of event that we observe).

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

STAGE 3
Thinking about the experience may make people realise that 'there is more to it than meets the eye', that the experience is simply one example of a pattern of things. We may begin to make connections (with previous experiences or theories of work practice) to form ideas or theories about what that pattern is. We may make generalisations about the experience. We may, of course, then confirm those ideas by repeating similar experiences and maybe observing similar results.

STAGE 4
However, they may go on to apply those ideas to new or different situations in order to test them out. If ideas are borne out in practice then they are likely to apply them in future situations/experiences, and so the cycle may be repeated.

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

The experiential learning cycle, therefore, not only involves doing, but also reflecting, processing, thinking and further understanding. Kolb's cycle of experiential learning illustrates the idea of perpetuation – that the learning leads to the action, that is in fact experimentation, which leads to more experience and reflection (Moon, 2000). The role as facilitator will be to support learners as they move through each stage of the cycle, through listening and exploratory questioning.

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

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

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

[2]Kolb, D. 1984. Experiential Learning. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall. An evaluation of Kolb by the CLD sector can be found on the informal education website: http://www.infed.org/biblio/b-explrn.htm

WHAT TYPES OF EXPERIENCE CAN PEOPLE LEARN FROM?

People can learn from any experience they have had or some event they have observed which was significant for them in some way. It could be from work, home, leisure - anything at all - as long as they feel it was significant. It might be significant because it:

- was enjoyable
- affected them deeply
- changed their outlook on life
- taught them a great deal
- had successful outcomes
- was an experience they never want to repeat!
- gave them a sense of achievement
- earned them respect and recognition from others
- involved a major investment of time, energy or effort
- changed the way they did things.

Examples of types of learning experience include, but are not limited to:

- a particular piece of work, task or project that was undertaken at work, or through community learning and development or voluntary work, or through independent study
- the experience of doing a particular job (paid or unpaid) over a period of time
- an educational or training course that they attended
- the experience of training or teaching others, either formally or informally.

UNDERSTANDING REFLECTION

Learning through reflection is a skill that involves thinking about our experiences from the past, thinking about feelings about those experiences and drawing out some of the lessons that have been learned from those experiences. Reflection enables the integration of new experiences and understanding with previous or existing knowledge and skills. It can therefore be a transformative process. It can assist with the development of new skills, knowledge, perceptions and behaviours.

Learners can reflect on their learning in a number of ways. For example, reflection might be something that is done alone, or it might occur in a more social setting - as part of a group learning situation - whereby talking about and reflecting on experiences and thoughts can be shared with other people.

Reflection is something done as part of day-to-day life. As people carry out activities, sometimes the way they do things is changed according to that reflection. At other times, reflection is used long after an event or activity has been completed. In both cases, reflection can help people learn from themselves and their experiences.

HOW DO WE REFLECT?

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

The facilitator might ask the learner:

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

Questions like these force learners to think about their experiences and tease out some of the learning they have accomplished from what they have done. This may help them to understand the level of learning they have achieved and decide what they want to do in the future, with regard to further training or learning or career development.

When people reflect on their experiences or personal events in their lives they need to be able to describe clearly to others what happened during that event, when it happened, where it happened, who was involved, what the outcome of the event was, how long it lasted and so on. They also need to be able to identify the skills and knowledge that they used or learned during that event. For example, if someone chooses to reflect on their experience of running a neighbourhood sports club they might say that they needed:

- organisational skills (being able to organise venues and teams)
- communication skills (being able to share information with others and listen to the requirements of others)
- social and interpersonal skills (ability to work with others and encourage them to engage with specific tasks)
- problem-solving skills (to be able to manage fixtures and events)
- information gathering skills (to find out about accessing grants)
- financial skills (to be able to account for funds)
- knowledge about procedures and processes (for example health and safety requirements).

Whatever the event upon which they are reflecting, learners need to focus their thoughts on the skills and knowledge that they used or learned by asking themselves:

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

TRYING OUT REFLECTION

Facilitators may wish to try out reflection for themselves. Think of a particular experience that helped you learn something and ask yourself the questions in Kolb's cycle, starting with 'What happened?'. When you have done this complete the Reflective Exercise thinking of responses to each of the questions on the sheet.

REFLECTIVE WRITING

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

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

Reflective evidence demonstrates the learner's understanding of his or her role, of how s/he has dealt with particular issues, or incidents. These may be experiences that went well or badly. The important thing is for the learner to demonstrate what they learned.

Reflective evidence can be provided in a variety of ways including:

- written accounts;
- a case study;
- a reflective diary/learning log extracts; or
- through a structured interview with an assessor.

Some Awarding Bodies have specific units to assist with this and the RPL process as a whole.

HOW FACILITATING CAN HELP YOUR OWN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Acting as a facilitator can contribute to your own continuing professional development and can generate evidence for further professional qualifications possibly in your own sector or possibly in other more generic areas such as, for example, learning and development. By helping your learners to reflect, you will further develop your own skills of reflection. Your reflection may focus on the development of your own work practice and job role, or it may be specifically within the context of supporting the learning and development of others. In other words, through supporting the RPL process of the learners you might be able to achieve credit for the learning you gain from this as part of your own development goals.

