

Learning from the evaluation of two pilots of the Professional Development Award in Practice Learning at SCQF Level 9

**Summary of Findings and Future
Challenges**



November 2011

Acknowledgements

The two evaluations of the Professional Development Award in Practice Learning Stage 2 at SCQF Level 9 have been a collaborative venture, commissioned by Learning Network North, and supported by Highland and Moray Accredited Training Services (HiMATS) and South-East Scotland Learning Network, their partners, and the employing organisations that participated in the study. I would like to thank all those who have contributed time, energy and enthusiasm to both evaluations, and, in particular:

All the pilot candidates and their employers

Sandra Tucker, Manager, Highland and Moray Accredited Training Services

Marianne Hughes, Social Work Education Consultant

Yvonne Leathley, previously manager of Learning Network North

Wendy Paterson, previously manager of Learning Network South-East

Pat Collingwood, Independent Professional Learning Facilitator

Ann Brady, Care and Learning Alliance

Valerie Gale, Care and Learning Alliance

Sheila Lockhart, Scottish Social Services Council

Johanna Moncur, transcriber

Jean Gordon¹

¹ Contact e mail address: jean@jeangordon.co.uk

Learning from the evaluation of two pilots of the Professional Development Award in Practice Learning Stage 2 (SCQF Level 9)

The Practice Learning Qualifications (PLQs²) were introduced in Scotland in 2006 to support the learning of the social services workforce and of related professions, service users and carers. The suite of qualifications is underpinned by the principle that practice learning is 'everybody's business' (Scottish Executive, 2004) and the qualifications were designed to play a pivotal role in promoting and developing stronger learning cultures within the social work and social care sectors (Scottish Practice Learning Project). The purpose of this report is to summarise, and provide a short commentary on, the findings of two pilots of the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Professional Development Award in Practice Learning (PDAPL) at Stage 2 (SCQF Level 9). These pilots are of particular interest because they are the only two programmes at this level in the PLQ suite to have been delivered in Scotland, and because, whilst they were based on exactly the same standards, the programmes were delivered in different ways to different audiences in two very different geographical areas. The two programmes evaluated were:

- The PDAPL³ delivered in the south-east of Scotland by Learning Network South East and its partners in 2009/10.
- The PDAPL delivered in the north of Scotland by Highland and Moray Accredited Training Services (HiMATS) in 2010/11.

The evaluations were commissioned by Learning Network North and conducted by an independent researcher. Both evaluations assessed the quality of the learning experience and the impact of the award on the candidates, their practice and workplaces (see Gordon, 2011a and b for the detailed evaluation reports).

The aims of this short report are to summarise and briefly compare the programmes and their outcomes. The implications of the findings for future delivery of this and other PLQ qualifications are then explored with the intention of adding to ongoing discussion about the sustainability of the Practice Learning Qualifications.

² PLQ is used to denote both the PLQ and the PLQ(Social Services) or PLQ(SS).

³ The awards are described differently in different parts of Scotland: the north award was described by evaluation participants as 'PLQ2', but in the south-east was called 'the Level 9 award'. This report refers to the award as the Professional Development Award in Practice Learning or 'PDAPL', which refers to both the PDAPL(SS) - offered by both programmes - and the PDAPL - only offered in the North of Scotland.

Evaluation of a pilot delivery of the Practice Learning Qualification (Stage 2) in the North of Scotland

Executive Summary

This report summarises the findings of an evaluation of a pilot in the North of Scotland of the Professional Development Award in Practice Learning (Social Services) at Stage 2 (SCQF Level 9) during 2010/11. The award was approved by Scottish Social Services Council and the Scottish Qualifications Authority, delivered by Highland and Moray Accredited Training Services (HiMATS) and funded by Learning Network North (LNN). The evaluation was conducted in 2010/11 by an independent researcher, and drew on the experiences of candidates, assessors, employers, workplace learners and programme providers. It incorporated illustrative case studies centred around three candidates and their workplaces.

