Bridges to Learning: a Northern region partnership

Piloting the Open University Integrated Route to Health and Social Care in Newcastle City Council
(An Introduction to Health and Social Care (K101) combined with a level 3 NVQ3 in Health and Social Care)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
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Bridges to Learning
K101/IVR Study: Newcastle City Council – June 2011

Introduction and background

UNISON has a history of promoting and developing its members through learning and training. It is the lead partner in a Union Learning Funded project granted to Bridges to Learning (B2L), a partnership initiative in the North East of England between UNISON, the Open University (OU) and the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA). The aims of this partnership are to develop progression routes for individuals in the health and social care sectors to progress across the FE/HE divide, through the activities of Union Learning Representatives working with their employers.

Bridges to Learning operates through paying salary backfill to employers to release Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) from their day-to-day duties. They then have time to work and train as sector specialist ULRs. Two B2L ULRs have been active in Newcastle City Council and through working with their employer, principally the Care Services Manager, have recruited and supported 14 learners to undertake their first steps into higher education through the OU’s An Introduction to Health and Social Care (K101) combined with a level 3 NVQ3 in Health and Social Care. One of the ULRs has undertaken the programme herself. All participants successfully completed K101 and 6 have now gone on to further OU study with vocational ambition. This report is an evaluation of the pilot scheme to determine its usefulness and fitness for purpose.

Overall Summary

It is evident that the course has been viewed positively by participants and the Care Services Manager. Participants described changes in terms of their personal and skills development and also of their practice. They developed in confidence and enthusiasm, and discussed ways in which they had moved to a more reflective and considered approach to their work, one in which they perceived and valued the relevance of their own contribution to care. They also gained a renewed understanding and empathy with service users and their families and were able to
see the impact of the professional and political context in which health and social care takes place.

Language used by participants to describe these changes in their attitudes, knowledge and behaviour could be said to be transformative in nature. They used phrases such as: ‘it opened up my eyes’; ‘it woke me up’; ‘it made me think again’; ‘it made me look at things from a different angle’. It was apparent that all participants, whatever their level of experience have gained from undertaking the course. Those with less work experience found the information useful in that it not only increased understanding but brought clarity to their role. One more senior participant, although positive about its benefits and value to all working in social care, felt it might have been more useful earlier on in her career, whilst other senior staff spoke of its value in terms of remotivation and new learning. In terms of career development it has led to an increase in participants’ motivation and confidence about what they can achieve, with some providing evidence of this by enrolling on further courses in Higher Education.

The quality of the infrastructure and management of the course was seen by participants and the manager as crucial for its success. The role of Bridges to Learning and the Newcastle City Council partnership was essential and very apparent in creating effective opportunities for and facilitating learning. Participants were very positive about the support they gained from managers and colleagues, particularly in terms of time provided for them to attend vital face to face tutorials. UNISON Learning Representatives (ULRs) and the Bridges to Learning project worker also played a pivotal role in providing on-going support, advocating, negotiating and trouble-shooting for learners in general and for some for whom particular help was needed. The diverse composition of the student group also helped participants to learn from and support each other, building up an effective and motivating peer group network.

The Care Services Manager was particularly positive about the strong, enthusiastic and effective collaboration between all partners and considered that the course had fulfilled her expectations in providing a flexible course of excellent quality which has increased the confidence, knowledge and skills of participants. She considered that it had provided staff with a clear career pathway to further their professional development and in addition, has added value to business in terms of the evidence of increased knowledge and skills of participants and the consequent effect these will have on service user experience. She saw particular value in the opportunity for the integration of K101 with the NVQ3 qualification, as it embedded learning in the workplace and provided confirmation of the relevance of good practice within a theoretical framework.
Introduction and background

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Evaluation method and data collection

Data was collected from:-

1. Individual interviews which took place with:-
   - All 13 participants of the pilot scheme (6 people who had undertaken K101 alone, 7 who had undertaken this with the Integrated Vocational Award (NVQ3). Participants were predominantly women and had worked in a variety of posts within the adult social care services - within resource centres or care at home. Some were care officers providing direct help to service users and their families; others also had varying levels of management responsibilities as team leaders. Their work experience
varied in length from 2 years to over 20 years. The age spread was from 25 to 50+ years.

- A care worker who funded herself for K101 and started the course a few months later than the pilot group.
- The Care Services Manager.

2. A questionnaire (61% response rate) from the 13 participants who took part in the pilot scheme supported by Bridges to Learning (B2L).

A broad framework of questions was developed and used for the questionnaire which became the initial focus for the interviews with students. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and then analysed through categorisation of key themes and more in depth narrative analysis. The themes emerging in each interview were checked and developed throughout all subsequent interviews. A similar method of narrative analysis was used with the interview with the Care Services Manager.

**Results**

These findings are outlined in 3 sections below:

1. Results from questionnaire
2. Results from student interviews
3. Results from interview with Care Services Manager

**SECTION 1: RESULTS FROM QUESTIONNAIRE**

The detailed analysis of the questionnaires reinforced the qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts and can be seen in Appendix 1. Over 95% of responses fell into the two highest positive category response options. In terms of what had been gained from study, participants ranked personal and professional benefits and acquisition of theoretical and practice based knowledge very highly with professional benefits and practice based knowledge scoring higher than personal benefits and theoretical knowledge, respectively.
Related to this are the very positive responses to questionnaire items that related to impact on practice and in free text sections respondents identified the following areas where their practice had been enhanced: improved practice in supporting people, keeping colleagues informed, better handovers, being alert to problems, enhanced understanding of importance of role, being able to relate decision making to theory/evidence, greater awareness and, generally, increased knowledge and understanding that improved the level of care and support given. These improved areas of practice were expanded upon in the more detailed findings from student interviews in the next section.

Analysis of questionnaire items pointed to support and encouragement as critical success factors and the main sources of support were identified as employer, UNISON and ULRs, B2L and academic support by the OU tutor. Peer support was also an essential factor and this was enabled through the structures set up through the employer and B2L partnership work to provide an enhanced model of work based learning.

SECTION 2: RESULTS FROM STUDENT INTERVIEWS

The information gained from the interviews is categorised into 5 main themes:-

1. Course content and management
2. Support
3. Personal benefits
4. Skills acquisition
5. Changes in practice

(See table below for summary of themes and their characteristics)
1.0 Course content and management

1.1 Recruitment

The Union Learning Representatives organised recruitment events at adult care resource centres across the city. These events were comprised of a presentation from a representative of the Open University’s regional Faculty of Health and Social Care with information advice and guidance from the ULRs and a B2L project worker. The recruitment event was said by participants to be important in outlining both the content and opportunities the course provided and the following comment was made.

