

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and  
Workplace Learning: Staff Perspectives in a  
Social Care Organisation

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## **Abstract**

The demands upon the social care workforce in the UK are only likely to increase over the next decades. The social care sector is heavily reliant on NVQs and this is regulated through the Care Standards Act (2000). It is thus important that these qualifications appropriately support staff development. The purpose of the research was to explore this in one social care organisation (Homecare) through researching staff perspectives on factors that inhibited or supported learning through NVQs and to examine the Homecare/Centre delivery of NVQs and workplace learning with this in mind. The research is broadly qualitative in design and draws on the principles of narrative research combined with analysis focused on key themes (interpersonal, personal and organisational factors).

The research found that an understanding of the key concepts of workplace learning is relevant to the delivery of NVQs and can help these qualifications be implemented successfully as a part of a more holistic approach to teaching, learning and the assessment of competence in the workplace. The research identified that the organisation had a particular approach that strategically integrated assessment both at organisational and practice level. Additionally the research identified areas within the NVQ process, where integrated assessment proved of benefit to practice through professional level development of skills and knowledge, values and reflective learning and confidence. From this eight key elements of an enhanced model of NVQ delivery were identified that constitute the contribution to practice. The contribution to theory lies in linking the literatures of NVQs, competence and workplace learning and the suggestion that previous understanding of NVQs as behaviourist and atomistic is not as important as the approach to assessment adopted by organisations.

The research has relevance to any social care organisation but also to wider audiences where NVQs are used as it adds to understanding of workplace learning through a depth of practitioner-researcher understanding of specific qualifications in a specific context.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The social care sector in the United Kingdom (UK) is at a time of great change. Several key government reports (Department of Education and Skills and Department of Health, 2006; Department of Health, 1998, 2000, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009) have been published that considered the aims of the sector, workforce, recruitment and retention, the status of workers, education and training and registration of workers. These considerations have been recognised as intrinsic to the delivery of high quality care and to the support of the personalised care agenda for service-users that are regarded as part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century social care priorities.

There is also considerable change in the qualifications system. As a part of simplifying the qualifications structure (Leitch, 2006) the change from the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) took place in January 2011 (Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency, 2010). The QCF is a national framework that is intended to allow learners to gain credit towards full awards in small steps in order to meet learner and employer needs more effectively. NVQs at levels 2 and 3 have undergone a re-design and will be entering the QCF as diplomas at levels 2/3 (QCDA, 2010). The two NVQ level 4 awards in Health and Social Care (HSC) and Leadership and Management of Care Services (LMCS) will become a hybrid diploma at Level 5. However this research took place prior to the changes and therefore the awards will be referred to by their previous titles. Vocational qualifications are a key part of this new framework and the final structure of the level 2/3 (City and Guilds, 2010) awards are clearly recognisable in structure and content as similar to the current NVQs. NVQs have been a regulated part of the training and education in the social care sector since the Care Standards Act (CSA) in 2000.

The regulation of the NVQ in social care through the CSA (2000) and more recently the Health and Social Care Act (2008) has meant that NVQs have been made widely available to staff, with commensurate government funding initiatives through the Skills Funding Agency, to increase the number of qualified workers in the sector. Due to the nature of the regulatory framework social care is heavily reliant upon NVQs in relation to the development of staff in an area where increasing demands are being made of the workforce. Following considerable debate in the 1990s (Ashworth and Saxton, 1990) about the nature and methods of competency assessment within the NVQ framework more recent research (Cox, 2007; Roe et al. 2006; West 2004), into how the NVQ supports staff development, presents a more balanced and nuanced approach to the criticisms of NVQs. This understanding prompted

deliberation on how these criticisms could be challenged through an approach to competence assessment that encouraged, encompassed and acknowledged the importance of learning, teaching and support of NVQ candidates in the workplace.

In response to this fresh consideration of NVQs there is a need for research that considers this stance. The research that forms the basis of this thesis explored one model of delivery between an organisation and an education provider and focused on staff perspectives in one organisation that, for the purposes of this research, will be called Homecare. My role was that of NVQ co-ordinator of the programme of NVQs within the organisation. I was employed by the University NVQ Centre (Centre) and subsequently, as part of the Doctorate in Education programme also became a practitioner researcher in Homecare.

### **1.1. The research organisation**

Homecare is a small, charitable status organisation of less than twenty community-based homes based in the East of England that provides care for a specific group of service-users in a home-like environment. The homes range in size and number of service-users and usually have a manager, a deputy, a senior residential worker and several residential workers based in the homes.

