

SCOTTISH SOCIAL SERVICES COUNCIL

# Moving On

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## A professional journey in Childhood Practice

Report on the experience of learners moving from an SVQ4 to an academic programme of work based study and on the arrangements to support the transition

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## **Moving on: making the transition from SVQ4 to BA in Childhood Practice**

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# **1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Purpose**

This report has been compiled as an aid to the further development of Childhood Practice in Scotland. It is based on interviews with a range of stakeholders seeking their views on the present arrangements for the delivery of Childhood Practice degree programmes. The SQA level 9 Professional Development Award in Childhood Practice has been validated and was publicly announced in March 2011 but is not within the scope of this study.

This work was commissioned by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) in November 2010 with the project objective defined as being to provide evidence of:

- Candidates' views of how well the SVQ level 4 prepares them for undertaking the BA Childhood Practice;
- Candidates' views on the type of support that might usefully be given to help make the jump from a VQ to a degree level award;
- Providers views on how well prepared SVQ candidates are for the BA in Childhood Practice.

Bill Thomson and Joan Menmuir undertook this research on behalf of the SSSC.

## **1.2 Context**

The benchmark standard for a level 9 award in Childhood Practice that would serve as a qualification for leaders and managers was introduced in 2007. It was deliberately innovative in seeking to provide a pathway that would link work based awards such as SVQs with academic study and to provide a focus for the development of clearer and stronger articulation links between colleges, universities and the work place.

These ideas are at the forefront of the Scottish Government's thinking about the future development of Higher Education in Scotland. Some of the issues are set out in the December 2010 Green Paper Building a Smarter Future: Towards a Sustainable Scottish Solution for the Future of Higher Education <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/12/15125728/0>

*Our central proposition is simple: from school to university is not the only route to gaining a degree. There are many reasons why some learners take different routes over longer periods of time. We believe that we have yet to unlock the key benefits of articulation, but we are mindful that this has to be balanced with the costs of developing and implementing a more flexible system.*

*Articulation forms an essential part of our system both in offering a route to degree level study (which can be the best route for those who have no previous involvement in higher education) and in offering routes for up-skilling and cementing links between high level technical and academic education where employers require it.*

The SSSC wishes to take a leadership role in taking forward this debate in order to support and deal with the key challenges of future workforce development. It sees this research as contributing to that process.

## **1.3 The research process**

The researchers made contact with the 8 universities who currently offer Childhood Practice qualifications in Scotland and identified a number of other stakeholders who could provide evidence to meet the project objectives. The universities were asked if they would be willing to allow some of their learners to participate and, if learners also agreed, to supply contact details. Arrangements were then made to seek the views of all of the identified stakeholders first by asking if they were willing to take part. Almost all responded and all of these positively.

Semi structured interview schedules were then developed for

- Learners;
- University providers;
- Other stakeholders.

Learners' views were sought either individually by e-mail or through group meetings. University providers and other stakeholders were interviewed individually either face to face or by telephone. In each case, a summary note of the information and views provided was made and sent back to the originator for confirmation or amendment.

#### **1.4 Drafting the report**

Confirmed summary notes were obtained from 20 learners, 8 university providers and 8 other stakeholders. These were then analysed and consolidated into a draft report. The draft report was circulated to all respondents for comment or clarification. All points raised were taken into account in the preparation of the final report.

In the text of the report quotations are attributed to 'learners', 'providers' and 'other stakeholders'. The names of respondents are listed in appendix 1.

All quotations from respondents are anonymous though the researchers hope they will each recognise the contribution they have made. Collectively their assistance has been of great benefit.

## **2 Counting credit for prior learning**

### **2.1 The BA degree in Childhood Practice**

The Bachelor of Arts degree in Childhood Practice is based on learners gaining 360 SCQF credits at levels 7, 8 and 9. Two kinds of prior learning can count towards the 360 credits required. These are learning that has been assessed and credit rated and has achieved relevant qualifications such as HNQs, PDAs and SVQs, and learning that has been gained from experience either from work or from life in general.

In 2008 when the first Childhood Practice programmes were being developed relevant qualifications such as HNCs and PDAs had already been credit rated and levelled by SQA, and the credit rating of SVQs was underway. Each university made decisions about the amount of prior learning credit to accept, based on the extent to which each qualification mapped onto the Standard for Childhood Practice, fitted with the design of the particular programme, and met the regulatory requirements of the university.

### **2.2 University agreement**

From 2009 representatives from the universities offering Childhood Practice began to work together on how best to create a more consistent approach to the way they recognised prior learning. They used award information from SQA to help reach decisions and by September 2010 there was a growing consensus on how a range of awards including SVQ4s in Children's Care Learning and Development (CCLD) and Playwork would be treated across the sector for entry to a Childhood Practice programme or for exemption within it. (Appendix 2, 'Credit for Existing Awards').

According to the agreement, SVQ4s in CCLD and in Playwork generally get prior learning credit of 100-110 credits at level 8 based on individual matching. Individual matching involves working out if the learning maps onto the learning offered in the programme, is equal in volume and level to the equivalent learning in the programme and meets the organisational regulations of the particular degree level provider. Credit can be vired down a level, but not up.

Within the general agreement there are variations in some specific institutions. Glasgow, for instance, currently splits the 100 credits on the basis of 60 at level 8 and 40 at level 9. In Aberdeen, which works with 30 credit units, participants are credited with 90 credits leaving a further 30 credit unit at level 8 still to be achieved. In Edinburgh, Dundee and Strathclyde participants can get 100 credits at level 8. The UHI, previously validated through Strathclyde, plans to validate its own award in 2011 and will likely offer 100 credits at level 8. The variations between universities depend largely on individual institutions' regulations though the University of the West of Scotland, where there could be a similar split to Glasgow's, the allocation of 100 credits is usually at level 8.