*We had the road show but we didn’t know whether people would even turn up [...] then when we started advertising we didn’t know how many people were going to apply but so many people were interested [...] (ULR – also participated in pilot study)*

Subsequently, people expressing an interest went through an interview process, managed by Newcastle City Council, to select individuals who were strongly motivated and to ensure that the composition of the group reflected a diversity of roles within the Council.
### TABLE 1: OVERALL THEMES AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

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Reasons given by students for undertaking K101 or K101 combined with IVR:

- as a stepping stone for career advancement
- as an investment for the future at a time of change and service and resource cuts
- to gain NVQ 3 in health and social care
- to gain more knowledge and understanding about the role
- to provide evidence for practice by relating it to theory
- to keep up to date and improve knowledge
- to test personal capability of being able to undertake an academic course
- to provide a challenge and mental stimulation
- directed by line manager.

The opportunity to undertake the NVQ 3 award at the same time as K101 was a strong incentive for 7 students:

To be honest it was NVQ3 that attracted me to start with, because in homecare the only level you can go up to is NVQ2 and I wanted my 3, so to be honest that’s what attracted me at first [...] it made more sense to do them side by side (Int. 8).

The strong motivation to gain knowledge was evident even for those with many years experience:

With the younger generation coming up and I didn’t want to be in a position where they were going to know more than what I did even though I had the experience... and I was interested in the legislation that was coming through and I wanted to know about it (Int.11).

1.2 Course content

The OU materials were said to be of a high standard, relevant and user friendly. The use of interesting real-life examples throughout made topic areas come alive and were those with which the students could identify:

K101 was really well written and it made it quite easy to remember [...] the actual case studies, even the first one Anne and Agnes I remember them, so it’s like I only did it yesterday [...] So you could relate to it. ...So a lot of those people that we look after are from the community with their families, so I could relate to it and my own caring, what I’ve done myself with my family (Int.4).

The structure and the case studies also really have actually almost strengthened that kind of understanding and... also listening to the service
users as well and what they think of us and what the process they go through before we are able to go and deliver care to them. (Int.6)

The course introduced them to new ideas and helped them to make sense of what was going on in practice:

*I didn’t know what I was expecting from the course ….. Introduction to Health & Social Care is so wide, but... they touched on quite a few things that you didn’t even realise were there, like the life story work. I mean I hadn’t even heard of stuff like that and that was good to know it’s out there. (Int.8)*

*Because of all the changes that are going on in care at the minute anyway, so it was just a part of it….when there’s a change happening you can see it as part of the course [...] like all the reablement structure and everything like that, how they are moving to try and get people direct payments. ..You just hear snippets that people are getting direct payments, but then you’ve got all the information. (Int.12)*

Participants had many concerns about achieving the academic level required but were helped by clear course materials and the support they gained as the course progressed:

*The Good Study Guide helps you with setting up essays, because obviously if you haven’t done the work for a while you are all new to it and it’s different (Int.1).*

*I thought ‘No I can do this’ and the more I got into the units and started my assignments, the NVQ3 part and then talked to the others and going to the day releases that we had, I just loved it. It woke us up. (Int.11)*

The course contained an end of year examination and all participants were concerned about this but the on-going learning throughout the year prepared them for it :-

*All these months of putting in assignments of reading this and reading that and you think you’re not learning anything but then the exam comes and you sit down and you think I remember that and this was that bit. (Int.14)*

**1.3 Integration of K101 and NVQ3**

There was evidence of the value placed on the identification of the links between learning gained from K101 with the practice-based activities of the NVQ:-
They bounced off each other, they gelled well together and even though some of it was a little bit repetitive where you were doing assignments or you were answering questions on the activity sheets and then you’d go to NVQ3 and you’d think well I’ve just answered that. But at the same time it reinforced what you were learning. (Int.11)

The clear exposition of the links helped completion of an online portfolio which demonstrated application to and achievement in practice:-

It was quite good because the activities in K101 were part of your NVQ [..] The NVQ helped as well because it would give you like examples then it would say “How do you do this in your work?” and then you had to give a step by step account of how you would do it. So that was quite easy because I am doing the job every day, then I knew what to write. (Int.1)

The value of K101 in providing important background knowledge was emphasised even by those who had already gained the NVQ award:-

K101 is the underpinning knowledge. You can do that vocational qualification without K101 but I found it very helpful and also it’s given me a lot of in-depth understanding of my job role. (Int.6)

NVQ is all about what you do, K101 is all about knowledge you’ve got to learn [...] and it also gives you a foundation in the values, your principles. You’re looking at social work; you’re looking at things from a different angle. (Int.5)

Although generally viewed very positively, the pressure of time, workload and family concerns did however cause difficulties for some of those completing both courses but these were overcome by the flexibility offered by the OU supported open learning method and in deferring full completion of NVQ3 until pressures lessened (see 1.4 below).

1.4 Flexibility

The organisation of K101 course material into discrete small blocks of learning fitted well into a busy working life which consisted of fragmented opportunities for study :-

I work in shifts, when I think about how I’m going to stagger my time, divide it up I would maybe say if I’m in late shift in the morning do it before I went to work, so an hour in the morning [...]. so that was an hour gained for me really rather than doing it on a night time. [...] You don’t miss it an hour in the mornings. I think oh I’ll just do a quick hour - even if I just do something on the DVD, an activity or something, I’ve done something... (Int.10)
We do ‘sleep ins’ so we’re here all night. I did it then or I did it weekends because technically we work half nine till quarter to five on a Saturday and a Sunday every third weekend, So I was coming in about eight o’clock and doing a couple of hours - doing it then (Int.13)

Keeping up with deadlines and requirements for K101 tended to be given priority but the flexibility of time for completing NVQ3 was appreciated:-

I didn’t do the NVQ until later because when we had the session with the assessor I had a word with her… she knew I was struggling so she said “What if we do the assignments first and then we’ll come back?” (Int. 2)

It wasn’t the course material or doing the two together that was the problem I actually had personal problems as well which took some time up so the NVQ did start lagging behind the K101 because of that reason. Because I thought I’ve got to concentrate on one and so I knew I had the extra time for the NVQ, but it was a lot easier to get back into it, I just kept the information. (Int.4)

The high flexibility in the length of time allowed to complete this was however perceived by one student as slightly problematic in terms of personal motivation:-

We’ve got till 2012 to complete it and you think I can leave it. So I don’t know …… part of me would have liked some kind of deadline. (Int.8)

2.0 Support

Whilst participants were positive about what they gained from undertaking the course, they all experienced stress mainly related to work load:-

I think there was times when you did feel alone when things weren’t going right and you’re half way through it and you get to a stage where you get tired and you’ve got work but you must have this assignment in for this deadline […] and then that passes so I think everybody goes through that at some time or another on the course because it’s different, it’s new, it’s a new challenge (Int.11)

However all participants completed the course and attributed this, not only to their own hard work but to the various types of support they received:-

You know you are distance learning and there is a lot of responsibility on yourself to get on with it, but when you need questions, you’ve got your tutor, you’ve got the students, you’ve got your online forums, you’ve got people you can call on or colleagues here. (Int.5)
2.1 Support from tutors and face to face tutorials 

Participants appreciated the support they received from the K101 tutor online, via telephone, face to face and from the detailed and ‘authoritative’ feedback from their assignments.