Within Homecare and social care more generally there has been a tradition of accreditation and valuing of experience leading to internal promotion, but prior to the Care Standards Act (CSA) 2000 this was not necessarily linked to a specific qualification framework. The CSA set national requirements that fifty percent of residential workers should be qualified to NVQ level 2 and required managers to have attained or be working towards two NVQ level 4 awards, one in health and social care and one in care management, initially the Registered Managers Award (RMA) and then the Leadership and Management of Care Services (LMCS) award. Managers are required to achieve both qualifications or their equivalent. Some managers, having been promoted from within the organisation, may have worked in only one organisation and have limited wider experience of care in the variety of settings that would be a feature of professional training. Most have not had professional level education or any of the formal input regarding teaching and learning in practice settings that are integral to both nursing and social work training. Within Homecare most managers are working towards or have obtained the NVQ awards and more than fifty percent of residential workers have achieved level 2 NVQ. The organisation regularly exceeds the requirements of the CSA by developing staff to level 3 and sends most deputy managers on the level 4 health and social care qualification to prepare for a management level role. Most managers are NVQ

assessors and some are verifiers. Job descriptions outline expectations that all staff will participate in the NVQ.

In 1993 Homecare and a University NVQ Centre (Homecare/Centre) devised a delivery model of NVQs for Homecare staff that incorporated a named NVQ co-ordinator to plan and run the programme and a named manager in the organisation for the co-ordinator to liaise with. The programme consists of twice yearly inductions, workplace assessors who are usually managers or deputies in the homes and internal verifiers who are usually experienced assessors and managers. Assessors and verifiers are trained and assessed by the co-ordinator. Around 5 new assessors are trained each year. Twice-yearly standardisation and updates meetings are held at Homecare's offices. Since the inception of the programme the main change has been the introduction of monthly workshops that take place at the University for Homecare candidates and assessors that are run by the co-ordinator and attended by the internal verifiers. There is an expectation that all candidates attend the workshops. Assessors and verifiers also attend.

Homecare starts two NVQ cohorts per year of level 2 and 3 candidates, around 15 candidates in total. Managers and deputies join cross-organisational workshops for the level 4 qualifications that start twice in the academic year. This has the advantage of allowing managers to engage in a network with other managers in similar organisations, which allows for comparison of service and debate. It is expected that all candidates will complete their qualifications in 12 months, or 2 years for managers who require both qualifications. This is flexible, organisational and personal issues mean that these targets can be altered.

There is an annual review of the Homecare/Centre contract and its delivery and monthly communication between the Centre co-ordinator and the responsible organisation-level manager regarding candidate progress and any problems encountered. This organisation-level manager regularly meets with the home managers for supervision. Issues relating to NVQs are a part of the supervision agenda. In this way close collaboration between the purchaser and provider of the qualifications is supported.

## **1.2. Introduction to the research**

Within this one social care organisation the purpose of my research was to:

1. Establish staff perspectives on factors that might inhibit or support learning through NVQs in the workplace;
2. Examine the Homecare/Centre NVQ model and delivery approach in relation to the development of workplace learning.

More specifically, in order to establish the perspectives of staff, I interviewed assessors and candidates within Homecare. With these people and their experiences in mind the research explored the value and challenges of the NVQ and the Homecare/Centre delivery model from a standpoint of workplace learning as well as NVQ research. Also incorporated into the research is my own reflexive engagement. I have drawn on my own experiences as a way of deepening the understanding of practice and the complexities of delivery within a particular organisation at a particular point in time. Three models are examined in this research: the Homecare/Centre delivery model, the NVQ assessment model and a model of enhanced NVQ delivery. This final model arose from the research and is not intended to be prescriptive but to be used as a framework of general principles to inform practice.

The research set out to explore staff perspectives through themes drawn from the literature about how the social nature of learning, personal background to learning and organisational factors contribute to engagement in workplace learning and NVQs. Staff were to be interviewed once or twice during the process of the research using an interview strategy that was based upon these themes but using an approach that was designed to be participant-led.

The empirical evidence prompted a reflection on the criticisms of the NVQ assessment model and an identification of positive benefits of the NVQ as it is implemented within Homecare. This reflection suggested that the research had more to offer than an overview of staff perspectives. As part of the analysis and interpretation process participant narratives were created that represented the individual perspectives of the staff interviewed. As part of meeting the second research purpose a further stage of data analysis and interpretation was undertaken. This stage drew on data from across all the participants' narratives to establish commonalities and differences in perspectives and experiences. The commonalities identified led to a deepening of understanding of the learning and teaching found in Homecare that were echoed in the NVQ and workplace learning literature.

The realisation that understanding Homecare delivery might also be of more general use to social care practitioners who were using NVQ qualifications led to further consideration of the implications of the research. This was another step in meeting the second research purpose. Engagement with the empirical data together with further exploration of the literature in the three fields of NVQs, workplace learning and competence development led to the development of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery, distinct from the Homecare model but informed by the research.

It is proposed that features of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery can facilitate more general staff development. It is of importance to the social care workforce in that it is not limited to

assessment of certain tasks but can incorporate broader learning and development. It is suggested that this is important not just for NVQ candidates but also for assessors who can develop skills in teaching and learning in the workplace through the NVQ.