The candidates and their employers

- The award's candidates came from diverse academic and health and social care backgrounds, and had roles in supporting and assessing a range of learners, including workplace colleagues, students, volunteers and SVQ candidates.
- Of 13 candidates that started the award, 8 completed the programme.
- The candidates were all women and came from a wide geographic area in the north of Scotland. The majority were in the childcare/ early years sector.
- Candidates were mainly motivated to undertake the award by the opportunity for personal and professional development; some also hoped that their learning would be recognised as prior learning for other qualifications.
- Employers (local authority, voluntary and private sector and NHS) wanted their staff to undertake the award as part of their continuous professional development, and, in some cases to enable them to promote a culture of learning in the workplace. LNN's funding for candidate places was also a significant motivator for employers.

Experiences of the programme

- The programme was delivered primarily through online distance learning, with two face to face meetings in Inverness. The meetings were highly valued, but were seen as having significant time and travel implications for many candidates.
- The programme start was more rushed than initially planned, and this may have contributed to the loss of 5 candidates in the early stages of the award.
- The online learning environment was perceived as effective, flexible and well supported by tutors. It was sometimes difficult, however, to sustain the sense of 'online community' through the discussion forums.
- Candidates mostly found their learning engaging and relevant to practice, but some found the programme content quite challenging in level and volume.

- Reflective learning was a strong theme for nearly all candidates, and the reflective journal was seen as a particularly effective learning tool.
- The diversity of the candidate group was seen as a benefit, but there were differing views about the breadth of the programme, with candidates from the NHS finding too much emphasis on the social services context for learning.
- Candidates felt well supported by their tutors, assessors, and employers, and the programme team members provided each other with good support.
- Personal capabilities that supported learning included a positive orientation to distance learning, self-management, motivation, study and ICT skills, a proactive approach and a willingness to reflect on practice.
- The main challenges identified were time management, work/ life balance, anxiety about technological skills and academic performance, and, for some candidates, a sense of isolation from other participants.

Learning from the programme

- Overall, candidate responses to the programme were mostly positive
- At the end of the programme candidates reported that the award had increased their self-awareness, ability to reflect, open-mindedness and confidence, and had strengthened analytical and leadership skills. These changes were supported by improved knowledge about facilitating learning and the context for practice.
- Candidates and employers described how the programme had helped participants to expand their repertoire of strategies to support learners, cascade new knowledge to others, evaluate learning, represent the employing organisation, justify decision-making and make presentations to others.
- Changes in organisations and environments were harder to measure, but there was evidence that the award was starting to enable case study candidates to take on new roles in their organisations, and to make a positive difference to individual learners and organisational practices.

Future challenges

- The findings suggest that the pilot PLQ2 broadly met the principles, aims and learning outcomes of the SQA award. The programme appears to have been well supported by its teaching and assessment framework.
- The evaluation identified ways of improving future delivery of the award e.g. by adjusting the balance of distance and face to face learning.
- HiMATS has been encouraged by its experience to wish to offer the award in the north again. However, there are uncertainties about the sustainability of the award with doubts about future uptake by employers during a time of economic constraint, without clear articulation of the award with specific workplace roles or with other qualifications at SCQF 9.

Evaluation of a pilot delivery of the Professional Development Award in Practice Learning (SCQF level 9) in the South East of Scotland

Executive Summary

This report summarises the findings of an evaluation of a pilot, in South-East Scotland, of the Professional Development Award in Practice Learning (Social Services) at Stage 2 (SCQF Level 9) during 2009/10. The award was approved by SSSC and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), delivered by Learning Network South East, Stevenson College and their partners, and part funded by the Learning Network. The evaluation was conducted in 2011 by an independent researcher, and drew, retrospectively, on the experiences of three candidates and their employers, tutor, assessor and line managers, as well as documentary evidence and interviews with programme providers.

The candidates and their employers

- The award's candidates worked in social services settings in the south east of Scotland, and all but one was a qualified social worker. The majority of candidates had prior academic qualifications at SCQF 10 and 11.
- Nineteen candidates started the programme, and 15 completed it.
- Case study candidates were primarily motivated by a wish to qualify as practice teachers for social work degree students, but some also wanted to promote learning more widely in their workplaces and organisations.
- Local authority and voluntary sector employers were also said to be mostly motivated by the need to offer practice learning opportunities, although the wider aspirations of the award, to support the development of social services learning organisations, were significant to some managers.