If you want to do this you should:

- seek guidance from your employer on the ways in which the facilitation experience could contribute to your own professional development goals
- keep a record of the activities you carry out as a facilitator - your record could include support materials you have developed and used or reports you have produced as part of an evaluation or monitoring process or as part of a performance appraisal process
- keep a reflective diary recording your reflections on your experiences as a facilitator - this will assist you in the production of reflective evidence.

ANNEX 2

HANDOUTS FOR LEARNERS

HANDOUT 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR INFORMAL AND NON-FORMAL LEARNING (RPL)

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PRIOR INFORMAL AND NON-FORMAL LEARNING AND RPL?

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

RPL is a process through which the learning you have gained from experience can be counted.

RPL can help you to:

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

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

RPL PROFILING

RPL can help you get recognition for the learning you have gained through your life and work experiences. You are starting out by using RPL as part of this programme to help you achieve your goals. It will do this through building your confidence as a learner and developing your skills of reflection.

You will carry out activities with your facilitator to prepare you to do RPL profiling. This profiling will support you in thinking about the extent of what you have achieved, through your life and work experiences and, where applicable, meet the elements of the sectoral standards and/or qualification or the learning programme that you are seeking.

Your facilitator will support you in this through:

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

Profiling will help you to identify:

- the key learning experiences which have helped you to achieve these elements;
- any further action you need to take to fully achieve or demonstrate the elements.

This further action might include further training, learning and development or producing, gathering and selecting evidence to enable assessment towards the qualification or the sectoral standards that you are seeking.

People can gain a range of strengths and skills through:

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

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

RPL can help you to:

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

HANDOUT 2: RPL AND THE SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (SCQF)

The SCQF is Scotland's lifelong learning framework. It provides a shared context for learning in Scotland. Within the overall context of lifelong learning the aims of the SCQF are to:

- help people of all ages and circumstances to access appropriate education and training over their lifetime to fulfill their personal, social and economic potential; and
- enable employers, learners and the public in general to understand the full range of Scottish qualifications, how the qualifications relate to each other, and how different types of qualifications can contribute to improving the skills of the workforce.

The SCQF provides a way of comparing qualifications in Scotland. It starts with level 1, which indicates very basic learning, and goes up to level 12 which indicates very complex learning. The levels are defined by level descriptors which show how the learning gets more demanding as the level of the learning rises. Putting learning into the SCQF helps to show how different qualifications relate to each other. This allows learners to identify progression routes between qualifications, and helps to make credit transfer opportunities more visible.

The mainstream qualifications such as, for example, Standard Grade, Highers, Higher National Certificates and Diplomas, Degrees and Doctorates are already in the SCQF.

It is also possible to use the SCQF for less formal learning than these mainstream qualifications. Learners whose learning is experiential and who are following the RPL route can compare the evidence of their learning with the descriptors and with the learning outcomes of the required qualification or learning programme or particular job requirements.

By using the SCQF it is possible to recognise your learning for:

- personal/career development – or formative recognition OR
- the award of SCQF Credit Points – or summative recognition.

SCQF Levels	SQA Qualifications			Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions	Scottish Vocational Qualifications
12				DOCTORAL DEGREE	
11				INTEGRATED MASTERS DEGREE / MASTERS DEGREE POST GRADUATE DIPLOMA POST GRADUATE CERTIFICATE	SVQ5
10				HONOURS DEGREE GRADUATE DIPLOMA GRADUATE CERTIFICATE	
9			PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AWARD	BACHELORS / ORDINARY DEGREE GRADUATE DIPLOMA GRADUATE CERTIFICATE	SVQ4
8		HIGHER NATIONAL DIPLOMA		DIPLOMA OF HIGHER EDUCATION	
7	ADVANCED HIGHER SCOTTISH BACCALAUREATE	HIGHER NATIONAL CERTIFICATE		CERTIFICATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION	SVQ3
6	HIGHER				
5	INTERMEDIATE 2 CREDIT STANDARD GRADE				SVQ2
4	INTERMEDIATE 1 GENERAL STANDARD GRADE	NATIONAL CERTIFICATE	NATIONAL PROGRESSION AWARD		SVQ1
3	ACCESS 3 FOUNDATION STANDARD GRADE				
2	ACCESS 2				
1	ACCESS 1				

HANDOUT 3: WHAT DOES RPL INVOLVE?

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

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

So, for example, two people might have the same experience through doing identical jobs but one might have learned much more from the task(s) involved than the other. You may have said about someone, 'They never learned any lessons from ...'. People who have learned something are able to use that learning to help them in other related situations. Again you will have heard it said, 'They drew on all their experience to overcome the problem'. So you need to provide evidence of what you have learned from your experiences, not just describe what you've done. This involves reflecting on your experiences and drawing out from them what you have learned, then writing this down and talking about it with your facilitator. The writing and the talk will help to provide the evidence you need. That evidence is then assessed by an assessor at a college, university or learning and training provider. Once the evidence has been assessed and once it is decided that your evidence meets the performance criteria for the programme of learning that you are seeking, you may be awarded credit towards that programme or gain entry to another programme of learning.

