



Centre for excellence
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Recognition of Prior Learning and Looked After Young People

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Recognition of Prior Learning and Looked-After Young People

This research briefing describes the findings from a research pilot designed to test out an application of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for young people from a looked-after background. RPL is a profiling process, which may be used to benchmark skills developed in informal settings against academic qualifications. Professionals from a variety of backgrounds within children's services undertook multi-agency RPL advisor training. They learned to benchmark experiences and skills gained in the wider community with the equivalent SCQF level and Curriculum for Excellence 'experiences and outcomes', and went on to carry out profiling with young people. Eight advisors and eight young people completed the research evaluation.

The study found that:

- Many of the resilience-building and success-promoting factors previously associated with RPL profiling occurred during the pilot.
- Although not all of the young people experienced all of these outcomes, benefits of RPL profiling for many of the young people included:
 - engagement with process;
 - increased skills awareness;
 - increased self-awareness;
 - feelings of being nurtured;
 - recognition of skills;
 - increased self esteem
 - increased motivation and ambition
- Advisors reported that increased awareness of career options occurred more than increased awareness of opportunities during RPL profiling.
- Advisors were able to adapt effectively to the role of RPL advisor with the training and support given, irrespective of their professional background.
- Advisors and young people stated that the materials would be suitable for use with looked-after children.

Background

Education Scotland commissioned a research pilot to determine whether RPL profiling could be used to recognise the wider achievements of young people who have been looked after by a local authority. Advisors were recruited from two local authorities, West Lothian and East Renfrewshire, and received one full day and two half days of RPL training.

The RPL toolkit used in the pilot contains cards that detail the skills associated with everyday activities. Young people were recruited by the advisors. They worked together with the toolkit in a one-to-one setting to determine their skill areas, and to benchmark their skills against the relevant SCQF level. A recent addition to the toolkit also allowed benchmarking against Curriculum for Excellence ‘experiences and outcomes’

Advisors came from a range of professional backgrounds, and included social workers, teachers, ‘More Choices More Chances’ keyworkers, a community learning and development worker and a youth justice worker. Eight advisors and 12 young people went through profiling. All eight of the advisors and eight of the young people contributed to the research evaluation, which was designed to address four questions:

- What were the outcomes of undertaking RPL profiling?
- Did the young people find the profiling approach useful in clarifying learning and employment ambitions?
- Were the existing materials suitable for looked-after children?
- Were advisors able to adapt effectively to the role of RPL advisor with the training and support provided?



Research Findings

This study on RPL profiling has shown that it could be used to recognise, in an informal way, the wider achievements of looked-after children. Benefits previously associated with RPL were evidenced by the young people and advisors who took part in the pilot and evaluation. Many of these benefits represent resilience-building and success-promoting factors.

Outcomes of RPL Profiling

Young people were engaged with profiling, and particularly enjoyed benchmarking their skills against the SCQF level descriptors.

‘After doing the first one, it made me think, “Aye, I want to do another one.”
(Young Person)

Benchmarking against Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes was less successful; however, it was recognised by advisors that the Curriculum for Excellence benchmarking had potential for the future.

‘Further down the line, doing it when the kids are more aware of the Curriculum for Excellence, I think then it’ll be more worthwhile.’ (Advisor)

An increase in self-esteem of many of the young people was indicated by advisors.

‘That wee glow in her face when she realized she was higher than she thought.’
(Advisor)

The young people were less positive about this area, but this was predicted by an advisor, who commented that the effects were subtle.

Concern was expressed that the benefits could be short lived. Offering continued support to the young people following profiling would be desirable.

Increased skills awareness and self-awareness were reported by advisors and young people, leading to a discussion with advisors about the possibility of using RPL profiling to help complete an SQA Personal Development Award on self-awareness.

This addressed a common concern of advisors: that the process did not lead to a formal qualification for the young people. The possibility of linking profiling to a Youth Achievement Award or one of the other SQA accredited awards detailed in *Amazing Things: A Guide to Youth Awards in Scotland* was also discussed. (Youth Scotland, 2012)

The advisors and young people confirmed that the young people had felt supported and encouraged during the process. Advisors knew the young people to varying degrees prior to profiling, and opinions were split on how important this was. It was suggested that one potential use of the toolkit is as a ‘getting to know you’ tool.

‘It gives the worker a lot of information about them in a very natural way, and in a very non-threatening way. And if you’ve got a good memory...you can always use

pieces of the interview to go back time and time again.'

(Advisor)

All of the advisors and a few of the young felt that going through profiling had increased their motivation levels.

'Finding out about the skills has made me want to get out and get into college...I came out of school too early, and then stopped all education. When I started coming to this it started to push me on a bit.'

(Young Person)

Career and Opportunity Awareness

Increased awareness or reinforcement of career choices was reported more than increased awareness of opportunities. Additional training or literature on career advice could be shared with future potential advisors, as well as the *Amazing Things* booklet.

Ability of Advisors to Adapt to the Role

Coming from a variety of backgrounds, the advisors possessed varying levels of experience of RPL and mentoring. They placed high value on the training sessions as an arena to obtain information and share ideas, and maintained that preparation was vital to their confidence with the toolkit. The advisors were able to show at the training and support days, and during their interviews, that they were able to adapt to the role of RPL advisor with ease.

Suitability for Looked-After Children

The profiling and toolkit were thought to be appropriate for use with looked-after children. It was thought that the flexibility of the toolkit was an attractive feature, and that it would be useful at transition stages. It could be used for CV preparation and at the S3 profiling stage detailed in *Building the Curriculum 5*. (The Scottish Government, 2011)

Advisors saw the multi-agency accessibility as a useful feature of the toolkit.

Methodology

An RPL profiling toolkit, previously developed by the Learning Enhancement and Academic Development team (LEAD) at Glasgow Caledonian University, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and the SCQF partnership was used in the pilot project. A qualitative research evaluation was carried out using three methods: observational data were obtained at an advisor training day and subsequent support sessions; questionnaires were completed by advisors at the start of profiling, and by young people at the start and end of profiling; and interviews were conducted with all of the participants at the end of profiling.

Ethical approval was granted by the University of Strathclyde Ethics committee prior to commencement of the study.

Transcribed data were coded into themes by hand, and organised using NVivo qualitative analysis software.

References

- The Scottish Government. (2011). *Building the Curriculum 5: A Framework for Assessment*. Retrieved from www.educationscotland.gov.uk
- Youth Scotland. (2012). *Amazing Things: A guide to the youth awards in Scotland, (3rd ed.)*. Retrieved from www.awardsnetwork.org

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About CELCIS

CELCIS is the Centre for excellence for looked after children in Scotland. Together with partners, we are working to improve the lives of all looked after children in Scotland. We do so by providing a focal point for the sharing of knowledge and the development of best practice, by providing a wide range of services to improve the skills of those working with looked after children, and by placing the interests of children at the heart of our work.

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