Experiences of the programme

- The award was delivered through a combination of face to face programme days, candidate-run action learning sets and private study.
- The award's content, approach and assessment were positively regarded.
- Adjusting to SQA evidence requirements was an initial challenge for programme providers, assessors and some candidates.
- Uncertainties about the sufficiency of the status of the Level 9 award as a preparation for practice teaching were problematic for some candidates, who felt that their achievements might be "*devalued*".
- Case study candidates said they were well supported by programme staff, other candidates and line managers and colleagues in their own agencies.
- Candidates were supported by personal capabilities such as self-management skills and the ability to draw on past and present experience.

- The major barriers to learning were cited as competing workload pressures and lack of time; workplaces varied in the amount of workload relief they gave candidates. Some candidates had to overcome individual barriers to learning, such as managing dyslexia, and anxiety about resuming academic study.

Learning from and impact of the programme

- Case study candidates attributed positive changes in their self-awareness, reflexivity, independent thinking, analytical and leadership skills, and confidence, supported by improved knowledge about facilitating learning, evaluation and the context for practice, to their participation in the programme.
- The three case study candidates had offered seven practice learning opportunities since they started the award in 2009.
- Changes in candidate behaviour were evident in their new roles as practice teachers, as well as a developing ability to support colleagues, active evaluation of learning, cascading knowledge to other workers and use of presentation skills to facilitate others' learning.
- Changes in organisations and environments are harder to measure, but there was evidence that achievement of the award is enabling some candidates to take on new roles in their organisation, be proactive in facilitating and evaluating learning, and, mostly in less explicit ways, to improve outcomes for the service users and carers that they work with.
- Two of the case study candidates had management roles which seemed to support their use of learning from the award to promote the development of a learning culture in their workplaces in imaginative and creative ways.

Future challenges

- The findings suggest that Level 9 in south-east Scotland broadly meets the principles, aims and learning outcomes of the SQA award, although it proved difficult to attract candidates with more diverse roles and experience.
- The evidence suggests that the programme is well supported by its teaching and assessment framework. The level 9 award was thought by all participants to provide a good basis for practice teaching social work students.
- The pilot was small scale and its findings may not be representative of all candidates' and employers' experience of the Level 9 award.
- There are continuing doubts about the sustainability of the award, with concerns about the level of future uptake by employers during a time of economic constraint. Locally, the main demand for practice learning appears for qualified practice teachers, and uptake for the Level 9 award was said to be likely to remain low unless its suitability for practice teaching is agreed nationally.

One set of standards: two different programmes

The two programmes were based on the same SQA evidence requirements, and had similar arrangements for assessment and verification. The awards were approved by SSSC, and both received favourable reports from the SQA External Verifier. However, as the Executive Summaries of the two reports describe, they attracted very different candidates and were delivered in very different ways. These differences are, in some respects, consistent with the guiding principles of the PLQ awards, which stress the need for flexible delivery routes and comprehensive access and participation across Scotland (SIESWE, 2006). The main similarities and differences between the two programmes, and the outcomes identified through the evaluations, are summarised below.

Table 1. The PDAPL programme: similarities and differences

	North of Scotland	South-east Scotland
Award	PDAPL(SS) and PDAPL at SCQF level 9: known as the 'PLQ2'	PDAPL(SS) at SCQF level 9: known as the 'Level 9 award'
Providers	Voluntary sector training organisation	Learning Network S-E, Stevenson College and partners
Funding	Funded by Learning Network North	Part funded by Learning Network South-East
No of candidates	13 started; 8 completed	19 started; 15 completed
Candidate roles	Social care staff/trainers, nurses	Nearly all social workers
Candidate prior qualifications (SCQF level)	SCQF 8 - 11: Mostly SVQ qualifications: 5 had degrees.	SCQF 9 - 11: Mostly degrees/postgraduate qualifications
Candidate and employer motivations	Personal and professional development	To become a practice teacher, personal and professional development
Learning approach	Mostly distance learning, delivered online	Face to face learning, action learning sets
Assessment	'Academic' and reflective assignments, assessment of practice	'Academic' and reflective assignments, assessment of practice

Table 2: PDAPL award outcomes

(after Kirkpatrick's four levels of learning, 1994)