### **1.3. Structure of dissertation**

This section sets out the structure and content of the dissertation. Chapter 2 explores the research context. It explains how the NVQ came about and the current policy context within which the qualifications exist. It looks at how the NVQ assessment model was applied to the social care setting, how assessment takes place in workplaces and outlines the expectations of regulations in social care against the backdrop of a developing workforce. Current issues in social care are explored in relation to the particular workforce demographic and the issue of the importance of professional development for social care workers as pertinent to the research.

Chapter 3 is in two parts reflecting the research purposes and the two main strands of thesis development; firstly the factors that affect learning through NVQs in the workplace and secondly the NVQ model and delivery and the development of support for learning and staff development within social care, the former setting the scene for the understanding of the latter. The first section explores workplace learning research in relation to NVQs under the three themes identified in the literature; the social nature of learning, the influence of personal background on learning and the organisational context for learning. It establishes key theoretical concepts that underpin these themes: the support for learning in the workplace, personal and work-related identity and expansive workplace practices. The second part of this chapter begins by outlining some of the criticisms of NVQs and more recent research that identifies that NVQs are working well within the regulated environment of care, where implementation of the qualifications is considered and strategic. It explores the key concept of a more integrated approach to competence assessment that can be enabled through support for learning and staff development in the workplace. The enhancement of the developmental aspects of the NVQ is explored through concepts of professional level skill and knowledge development, values and reflective learning and confidence. These examples are not definitive but are used to show how broader development can be facilitated. It is expected that each workplace would be able to identify areas for development that were context specific. The chapter draws together workplace learning and NVQ research to begin to identify the characteristics of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery that is of significance to a sector that is evolving in relation to staff development and learning.

Chapter 4 explains the broadly qualitative research approach that used the creation of participant narratives to explore staff perspectives in a way that kept the participants' perspectives central to the story of the research. It also shows how these narratives were then used to further explore the data in relation to themes previously identified in the literature. The chapter describes the exploratory study undertaken in the first year of a doctoral programme and how the experience and findings influenced the research approach. Reflexivity is also explored as an important and ongoing part of the research process. The chapter explains the development of the research design and the qualitative approach of semi-structured interviews that were participant-led. Data analysis and interpretation are examined, explaining how participant narratives were held at the core of the process and were then viewed in relation to themes and sub-themes. It shows how an inductive approach to analysis and interpretation enabled further themes to be explored and how a model of enhanced delivery of NVQs arose inductively from the research. This chapter explores how some of the considerations such as confidentiality, anonymity, voice and insider research were addressed within the research process. Examples of how the data was worked with are given within this chapter and are to be viewed in conjunction with Appendices 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7.

Chapters 5 and 6 present the analysis and interpretation of the data. The research outcomes are divided into two chapters in order to more fully explore the data in relation to workplace learning and NVQ literature. Chapter 5 relates to staff perspectives on the themes and sub-themes that arose from the examination of the workplace learning literature. The chapter examines workplace learning more generally as well as using NVQs as examples in the social nature of learning, the influence of personal background on learning and the organisational context for learning. This chapter concludes with a discussion (5.3) of the findings in relation to key concepts explored in section 3.1: the support for learning in the workplace, personal and work-related identity, and expansive workplace practice. The chapter shows how the empirical data and the literature contributed to establishing the first four key elements of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery.

Chapter 6 examines NVQ candidate and assessor perspectives of NVQ delivery and assessment and how the Homecare/Centre model has facilitated learning and teaching in Homecare. It examines staff perspectives of the Homecare/Centre delivery in relation to the key concept established in section 3.2 of a more integrated approach to competence assessment. It explores how an integrated approach to NVQ assessment incorporates a broadening of the learning process as part of the NVQ, the close collaboration of candidate and assessor and explores three inductively derived themes that were found to be present in the research; values and reflective learning, confidence and professional level skills and knowledge. The discussion at the end of the Chapter (6.7) argues that the Homecare/Centre

model incorporates some of the aspects of a more integrated approach to competence assessment. In a discussion of the texts explored in 3.2 and the empirical findings four further key elements to those established in Chapter 5 are added to a model of enhanced NVQ delivery.

Chapter 7 reviews the findings and the discussion sections at the end of Chapters 5 and 6 and establishes the link between the research purposes of exploring staff perspectives of the NVQ and its delivery and the development of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery. The chapter identifies how looking at NVQ delivery through the lens of workplace learning can contribute to an approach to NVQ assessment that embeds the qualification as part of a learning as well as an assessment process in workplaces. The chapter summarises the findings that have contributed to the development of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery and which incorporate the importance of organisational support, the understanding of personal and workplace identity in relation to learning and the continued support and development of workplace assessors within the organisation. It also highlights the importance of a close link between education provider and the organisation through which a community of learning and practice can be established. A model of enhanced NVQ delivery is where the contribution to practice lies and the potential for using this model more widely within social care is also explored. The contribution of this research to theory is also examined within this chapter. It focuses on how the research has worked with three areas of literature to come to a better understanding of the NVQ and how this can contribute to thinking about workplace learning and NVQs more generally. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the reflexive research journey, the learning that has occurred in relation to the development of personal research practice and the next steps for me as a researcher.