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

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

In summary then, RPL can be useful to you because it can help you to:

- access further learning at all levels
- build your confidence
- gain credit within vocational or academic programmes or towards qualifications
- undertake personal/self development
- improve your learning skills
- undertake professional development
- value your life experiences.

HANDOUT 4: HOW DO YOU LEARN BEST?

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

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

DIFFERENT STYLES OF LEARNING

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

Sometimes we learn by experience. Over time we do things repeatedly and improve how we do things (i.e. through learning to get better at it) or we watch others doing things and learn from observation. We also learn by reflecting on our experiences, going over in our minds how we did something, how we might do it better next time, what was good about what we did and what could be better.

If you want to know more about different types of learning and to consider your own learning style please refer to Kolb's learning styles at this link: http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/styles/kolb.html

HOW DO WE LEARN FROM EXPERIENCE?

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

People may often learn more from the experience of doing something than from reading books or from listening to a trainer or lecturer. Learning can be an individual or a shared experience.

Various attempts have been made to describe the process of learning but it is often described as a learning cycle.[3]

According to this cycle:

STAGE 1
Learning begins with a real experience - this can be any experience or 'event'. It may be a specific experience or a series of related tasks/experiences such as a job we have done, bringing up a child, learning to drive, engaging in community or voluntary activities or the experience of being unemployed. It could also be some type of event that we observe.

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

STAGE 3
Thinking about the experience may make you realise that 'there is more to it than meets the eye', that the experience is simply one example of a pattern of things. We may begin to make connections to form ideas or theories about what that pattern is. We may make generalisations about the experience.
We may, of course, then confirm those ideas by repeating similar experiences and maybe observing similar results.

STAGE 4
However, we may go on to apply those ideas to new or different situations in order to test them out. If our ideas are borne out in practice then the 'lesson has been truly learnt' and we are likely to apply it in future situations/experiences, and so the cycle may be repeated.

[3]Kolb, D. 1984. Experiential Learning. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall. An evaluation of Kolb by the CLD sector can be found on the informal education website : http://www.infed.org/biblio/b-explrn.htm

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

It is important to realise that we are not all equally effective in each stage of the cycle. Some individuals are stronger at generalising, expressing themselves in theory, while others are more effective in putting into practice what they have actually learned. Different individuals have different learning styles.

WHAT TYPES OF EXPERIENCE CAN WE LEARN FROM?

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

It might be significant because it:

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

Examples of types of learning experience we might consider include, but are not limited to:

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

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

HANDOUT 5: WHAT IS INFORMAL OR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING?

Learning can take many different forms and, in particular, can be either **formal** or **informal**. Formal learning often takes place in an educational setting such as a school, college, university, learning and training provider or workplace. Informal learning can take place anywhere - in community settings, in the workplace, at home - and might be said to be happening all the time and all around us. So what is informal or *experiential learning?*[4]

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

We can also learn from bad experiences - for example, a period of unemployment. Both good and bad experiences teach us things.

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

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

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

Sometimes we underestimate the importance of our experiences, especially those that we take for granted. Engaging in RPL allows people to consider their own experiences objectively, reflect on them and perhaps look at them in a different or new way. In some situations we might have learned poor practice which we may feel we need to question. This is also a valuable learning experience.

Through informal or experiential learning we are constantly acquiring and renewing our skills and knowledge and it is important sometimes to take stock and reflect on how these have developed and changed.

HANDOUT 6: WHAT IS REFLECTION?

Learning through reflection is a skill that involves thinking about our own experiences from the past, thinking about our feelings about those experiences and drawing out some of the lessons that we have learned from those experiences.

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

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

HOW DO WE REFLECT?

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

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

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

Below is an example of how you might want to reflect on and evidence some of the skills you will use in everyday life. A skill is anything you can learn to do competently, an aptitude or ability you have developed.

For example the Core Skills are:
- problem solving
- communication
- numeracy
- information technology
- working with others.

SO HOW DO I KNOW WHICH SKILLS I HAVE?

Verbal communication skills - talking to/dealing with people

For example:
- using the telephone
- answering enquiries
- selling
- organising people
- teaching
- ability to talk to people
- dealing with complaints
- explaining things
- listening to people
- understanding their difficulties
- counselling.

Written communication skills

For example:
- writing minutes
- reading papers and documents
- writing or checking reports
- writing letters or e-mails.

Skills dealing with paperwork and numbers

For example:
- keeping or organising records and files
- doing accounts
- budgeting
- dealing with letters
- typing or keyboard skills
- using measurements.

Problem solving skills

For example:
- planning and organising things
- finding solutions to problems.

Practical and mechanical skills

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

Information technology skills

For example:
- using office applications - word processing, spreadsheets, databases
- Internet skills - doing searches, using e-mail
- advanced computer skills - programming, hardware/software support.

Transferable skills

Skills you have learnt and developed in one situation, which you could use in a different situation, are referred to as transferable skills. Core skills are transferable skills - you need them to be able to study and work effectively no matter what you are doing.