	North of Scotland	South-east Scotland
Level 1: Candidate response	Broadly positive; some recommendations for future delivery	Broadly positive; some recommendations for future delivery
Level 2: Main changes in learning	Self-confidence; analysis; self-reflection; open-mindedness; self-awareness; use of research; leadership skills; understanding of social services context; new knowledge e.g. about how people learn	Self-confidence; analysis; self-reflection and reflexivity; self-awareness; creative thinking; understanding of social services context; new knowledge e.g. practice teaching tools and approaches, learning cultures
Level 3: Changes in behaviour	Cascading new knowledge; evaluation of learning; range of strategies to facilitate learning; evidence based decision making; giving presentations; representing employing organisations	Practice teaching social work students: facilitation of learning of others e.g. students, colleagues; cascading new knowledge; evaluation of learning; leadership; use of group training skills
Level 4: Changes in organisations and environments	Impact of taking on new roles and responsibilities; introducing new evaluation practices; enabling positive outcomes for e.g. service users, volunteers, team members.	Impact of taking on new roles and responsibilities, especially practice teaching; introducing new evaluation practices; enabling positive outcomes for e.g. service users, team members; greater emphasis on service user and carer involvement in service provision.

The findings revealed considerable similarities in outcomes from the two awards, with the exception of those relating to the training of practice teachers: all graduates of the South-East programme emerged as potential practice teachers, whilst the outcomes for north of Scotland graduates took the form of more generic development of capabilities in, for example, facilitating and evaluating learning, and leadership of others. Candidates in the south-east formally assessed a social work student's practice learning. In the north candidates generated evidence to meet evidence requirements in more varied ways. For example, some had roles as SVQ assessors and verifiers or, in one case, as a link supervisor of social work students, whilst others were more involved in the facilitation of learning of, for example colleagues and supervisees. Whatever the candidate's role, matching accounts of their development against the PDAPL's standards, both evaluations produced strong and consistent evidence of equipping candidates with "the skills, knowledge and understanding required to provide practice learning opportunities for others and to give appropriate support, feedback and assessment" (SIESWE, 2006: 41). However, it is also important to highlight the limitations of the two studies, which drew heavily on evidence from three case studies. It is likely that those that were willing to take part in the case studies were those who felt most positive about their experience of undertaking the PDAPL. This is probably particularly true of the more limited and retrospective south-east evaluation. For example, interviews with programme providers and assessors suggested that, although all three case study candidates were very active practice teachers, this is not true for all those that completed the award; there may be several reasons for this, but the lack of recognition of the PDAPL at Level 9 as a sufficient training for practice teaching by some universities (and individual university tutors) may provide one explanation.

Some current and future challenges

The uncertain environment for future delivery of the PLQ awards suggests that setting out detailed recommendations for future delivery of the PDAPL will not be terribly helpful. Instead, this report briefly explores six challenges that emerged through the delivery of the two awards and their evaluations. There are no easy answers to the dilemmas posed, but their exploration, based on the evaluations' findings, may usefully contribute to ongoing debates about how best to support the future learning of the social services workforce.

1. Breadth vs. Specificity

The north of Scotland PDAPL was successful in attracting a wide range of candidates, including social care practitioners and managers with both training and direct practice roles, and nurses working for the NHS. The evaluation found that breadth of candidate experience and academic preparation was both a strength, in terms of shared learning from this diversity, and a challenge, because "*..we had such a broad range of people with different backgrounds, we needed that breadth of scope of reading, research and thinking*". Tutors also found that candidates less familiar with working at SCQF Level 9 needed quite a lot of

individual support and encouragement, especially near the start of the programme. In contrast, whilst the partnership that developed the Level 9 award in the south east was concerned to promote the broad vision, "*that looked at a much wider group of the workforce benefitting from the different levels*", as set out in the principles of the PLQs, in practice this was not achievable because the predominant driver for local employing organisations was to use the award to tackle a shortage of practice teachers for social work degree students. This meant that, with the exception of one individual, all applicants were social workers, and the focus of interest for candidates was necessarily the facilitation of learning of social work students. So this programme had less diversity of experience to draw on, but the shared context of learning provided stimulating and more common ground in workshops and candidate-led action learning sets than was possible in the north of Scotland presentation.