*The tutor was really good. If we were stuck we could ring her at any time and she would help we could email her and she said ‘You know I’m always there’ and it was good because she was a social worker and she would tell you things that we needed to know like from the social work side. (Int.1)*

This was reinforced by monthly face to face tutorials:

*I think the support from The OU and the tutor was excellent as well and having monthly meet ups they were brilliant again to point us in the right direction, because yes you do get anxious. Were we going in the right direction? How were we doing? Because none of us had taken exams for a lot, lot of years. (Int.3)*

*We had one every month […] at The Open University and we all met up as big group and we talked through the Block that we had been reading and then we would talk about the essay and what we wanted to write and what structure to set it out in. (Int.1)*

To ensure participants were clear about course expectations, support from the NVQ assessor took place within the workplace as well as in the University:

*The NVQ tutor came […] and she observed me for two days doing my job and we sat down for about an hour and talked about all the points that I needed to highlight and the things that I needed to answer […]. So that was helpful as well because we had an online portfolio […] and we had a day just learning how to use that portfolio and that helped because then you were not struggling you could just go on and do your work. (Int.1)*

2.2 Online support from the OU helpline and student forum

Being able to use the computer to access materials and submit essays was a daunting task for most participants and some relied heavily on local support (see 2.5 below) but the OU helpline was also said to be a useful resource:

*I managed and I’m no whizz kid but I know the helpline number was on the back and some of the other girls had rung the helpline and said they were absolutely brilliant. (Int.11)*
The course team also helped;--

You could always go on the website and look for something. You used to get emails helpful emails to link in to different stuff which was helpful. (Int.13)

Some found the national student forum more helpful than others, since it could cause tension if participants read information from students who were perhaps ahead of them in their progress. However just being able to read what other students said was useful:-

I used to go and I used to read, but I never used to comment myself [...] Somebody usually asked the question any way [...] and I just read down and see the answer they’ve got which was useful. (Int.8)

Some participants enjoyed being able to talk to a wider student population:-

It was like the world wide forum because everybody’s from all over the world [...], but when you’re speaking to different people you realise that you’re not the only one [...] I like to meet different people and I’m the sort of person I will talk to anybody. [Int.12]

This was particularly important for the student who was not part of the pilot scheme but started the course independently a few months later:-

I went on to the website and the chats [...] Yes, it was good and then especially when other people put their questions on as well, so you know that you weren’t the only one. (Int.9)

2.3 Peer support

Participants valued peer support highly and saw this as critical to their success. As well as meeting together at monthly tutorials, they met on-line, they spoke on the telephone or met informally in small groups. Peers shared common experiences which helped to overcome self-doubt and there was concern for each other and a sense of solidarity. Peers spoke ‘the same language’ so they could help each other by explaining academic work and strategies:-

We were a group from the same City Council so you knew everybody, you felt comfortable with everybody, you felt that you could speak, and say aaarrrgh!! (Int.4).

I think I gained support from other people as well indirectly just by seeing how well they were doing and seeing nobody had given up, I had to feel motivated because of that. (Int.6)
Yes for some of the girls who worked in home care they knew where each of us would be so they could pop in or could ring up if they were stuck on anything. (Int.3)

For two of the group undertaking the course was a particular challenge in that English was their second language and they valued the support they had from colleagues:

> We got in touch with one another, the group that we were in was quite a friendly group and we supported one another so they all said just ring us up at any time you need help. (Int.2)

The group made informal arrangements which reflected their differing work patterns:

> We used to actually agree times that the group would go on line so everybody could participate. …and we staggered it for people’s shifts and things. (Int.10)

> We all supported one and other, and I found if one of us weren’t able to attend the tutorials or anything like that because if you’re on holiday, then we would take that information that we got on the day … and then we would pass it on…. (Int.12)

Peer support has continued as 5 members of the group moved on to undertake another course in health and social care:

> On this course that we’re on again there’s 5 of us going together it’s about just keeping that support there for each other. (Int.10)

> We said right we’ll all get together after our work, … and we’ll discuss it, so we’re set in our own minds what we’re doing and we sat for about 2 hours and it was really good. (Int.1)

### 2.4 Management support

Managers were vital in terms of providing time and support:

> I got the time off work to go to the tutorials… and we got two hours a week to do NVQ work on the computers here (Int.1)

> The management gave me support - they gave with my time off and the time I needed –D gave me a lot of support and she arranged a lot of things for me so I could be here and be there (Int.8)

> My manager was really good because I doubt myself when I’m writing because I’m very straight to the point but where I asked P - if she could
Participants were also clear about the benefits there could be to employers in encouraging members of staff to complete the course:-

*I think the benefits for the employer are so many. Boost their morale; improve their confidence, better skills, better qualifications and actually just bringing that spirit of learning [...] It’s just getting staff into learning and interested and who knows in future the council may be able to raise their own social workers or even better qualified people, they might be able to do that, maybe without paying anything for it, just by giving them time to be facilitating and supporting staff to be able to do this for the benefit of so many. (Int.6)*

*When people are happy at work, if you can support them to be able to do what they want to do, they will be happier staff I think [...] We can see the difference that learning can make to individuals and what they do for the employer so it would be good if the doors are open to other people as well. (Int.6)*

2.5 Support from Bridges to Learning and UNISON

The Bridges to Learning Partnership between UNISON and the Open University enabled the formation of a dedicated tutor group for the City Council students, to bring a collective approach to the normal OU supported open learning mode of study. Participants described the the pivotal role of Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) and the Bridges to Learning project worker in providing on-going support, advocating, negotiating and trouble-shooting for the students :-

*Well they (UNISON) were our voice. They spoke to the Council about the different things that we needed, because I think the Council didn't realise that we would have to meet up on one or two tutorials and UNISON sorted all that out for us. They sorted out getting the books that we needed; they were at the end of the phone if we were struggling. [...] One of the girls who did the K101 NVQ, she’s a UNISON rep and she works here so I just had her to speak to, I didn’t need to ring anyone, I just spoke to her and then she took it to where she needed to and sorted things out, but yes they were a great help. (Int.1)*