### **2.3 The system in practice**

Where participants have some other recognised qualifications like HNC and/or PDA in addition to an SVQ4 then their volume of relevant prior learning credit is greater. The total volume of credit allowed within a university programme depends on each institution's regulations for degree courses. Most work with a maximum of 240 prior learning credits out of the 360 required for a degree but some, for example Edinburgh, offer less than that. Edinburgh's general university regulations will only allow 120 credits to be set against a degree programme. Its BA programme therefore requires another 240 credits at levels 8 and 9 (to be taken over a three year period).

The universities tend to treat learners individually as they work out how best to count their prior learning credit but not all learners or employers understand or agree with the decisions that are made.

*I just can't get to grips with how they made the decisions about this.....the SVQ4 certificate SQA points and the University Degree points do not match up so I feel we haven't got enough credit for what we have done. Learner*

*Universities often won't give any credit at level 9. Other stakeholder*

Where learners come with some level 7 credit such as an SVQ3 or a HNC and some level 8 credit such as a PDA or an SVQ4, then they usually start with a reflective unit at level 8 which allows them to pull all of their learning together and work out what else needs to be done before moving on to level 9. Learners who come with only SVQ4 in CCLD or Playwork must make an important decision. Do they keep their level 8 credits from SVQ4 and then build credit at level 7 and the rest of level 8 before starting on level 9, or do they count the SVQ4 credit against level 7 and then work on new level 8 units to bring them up to the start of level 9? Universities support learners as they make this choice.

*I received 100 credits at level 8 but it was suggested that I put it towards my level 7 which means I only have only one module of 20 credits (at level 7) to do before commencing level 8. Learner*

*Most however don't want to do this (use their SVQ4 credit against level 7) as they want to keep the level 8 credit they have. In this case we build up (the other)....credits at level 7 and.....at level 8. Provider*

This raises the issue of whether it is necessary for learners to be expected to demonstrate outcomes at level 7, if they have already shown competence at a higher level. While it may be that an individual university's general regulations for degree bearing courses requires some learning to have been assessed at level 7, the spirit of the Framework for Qualifications in Higher Education and of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) would suggest that more credit at level 8 and less at level 7 could be within the general requirements of a university for entry to level 9 of a BA degree. This could be investigated further by university providers.

As the move to greater consistency across the sector develops it is important for learners to be given up to date and accurate information about credit and to make shared decisions that are clearly understood. University and SSSC information about credit is currently not well understood by some employers and by some learners and is seen by them to be inconsistent.

## **2.4 The Open University**

The Open University does not provide an award in Childhood Practice that qualifies learners as leaders and managers. What it does offer is a Diploma of Higher Education in Childhood Practice that is recognised by SSSC as a practitioner qualification. The Dip HE consists of 240 credits (120 at level 7, 60 at level 8 and 60 at level 9). As well as through OU study, entry can be through an HNC that gets 90 credits at level 7 and is followed by the 30 credit module 'Making your experience count'. The other universities recognise the Dip HE as 240 credits towards their Childhood Practice degrees, except Edinburgh. Edinburgh's general university regulations will only allow 120 credits to be set against a degree programme. It can credit the Dip HE at 240 but a further 120 leads not to a

degree but to an award. (There is no agreement as yet from the SQA on credit for the Dip HE within the level 9 PDA in Childhood Practice).

## **2.5 Conclusions**

**Universities have developed arrangements for allocating credit to vocational awards such as SVQ4s in Children's Care Learning and Development (CCLD) and in Playwork.**

**Most universities allow maximum prior learning credit for other awards such as HNC and PDA.**

**Universities support learners as they make choices about prior learning credit.**

**Credit information for learners and employers is not always easy to understand, consistent, and up to date.**

**Universities should consider whether it is necessary for learners to gain further credit at levels below that which they have already achieved.**

### 3 How well prepared are SVQ4 entrants?

#### 3.1 Coping with change

University providers find variation among learners entering the degree programme. Some find it very straightforward to move from earlier qualifications and others do not. Although not always related to the specific prior learning qualifications they bring on entry, providers suggest that some learners with an SVQ4 and no other prior learning qualification can find the transition more difficult, more so than candidates with SVQ4 and HNC, or PDA and HNC. Building up a 'learning from experience' claim to gain credit at SCQF level 7 can add an extra burden for these learners.

*SVQ entrants perform well and have no general difficulties. Provider*

*There is a huge variation among all students. SVQ4s vary too. We took in a group of out of school care students six months ago and they are doing very well. At other times SVQ 4 students struggle. Provider*

*In general those students who have VQs as their main qualification are possibly less well equipped to deal with the requirements of academic writing. ....More so than students who have achieved HNC/PDA as their main qualification, the quality of the provider of the VQ has a correlation on the writing abilities of the student. Provider*

There was general agreement among both university providers and learners that the approaches of SVQs and degree work are different. SVQ4s are essentially concerned with practice and that experience equips learners very well to identify and present work place evidence against benchmark standards. Universities are more interested in a critique of practice based on wider reading and discussion. Some SVQ4 entrants felt well prepared for the transition to this new approach and some did not.

Coping with new forms of assessment, reading, academic writing, ICT and the evening/weekend timing of classes were all mentioned by SVQ4 learners as potentially challenging when they joined the degree programme. Their general advice to colleagues starting at the university was that if you were willing to work, everything is fine.

*Similar in that I am working under my own initiative, meet up occasionally with fellow students. Think the elements in the SVQ gives more guidance as to what I need to write about. Present course relies on me carrying out more research on line whilst SVQ was more about my own practice. Learner*

*SVQ is about proving you know what you are doing whereas BACP encourages you to research and grow in knowledge and understanding. Learner*

*I actually preferred doing my CCLD4 as it was regular assessments then you wrote up the reflective accounts. Learner*

*I really enjoyed the step up to the level required for the BACP. The course requires lots of research and ability to critically analyse. I have spent lots of time reading and have acquired proper study skills. Learner*

*You can't wing it (at the university). You need to take time and read. It is much harder than I thought it would be, quite a jump from SVQ4, but there is lots of support. Learner*



The transition involves a move from a fairly standardised approach in the SVQ4 to a learning approach that can require a new kind of thinking and reflection. This transition is supported by universities as they find appropriate SCQF level 7 and 8 modules for individual candidates to make up the 240 points required before embarking on level 9 of the programme.