The evaluation also demonstrates clearly that the south east award, whilst centred around the process of learning to assess the practice of social work students, has, like the north of Scotland award, enabled some candidates to play new roles in facilitating the learning of colleagues and students from other disciplines, and to contribute to organisational leadership, and policy and practice development. However, questions still remain about the attractiveness (to employers, candidates and other stakeholders, such as universities) of a more inclusive award, both in terms of range of candidates and breadth of learning it aims to support. In the south east it proved challenging to "*make the case*" for the broader aspirations of the award, especially its "*transformational role as a catalyst for doing things differently*" by supporting the development of learning cultures within social services organisations. It has been argued that, whilst the rhetoric of the learning organisation has been taken up very enthusiastically in social work, as well as other human, services (e.g. Scottish Executive, 2006), without significant changes in workplace cultures, and sufficient resources (money, time, expertise, opportunities), this ideal will prove very difficult to translate into reality (Beddoe, 2009, Postle et al., 2002). Additionally, the evaluation in the south-east heard that the practice learning qualifications are generally "*not understood in the workplace*". However, while it is possible to become cynical about the potential for transformational change, it is important not to underestimate the local impact of the PDAPL in terms of candidate and organisational change identified in both evaluations. The findings from both the north and south east furnish sound evidence for supporting the continuing ambitions of the PDAPL in terms of promoting workplace learning cultures despite the many challenges this endeavour poses in day to day social services and health practice.

2. National vs. Local

The two awards used national standards and delivered programmes to meet local needs. The learning approaches employed - distance learning in the north, and a more face to face approach in the south-east - were generally well attuned to the needs of candidates and the

geography of the regions served. Both programmes could probably also learn from each others' respective successes in online and face to face learning. However, the model of local development adopted to deliver the PLQ awards also gave rise to inconsistencies. The most obvious of these is in the name of the award: 'Level 9' award in the south east and 'PLQ2' in the north. There are also other, more substantive, concerns about equivalence, illustrated best through the contrasting stories of two case study candidates, both with long standing experience in social care, one in the north and one in the south-east. The candidate in the north was an experienced link supervisor for social work students and wished to work towards becoming a practice teacher. However, this was not achievable through the PDAPL in the north as it has not been designed to act as a preparation for practice teaching, and is not recognised as such locally. In contrast, the candidate in the south-east, who has met the same standards and has the same qualification, but one with an explicit focus on facilitating the learning of social work students, is now practice teaching on a regular basis, with very positive feedback from students and his/her manager. This contrast in outcomes is illustrative of the risks of local development of a national award, as well as of different local policies (e.g. of universities, geographical regions). It begs some quite big questions about equivalence between PDAPL qualifications gained in different parts of Scotland.

These kinds of questions in relation to the Level 10 award have led the Scottish Organisation for Practice Teaching to recommend exploration of the potential for national delivery of the PLQ awards (ScOPT, 2011). This would tackle this consistency question head on, although it will be important to ensure that any development does not lead to the exclusion of other possible beneficiaries of the qualifications, including people like the social care and health practitioners and managers that successfully undertook the PDAPL in the north. A national award with larger cohorts of candidates could also address some of the issues of breadth and specificity raised earlier through developing a programme that combines core and context specific modules. This could allow opportunities for sharing experiences and establishing common ground through core modules, whilst providing learning more closely attuned to role and sector with colleagues in similar working contexts.

3. Level 9 vs. Level 10

Three inter-linked questions arise here. The first relates to the debate, regularly rehearsed in the south east evaluation but not mentioned in the north, about whether the Level 9 or the Level 10 award is the appropriate qualification for practice teachers of social workers. The second is whether there is a sufficiently good, shared understanding of the differences between these two SCQF levels. During the south east evaluation some programme providers said they were unsure whether in fact the award had been pitched too high, or possibly, given the high calibre and considerable experience of participants, achieved at a higher level than it was assessed at. A similar question was raised during the north evaluation in relation to the achievements of the most able candidates. Linked to this was a

third question, about whether these two stages of the PLQ suite are "*just too close together*" and so should be replaced by a single qualification. ScOPT (2011) has proposed that the potential for merging the two awards into a single, Level 10, award be explored. Feedback received during this evaluation suggests that current and future deliberations about the two awards will require a shared and very well informed understanding of:

- The roles that the current Level 9 and Level 10 awards prepare candidates for. Whilst the Level 9 awards aim to enable candidates to provide practice learning opportunities for others and to give appropriate support, feedback and assessment, the Level 10 award is intended to support candidates to 'develop and evaluate learning opportunities and be responsible for formal assessment across a wide range of settings' (SIESWE, 2006). Several respondents in the south-east evaluation, including one who also has a Level 10 PDAPL, stressed the depth of Level 9 in relation to working with individual learners, and were concerned that this aspect of the award should be retained in any plans to merge the qualifications.
- The generic SCQF descriptors for Level 9 and Level 10 (e.g. the increased level of criticality, creativity and independent thinking expected of Level 10 candidates). It is important to note that in the north pitching the award at Level 9 enabled a range of candidates with prior qualifications at SCQF level 8 to access an award at an achievable level. Whilst some of the north candidates might well have welcomed undertaking an award at level 10, for those with prior qualifications at Level 8, the PDAPL was sufficiently challenging, and was seen as providing a sufficient preparation for their task of facilitating and assessing workplace learning in many different forms.
- Who can assess whom. There were reported to be different understandings of the relationship between SCQF levels in practice learning and those relating to professional qualifications (e.g. social work). For example, is an assessor with a practice learning qualification at Level 9 qualified to assess a social work student undertaking a PLO at Level 10? (and would the answer to this question be different if the assessor also had a professional qualification at SCQF 10 or above?). These questions about assessor qualifications appear to require a clear steer from regulatory bodies such as the SQA and SSSC.
- The perspectives and needs of PLQ candidates who are not social workers
- The overall context of requirements for other qualifications at levels 9 and 10 e.g. in leadership, management and supervision.

4. Stand-alone vs. articulation

There has been a significant amount of work carried out on establishing paths for the recognition of prior learning⁴ for the PLQ awards. However, these routes were not used in either award, and during the two evaluations I came across a good deal of uncertainty about how the PDAPL relates to other awards and to workplace roles. In the north, where many candidates worked with children and early years, this uncertainty particularly related to how the award articulates with the Childhood Practice Awards⁵, also at SCQF Level 9. In the south-east, as explained earlier, the doubts related more to the practice teaching role. There was also a very clear message from employers and others in the south-east evaluation, that, given the size and cost of the award (see above), the Level 9 award was generally considered excessive for Link Supervisors to social work students. The current and successful, non-assessed Link Worker Programme at SCQF Level 8 was considered to be sufficient preparation for this role in the south east (Learning Network South East, 2011). There also seemed to be a lack of shared understanding about how the PLQ awards articulate with other awards that address the facilitation and assessment of learning, such as the PDA in Health and Social Care Supervision, mentoring in the NHS and the University of Stirling's Certificates in Supervising, Managing and Mentoring. The candidates in these evaluations had not considered alternative qualifications, partly perhaps because they and their organisations had initially been attracted to the award because it was both local and free, but there also seemed to be a lack of knowledge about different options. Any attempt to move forward will require to look at the range of awards on offer, their target audiences and how they can complement each other to create more integrated pathways for supporting others' learning in the social services and other linked professions.

5. Size and cost of the award

It was emphasised many times during interviews that, at 48 credits, the PDAPL is a major award, which makes considerable demands on candidates, employers and programme assessors/ providers. Employers, and some candidates in both evaluations made it very clear that the subsidised nature of the award had been a major motivation for uptake; even with this substantial 'carrot', offering study time during the working week was problematic in some workplaces, and all the case study candidates had undertaken much of the award in their own time. This evaluation did not attempt to estimate the true financial costs of the award, but it does seem likely that time and cost will act as a considerable disincentive to future uptake in the prevailing economic climate, assuming that subsidy will not be

⁴ <http://www.continuouslearningframework.com/sssc/news-releases-2008/practice-learning-qualifications-social-services-plq-ss-recognition-of-prior-learning-rpl-and-credit-transfer.html?txo=0>

⁵ <http://www.sssc.uk.com/ewd/childhood-practice/about-the-childhood-practice-awards.html>

available in the future, particularly, as explained above, if the award's role and currency remains uncertain.