*F-... was brilliant. [...] When we had to do group activities, arranged for us to have venues where we could all be together with computers. And that was really good because we got split up into little groups, so we could all work together on specific tasks that we had to do. So that was really good particularly in support of those that weren’t very confident on computers. (Int.3)*
It was yes, the Bridges to Learning staff were really good. It was the key in really and it was the promotion, it was the hard work of J and W that they put a lot into that and did put a lot into it, e-mailing, ringing up, walking, coming round to meet all the staff, etc. plus J was on the course with us anyway, so she was always there. She always knew what was coming. (Int.5)

J- was always saying do you need any help with this, we can get such and such to speak to you. (Int.8)

Yes there was UNISON …. obviously agreeing for the time off, agreeing for me to go to the workshops; they actually changed (where the university like them on a Saturday) they got them changed to a Wednesday so it fitted in better with us. I think they put in a lot of support …. (Int.10)

Those who had English as their second language found the support they gained invaluable:-

That’s why I got through […] Oh yes, they [UNISON] were very supportive they have been really supportive. (Int.2)

I thought oh my goodness it’s really hard […] J and other people said ‘Don’t panic don’t worry about that and slowly, slowly I got more confidence’. (Int.7)

3.0 Personal Benefits

3.1 High sense of achievement

It is evident from the data analysed that the course has had a positive impact on participants, most of whom had not had the opportunity for academic study for many years. They developed in self confidence and were enthusiastic about their achievement:-

When I started K101 I thought oh I’m not going to be able to cope with this […] but since I did K101 I thought well I can do it and I’m going to go on and do the next level. (Int.1)

I feel a bit proud of myself so that even though I struggled with the family I’m just a bit proud of myself that I went for it. (Int.2)

When I came out of the exam it was a weird feeling but it was like total relief at the same time that I had answered the questions. But what I found more interesting was the self satisfaction, knowing I had done it, and I knew I had passed because the answers - I may have waffled a bit here and there - but basically I knew the answers were right and I thought God I’ve taken it all on board! (Int.11)
3.2 Increased self confidence

The increased knowledge and sense of achievement have had an effect on their self esteem and on the ways in which they feel able to relate to service users and colleagues:

It has given me a lot of confidence […] I can now say I’ve a higher education certificate, when before I didn’t have. (Int.6)

Increased confidence, resulting in changing practice, was expressed in the narratives in a variety of ways and was expressed through use of language such as ‘waking up’.

I’m a confident person anyway, but I think because I hadn’t studied for a long time […] It did wake me up and it probably boosted my confidence more than what it was beforehand, without a doubt. I am a confident person but because I needed that extra boost, that gave me it. (Int.11)

Participants were able to articulate concrete ways that increased confidence had impacted upon the way they carried out their jobs and the much more pro-active support they were able to give service users.

It’s helped me to be more confident, speaking to families … the theory work has given me more confidence to speak to them and to advise them, things that maybe we might see what the family don’t see, so I can say look we’ve done this with him and it works, why don’t you try that at home. (Int.1)

Because when I go to carer’s house I have more confidence, I take it calm. (Int.7)

They also identified how previous practice learning took on new significance because it was now better understood. A sense of legitimacy also promoted internal communication between participants and their managers.

It’s relevant to our job role and it’s easy to put everything into practice because even what we’ve learnt in practice before I am able now to understand … So I have a better understanding and I can approach my manager because this has been validated already if you have problems …., the procedure is very clearly laid, it’s exactly what we’ve always been told, but this time I’ve seen it in writing,… and it’s part of my course so I feel more confident. (Int.6)
3.3 Increased self esteem and motivation

For all participants, there was evidence of an increase in motivation and enthusiasm about their current role and considerations about how they might progress in the future. One participant expressed an interest about staying in care but exploring opportunities for moving sideways:-

*I think I would probably like to stay in the care system but maybe side step into something else, and I think the K101 it’s given me the confidence - the get up and go - just to start looking around and to see what doors can open.* (Int.11)

Other participants expressed specific ambitions to become social workers. Frequently, this was expressed as something that had been seen previously as out of reach but they could now envisage both their own ability to take it on and a practical means of achieving it.

*I’m determined to do some more […] hopefully I will get them all done to build towards being a social worker.* (Int.9)

*I think now the family’s grown up and left home and I think … it’s about time you started thinking about yourself and doing something you want to do… I do love my work and I keep thinking about something else that moves alongside your work, where you can move on your career path.* (Int. 3)

The narratives were characterized by a transformatory sense of individual self-efficacy and empowerment.

*Well the world’s my oyster … I just feel totally motivated now and I didn’t beforehand.* (Int.11)

3.4 Positive re-evaluation of own role

Undertaking the course and gaining increased understanding, led participants to think again on the value of their role within social care:-

*There’s value in the work I do, definitely without a doubt […] I can only speak from my own experience, not only did I enjoy doing it but it has given me value as a carer it’s opened up my eyes.* (Int.11)

As in section 3.2, increased understanding was seen as very important and even though participants couldn’t always articulate why they were doing the job better there was evidence of a more person centred approach to care. There was also a suggestion that encouragement through learning made them see the routine aspects of work in a new light.
As a care worker I have a better understanding of that role. I can provide better service now because I understand it better… I don’t know why it’s better because I’ve always done my job, I suppose I’ve done my job well but I understand it better. (Int.6)

It’s not just about the service it’s about the person, it gives you something to work for, I mean you can get so complacent in a job it’s just so routine, but having something to learn on a daily basis it gives the carer something to look forward to and a little bit of encouragement and responsibility and if the carers are working better the service is better - it’s encouragement. (Int.8)

**3.5 More knowledgeable**

There was an awareness of the how the course could meet the need of keeping up to date in a constantly changing political and social environment:-

*It keeps up your skills and your knowledge and things change, legislation changes, work practices change … courses are very important to keep up your skills and your knowledge because everything is moving on.* (Int.4)

*It just gives you a greater knowledge for taking into the work place. It’s like a reminder you know about what you’re doing and what you should be doing… the bit about accountability really flashed up for me and it’s not till you sit and think about what you’re accountable for. it’s about having greater awareness.* (Int.10)

A main benefit of the course was the opportunity to reflect on the applicability of the knowledge gained to practice and much gained by sharing ideas and experiences within the group:-

*I’ve been in care for a long time, over 20 years, and I felt I’ve learned from it [ ] it doesn’t matter how long you’ve worked, I think you come out from K101 with something that makes you better. You’re maybe providing a good service, but it also makes you better because it makes you reflect more and it gives you a better understanding.* (Int.4)

*I think it gave us a better understanding and then during our tutorials we would share some experiences which are similar to what we do…* (Int. 6)