Other stakeholders held a variety of views about how learners coped with the transition from SVQ4 into the degree level programme. One, for example, felt that employers had a responsibility to ensure that their learners were prepared for the transition by providing transitional modules in addition to the SVQ4 for their employees. Another said that the upcoming SQA level 9 route was being perceived by employees with an SVQ4 as more 'friendly' because the learning environment would be more familiar. A third commented on the range of factors that could affect the transition.

*The extent to which they are prepared is variable and depends on factors such as who their employer is and what their workplace setting is like. Initial advice from the SSSC and the (SVQ4) training provider also matter and are not always consistent. The length of time since they have undertaken any formal learning is also a factor as is the style/mode of study offered by the (SVQ4) training provider. Other stakeholder*

### **3.2 Bringing strengths**

As well as insight and practice in managing work based evidence many of those interviewed identified learners with SVQ experience as having a wide range of skills, knowledge and appropriate values which had often been developed through workplace experience and professional development. Learners had worked closely with standards and were clear about the requirements of the management role.

Both providers and other stakeholders used words like drive, dynamism, tenacity, and passion to describe some learners. There was also emphasis on commitment and dedication and the recognition that SVQ4 learners work well together and support each other.

*Very experienced practitioners who can see what a practitioner does and why. Show professional competence and can reflect on what they do. Provider*

*They are familiar with problem based and work based learning. Provider*

Learners themselves were perhaps less forthcoming about the strengths they brought with them. Despite this there was clearly a confidence among some of them in their own capacities.

*I am practical and able to evaluate my practice /good/bad/ needs improvement, learning etc. But again writing this down as well as doing the reading, appendices and essay, it was just another thing to do. Learner*

*I feel that a great deal of the work I have done to date has already been covered within my SVQ 4, however, this has allowed me to deepen my knowledge and understanding and move on the work that I did. The inference that at SVQ4 we didn't analyse our own practice or were reflective practitioners is a bit of an insult. Learner*

### **3.3 Identifying potential difficulties**

Providers identified a number of areas of potential difficulty for candidates as they cope with the transition from SVQ4 to degree level demands. Some of these relate to the way in which the values, knowledge and skills promoted in the SVQ4 were revisited and challenged by the new learning environment. This could be difficult for some learners with SVQ4s particularly if they have come from very limiting professional learning environments or with a limited range of theoretical perspectives to inform and challenge their understanding of children and their childhoods.

*Professional development and work experience varies. Some have done SVQ2, SVQ3 and SVQ4 all in one establishment. Provider*

*Knowledge is not current, older textbooks have been used, a more old fashioned approach.....these gaps are getting less with newer qualifications. Provider*

One interviewee who works with SVQ4 learners suggested that sometimes these learners don't really know what is happening, other than what their Local Authority promotes (lots of Reggio in Fife and GIRFEC in the Highlands). SVQ4 learners can lack depth and breadth in their thinking and don't have a critical understanding of the range of theoretical positions on which decisions are made. Giving names and saying 'we do that' is not the same as understanding the underlying concepts and philosophies.

One of the central differences in the university environment as learners move towards and into level 9, is that they are actively encouraged to read widely and critically, to challenge their own understandings, and to communicate these understandings to other professionals. This can be more difficult for learners who have just arrived in the university than for those who have already completed more of level 7 and 8 in that environment and been introduced to a broader range of literature and a greater variety of practice.

*Students coming into the BACP with few/no school based qualifications and SVQs may not have the academic literacy skills required (structuring essays etc.). Other stakeholder*

*For some it can be a bit of a jump in terms of academic level/report writing and research skills. Knowledge and understanding are fine but getting it onto paper is more difficult. The ability to present evidence and get it into practice are both needed in raising standards. Other stakeholder*

*....the gaps are mostly in academic writing, composition and analysis. Referencing can be an issue too if they have not had to evidence their reading before. ....Some learn fast, but not all. Some HNC and PDA candidates have similar issues too. Provider*

*....less able to write analytically than those students who have been in-house (in the university) for longer. Provider*

*Students with VQs are very good at providing evidence and at using policy papers but are not good at using professional literature to underpin their arguments. They tend to lack awareness of other points of view and are generally uncritical of policies and literature. Accounts tend to be descriptive – 'this is what I do' but not 'why?' Provider*

*I found the format of the SVQ4 very restrictive except for the child development section which encouraged reading and expression of thought through essay work. Learner*

A practical concern that was raised, mostly by SVQ4 entrants themselves, was computer literacy. Many felt that the university expectations in this area were quite a challenge at the start. Learners who had completed their SVQ4s most recently felt much more competent than those whose qualification had been achieved up to 5 years ago. All commented on the effective support they received from university staff, but they felt they would have benefitted from more ICT experience before arriving.

*ICT literacy is not always developed enough at the time of transition. Other stakeholder*

*I think getting used to the VLE, felt it took me a while to navigate around the site, kept coming upon new information. Learner*

Being independent and proactive can also be a challenge for some SVQ4 entrants to degree level programmes. Providers and employers suggest that some SVQ4 candidates are fearful of coming to university, possibly because of previous experiences of education. They need support to overcome the fear of failure.

*Candidates are used to a high level of individual support in SVQ4 and can find it more difficult to be independent learners when they move to BACP. Other stakeholder*

*You submit VQ evidence as you go along and get feedback on each one. The 'well done's' as I went along in VQ were important to my enthusiasm to complete and confidence to continue. Learner*

*They don't have strong views on where they stand themselves. Their thinking needs to be more challenged (in the SVQ4) and they should not just be doing something because that is what they think HMIE want to see. Other stakeholder*

### **3.4 Easing the transition for SVQ4 entrants**

A number of suggestions for easing the transition were identified by university providers and other stakeholders, but not explored in detail during the project. These were mostly concerned with potential developments in SVQ4.