6. Leading a vision vs. reality of immediate needs

A thread that runs through all five of the preceding challenges relates to a central tension between the very positive vision underpinning the PLQs, with their inclusive approach to facilitating learning in the social services, and current realities, both in relation to current financial constraints, and, closely linked to those constraints, priorities for workforce planning. Key to sustaining these aspirations will be an ability to see the awards as part of a much wider agenda to develop stronger learning cultures and organisations. For example, the evaluations found evidence of development in many of the same personal and organisational capabilities that are highlighted in Scotland's Continuous Learning Framework (SSSC/IRISS, 2008). There are also many shared elements between the PLQs and the emerging leadership capabilities⁶, under development by SSSC and its partners.

Conclusion

This report has summarised the findings of two evaluations of the same award. In many ways, the outcomes of both awards are extremely positive, and very heartening at a time when cuts to services, as many evaluation participants suggested, are making it more and more difficult to establish and develop workplace learning cultures. Both evaluations indicate that, not only have these two very different programmes been successful in meeting the principles and learning outcomes of this PDAPL, most candidates and their employing organisations have gone on to use the learning from working with individual learners to bring about positive and measurable changes to organisational learning cultures. At a time when there are considerable shortages of practice teachers, graduates of the programme in the south east are also making a significant contribution to meeting the continuing and pressing need for practice learning opportunities for social work students.

Whilst acknowledging these important outcomes, searching discussions are currently taking place about the sustainability of the PLQ qualifications, particularly in the light of the disbanding of the four Learning Networks which all had central roles in promoting and delivering the qualifications. Difficult decisions are likely to be required about the future strategy for practice learning in Scotland, recognising both the pressing need for practice teachers for social work students, and the wider imperative of finding effective ways to promote lifelong learning, leadership, continuous improvement and critical reflection in the social services workforce at a time of rapid change and economic constraint. I hope that these two evaluations, and the perspectives of the programme providers, candidates and their employers, will make a useful contribution to these decision making processes, by

⁶ <http://www.sssc.uk.com/ewd/workforce-development/leadership-in-scotlands-social-services.html>

acknowledging and building on successes whilst maintaining the momentum of the past five years of achievements in practice learning in Scotland.

References

- Beddoe, L. (2009) Creating continuous conversation: social workers and learning organisations, *Social Work Education*, 28,7, 722-736
- Gordon, J. (2011a) *Evaluation of a pilot delivery of the Practice Learning Qualification (Stage 2) in the North of Scotland*, Inverness, HiMATS
- Gordon, J. (2011b) *Evaluation of a pilot delivery of the Professional Development Award in Practice Learning (SCQF Level 9) South East of Scotland*, Inverness, Jean Gordon Consultancy
- Kirkpatrick, D. L. (1994) *Evaluating Training Programmes: The Four Levels*, San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler Publishers
- Learning Network South East (2011) *Mission Possible Report*, Edinburgh LN-SE
- Postle, K., Edwards, C., Moon, R., Rumsey, H. and Thomas, T. (2002) Continuing professional development after qualification - partnerships, pitfalls and potential, *Social Work Education*, 21, 2, 157-170
- Scottish Executive (2004) *Confidence in Practice Learning*, Edinburgh, Scottish Executive
- Scottish Executive (2006) *Changing Lives: Report of the 21st Century Social Work Review*, Edinburgh, Scottish Executive
- Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education (2006) *Practice Learning Qualifications and Practice Learning Qualifications (Social Services): Submission to SSSC December 2005 (Revised November 2006)*, Dundee, SIESWE/SSSC
- Scottish Organisation for Practice Teaching (2011) *PLQ(SS): Best Practice for a Sustainable Future*, Alloa, ScOPT
- Scottish Practice Learning Project <http://www.scottishpracticelearning.com> [Accessed 5.12.11]
- Scottish Social Services Council/ IRISS (2008) *The Framework for Continuous Learning in Social Services*, Edinburgh, Scottish Government
<http://www.sssc.uk.com/clf/home/welcome-to-the-continuous-learning-framework-website.html> [Accessed 5.12.11]