Additional skills

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

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

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

We also need to be able to identify the skills and knowledge that we used or learned during that event. For example, if someone chooses to reflect on their experience of running a neighbourhood sports club they might say that they needed:
- organisational skills (being able to organise venues and teams)
- communication skills (being able to share information with others and listen to the requirements of others)
- social and interpersonal skills (ability to work with others and encourage them to engage with specific tasks)
- problem-solving skills (to be able to manage fixtures and events)
- information gathering skills (to find out about accessing grants)
- financial skills (to be able to account for funds)
- knowledge about procedures and processes (for example health and safety requirements).

Whatever the event upon which they are reflecting, learners need to focus their thoughts on the skills and knowledge that they used or learned by asking themselves:

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

Keeping a Reflective Diary

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

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

Keeping a reflective diary will help you to make sense of situations and experiences so you can learn from them more easily. It will also be useful when you come to prepare the reflective evidence for assessment towards a qualification or programme of work. Extracts from your journal can be used as supporting evidence.

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

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

1. **Topic** – main focus of this diary entry

2. **Sequence of events** – a short list of what happened

3. **Highlight one or two notable events** – select one or two situations that happened which were significant during the week, and describe in detail what happened

4. **Analysis of the event** – This is the time for you to interpret what happened, and what you learned from the event

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

Think about the following questions and write down your responses:

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

HANDOUT 7: SOCIAL ROLES IN MY LIFE AND IDENTIFYING SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

Throughout our lives all of us play different social roles at different times - in any one day we might take on several different roles. For example, we might say that we have a role as a parent, child, worker, volunteer, learner, customer, client and so on. The social role that we take on at any one time depends on the social context we are in at that time and what we are doing.

For example, in the home, we may take on particular roles which are defined by where we are (context) and what we are doing (e.g. maintaining the house, caring for children etc.). In a different setting - for example, a hotel, we might take on a different role. For example, we might be a guest, or we could be a worker - cleaner, manager, receptionist. In a training and education setting, we might take on the role of student or learner or teacher, depending on what our responsibilities are and what is expected of us.

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

When you reflect on your experiences it might be helpful to think about your life in terms of the different social roles that you have played. Then you can describe them in detail:

- What were your responsibilities?
- What was expected of you?
- What skills did you need to have to perform that role?
- What knowledge did you need to have?

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

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

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

HANDOUT 8: INTRODUCTION TO THE RPL PROFILING TOOL

The profiling tool aims to prepare you for the process of recognition by helping you make connections between the life experience you have gained and:

- what you have learned from this experience
- the ways in which you have applied this learning to your current work practice or other activities (providing reflective evidence of this)
- the ways in which you can plan to build on this learning through your current role to meet your particular goals.

Therefore you should now look at the requirements of the elements or units of the qualification or programme of learning for which you are intending to provide RPL evidence.

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

The types of experience which might have helped you to develop some of the skills defined in the elements and units might be:

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

How to use RPL profiling

1. Look at the first column in the profiling tool (see page 33): **Examples of life experiences**. This contains some examples of typical life experiences. You could use these if they are appropriate to your situation. Alternatively, you could develop your own life experiences. Now provide a specific illustration - a particular event, task or situation – for each experience you have noted.

2. Look at the **Learning and skills gained** column. Again, think about whether these are the types of skills/ knowledge that you gained, or developed further, through this experience and amend and add to these as appropriate to your situation.

3. The next column asks you to think about the **Evidence of application of prior learning to current role.** It is likely that you have used and

built on the skills and knowledge that you have gained through your life experiences in your present role and you should note this here.

4. The next column can be used to indicate the **Potential match to selected elements or units** to which your learning could relate.

5. The next stage of the profiling process is to provide reflective evidence of your learning through experience.

   First all complete **Reflective Exercise 1** in relation to one of your life experiences. Then complete **Reflective Exercise 2** in relation to a recent experience in work which demonstrates the way in which you have used and built on these skills within your current work role or other activities.

   These two exercises will be discussed with your facilitator in a professional discussion. You will then produce a reflective account as reflective evidence for the relevant unit of your qualification or programme of learning.

6. Before you complete your evidence you will need to discuss with your facilitator what **action** you need to take in order to:

   - gain further experience in your current role
   - gather or produce the evidence you have identified.

   You may need to undertake further learning and development in particular areas and you will need to discuss with your facilitator how you can do this.

   If you are ready to gain credit for your prior informal learning through formal assessment, your facilitator will arrange for you to have an assessment planning meeting with an assessor for the element or unit concerned. This will start off the process of formal assessment of your evidence.

Undertaking the profiling Process

You should use the profiling process for the units and elements agreed between you and your facilitator.

Time required approx 2 hours.

Your facilitator will arrange a follow up meeting with you for the professional discussion stage.