#### **For the SVQ4:**

Develop the professionalism of the work place contexts in which SVQ4s are delivered.

*There is a huge amount still to do to develop the professionalism in Childhood Practice. Even those who have SVQ4 can still lack the level of professionalism required if their organisation does not value it. Even at SVQ 2 professionalism should be discussed. Other stakeholder*

Improve the quality assurance.

*The quality of SVQs seems to be very variable with some assessors verifying practice as good, when this is perhaps questionable. The quality assurance of training is important. Although it might be difficult and painful for the student to get to the level required, it is important that the learning is valued and valuable. Other stakeholder*

Provide more choice within the award.

*SVQ4 candidates who are doing the CCLD award for registration have all the units defined by SSSC except one. If they were not doing the award for registration, but as progression into level 9, then there are many interesting units in SVQ4 which could be studied. You don't need to do the full SVQ4 to see its worth. Other stakeholder*

Link the SVQ4s to other level 7 and 8 awards.

*For SVQ3 CCLD students we are working towards embedding HNC core assessments into the SVQ3 when we deliver it and cross reference them. This means that the students get the 60 credits for their SVQ3 (into CP) and in addition get 36 –may be 32? credits for the core of the HNC. This could be done with SVQ4 and relevant aspects of other level 7/8 qualifications. Provider*

Create new forms of assessment and professional writing.

*Finding another /additional way of assessing the SVQ4 CCLD standard would be more helpful than changing the standard. As in SVQ3, knowledge is applied, but is often not delivered. Provider*

*If CCLD VQ standard is being redeveloped, then more practice of writing reflective accounts which demonstrate wider reading and different perspectives would be a good idea. Provider*

*One candidate did an SVQ3 and had some difficulty with writing. She then went into the BA Childhood and Youth Studies at UHI. She said her writing got better and better with practice and she learned a lot about herself as a learner. Level 4 doesn't do this for a candidate. Other stakeholder*

### **For the BA in Childhood Practice:**

Work further on the transition for SVQ4 Playwork entrants.

*The CP standard is fine at the moment, and we are beginning to examine its fitness for purpose in relation to 'out of school care' and 'playwork' candidates. It looks as if playwork candidates may well opt for the SQA level 9 PDA route. Provider*

*I work in out of school care and my first module was all about early years. Maybe it will get more relevant as it goes on. I hope so. Learner*

Continue to develop workplace partnership arrangements, particularly with private and voluntary sector employers.

*Partnership arrangements with the workplace are not really working at all. In fact I don't believe they exist at this time. Other stakeholder*

### **3.5 Understanding the need for change**

When programmes were initially delivered in 2008 providers found some resentment from SVQ4 learners about the new qualification requirements. They suggest that this is reducing as newer learners and their employers have had more time to understand the requirements and see for themselves the positive impact that those undertaking the award are having on workplace practice and on the children in their care.

*CCLD students sometimes used to feel they were being forced to do the qualification, but this has improved now. Playwork students are perhaps feeling this a bit now, but after a module or so their confidence grows and they are fine. Provider*

*..... this (initial lack of engagement) in my opinion does not continue throughout the course and the students overall generally are proud and pleased with themselves and their achievements. Provider*

*I wasn't looking forward to coming. I had to do it. But I came along and I'm enjoying it. I feel I am benefitting. I am changing. I'm going back to my roots with nursery. We've been bogged down with the 3-5 Framework but now I am back to the child. I reflect much more. Learner*

### **3.6 Conclusions**

**The strengths that SVQ4 entrants bring to a degree in Childhood Practice provide a strong basis for their continuing professional development.**

**SVQ 4 entrants are like entrants with other qualifications. There is individual variation in the extent to which their SVQ4 qualification has prepared them for further study.**

**Some SQV4 entrants may need specific types of support in the new environment, especially in developing their professional writing skills, computer literacy, and independence as learners.**

## 4 Providing support for learners

### 4.1 Special characteristics of Childhood Practice learners

There is a substantial literature on supporting students in higher education. A recent enhancement theme in Scotland, for instance, produced a series of reports in 2009 including 'benchmarking practice in Scotland against practice internationally', 'Supporting student success: Scoping other UK and international practice' and case studies of practice in Scotland.

<http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/SHEECIB/default.asp>

Much of the material in these enhancement theme documents is concerned with what may be seen as conventional students. Childhood Practice learners entering the university environment have their own special characteristics. They are in employment, usually full time. They are often older and professionally very experienced. They are almost all, so far, women. Many have had no previous experience of university study but all have entered with some prior learning credit and start their study at an advanced level. Some are very confident, some are less so. Most are very conscious of having to embark on further learning as a requirement for keeping their jobs and some are resentful of that fact. All are mature with the demanding life styles that maturity brings. Work life balance is important to them.

### 4.2 The learner experience of support in SVQ4

Broadly speaking the SVQ4 learners in this study were satisfied with the support they had received both in their SVQ programmes and in their university studies.

Learners' experiences of support during their work for the SVQ4 varied considerably. For most there were regular meetings with assessors and clear guidance.

*My assessor visited me at work, home and kept in touch through e mails and telephone calls. Learner*

*My tutor was willing to work at my pace. Learner*

*Help if I wanted it and also 'pats on the back' which I liked. Learner*

For others the experience was more mixed.

*I met up with my assessor monthly but that was not frequent enough for some of the units. I was in contact with my assessor by phone and the girls I worked with were supportive but there was not enough detailed support to complete the assignments. Learner*

*I had never done an svq qualification before so I was not familiar with the system of KS, PC's and reflective accounts. This was such a strange way of learning for me and it took me slightly longer to get the hang of it. I think tutors or course leaders need to recognise that this way of learning may be very foreign to some people and a little more information on this, early on the course, would have helped me not to worry so much. Learner*

A very few were quite critical.