This chapter has introduced the research and its context, both in the broader frame of social care and the research organisation of Homecare. It has established the research purposes of exploring staff perspectives and the Homecare/Centre model of delivery and has shown how the research unfolded. The structure of the dissertation has been described with an overview of the broad content of each of the chapters.

## **2. RESEARCH CONTEXT**

In order to contextualise the research in this chapter the background to the introduction and development of the NVQ national framework (within the broader context of vocational training) is explored in relation to how it has been used within adult social care. There is a brief outline of the NVQ assessment model. There is then an outline of the background issues in the current adult social care sector to highlight the importance of continuing effective training in the sector. Some of the issues in this chapter are returned to and more fully addressed in Chapter 3.

### **2.1. Background to NVQs**

In the 1980s in the United Kingdom (UK) it was perceived that traditional education had failed to address a section of the workforce who found themselves without formal qualifications. The NVQ system was established to meet this need and to be part of improving and streamlining the UK's vocational education and training system (West, 2004).

The intention behind the establishment of the new system was to recognise what people could do as well as what they knew through the assessment of competence as reflected in workplace performance and underpinning knowledge (Jessup, 1991). The introduction of the NVQ sparked debate and heavy criticism of the qualification framework. NVQs were to have competence assessment at the heart of the award but the way that this was to be addressed proved controversial.

The structure of NVQs is built on two basic assumptions. Firstly, that competence can be described in explicit terminology for use in assessment; and secondly, that competence can be 'unitised' or broken down into its constituents for flexible assembly into the NVQ qualification as a whole. (Roe, 2006: 6)

The award was to be geared towards assessment, there was no curriculum at the heart of the qualification, and it was not expected that training would necessarily be included as part of the accreditation process. This was in recognition of the many employees whom it was expected would require solely accreditation of their expertise due to long experience in the workplace (Jessup, 1991). The qualifications were structured to have a transparent, nationally understood value shaped around employer need and were intended to address a skills and qualifications deficit in order to maintain the United Kingdom's global competitiveness (West, 2004). The establishment of the NVQ framework was a model adopted to counter what was perceived as the 'academic drift of most college-based vocational courses as well as a means of accrediting work-based learning' (Young, 2004:

189). By 1992 NVQ qualifications had been designed for eighty percent of the workforce (Roe, 2006). Currently the NVQ is a central part of the Modern Apprenticeship scheme, there are 800 different awards and 25 percent of major employers offer the qualifications (Roe, 2006).

Stevenson (2005), an Australian author who has written widely about vocational learning, argued that:

The existing tensions are seen to lie between discourses that place the vocational at the bottom of a hierarchy of knowledge and value, and discourses concerning expectations for the vocational. It is argued that these tensions flow from a mistaken view of the vocational and vocational knowledge, especially those based on polarisations of behaviour and codification of the knowledge that is implied... The findings are interpreted as supporting the need to restore the vocational to its rightful place, as central to the ways in which individuals make meaning by engaging in significant activity. (Stevenson, 2005: 503)

This view is an important one in the attempt to understand the assessment of competence in relation to vocational learning and the potential benefits of workplace learning and teaching. It enables a re-framing of the argument and a focus on understanding how work and learning are interrelated.

The Leitch Review (2006) continued to make the explicit link between the UK achieving world leader status by 2020 and the education and training of the workforce. It suggested that government, employers and individuals needed to be involved in improving skills levels. The review recognised that there were too many qualifications, especially at low levels, and that employers and individuals did not always value them. The review set out aims of simplifying the system of qualifications and providing qualifications that were perceived as valuable. This latter aim was to be achieved through government funding for the skills that were identified as being intrinsic to workforce development by employers through sector skills councils. Train to Gain funding initiatives and Learner Accounts (DfES 2006a) were established to support these qualifications in operation. Raising aspirations of employees and encouraging individuals to take responsibility for lifelong learning was also seen as central to the review.

In spite of two decades of opposition to and criticism of the awards (West, 2004) NVQs remain a fundamental part of the qualification system in the UK. The recent shift to the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) has not changed the fundamental principles of the NVQ, although the names of the qualifications may change and the term NVQ may disappear from some of the titles of the awards. The criticisms of NVQs and the current debate will be discussed more fully in Chapter 3.