Participants spoke about the benefits to the service of this increased knowledge:-

*It makes you stop and think, you think of what you’re doing more, the consequences of not doing it, or doing it, so knowledge isn’t a bad thing. They say too much can be dangerous but because you’ve got the confidence to ring in [...] it can only be benefiting to the service.* (Int.14)
The following team leader expressed the need for a theoretical background to back up and extend practice knowledge:

For me as an individual who’s got a responsible job … but hasn’t got the back up of the theoretical knowledge, then that’s why I was doing it. (Int.5)

3.6 Wider horizons

At a time when reorganization, political change and an economic down-turn threatened job stability it was not surprising that participants were looking to the future with some trepidation. However their achievement helped them to view this more optimistically looking for opportunities which before would not have been thought possible:

We are all going through a very difficult time at the minute, I have to say for myself had I not have had that opportunity I don’t know where I would have been now, but we may be redundant some of us, … and for me I thought well I’ve done the K101, I’m onto the next step ….. that’s something I did myself and something to take me into the future. (Int.3)

Participants reported changes related to their aspirations and changing horizons in terms of what was now possible to achieve.

I wouldn’t have thought getting a degree about before I’d done K101 definitely not. .. if I keep plodding on and doing little bits at a time, and just keep adding to it and adding to it…. oh I could get this (Int.10)

You think oh university there’s no way I could do it and I think…..I wish I’d done it years ago now. I know my husband did it years ago when the kids were small and I encouraged him […] I didn’t think of doing it myself I just thought well I would just get a job around the kids ….. I’m pleased I’ve done it now. (Int.12)

3.7 Future orientated

One specific area of aspiration was about becoming a qualified social worker and studying K101 had opened up a possible route to combine work and study:

I would like to go on to be a social worker … but then you think well I can’t do it because you’ve got to go to University, and of course I need to work. So it gives you that kind of yes I can do the course and work at the same time to maybe get to where I want to be in the future. (Int.4)
Some participants aspired to get a more generic health and social care qualification and thought that the preparation through study would make them more likely to succeed:-

I want to get a degree in health and social care. I don’t know when because .. I’m a single parent so it might be hard and have my job as well but it’s something with all the flexibility I’d like to do. (Int.6)

I think if I hadn’t had the experiences of say last year and I’d gone in blind this year I would have been like ‘Oh my God!’ and not done anything so I’m pleased I did it in many ways. (Int.13)

4.0 Skills acquisition

4.1 Developing and utilising academic learning and writing skills

Participants were positive about the increase in their ability to express themselves through academic writing in terms of learning about structure, fluency and referencing, although for all of them this was a particular challenge:-

By the time I got to the end I thought well that’s … when you looked at your first one to your last one you see a marked improvement but I think it will take me a few years for me to do a good a really good essay. (Int.12)

If I look at what I wrote in the beginning to how I wrote things at the end it was very… very different. .. you had that structure of .. the introduction, the beginning, the middle and then the conclusion. (Int.3)

I had a few problems not getting it to flow at the beginning. (Int.8)

For those with English as a second language this was even more of a challenge but they were helped by the ‘step by step approach’ of the course materials and the detailed feedback from the tutor

In the beginning … my second language English, was the main problem. But I like to learn something new and after the first one or two assignments it was really hard, and after that slowly, slowly I go and finish by the deadline […] and when I looked at the mark it was lovely. (Int.7)

4.2 Increased organisational and time management skills

Keeping up with the course timetable was a priority for participants and led to careful organisation and planning:-
When the first box came I thought how much am I going to be doing but when you split it all down and you haven’t got that much but I just got myself organised and I got my desk all set up the way I wanted it at home […] I just bought loads of pencils so and I bought loads of yellow post-it’s and things like that so I just got myself organised. (Int.1)

It’s manageable […] I’m a single parent but I could still do it […] I’ve got my desk at the top of my stairs with all my books […] I thought am I going to be able to manage it, but I enjoyed it, I enjoyed reading the material, all the books (Int.9)

I used to plan, I had to plan my time off work to sit and do my essays but the reading - I had to keep up with the reading so I don’t mind reading so that wasn’t a problem to me I have to say. (Int.3)

Managing and structuring time was essential and the quotations here interrelate with section 1.4 on flexibility. Participants managed the heavy workload demands by integrating study into their daily working and living practices:-

I think that was the case of having to have a timescale and sticking to it myself, making sure that I stuck to it because …sometimes if I’ve missed if I had my day off I found that I was just reading and writing and just trying to catch up. (Int.10)

I think structuring your time is a big one. Time management. A couple of times I think I left assignments to the last minute which is absolutely ridiculous it’s no good because then you panic and you get yourself agitated. I (Int.12)

… I just had to put a social life on hold. (Int.1)

4.3 Increased computing skills

Participants were required to not only use computers for accessing some materials and information and communicating via websites and email but also for submitting their assignments. This could be challenging even for those used to computers:-

I know computers and things but at the beginning I was worried I would lose a TMA if I sent it […] I kept thinking ‘Am I doing this right?’ And I think when you submit it, it does say if it’s been submitted successfully and then you think ‘Oh thank goodness’. (Int.14)

Those who were inexperienced developed confidence with the support they gained from B2L colleagues :-
I decided to do it on the paper and then I thought how am I going to learn a bit more about the computer if I don’t try, so I did it electronically just sent it off by computer with the support of J from UNISON and S from WEA. (Int.2)

They also helped each other out:-

I wasn’t very good with computers and a lot of it being computer based but I think because we were doing it as a pilot scheme as a group we helped each other out in that way. (Int.10)

The self satisfaction of achieving success in this area was evident:-

A lot of it was computers, that was the bit that really put us off but I’ve done it and I’m pleased I’ve done it and I’ve got to say I’m able to use the computer a little bit better now so there’s something come out of it. (Int.10)

Even though I’m not a computer whiz kid I’m finding my way around, I’m ok but I learnt things about the computer that I didn’t even know I could do, by doing the course (Int.11)

That was much of a learning curve which I think was very beneficial for me for what I do now because I ironed out all the problems I had using the system because I think the OU system’s really easy once you get the hang of it. (Int.13)

4.4 Cognitive skills e.g. Increased analytical and reflective skills; able to see relevance of evidence as a basis for practice.