*Felt my mentor and the college made us sign agreements so that we worked through the SVQ at the rate expected but they didn't keep to their side and I was always waiting on them*

*to let me progress. There was no feedback either, perhaps because I was always having to push to get the responses. Learner*

Generally, though, perceptions of the SVQ were positive.

*I loved them (assessments) and was able to complete them in a much quicker time as my tutor was very accommodating. Learner*

#### **4.3 The learner experience of support in the university**

SVQ4 entrants were generally happy with the support they received from the universities. As might be expected though, learners following different kinds of programme expressed different concerns and their support needs changed as they progressed through a programme.

##### **Support at the start**

There was a need expressed by some learners for more time and more explanations in the earlier stages of a programme. Some comments of this kind came from learners where induction courses of one kind or another had already been undertaken. Possibly, because learners need time and experience to be able to understand the significance of what they are learning, it is unrealistic to expect everyone to understand what is expected at the same time. Providers may have to plan to revisit issues about the programme from time to time.

*It would have been nice, when we first started, if we had been given a list of the items we needed to complete and where to find them on the VLE. Learner*

*I think that I would have benefited a great deal from a workshop on planning your module and what it expected. I know we are all coming in at different levels but everyone would benefit from this at whatever level they enter. Learner*

*There was a lot of information to take in (turnitin, Mahara, moodle, websurf, setting up emails) but when you start to use them it becomes easier to understand. Learner*

Most of those following on-line courses had initial difficulties with the technology although some also commented on how they had come to terms with it.

*The info on using the e-brary and the VLE at the first workshop was very helpful but felt we had to stumble through the VLE when doing our induction exercise, although I can offer no suggestions on how this could be overcome. Learner*

*I found using the VLE very overwhelming to begin with and when there were problems, I felt very alone! I am not very good with computers and found this difficult to begin with. Learner*

*I found using the VLE quite difficult to begin with. I then found that the blogs were great but now find no one goes on and no one uses them. We were supposed to be a community of learners however, it doesn't seem to work that way, it seems it's now each to their own. Learner*

*I myself like the on-line teaching methodology and how it is has been easy to access different web sites which I would previously not have the knowledge of. Learner*

## Support as the programme progressed

What did students like? The following is a list of things that students liked when they got them and expressed a desire for them when they didn't. The suggestions are all about academic support of one kind or another.

- Workshops, group support sessions, classroom time;
- Seeing examples of other students' work;
- On-going support from tutors and colleagues;
- Libraries and web based resources;
- Help with referencing.

*I would have preferred at least once a fortnight to have an open meeting at the Local College with Early year's lecturers whom are aware of the course content for support and feedback on current work that we the students are undertaking. Learner*

*I've been to a couple of workshops so far which I found interesting. I emailed my tutor and received a response very quickly, which contained positive feedback and suggestions. At one of the workshops we were given the opportunity to read a previous student's essay, which was very enlightening and gave a clearer indication of what was expected. Learner*

*Face to face / or online tutorial with tutor going over some aspects of the module. Asking questions and hearing other people's questions. This gives me confidence that I'm progressing in the right way and along the right lines. Any help with referencing. I know how to do it now but I find it a bit of a pain. Sometimes the blog to see others' comments. It is used as a place for constructive comments and questions from peer group and I would probably like a chattier, moaney forum. Learner*

*I like the library resources, I buy a great deal of texts in any case but it does allow you to read more than you could afford to buy and access to materials that you would not be able to access otherwise, most impressed. Learner*

## Particular support issues for learners

A few of the learners raised quite specific issues. One learner who had joined a cohort that had already been in the programme for some time would have liked more help on how to deal with course work.

*My advice to university staff would be to support people who join in the 2<sup>nd</sup> (year) when preparing for their first assignment e.g. how to make bibliographies. Learner*

Another suffered from dyslexia but found that the university had been most helpful in managing proof reading. Interestingly, she had preferred her SVQ course because she had weekly face to face meetings with her tutors, though they didn't give her help with proof reading.

None of the students mentioned money as an issue.

## 4.4 Providers' perceptions of the support they provide for learners

Aberdeen, Dundee, the OU and UHI offer Childhood Practice programmes based on on-line learning or on a blended learning approach with a mix of on-line and face to face learning. Edinburgh,



Glasgow, Strathclyde and the UWS provide classroom based programmes. All have designated course directors and tutors, though the terminology varies between universities. All offer induction courses and on-going tutor support. All provide extensive VLEs and access to the university's central services such as libraries and academic practice departments, though again the terminology varies between universities. All offer pastoral support through course directors and module tutors.

The university providers are universally sensitive to the needs of their Childhood Practice learners and go to considerable lengths to provide support. They do not differentiate among learners so SVQ4 learners are offered the same level of support as other learners on Childhood Practice programmes.

*Some (learners) see the move to degree level work as a bigger step than it actually is. We offer a lot of support at the start as they can be apprehensive. Provider*

*Our students travel mostly straight from work to their classes, finish at 8.30 and travel home. Many live a considerable distance from the University and are not back in their home until late in the evening. Provider*

*It's important to have walked in their shoes, to be anecdotal at times, to know what it feels like to have the Care Commission come in, not to be a scary academic. It's important to use normal language not academic that makes them feel inferior. Provider*

*We are flexible about extensions to submission dates. For instance one of the students was involved in a stressful child protection case and it was perfectly reasonable to give her more time. Provider*

### **Proactive support systems**

Typically, induction courses will provide guidance on

- Finding reading materials
- Keeping your work safe
- Information literacy skills
- Writing
- Communicating online
- Working in a group
- Feedback
- Understanding plagiarism
- PowerPoint, posters and presentations.

VLE resources in each university are extensive, with local variations on what is available.

Edinburgh, for instance has 'Turnitin' software which is used for electronically uploading assignments and helping students identify where they may have inadvertently plagiarised materials. <http://turnitin.com/static/index.php>

At the OU, Childhood Practice learners are supported through the university's VLE which allows them to access asynchronous on-line forums, on-line resources, and synchronous on-line tutorials.