## **2.2. The NVQ assessment model in social care**

Adult residential social care is primarily delivered in community settings. These are homes that are run for service-users where health needs are not the main focus for care. This form of care includes homes run for the elderly (physically or mentally infirm), people with a learning disability or mental health problems and services that support these service-users in a more independent fashion, usually termed supported living (CQC, 2010). They may be run by the local authority, charities, not for profit organisations or independently owned and run as businesses in the private sector. Care Managers (who are registered social workers) are responsible for the referred service-users and monitor their care through meetings with the multi-disciplinary team within the home once or twice per year. The day-to-day care is not supervised directly by the Care Manager but by managers in the homes and teams of staff.

In recognition of the eighty percent of the workforce that was unqualified, and serious skills shortages in social care that were proving to be a hurdle to improving provision of services (Gospel, 2010), the government introduced a regulatory framework through the Care Standards Act (CSA) (2000), the National Minimum Standards and subsequently the Health and Social Care Act (2008). The integration of NVQs into regulation has meant that, within social care, an organisational and individual currency was established for the achievement of the NVQ as has previously been discussed on page 7.

It is in this policy and regulatory context that the question is raised of whether the NVQ is effective in developing the social care workforce, taking into account the many criticisms of content, process and outcomes (Cox, 2006) that will be explored more fully in Chapter 3. In 2009 CQC reported that ‘85% or less of adult social care services (care homes and home care agencies) meet minimum standards for training which were set out in 2000 (CQC, 2009: 11)’ indicating that there is still room for improvement after a nearly a decade of regulation.

The NVQ system was to accredit previously unqualified workers with nationally recognised qualifications that acknowledged their vocational experience and competence. The NVQ framework provided an opportunity to assess and accredit this competency in the workplace to a set of national standards.

Delivering a high quality integrated and personalised health care and social care system needs a skilled workforce. Staff need ongoing training and support and supervision if they are to be responsive and flexible, and fully understand the importance of maintaining people’s dignity and respect at all times (CQC, 2009: 75).

A NVQ candidate is assessed against national occupational (in Health and Social Care six units at Level 2, eight units at levels 3 and 4) comprising some mandatory and some optional units that make up the full award. The nature of the assessment and verification process is described (City and Guilds, 2005) and provides guidance to the award to candidates, assessors and internal verifiers. The standards cover competences that encompass both performance and underpinning knowledge that must be demonstrated through workplace practice. The guidance states that in order to achieve a NVQ the candidate must have the opportunity to be observed in a job role that matches the level of the qualification and to be able to demonstrate the appropriate knowledge that underpins that level of performance. Usually individuals are employed but they could be voluntary workers or carers for relatives. Candidates' produce portfolios that contain evidence demonstrating how knowledge and performance requirements for each unit are met. Observation is a main evidence gathering method but can be supported by testimony from others in the workplace, accreditation of prior learning, reflective accounts of own practice written by the candidates, products of work such as care plans or reports and questioning to test underpinning knowledge.

From the earliest stages of development of the NVQ in care it was recognised that the assessment of care practice would require a system of assessment that did not solely encompass the observation of a particular task completed effectively (Winter and Maisch, 1996). Values have been built into the standards in order to address the knowledge and performance that are involved in working with vulnerable people. As values have always been an important part of competence assessment in the care NVQ and there is a broader assessment process than in some other NVQs. Each qualification at each level has a unit that focuses on the gathering of evidence to show that candidates are engaged with the concepts of choice, well being and protection, as well as their implementation in practice. Although explicitly assessed in a separate unit there is also an expectation that values will be assessed in all units alongside working practice. Every unit contains this statement:

The values underpinning this unit have been derived from the key purpose statement, the statement of expectations from carers and people receiving services, relevant service standards and codes of practice for health and social care in the four UK countries. They are embedded in this unit and should be applied in your practice and through your knowledge demonstrated in any other standard you are working towards. (City and Guilds, 2005: 70)

The key purpose statement referred is: 'to provide an integrated, ethical and inclusive service which meets agreed needs and outcomes of people requiring health and/or social care'.

A quality monitoring system is an important part of the NVQ process and when the responsible assessor has assessed a unit, or several units, the units are passed to an internal verifier (IV) who systematically samples a proportion of the assessor's work to ensure consistent adherence to the requirements of the award. The external verifier (EV)

(employed by the relevant awarding body) visits the NVQ centre regularly and strategically samples the processes and work of the centre, its assessors and verifiers, to ensure continued compliance with the national occupational standards and the awarding body requirements (City and Guilds, 2004).

Assessors are required to undertake their own award, one NVQ unit demonstrating their competence to assess using a variety of evidence-gathering methods (A1) and verifiers are required to undertake one NVQ unit showing competence to conduct the quality assurance of the NVQ process (V1). The external verifier is required to undertake one NVQ unit demonstrating competence to conduct the external quality assurance of the assessment processes (V2) (City and Guilds, 2004).