Acquiring a theoretical background was useful in giving a greater understanding of social care practice and setting in within the context of social and political change:-

I needed to get that theory, I needed to understand more what decisions I was making. (Int.5)

I think it’s given me a better knowledge of the theory behind what happens [...] what it used to be and what it is now and how things move on and why they move on [...] The move more towards the community care side of it [...] and legislation as well. It’s giving us a more wider and better knowledge basis of why, you know - it’s given us more confidence in what I’m doing [...] Because you think right this is company policy, this is what you do but it also means you think well this is where it comes from. (Int.4)

This might lead to a re-evaluation of practices and of the importance of reflecting on these:-
I think when you’re in a job like this you get - not set in your way - but you know the stuffs there and you know you use it every day but sometimes it makes you review how you use things. There was one on institutionalisation and it just made you think some of the things we sometimes do as a matter of course, maybe we just need to look at and think. (Int.13)

I’m going to make sure that wherever possible I am going to be reflecting on my practice, making sure that I’m constantly up to speed with what’s going on, and if a situation occurs that I can learn from … then I’ll alter my practice. (Int.5)

You can become complacent …. but I found doing the course you ..also pick up some snippets when you’re reading it, and think “Oh well maybe if I did do it that way” it’s a different approach (Int.12)

5.0 Changes in practice

5.1 Increased sensitivity to the experience and needs of service users and their families.

There was overall agreement that the course made participants think again about the need to individualise care and not make assumptions:-

I’ve seen that they needed their care centred around them. You know you can’t just give the same care to everybody, everybody needs a different care, and some need more than others …and they all need some different input and different choices made as well. (Int.1)

One of the assignments was around service users not getting the help that they need because of cultural needs so it was just bringing home everything, making you think…. is there a reason in the background? So it’s making you dig a little bit deeper I suppose. (Int.10)

They emphasised the need to understand the ‘whole picture’ :-

It just makes you think that you’re not just getting them for what they are now. I mean they’ve got a past and a history and that all affects who you are.[…]. We just go in, we just open the door and we see what we see half the time, but it just gets you to think and just take a step back and this person’s a wee bit angry, why are they?..They’ve got something - that just makes you think. It’s not just what they are now it’s what they have been and - the biggest thing that I took is to just step back and look at the whole picture … (Int.8)

We never see the trials and tribulations for them to get us into that house and after doing the assignment, regarding the access and services, I think that
helped me realise just what the service user has to go through before we actually walk through that door. So the accessing services really stood out for me. (Int.11)

Sometimes you can easily misunderstand them, especially when you first go there and they are struggling, even to accept you or to accept the service you are giving them. And I've never thought about the difficulty maybe they have got in trying to accept that they now need care, they are not able to look after themselves. I have never looked at it like that. You maybe get somebody difficult and you just forget about it and move on, but I think now it gives me a better outlook. When I go there I have to think it’s not easy for this person, especially if it’s the first time they are receiving care, it’s not easy at all. They are opening the door to a stranger, they don’t know who you are but they have to trust you and it’s not easy (Int.6)

This increased sensitivity led to reflection on everyday communication :-

It made you think sometimes do we say things to staff or service users and they tell us what they know we want to hear [...] It makes you reflect on how you interact with some people. (Int.13)

The link between providing quality care and staff development in terms of increased knowledge was highlighted by several participants, one in a more senior position explaining:-

I think [by undertaking K101] people’s practices develop to become better their knowledge would be greater. I just think it’s all good … all good stuff will come out of it, nothing bad could come out of it. And if you had staff team on development being more aware of what’s there, what greater thing can you ask for. (Int.10)

5.2 More detailed approaches to care and care planning/report writing

Participants were aware of changes they had made by finding out more information:-

You give a higher standard of care I think if you know a little bit and can ask for a little bit of information and some people think what you’re given is what you’re given and people don’t think about saying can I have a little bit more on this and a bit more on that which I like to have. It just opens your eyes a bit (Int.8)

They emphasised the importance they now placed on using care plans and accurate recording:-

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It made me aware of- whenever I’m going to a service user- I want to read the care plans first to see what is needed there. Before we just used to go in, and say ‘Right I’m so and so what do I do for you here?’ So it’s made me a bit more aware of these things. (Int.2)

I think even in my work as well now when I’m writing a report or something I’m making sure I get every little detail in because I’m aware and I’m thinking – no I need to put this in and I need to put that in - so I’m putting more in to my written work.(Int.10)

5.3 Changes in ‘mindset’

For some undertaking the course meant a distinct change in the way in which they thought about their work:-

It (the job) was just humdrum, even though you were doing the things and you were looking after people there was no personal challenge for me. … I haven’t changed what I’m doing but I’ve changed in my attitude and my outlook. (Int.11)

There was a wealth of evidence that a changed outlook had a direct impact on actual practice with positive outcomes for service users-

It just gets you to think about things in a very very different way. All I can think of is more positive outcomes for the service user, how you approach things, where you want to go with them and it just gets you to think about things and to share that with others. (Int.3)

I think sometimes you get yourself in a mindset because you’ve been doing the same thing for years and now I find I take a different approach. Now I would be looking at it and saying ‘Oh right, mobility’s a bit poor, I’d be asking the question well what’s wrong with their mobility, do they have any aids, do they need any aids, have they been assessed by OTs, it makes you think just to ask for that little bit more information.[..] So I just found reading through the K101 stuff has helped me manage it a bit better, and helped me get a bit more flow and just take a step back and look. (Int.12)

Everybody worries about change, people don’t like change, you get in a mindset, you get in a rut and you just do it on a day to day basis … if they were to do that course then that would give them all the insight into the changes, the transformations that going on and then it’s a benefit to the Council because if they’ve got staff who are doing this and getting themselves up to date and realising the changes. It’s better for service users, carers, senior workers, it’s a benefit to the whole lot. (Int. 12)
5.4 More confident about own role in service user advocacy

There were positive examples of an increased awareness of and confidence about their role in service user advocacy:-

Quite recently I got somebody discharging today and you’ve got the social worker saying she didn’t want her to know but then you think, I need to advocate for this person what’s best for them.. but then it’s about me, I have to make a decision that’s best for the service user here and if I feel that’s right, and I can manage that situation then I will do that and touch wood it worked out ok because she’s going today and is having a positive mental attitude about going (Int.3)

It’s definitely influenced my practice…I can introduce ideas and options to them that they may not already have been aware of, services that are out there that they may not be aware of, so yes.[..] I’m totally more aware now. I always thought and I still do I think myself as being a good carer but it’s made me more aware, which is a good thing (Int.11)

One interesting change was that, in addition to better communication and interaction with service users, there were concrete examples given of better internal communication within the service to the benefit of service users.