Summary of steps

Step 1 Preparatory support provided by facilitator
Step 2 Use RPL profiling
Step 3 Professional discussion with facilitator
Step 4 Production of reflective account and updating of RPL profile
Step 5 Undertaking agreed action

EXAMPLE OF THE PROFILING TOOL

Examples of life experiences	Learning and skills gained from prior experience	Evidence of application of prior learning to current role	Potential match with selected elements or units	Action I need to take
Working in a pub (e.g. managing a busy night behind the bar)	Negotiating skills; verbal and non-verbal communication; written communication; planning; prioritising; budgeting resources; team working; knowledge: legal framework; own role within legal framework; effects of alcohol; factors that can affect communication; how to work with and manage conflict.			
Chairing a meeting	Verbal communication; negotiating skills; managing conflicting viewpoints of meeting participants; organisational and planning skills; planning; knowledge: understanding of systems and policies; problem solving skills.			

BLANK PROFILING TOOL

Examples of life experiences	Learning and skills gained from prior experience	Evidence of application of prior learning to current role	Potential match with selected elements or units	Action I need to take

HANDOUT 9: **PRODUCING EVIDENCE OF YOUR LEARNING**

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

You will need to provide direct and reflective evidence of your skills and knowledge.

Direct evidence

Direct evidence demonstrates what you can do. It is something you have produced while carrying out your role or something written about your work activities by someone who has observed these. That person might be your supervisor or facilitator, a colleague, a mentor, a customer or client.

Evidence which you could produce might include:

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

Evidence based on something someone else says about you and your strengths and skills might include, but is not limited to:

- written testimony about activities
- feedback given by others on a task you have carried out, or a presentation or talk you have given.

Evidence can also be provided by an assessor directly observing you as you carry out your work.

Reflective evidence

Reflective evidence demonstrates your understanding of your role and how you have dealt with particular issues or incidents. These may be experiences that went well or badly. The important thing is to demonstrate what you have learnt from them. Reflective evidence can be provided in the form of a written account, or case study e.g. reflective account such as a reflective diary/learning log extracts, or through a professional discussion with your assessor.

HANDOUT 10: LEARNING ACTION PLAN

WHAT IS AN ACTION PLAN?

An Action Plan is a document that sets out:

- your goals
- how you will achieve these
- the timescales for doing so
- possible barriers to achieving them, and
- ways to overcome the barriers.

It is designed to help you plan for your future by setting realistic targets for you, based on your own ideas and preferences, and setting out timescales for you to follow. It helps you to decide what you want to do next in your life and within your work and how you are going to do it.

Designing and writing an Action Plan

You can structure your Action Plan any way you like as long as it means something to you and is set out in a way that you can understand. For example, an Action Plan might have headings that look something like this:

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

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

ANNEX 3

ACTIVITIES
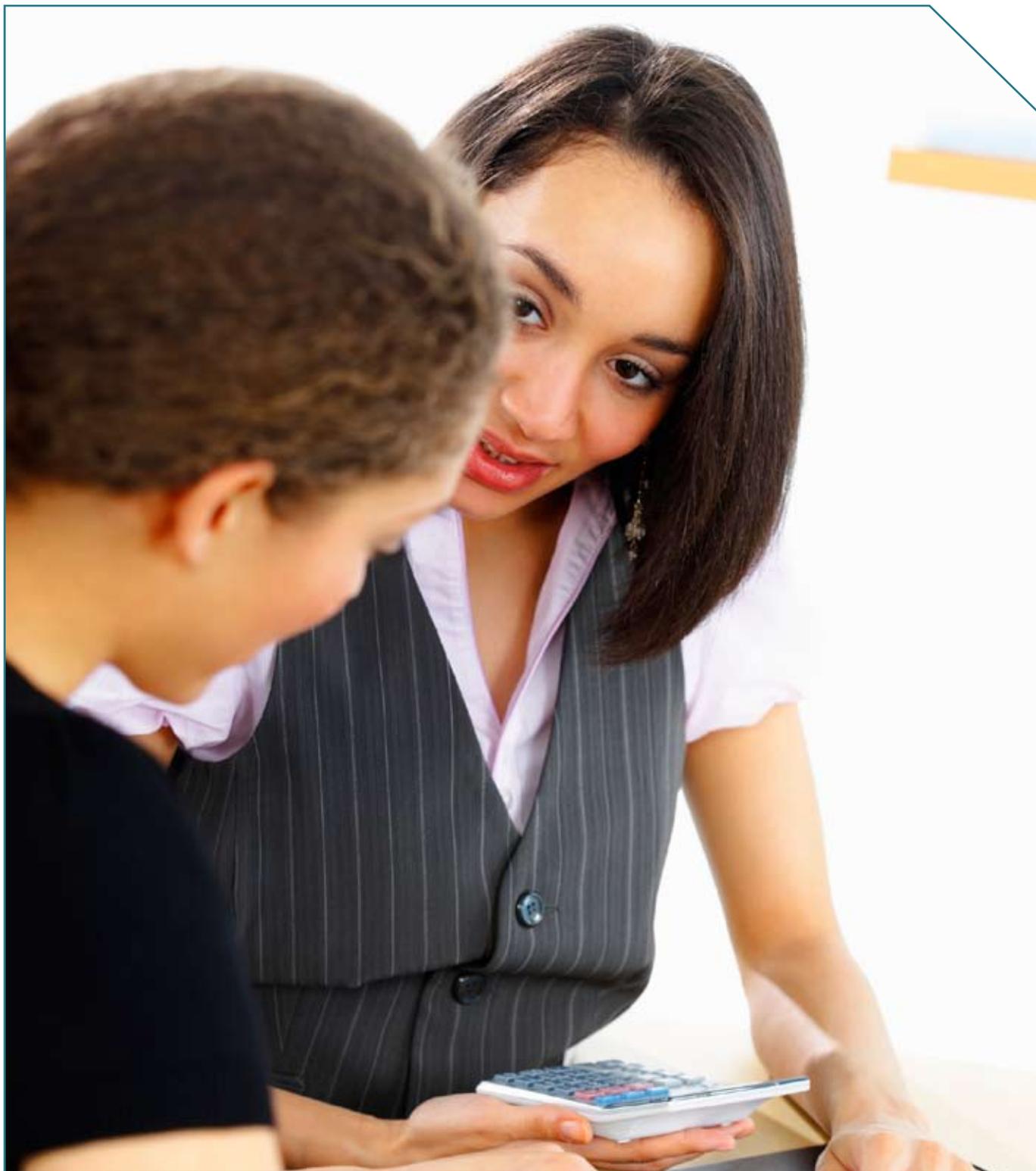
ACTIVITY 1: **WHAT IS RPL?**

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

Use and discuss Information Handout 1 for Learners: Introduction to the Recognition of Prior Informal and Non-Formal Learning (RPL)

Allow about 30 minutes for this.

ACTIVITY 2: WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING?

Note: this activity could be used either for small groups or adapted for use with individual learners.

Learners are asked first to focus on positive experiences of learning, and then, on the negative.

Record the outcomes of discussion.

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

Ask the group to compare positive experiences of learning with negative experiences.

Use and discuss Information Handout 4 for Learners: How Do You Learn Best?

Allow about 30-40 minutes for this.

Note: You should remember that discussing negative experiences of learning could stir up other negative thoughts on the part of learners during this activity and be ready to deal with these.

ACTIVITY 2 HANDOUT: **POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING**

Work in small groups. First focus on the positive experiences of learning, and then on the negative.

What was the situation like?

What was it you learned?

Was it easy or hard to learn?

POSITIVE

Describe the people around and the difference they made to you.

What made the learning enjoyable?

Who else was there?

What was the situation like?

Was it easy or hard to learn?

What was it you learned?

NEGATIVE

Describe the people around and the difference they made to you.

What made the learning not so enjoyable?

Who else was there?

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

Compare positive experiences of learning with negative.

Ask: What contributes to positive and negative learning experiences?

ACTIVITY 3: PERSONAL RECOGNITION OF CURRENT SKILLS AND RECOGNITION OF THE SKILLS OF OTHERS

Ask the learners to pick something that they do e.g. paid or voluntary work, family responsibilities, interests or hobbies and list the skills and knowledge that they have in order to perform the selected activity well. Provide a few examples of what is meant by 'skills' and 'knowledge'. You can use the examples of core and soft skills in Information Handout 6 for Learners: What is Reflection?

Learners compare their answers - if possible this could be done in small groups. Each partner can contribute to the lists prepared and add skills they identify as being necessary for the task selected. Compare this again in the larger group so as to gain a clear picture to the skills and knowledge identified within the lists.

Use and discuss Information Handout 5 for Learners: What is Informal or Experiential Learning?

Information Handout 7 for Learners: Social roles in my life and identifying skills and knowledge

Information Handout 6 for Learners: What is Reflection?

Allow about 30-40 minutes for this.

ACTIVITY 4: INTRODUCTION TO REFLECTION AND IDENTIFYING EXAMPLES OF LEARNING

Ask the learners to pick one of the examples produced in Activity 3 listing all the things they have to do and the skills required to be able to do the task or activity highlighted. The group members should then identify what has been learned through this. All the learning that is identified should be recorded.

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

Use and discuss Information Handout 6 for Learners : What is reflection?

Use Activity 4 Handout: Identifying Learning

Allow about 30-40 minutes for this.

ACTIVITY 4 HANDOUT: **IDENTIFYING LEARNING**

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

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

ACTIVITY 5: REFLECTING ON EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING IN LIFE

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

As a group go through the reflective exercise to make sure people are clear about what they have to think about at each stage. You can do this by using an example of one of your own experiences which you will have prepared as part of your own learning for your role as facilitator.

Ask the learners to work in pairs and 'interview' each other in relation to each stage of the reflective process and complete the reflective exercise.

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

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

Use Activity 5 Handout: Reflective Exercise

Allow about 30-40 minutes for this.

ACTIVITY 5 HANDOUT: **REFLECTIVE EXERCISE**

Description:
What happened?

Feelings:
What were you
thinking and
feeling?

Action Plan:
If it happened
again what would
you do?

Evaluation:
What was good
and bad about it?

Conclusion:
What else could
you have done?