### **2.3. Current Issues in the Social Care Sector**

The Government expects that, in 20 years' time, 1.7 million more adults in England will have a care and support need. At the same time, we are entering a period when public finances will be stretched. And people are, rightly, coming to expect more choice and control over their care. (CQC, 2009)

There has been an overall increase of 8% in the social care workforce since 2006-07 and residential care workers number 635,000 or 42% of the total care workforce (Department of Health, 2009). Within the social care workforce 85% is female; the age profile is similar to that of other industry, commercial and public employment except slightly higher in the 35-49 year old range (CSCI, 2005).

The Social Work Taskforce (Taskforce, 2009: 12) has acknowledged many problems in social work as a profession

Widespread staffing shortages mean that social work is struggling to hold its own as a durable, attractive public sector profession, compromising its ability to deliver consistent quality on the frontline. There is no robust, standing system for collecting information on local and national levels of vacancies, turnover and sickness, and for forecasting future supply and demand. Local authorities are finding it hard to identify effective methods for managing the workloads of frontline staff. Staff shortages and financial pressures are making these challenges harder still.

However qualified social workers only make up 5 percent of the social care workforce in England (Lombard, 2009) and therefore their relationship to the 'ancillary and para-professional roles' is a very important one in times where caseloads are very high.

Arguably adult residential social care workers occupy an 'in-between' situation with regard to being viewed as professionals. This is because the Care Manager is the named responsible professional (a qualified social worker) in the residential social care environment. However

on a day-to-day basis home managers, with very little input from the responsible social worker, are fulfilling the function of a professional but without the protection and regulation of a professional body. Hodkinson (1995: 63-66) describes a professional as one who has developed expertise that involves professional growth, independence and empowerment ‘within a moral and ethical dimension’, a ‘critical autonomy’ involving the use of reflective practice and focused on providing a service. It is within this context that the issue of professionalism of social care managers and their NVQ qualifications is considered.

There is a problems in social care recruitment and retention and vacancies are twice that of other areas (CSCI, December 2005) due to the poor perception of work in the sector.

Recently social care has been the subject of a national television advertising campaign to encourage people to work in the area (Department of Health 2009). It is recognised that public perception, leadership status, training and support must all improve to deliver a better quality service that reflects the changing needs and expectations of society (Department of Health and Department of Children, Schools and Family, 2009). Schemes to attract graduate trainees into the profession and another to attract the long-term unemployed were implemented in 2010 (DfES, 2006). Business benefits for staff development need to be very clear in an area where money is tight. Many residential care homes are small businesses that have seen their profits drop, the regulatory demands increase and user expectation rise (Horwath and Morrison, 1999). On a positive note the CQC reported that.

The proportion of adult social care services (such as care homes and home care agencies) rated as good or excellent rose from 69% in 2008 to 77% in 2009; with those rated excellent increasing by 4% to 17%. There was also a small reduction in the number of poor services (down from 3% to 2%) (CQC 2009: 75)

However it also recognised that there was still much work to be done in achieving a social care workforce that could meet future demands of the service, in that,

A fundamental cultural shift needs to take place, so that people are able to shape their own care. (CQC 2009: 7)

Alongside a rise in the expectation of skills and qualifications of social care workers following regulation through the CSA 2000, training in the sector remains very important,

Compliance with standards on training and development ranged from 81 percent to 86 percent for Shared Lives schemes. There were more variations in standards relating to supervision and support – care homes for older people again showed the lowest level of compliance (71%) and care homes for younger adults the highest (81%). (CQC, 2009)

A government paper ‘Working to Put People First: The Strategy for the Adult Social Care Workforce ‘ (Department of Health, 2009) sets out the government agenda for moving

forward with transforming the workforce. The new National Skills Academy for Social Care aims to develop the leadership, management and commissioning skills that are central to the reform of social care. As NVQs are key qualifications in the sector the evaluation of the efficacy of the qualifications in meeting sector needs must be scrutinised carefully.

The General Social Care Council (GSCC) is the regulatory body for social workers and social work students and is responsible for the code of practice and the professional register. There is a common code of practice for all social care workers (although sanctions can only be imposed upon registered social workers) however government has recently backed the Social Work Taskforce in establishing a separate code of practice for social workers. The GSCC chair since 2008, Rosie Varley (Samuel, 2009, online resource) questioned this: 'We believe there is value in having one code of practice applicable for all social care workers who should all be held to account for the same set of standards. We would be interested in understanding the rationale for a separate code.'

Currently the GSCC register is not open to managers or workers in adult residential social care. However the CQC (2009: 16) stated that, 'We are introducing a registration system across health and adult social care, with a common set of new essential standards of quality and safety that all services have a legal responsibility to meet.' However previous strategy documents (Department for Education and Skills and Department of Health, 2006; Department of Health 2009) indicated that the costs and benefits of extending the register to domiciliary workers will be closely examined before a decision to further extend the register is made. There is confusion about the governmental approach to registration in that the GSCC (Lombard, 2009, online resource) stated that; 'It is government policy to register the whole of the social care workforce. The GSCC believes this is the right approach and would like to see this happen within the next ten years.'