It’s just made me more ready to listen even though I was a good listener before, but I think I’m an even better listener now. I think I ask the right questions, and I feel as if I’m asking more questions and trying to point people in the right direction and I’m on the phone to my manager, right this has happened, what if I do this? (Int.11)

I think the course and then the exam gave a lot more people confidence to maybe ring in and give you information, and not be scared to say things. (Int.14)

5.5 Raised awareness and knowledge of impact of contextual issues related to professional and political change

There was a raised appreciation of the importance of understanding the influences of political and professional changes on the ways in which care is provided :-

It was also about the development of the welfare state ..which I’d never really thought about and yes I work in that… What I can do now is I can go and pick up a journal up and read something, I know that that knowledge is there if I need it and I know where to look for it. (Int.5)
At work it has made me a bit more aware of things that I’m doing and I’m seeing. Like learning up on the Code of Practice. We would get the booklet from work [] and its in the drawer which we don’t look at you know, but when we came to that point [in K101] we thought we should know this. (Int.2)

You’ve got better knowledge it makes you step back and actually think about what you’re doing and how you’re doing it… and why these policies and procedures are here. It actually makes you more competent in being able to talk to people. (Int.4)

I always had a good awareness of the policies but… I think it does increase your awareness that little bit more and gets you to think about them a bit more. I think … yes it does influence what’s important and why. (Int. 4)

Participants also considered that the increased knowledge helped those working in social care to be more prepared for any changes:

It gives you a better insight into the job that you’re doing. Care’s changing so much at the moment you know it’s coming down from the Government. And because it’s changing I think people in care - carers - they need to be aware of the changes and they need to move forward with the service. They can’t stay in the past they need to come forward with the service because the changes are there. So if I was a manager I would say yes it (K101) was value for money and all the carers should do it. (Int.11)

With the K101 you could see where the care’s moving and you can actually see it, how they are trying to merge with the NHS and you could see that in part of the course, when you’re reading things you think ‘Oh we’re going through that at the minute’ or ‘This is going to happen’ [...] Because you just take it on board that there’s going to be changes, because there’s so many changes going on, but the course was relevant to the changes that’s happening right at that precise moment and what is still going on now. (Int.12)

SECTION 3: INTERVIEW WITH CARE SERVICES MANAGER.

The Care Services Manager outlined the requirement for a flexible course which provided a clear pathway for staff development and took into account the particular needs of a mature, largely female, workforce disadvantaged because they may not have had the opportunity to engage in academic study in the past and also lacked the confidence to do so.

I felt that perhaps our staff were at a disadvantage. They couldn’t reduce their salary because at one time you were seconded (to undertake social work courses) on full salary and then that was reduced to £13,000 a year and then
to £16,000. If you’ve got things like single parent families then they couldn’t take that opportunity or mortgages. Even at team leader level they couldn’t suddenly drop to that where you perhaps have as I say mortgages or perhaps children going off to university or whatever so they were disadvantaged.

The K101 course and integrated award of level 3 NVQ in health and social care was chosen to pilot with a group comprised of a mix of team leaders, senior workers, frontline care at home workers and care officers with differences in age ethnicity and work experience after the following considerations:-

How could we support that opportunity [...] with a career pathway that they could get off, get on, and get off at times in their lives when perhaps something else was happening for them? It would need to be of excellent quality, it would need to be flexible in the time that people could do it, so they would have to be able to do it in their own time. We couldn’t afford to take them away from front line services so the important thing was, let’s see how we could pilot this to see would it do, what we wanted it to do.

The content and effects of the course on participants and to the business were positive:-

1. **Value to business**

   Apart from all the learning they have done the study skills, and that’s what it gave them. It gave them the ability to write and to put down their thoughts on paper too and their opinions, no matter if they never went beyond K101. The value of that is incredible to the business particularly for people who’ve not had those opportunities

   I think that increases not only the quality of the staff that you’ve already got and values them, but I think it makes it very attractive to recruit and plus the fact that it’s about health and social care, not just social care, and that’s the model we’re in, the whole re-ablement model provides that, it ticks all the boxes.

2. **Integration of theoretical (K101) and practice components (NVQ3)**

    There was confirmation of value in the integration of the two components:-

    I think the NVQ confirms what you do, I think it is of far greater value done together, integrated. I think what that brings in is confirmation of practice within a theoretical model. [...] It is a confirmation of that - of being able to tie it together and affirms and confirms I think what they are learning. But on it’s own I don’t think it (the NVQ) has anywhere near the value.
3. Perceived impact on service

Well it has to improve the quality of the service because if you look at the modules and the content of the course, it starts off looking at the service user, what their needs could possibly mean, what you need to take, so it’s got people thinking around the service user, then thinking even broader, how has the whole health service developed, how have social services developed, what is the philosophy behind it, what are the policies. To have that greater understanding treats people with respect. It treats staff with respect and understanding, and if you treat people with respect they treat others with respect. They understand the context of the service user and why they may be in the situation they are in.

4. Impact on staff

This has been a journey really of trying to find what would support our staff and give them real quality opportunities. You’ve just got to look at the materials to determine the quality of them, the support they’ve had, the way they’ve supported each other. You’re looking at different staff at the end of this, they walk taller, they talk with more confidence, you’ve just got to watch that video.

I interviewed senior workers last week who had been on K101, one in particular comes to mind who always has been a very good member of staff, but the way she articulated that at her interview was outstanding, outstanding - and that’s the difference, that is really exciting stuff to see.

5. The nature of the partnership

The nature of the collaboration with Bridges to Learning partners was particularly effective:-

I think the whole year with Bridges to Learning – they have bent over backwards to help us …The collaboration - I don’t think I have seen in thirty three years - the enthusiasm from everybody involved with it. It’s a collaboration, it’s a real ‘can do’, what can we do to make this work.

Sometimes there are times where it’s a sort of knitting without wool really, there isn’t the money to do anything and you can often be at your most creative when your back’s against the wall.

Overall Summary

It is evident that the course has been viewed positively by participants and the Care Services Manager. Participants described changes in terms of their personal and skills development and also of their practice. They developed in confidence and enthusiasm, and discussed ways in which they had moved to a more reflective and
considered approach to their work, one in which they perceived and valued the relevance of their own contribution to care. They also gained a renewed understanding and empathy with service users and their families and were able to see the impact of the professional and political context in which health and social care takes place.

Language used by participants to describe these changes in their attitudes, knowledge and behaviour could be said to be transformatory in nature. They used phrases such as: ‘it opened up my eyes’; ‘it woke me up’; ‘it made me think again’; ‘it made me look at things from a different angle’. It was apparent that all participants, whatever their level of experience have gained from undertaking the course. Those with less work experience found the information useful in that it not only increased understanding but brought clarity to their role. One more senior participant, although positive about its benefits and value to all working in social care, felt it might have been more useful earlier on in her career, whilst other senior staff spoke of its value in terms of remotivation and new learning. In terms of career development it has led to an increase in participants’ motivation and confidence about what they can achieve, with some providing evidence of this by enrolling on further courses in Higher Education.