Analysis:
What sense can
you make of the
situation?
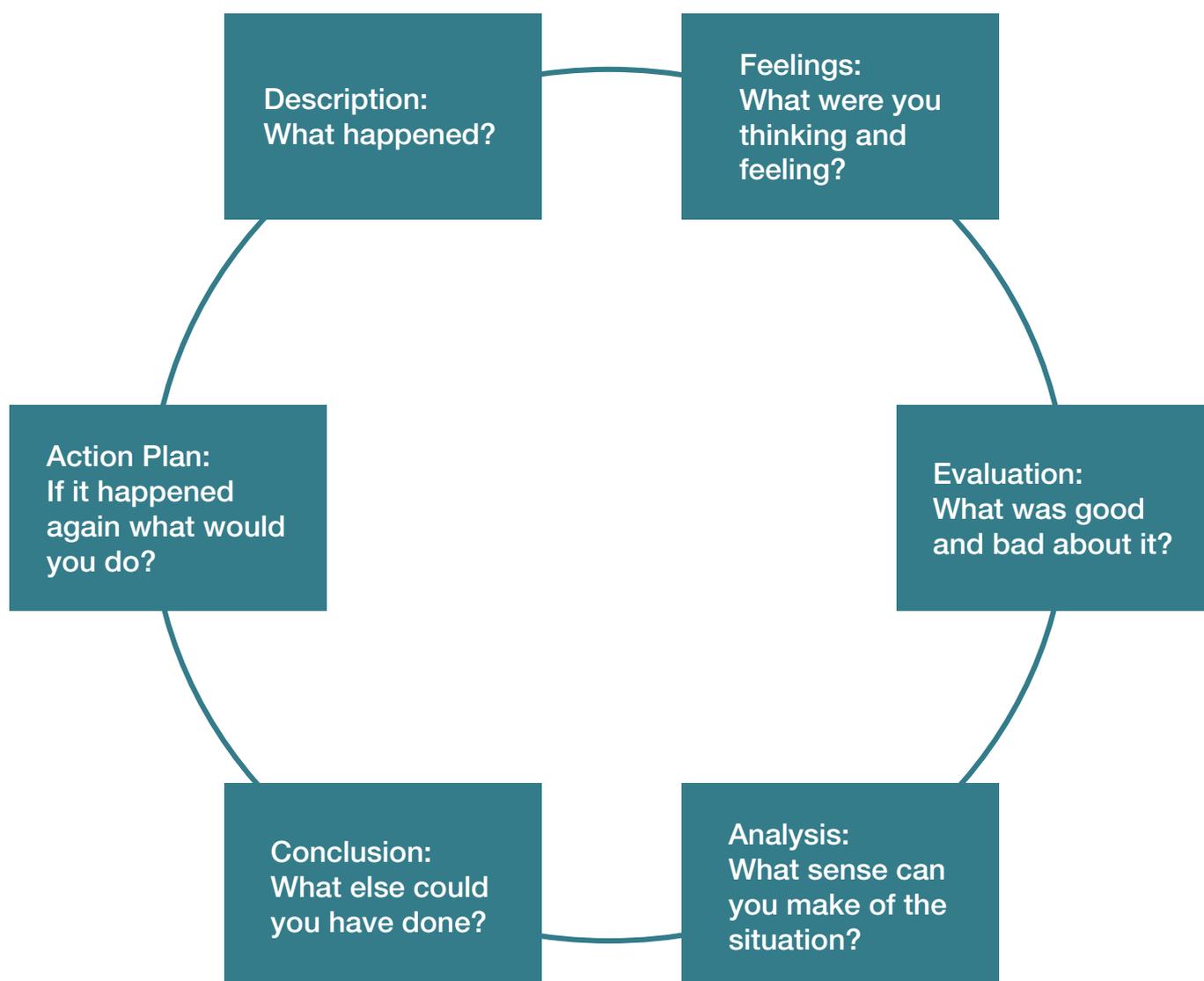
Think of a particular experience which you think helped you learn something and ask yourself the questions in the cycle, starting with 'What happened?'. When you have done this, complete the Reflective Exercise, thinking of responses to each of the questions on the sheet. Working in pairs is a good way to do this at first. One person can interview the other using the questions and note down their responses on the sheet.[5]

[5]This exercise was adapted from Gibbs, G. 1988. Learning by Doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods. Oxford Further Education Unit, Oxford Polytechnic.

REFLECTIVE EXERCISE

EXPERIENCE: Describe the experience. What happened? What did you do in reaction to the experience?