Dundee has 'advance@Dundee' an online guide for students covering effective writing, studying and personal development, that they can dip into this at any time. It covers:

- Personal Development
- Curriculum Vitae and Careers
- Interpersonal Skills
- Studying and Learning
- Research and Problem Solving
- Effective Writing
- Basic Maths and Statistics
- Information and Communications Technology

<http://www.dundee.ac.uk/aatu/advanceug.htm>

In Aberdeen the BA Childhood Practice learners use the distance services of the university more than any other group.

### **Face to face meetings**

Arrangements for tutorials and classes also vary between universities.

In Glasgow, for instance, each course gets 4 days and each course is delivered twice. This allows learners to choose the days that suit them best. All class notes, Power Point presentations and learner produced posters go on Moodle (VLE). The University has an 80% attendance requirement but these arrangements mean that all material is available and staff can check whether a learner has accessed it.

In UWS, learners are placed in tutor groups of 10, moving in future to groups of 15, each with a tutor. There is also an 'effective learning tutor' who helps with writing skills, structure, referencing etc.

In UHI, each group has a 'studies advisor' who looks after academic and pastoral issues. The course director acts in that role for level 9 and meets each learner 3 times a year either face to face or by telephone. The module tutors will offer general support during the module and there are chat rooms, e mail, face to face and discussion boards.

In Strathclyde, learners are organised in cohorts, some campus based and some out-reached based in North and in South Lanarkshire. Modules are delivered on a classroom basis in the evening and on one Saturday per module, with extensive use of group and project work. The course director provides general guidance with module tutors providing module specific support.

The OU provides Childhood Practice learners with the opportunity to attend face to face tutorials or day schools (usually held on Saturdays) or be supported by their tutors through group telephone tutorials.

### **Peer support**

Each university tries to encourage mutual support systems for its learners through chat rooms, discussion boards and some set up study groups.

*Students also are a great support for each other. We have a BACP Cyber Café on-line – treated like an on-line common room. Within the area the students have access to a PUB. This is an area only accessible to students where they have the opportunity to share and*

*openly discuss issues relating to the course and beyond. When they are put in touch with each other it is geographically, rather than those on the same qualification. Provider*

*We have a discussion site on web-CT and we form 'action learning cohorts' that are groups of up to 6 sharing experience on-line within the group. We believe this works really well. It would work better if we had more numbers. Sometimes there are only one or two students doing a unit at a particular time. Provider*

*Blogs have been very successful. We have a Childhood Practice Community Blog and a blog on every module. The blogs help students to arrange their own peer support, sometimes level 9 students will support level 8, it feels a very shared space and students feel less isolated, we use it to give advice or do a bit of teaching when we see it would be helpful. Students like it and use it well. Provider*

### **Support for specific skills**

Tutors think that learners need support with writing but are aware that this varies with individuals. Generally, however, skill in academic writing involving critical analysis and referencing to texts and to evidence is seen as an issue. At an extreme, some learners have very little experience of writing and others have specific learning difficulties.

### **Workplace support**

All course directors are aware that workplace support varies considerably. Some are finding it difficult to build up and strengthen their connections to private and voluntary sector employers, particularly those that are not members of the childcare partnerships.

*A lot of them don't yet fully understand the requirements of registration. Some private employers.....are not in the partnership. Provider*

*...it was difficult to get sustained interest from employers and managers. Early on we organised a meeting of people we thought would be interested. A lot of them came to the meeting but basically said that they now knew about it and that would be enough. Provider*

*For workplace mentor support we supply a guidance booklet and have a learning agreement signed by the student, Programme Director and the workplace mentor. Student evaluation of the workplace support shows it to be very variable. Some students find it difficult to find a suitable mentor, some use their deputy, head Teacher, class teacher, manager and occasionally they may use a fellow student. Those working in out of school care may find it difficult, but all have managed to date. Provider*

*Students negotiate their own placement and this has worked well though there have been a few occasions where private providers have asked for SCRO checks. Provider*

An emerging and significant problem relates to the cutbacks now being rolled into place.

*There have been a few calls recently about people losing their jobs and therefore not meeting the workplace requirement. Tutors are flexible and give them more time. If still not sorted they can do voluntary work or work related modules in the interim. But they still have to meet the minimum work based requirement. Provider*

#### 4.5 Other Stakeholders' perceptions of the support provided for SVQ4 entrants

Some of the other stakeholders were keenly aware of the needs of learners and of the issues embedded in providing effective programmes. Some were also be highly critical of what they perceived to be happening.

*In the university environments the support from the universities range from no support at all, not even answering direct enquiries to active support and encouragement from tutors. Other stakeholder*

Generally other stakeholders say that what SVQ4 learners in the Childhood Practice programmes need is:

- Funding
- Workplace support, timed structurally into the programme (particularly at the start)
- Induction into value of training, course content, ICT, academic skills like referencing
- Peer group support
- Tutor support
- Pastoral support.

#### Funding

According to those interviewed current arrangements for funding learners as they undertake Childhood Practice degree level programmes are very variable.

The most obvious cost of programmes lies in the tuition fees charged by the universities. These fees vary and do not fully reflect the full economic cost as programmes are partly supported by the Scottish Funding Council. There are also significant costs in terms of time, both in and out of the workplace, travel, books and IT equipment to be considered.

Some local authorities provide full funding for everyone in their partnerships, others focus on the staff who work in local authority settings. Some authorities focus their funding on registration, so practitioner qualified staff working in relevant settings within the authority who see Childhood Practice as a path for progression are not funded.

*We have just heard that we will not now be funding any private or voluntary sector managers to undertake the level 9 due to cutbacks. We will only fund LA Heads and Deputes. We also have succession planning for seniors but have not been given the go-ahead to look at costs yet and indeed may not in the foreseeable future. Other stakeholder*

Private sector based employers seem less engaged in funding their staff through programmes.