The quality of the infrastructure and management of the course was seen by participants and the manager as crucial for its success. The role of Bridges to Learning and the Newcastle City Council partnership was essential and very apparent in creating effective opportunities for and facilitating learning. Participants were very positive about the support they gained from managers and colleagues, particularly in terms of time provided for them to attend vital face to face tutorials. UNISON Learning Representatives (ULRs) and the Bridges to Learning project worker also played a pivotal role in providing on-going support, advocating, negotiating and trouble-shooting for learners in general and for some for whom particular help was needed. The diverse composition of the student group also helped participants to learn from and support each other, building up an effective and motivating peer group network.

The Care Services Manager was particularly positive about the strong, enthusiastic and effective collaboration between all partners and considered that the course had fulfilled her expectations in providing a flexible course of excellent quality which has increased the confidence, knowledge and skills of participants. She considered that it had provided staff with a clear career pathway to further their professional development and in addition, has added value to business in terms of the evidence of increased knowledge and skills of participants and the consequent effect these will have on service user experience. She saw particular value in the opportunity for the integration of K101 with the NVQ3 qualification, as it embedded learning in the workplace and provided confirmation of the relevance of good practice within a theoretical framework.
Appendix

Analysis of questionnaires

Age

24, 37, 40, 42, 49, 50, 54, missing data

Gender

F F, M, F, F, F, missing data

Job

Care at home assistant, home care assistant, team leader (care services), care officer, team leader, team leader, care officer, missing data

Working hours

Working hours ranged from 20 hours per week to full time

Study skills

50% of respondents identified that study skills required some attention whereas the remainder thought they were fairly well prepared.

Prepared in terms of organisation and time management
50% of respondents thought that they were prepared for study in terms of time management and organisational skills. Only one respondent reported feeling not very well prepared.

Finding out about the K101/IVR opportunity

2 respondents found out through both their employer and UNISON
2 specified the B2L roadshow
1 through UNISON alone
2 specified a ULR
1 was informed by line manager

Module

50% of respondents studied K101: An Introduction to Health and Social Care and 50% studied K101 integrated with an NVQ Level 3 in Health and Social Care.

Tutorials

All but one of the respondents said they had attended most or all of the organised tutorials. One respondent had attended more than half of the tutorials.

Course

The course was related good to excellent in all aspects by the majority of respondents. One respondent had rated assignment turn round time and course materials as not very good. However, there were some internal inconsistencies with the course being ranked well in other parts of the questionnaire. Apart from this one
respondent, course materials and employer support were the most highly ranked items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excellent</th>
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<th>Not very good</th>
<th>Poor</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching sessions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group sessions with other students</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment turn round time</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course material (design and presentation)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course material (content)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>

1. **Support from UNISON/Bridges to Learning/ULRs**

All aspects of support were ranked good to excellent with support and encouragement, information on progression and continuity of support after course completion ranked the highest.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tr>
<td>Negotiating time off</td>
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</table>
### 2. Time studying

Two respondents just reported that time allocated to studying was a lot without specifying hours and both also indicated that it was more time than had been anticipated.

One respondent reported that 2-3 hours a week had been taken up with study. This respondent also reported that the minimum amount of time had been allocated in order to achieve an outcome [successful course completion]. This was related to negative responses about usefulness and what had been gained from study.

The maximum amount of time was 20 hours per week and the median 10 hours per week.

4 respondents said time allocated to study was more than anticipated, 1 a little more and 3 as anticipated.

### 3. Reasons for studying
The reasons given for studying were varied with individuals identifying, on average, 4 factors each. Out of 12 factors, continuing professional development was identified most frequently, followed by improving performance (this was worded as improving ability to do job), career prospects and academic challenge (this was worded, ‘to prove to myself that I could cope with this level of study’). The latter three factors were identified with the same frequency. Interestingly, those individuals who selected improved performance did not also select the logically related factor of improving organisational performance. Factors that were not selected at all were: to increase coping strategies, social reasons, to increase salary and to improve organisation’s performance.

![Reasons for studying](image)

**Table 1**

4. **Fit between course and personal, role related and organisational needs**

When respondents were asked how well the course matched different criteria they identified a good or very good fit between their personal interests and aspirations, their current or future role and organisational needs, with organisational needs coming highest. At first sight this seems to be inconsistent with the reasons for studying discussed in section 13, where no respondent had flagged improving organisational performance as a reason for studying. One possible explanation for this anomaly is that respondents personalised the reasons for study question but...
thought more structurally when asked about the fit between the course and personal/organisational factors.

![Bar chart showing how well the course matched set criteria](chart)

**Table 2**

5. **Support from employer and B2L**

One respondent identified that she had not been given time to study, mentoring support or support from peer relationships or specific tutorials. This was not reflected in other responses where the employer was credited with supporting the individual through time to study, access to computers with internet and general support and encouragement. B2L was credited with providing support and encouragement, resources, mentoring, specific course related tutorials and supporting peer relationships.

The most useful form of support identified was the group tutorials where individuals had structured support from their tutor and support from colleagues. Course materials were also mentioned by one respondent.

6. **Benefits from studying**
Respondents indicated that, in general, they had gained quite a lot or a great deal from the course both personally and professionally and perceived that both their theoretical and practice based knowledge had increased. Professional gain came out more strongly than personal gain and practice based knowledge more strongly than theoretical knowledge. One respondent flagged that not much had been gained in any of these areas. This was the respondent who was also atypical in the amount of time spent studying (2-3 hours per week), reasons for studying (the ‘other’ option had been selected – and a comment included that the main reason for studying was being asked by line manager to do the course) and opportunities to apply learning (none).

![Identified gains from study](image)

Table 3

The majority of respondents (6) thought the topics covered by the course were or would be very useful. The other two respondents thought they would be fairly useful.

The majority of respondents said that they had had quite a few or a great number of opportunities to apply learning to work based practice with only one respondent saying that there had been no opportunities to do this.

The majority of respondents had not encountered any problems in applying learning at work but two respondents flagged that new ideas were not valued by colleagues and there was one reference to organisational culture.
The examples given of enhanced practice included improved practice in supporting people, keeping colleagues informed, better handovers, being alert to problems, enhanced understanding of importance of role, being able to relate decision making to theory/evidence, greater awareness and, generally, increased knowledge and understanding that improved the level of care and support given.

7. Support

There was only one issue raised about support and that was a respondent who had not been made aware of time off to study until towards the end of the course. This was correlated with the limited amount of time spent studying and the limited amount gained from studying. One respondent suggested that it would be useful to alert potential candidates of the level of computer skills required for the course.

Both the employer and UNISON were identified frequently in specific comments as having provided excellent support and encouragement.