Domiciliary care workers and their managers are to be included on the register and it is acknowledged (Department of Health, 2009) that the GSCC will be able to act in cases where the Vetting and Barring Scheme, established under the Safeguarding of Vulnerable Groups Act 2006, cannot. It would be fair to assume that this would also be the case if adult residential social care workers were also included. There is a belief that risks are reduced due to the 'managed environment' of residential care is thought to be sufficient protection. However the government (Department of Health, 2009: 49) acknowledged that, 'there is evidence that the safety of people in residential care can be compromised by those caring for them' and states that 'we will continue to give consideration to the options for opening a register for additional groups of social care workers (including residential care workers)' indicating that risks are present. It is a confused picture but the cost and of establishing and monitoring a register, in proportion to the government assessment of the risk, seems to be

hampering the development. This is at odds with other parts of the UK as in Wales residential child care workers and their managers have been required to register with the Care Council for Wales for more than a year and in Scotland, ministers recently set out a timetable to introduce compulsory registration of 46% of staff by 2015.' (Lombard, 2009, online resource)

This chapter explored the background to the introduction of the NVQ qualifications system, the NVQ model and the adult social care workforce as a context for understanding why a continued focus on education is important to the sector. The chapter has explored the fundamentals of NVQ assessment and verification and the background and impact of the introduction of the NVQ model. It has explained something of the current state of the social care workforce and how NVQs will continue to be one of the central qualifications for social care workers. It has explored regulation of training and registration of social care workers in order to better understand some of the issues in the sector. The next chapter moves away from the specifics of social care and look at training from the wider perspective of workplace learning.

### **3. WORKPLACE LEARNING AND NVQS**

The first section in this chapter opens with an exploration of three themes: the social nature of learning, the influence of personal background on learning and the organisational context for learning. It explores key concepts of the support for learning, personal and work-related identity and expansive and restrictive workplace practice in relation to the three themes identified. The second section of the chapter examines competence and the NVQ and establishes that there is an opportunity for a more integrated approach to competence assessment that supports learning through close collaboration between assessor and candidate and the delivery system employed. The development and assessment of professional level skills and knowledge, values and reflective learning and confidence are explored as aspects of the approach of broader competence assessment. Participant and employer perspectives of NVQs are considered in the third section as a summary of the research in the area and in order to further reinforce the argument for a model of enhanced NVQ delivery that has been emergent in sections 3.1 and 3.2. All three sections establish concepts that are drawn on in discussion of data analysis and interpretation in Chapters 5 and 6.

#### **3.1. NVQs as workplace learning**

Working with the idea that NVQs are an example of workplace learning was the starting point to explore a wider literature base. Workplace learning research is discussed in relation to three themes and identifies features of the Homecare/Centre delivery model that relate to the concepts within the themes. The section contains an examination of the workplace learning literature with regard to:

- The social nature of learning and how experienced colleagues can facilitate learning in the workplace through NVQs
- The influence of personal background on learning and how learner and work-related identity may influence engagement in workplace learning and NVQs
- The organisational context for learning and how it relates to the success of workplace learning and therefore to NVQs.

The workplace is a legitimate space in which learning can take place (Engeström, 2004).

This confronts traditional perspectives and understanding of learning and reveals the potential learning available at work. Billett (2004) challenged the supposed superiority of learning in educational institutions arguing that workplace learning is both as legitimate and important and can be planned and undertaken just as satisfactorily.

It was important to understand the definition of terms, the theoretical foundations of the concept and to examine how NVQs can be understood in relation to workplace learning. Lee et al (2004), in an article by many of the key authors in the UK workplace learning field, described confusion over the term workplace learning commenting on the varied use of the term across different disciplines. They concluded that there are consistent themes across the literature, that workplace learning comprises both formal and informal practices, that it is an approach to learning that is social, and that it is characterised by organisational and individual factors that have an influence on its success.

### 3.1.1. The social nature of learning

Workplace learning has been analysed in terms of a social constructivist theory of learning (Billett, 1998, 2001c, 2002; Engeström, 2004) incorporating the idea that an experienced person working alongside an inexperienced person can facilitate learning, but also that more indirect factors such as the expectations of the workplace or the environment where learning takes place have an impact on the learning that can occur.

In exploring the social construction of learning Lave and Wenger (1991) examined the impact of the learning that is created through working together. They described this as situated learning theory: the learning that is primarily produced through experience and interaction between people and their context. The Homecare/Centre model of delivery of NVQs, which involves the close working together of a candidate and a work-based assessor, can be seen to incorporate this understanding of how learning takes place. Three components of Lave and Wenger's work (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) became central to the development of this theme, legitimate peripheral participation, identity and communities of practice.