*It feels as if there was a big push in the private sector at the start when Childhood Practice was launched, but that now the 'pressure is off' a bit. Maybe employers are thinking 'they have to have level 9 so they will just have to do it' and not always understanding their responsibility to support their staff. Some staff members are funding their own courses. Other stakeholder*

ILAs are open to learners studying for 40 SCQF credits or more in any one year and who are earning less than £22,000. For degree level courses this amounts to £500 per year though some learners are ineligible due to the income limit. Most learners on Childhood Practice degree programmes are

required to pay more than £500 per year for the modules they undertake. This extra funding requirement may or may not be covered by their employer.

According to the university providers and other stakeholders interviewed, these issues of funding support are important for all learners in Childhood Practice, but particularly for those for those receiving little employer support in the private and voluntary sectors. This group includes many learners entering Childhood Practice degree level programmes with SVQ4.

### **Workplace support**

Workplace support is sometimes seen as being problematic, but not always. If a learner is employed in a private nursery, the owner might be business orientated and not able to offer professional advice. Some owners also have significant concerns about the cost of providing support in, for instance, offering and covering time for study and assignment preparation. If in addition they are ambivalent or do not see why a degree led workforce is necessary they may be reluctant to commit resources to supporting their staff. The same issues may be embedded in the public sector, though perhaps less visibly.

*...the allocation of time which is a huge issue for a working manager or senior practitioner in a centre. Other stakeholder*

*We have a culture of providing a learning community in each workplace and I work as the authority officer who addresses concerns about qualifications as they arise. In one stand-alone nursery for example the head is doing her masters, the senior ECE has the BACP, another is doing her BACP in Dundee and another is doing a postgrad CP in Glasgow and the ECE is working towards her SVQ3. Other stakeholder*

There are also particular problems in rural areas and where the workplace context is individually isolated as in child minding though these can be partly met by using IT and Skype.

*The work childminders do is very isolated. They need regular feedback from providers. Online opportunities to network have grown a lot in the last 5 years and now form a central part of their support. Other stakeholder*

### **Induction, peer group, tutor, and pastoral support**

Induction tends to be seen as a matter for the universities though some organisations provide and foster a range of workplace systems.

*We build capacity through a network of support, pastoral support. We help to link people together as they go through the courses. Private providers are linked into this network too. We ask everyone to provide an annual update on progress and nobody has dropped out of a BACP course yet. The network of learning raises aspirations. Other stakeholder*

*We already use Skype, on-line, and face to face within the organisation for support, supervision and regular communication. Other stakeholder*

*Mentoring support can begin before staff access the level 9 award. This should ensure they will be well supported by their employer when they start. Other stakeholder*

*Most people quickly find their own peer group support and are not isolated. They do it themselves and support is informal. A mentoring group can be seen as an 'add on' but the form of mentoring we tried needs to be built in structurally and not just as an add on. Other stakeholder*

Arising from the work of the Childhood Practice Development Group a number of employers and private and voluntary training providers were funded by the Scottish Government to pilot a developmental approach to mentoring. Though this is likely to be of benefit to Childhood Practice learners the participants have seen the development to be of wider significance.

*The mentoring we piloted provided 'external' learning and pastoral support. It took a more holistic view of the person and considered not just the learning. It proved a useful positive experience both to the mentor and mentee. It was more than just about Childhood Practice, it was about career, family, organisational culture. Other stakeholder*

#### **4.6 Conclusions**

**Learners are generally satisfied with the support available to them, during both SVQ4 and degree level study.**

**Universities provide a substantial range of proactive and reactive support for all learners entering Childhood Practice programmes, including those with SVQ4.**

**Other stake holders have concerns about the amount and nature of workplace support for learners in the private and voluntary sectors.**

## 5 **Summary of Conclusions**

### **Counting Credit for Prior learning**

Universities have developed arrangements for allocating credit to vocational awards such as SVQ4s in Children's Care Learning and Development (CCLD) and in Playwork.

Most universities allow maximum prior learning credit for other awards such as HNC and PDA.

Universities support learners as they make choices about prior learning credit.

Credit information for learners and employers is not always easy to understand, consistent and up to date.

Universities should consider whether it is necessary for learners to gain further credit at levels below that which they have already achieved.

### **How well prepared are SVQ4 entrants?**

The strengths that SVQ4 entrants bring to a degree in Childhood Practice provide a strong basis for their continuing professional development.

SVQ 4 entrants to a Childhood Practice degree programme are like entrants with other qualifications. There is individual variation in the extent to which their SVQ4 qualification has prepared them for further study.

Some SVQ4 entrants may need specific types of support in the new environment, especially in developing their professional writing skills, computer literacy, and independence as learners.

### **Providing Support**

Learners are generally satisfied with the support available to them, during both SVQ4 and degree level study.

Universities provide a substantial range of proactive and reactive support for all learners entering Childhood Practice programmes including those with SVQ4s.

Other stakeholders have concerns about the amount and nature of workplace support for learners in the private and voluntary sectors.

## **6 Recommendations**

### **For learners entering Childhood Practice programmes from SVQ4**

Have confidence in your own abilities and experience. Use the knowledge and skills you are gaining in your degree level studies to be assertive and to make a professional impact on workplace practice. Accept the strength that comes from your professional status.

### **For university providers**

Seek to develop and extend effective partnerships with employers, owners, managers and other stakeholders. Ensure the maximum transparency in arrangements for credit recognition and transfer. Consider whether it is necessary for learners to undertake work at a level lower than they have already achieved.

### **For employers and managers**

Seek to enhance the value of the service you offer by supporting colleagues in achieving the qualities defined by the Standard for Childhood Practice. Cooperate with other stakeholders and providers in establishing networks for mutual support and development.

### **For the Scottish Social Services Council**

Promote an understanding of the value to service users of graduate led provision. Continue to identify and disseminate good practice.