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

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

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

APPLICATION: Think of a different situation in which you could apply what you have learned.
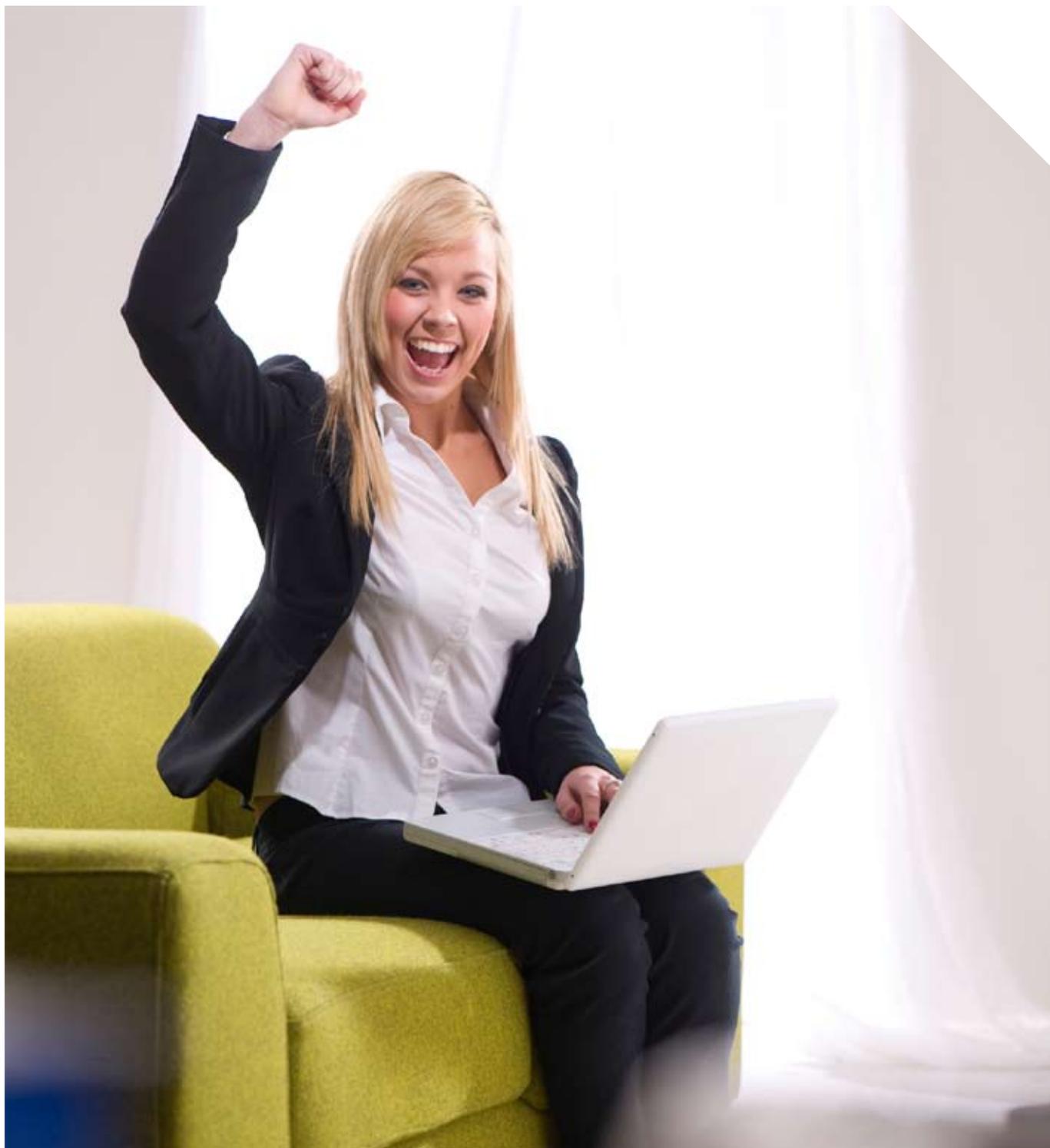
ACTIVITY 6: **PROBLEM-SOLVING**

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

Allow about 30-40 minutes for this.

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

ACTIVITY 7: **TRYING OUT REFLECTION**

Work as group to decide how to deal with a critical incident (supply a scenario which is relevant to your group). The group should analyse the situation, devise a plan for dealing with the situation, consider the possible outcomes or implications of this strategy, think about the skills and knowledge required/ developed, think about the transferability of these skills i.e. how these could be applied in different contexts, and identify possible evidence of these skills.

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

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

Use Activity 7 Handout: Critical Incident Analysis

Use Information Handout 6 for Learners: What is Reflection?

Allow about 40 minutes for this.

Note: Prepare scenarios in advance of a group session.

ACTIVITY 7 HANDOUT: **CRITICAL INCIDENT ANALYSIS**

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

What is a critical incident?

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

What to include in your analysis of a critical incident:

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

ACTIVITY 8: INTRODUCING RPL PROFILING

Use and discuss Information Handout 8 for Learners: Introduction to the RPL Profiling Tool

As a group, look at an example of how the Profiling Tool works, identifying:

- relevant life experiences
- learning and skills gained
- application of learning to your current work practice
- possible match with elements or units of your target qualification or programme of learning
- application of learning to your current work practice.

Discuss the example as a group.

Allow about 30 minutes for this.

ACTIVITY 9: WORKING THROUGH A RPL PROFILING EXAMPLE

Individually or in small groups, learners should work through the Profiling Tool for one of the elements or units in your selected programme of learning or qualification and then give feedback.

For both activities use the blank profiling tool for completion.

Allow about 20-30 minutes for this.

ACTIVITY 10: **IDENTIFYING EVIDENCE OF LEARNING**

Discuss the evidence which can be used to demonstrate learning.

Use Information Handout 9 for Learners: Producing evidence of your learning

Allow about 20-30 minutes for this.

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