## **Appendix 1 Learners, providers and other stakeholders consulted**

The following provided the researchers with valuable information and comment.

### **Learners**

Barbara Brennan, University of the Highlands and Islands  
Jill Bryson, University of the Highlands and Islands  
Linda Burgess, Strathclyde University  
Maureen Campbell, University of the West of Scotland  
Fiona Carey, University of the West of Scotland  
Irene Carstairs, Dundee University  
Frances Donnelly, University of the West of Scotland  
Germaine Dudgeon, University of the West of Scotland  
Wendy Haggath, Aberdeen University  
Karen Jackson, University of the West of Scotland  
Linda Keir, University of the West of Scotland  
Katriona Magill, University of the West of Scotland  
Joan McDonald, Glasgow University  
Lauren McInnes, Dundee University  
Linda McIntyre University of the West of Scotland  
Pam Mason, Dundee University  
Suzanne Ogg, Aberdeen University  
Lesley Robertson, University of the Highlands and Islands  
Pat Small, Dundee University  
Lisa Yule, Dundee University

### **University providers**

Brenda Dunn, Programme Director BA Childhood Practice, Dundee University  
Sue Dumbleton, Staff Tutor, Faculty of Health and Social Care, Open University  
Lore Gallastegi, Staff Tutor, Faculty of Education and Language Studies, Open University  
Jackie Hendry, Acting Course Leader, BA Childhood Practice, Strathclyde University  
Dorothy Johnstone, Programme Leader, Childhood Practice, University of the West of Scotland  
Catriona McDonald, Programme Director, BA Childhood Practice and PGCE Early Years, Aberdeen University  
Lorna McNicoll, Director BA Childhood Practice, Edinburgh University  
Joan Martlew, Course Leader BA Childhood Practice, Strathclyde University  
Alice Mongiello, Course Director BA Childhood Practice, University of the Highlands and Islands  
Sheila Nutkins, Lecturer, School of Education, Aberdeen University  
Mary Wingrave, Programme Leader BA Childhood Practice, Glasgow University

### **Other stakeholders**

Catherine Agnew, Team Manager, Care Commission  
Ann Brady, Chief Executive of the Care and Learning Alliance (CALA)  
Margaret Brunton, Policy Manager, Scottish Preschool Play Association (SPPA)  
Hazel Caldwell, Training Coordinator, East Ayrshire Council  
Kevin Kelman, Quality Development Officer, Stirling Council  
Sylvia Mackay, Member of the Policy Committee, National Day Nurseries of Scotland (NDNS)  
Maggie Simpson, Chief Executive, Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA)  
Sandra Tucker, Executive Manager, Highland and Moray Accredited Training Services (HIMATS)

## Appendix 2 Credit for Existing Awards

The HEI Childhood Practice Group has reached a general consensus in relation to the credit value of a range of awards. The table below indicates the credit ratings we would normally give. Each university provider will have the flexibility to decide the most appropriate starting point. Entry points will be based on individual merit. In order to ensure that learning is successful and relevant, account will be taken of certificated learning, current CPD and experiential learning. SQA have been invaluable in providing award information to help us reach an informed decision.

It should be noted that in order to graduate with a named degree such as BA in Childhood Practice each university may have a maximum amount of credit which can be awarded e.g. half the degree 180 points.

Award	SCQF 7	SCQF 8	Credit
SVQ 3 Children's Care, Learning and Development	60		SCQF 7: 60 – 80 credits based on individual matching
SVQ 3 Playwork	80		SCQF 7: 80 - 90 credits based on individual matching
SVQ 3 Playwork with 3 identified HNC units (future development)	120		SCQF 7: 120 credits
HNC Early Education and Childcare	96		SCQF 7: 96 credits
Professional Development Award in Early Education and Childcare		64	SCQF 8: 60 credits
Professional Development Award in Childhood Practice at SCQF Level 8 (new revised 2009)		64	SCQF 8: 60 credits

Open University Certificate in Early Years Practice	60		SCQF 7: 60 credits
Open University Certificate in Early Years Practice & Personal Professional Development in an Early Years Setting	120		SCQF 7: 120 credits (eligible to register as practitioner with SSSC)
HNC Social Care	96		SCQF 7: 96 credits
HNC Supporting Learning Needs	96		SCQF 7: 96 credits
HNC Additional Support Needs: Supporting the Individual	96		SCQF 7: 96 credits
SVQ 4 Children's Care, Learning and Development		(52 mandatory credits at level 9 and optional units)	100 - 110 credits at SCQF 8 based on individual matching Staff Tutor, Faculty of
SVQ 4 Playwork		(55 mandatory credits at levels 8, 9 and 10 and optional units)	100 – 110 credits at SCQF 8 based on individual matching
SVQ 4 Leadership and Management for Care Services (replaces Residential Management Award)		(72 credits at level 10)	Individual matching
HND Childhood Practice	120	120	SCQF 7 and 8: 240 credits with entry to SCQF level 9

HND Additional Support Needs: Managing and Supporting the Services	120	120	SCQF 7 and 8: 240 credits with entry to SCQF level 9
Open University Diploma of Higher Education in Early Years	120	120	SCQF 7 and 8: 240 credits with entry to SCQF level 9 dependent on university credit requirements
Pre 2005			
SVQ 3 Early Years Care & Education	18		SCQF 7: 18 credits
SVQ 3 Playwork	Not credit rated		Entry to SCQF Level 7
NNEB or SNNB or SNNB			Individual matching
HNC Childcare and Education	120		SCQF 7: 120 credits
Professional Development Award Certificate in Childcare and Education		60	SCQF 8: 60 credits
HNC Social Care	120		SCQF 7: 120 credits
HNC Supporting Learning Needs	120		SCQF 7: 120 credits
SVQ 4 Early Years Care & Education		60	SCQF 8: 60 credits
HNC Working with Children in their Early Years	120		SCQF 7: 120 credits
SVQ 4 Management and Leadership		60	SCQF 8: 60 credits

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