We used the concept of legitimate peripheral participation to characterize learning. We wanted to broaden the traditional connotations of the concept of apprenticeship - from master/student or mentor/mentee relationships to one of changing participation and identity transformation in a community of practice. (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 13)

Legitimate peripheral participation is described as the way that experienced staff introduce inexperienced staff into communities of practice. The peripheral component describes how the newer members can gain practice experience when working with a colleague. Legitimacy incorporates the idea that the learner must have sufficient credibility to be considered as a potential member of the community to which they aspire to belong. This legitimacy allows for

the fact that they may be far from competent to practice initially and it is the community of practice that facilitates the learning through which they can improve.

Wenger (1998) described us all belonging to a variety of communities of practice as a regular part of our lives, although we may never have named them as such and suggests that there are three dimensions to a community of practice that contribute to 'negotiating meaning in practice' (Wenger, 1998: 84):

1. Mutual engagement
2. A joint enterprise
3. A shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998: 73)

He stated that we are part of some communities of practice as core members and some in a more peripheral role and attests that we could all name many of the other members of our different communities. The understanding of the importance of an experienced person assisting an active participant to learn led to an exploration within the research of workplaces as sites where learning could be facilitated.

Rather than seeing learning as an individual activity where a person studies mostly alone to acquire the requisite knowledge, understanding and skills much of the workplace learning literature sees learning as socially constructed through life and suggests that learning at work reflects this. Sfard (1998) identified two metaphors for understanding learning which she defined as 'learning as acquisition' and 'learning as participation' (1998: 7). Learning as acquisition is classified as the classroom approach, which assumes a stable content of transparent knowledge that is possessed by an individual. Learning as participation is seen as being a more active and flexible model where knowledge and understanding are developed through practice. She argued for the need for both types of learning and an acknowledgement of their individual strengths and usefulness. NVQ candidates work independently at times but their learning is usually facilitated by and planned with an assessor to guide their development. Classroom type teaching is sometimes used in the workplace in a more formal delivery of content-specific material but there is also the opportunity for knowledge to be more participatively created between co-workers in a less formal manner. This description of the incorporation of both formal and informal learning raises issues concerning how candidates gain competence through NVQs, what learning and teaching opportunities are available and how these are created, approached and valued by staff.

It is in the drawing together of performance and knowledge that the NVQ attempts to establish competence. Knowledge may be formally acquired and tested or assessed through the judgement of how that knowledge impacts upon practice through observation by the assessor in the workplace. There is a participative exchange between candidate and

assessor relating to planning of the observation and feedback upon it. In the Homecare/Centre model experienced colleagues work alongside learners undertaking the NVQ, engaging in the facilitation of identified learning development as part of the planning of the assessment. This approach has the potential to be more generally collaborative than assessment carried out by assessors outside of the workplace. Where assessment is located within the workplace a whole team can be involved in facilitating learning around the NVQ and awareness of areas for development can be more fully addressed as part of workplace performance.

French and Bazalgette (1996) raised the issue of teaching in a learning organisation. They questioned whether we have lost the importance of teaching in our focus on learning. Taking their term of teaching to include facilitation of learning, it was pertinent to explore whether the NVQ could be a part of re-establishing teaching in the face of an assessment driven qualification system and how this might impact upon the assessment of competence in practice as part of strategic staff development.

Eraut (2004) also identified that there was a need of some support with more formal learning in the workplace and outlined his view was that the transfer of knowledge between educational and work settings was necessary. He emphasised the requirement for a programme that linked the two dimensions of knowledge and performance in order to achieve improved competence. He argued that neither academic nor vocational systems help students integrate knowledge and practice. He suggested it is not necessarily the frameworks that are at fault but the methods of implementation and argued that:

The intelligent development of more integrated programmes and more appropriate staffing could make a real difference. (Eraut, 2004: 220)

The issue of Eraut's 'appropriate staffing' came under scrutiny in the research and brought into question the calibre and preparation of the Homecare/Centre staff engaged in NVQ programmes and their key interactive role where they act as a conduit between learning and workplace practice, supporting learning. The development of staff to become facilitators of learning in the workplace became an important consideration in understanding the usefulness of the NVQ as a tool for learning and not just assessment but also in understanding how elements of the Homecare/Centre delivery system supported assessor and staff development.

Billett (2000) also considered the preparation of workplace teachers and assessors as an element that contributed to workplace learning. He investigated the role of mentors through research based on training the mentors to use guided learning strategies. He found that key to mentees' development was the mentors' involvement in everyday activities and in relating

the mentees' learning to practice and understanding. He established that training the mentors did indeed improve their engagement and performance. The close collaboration of the NVQ candidate and assessor allows for opportunities for this type of development. The issue of whether assessors within Homecare were sufficiently aware of how to support different individuals in different ways to make full use of this opportunity, considering the limited nature of their previous experience of teaching and learning, is therefore significant.

In researching mentoring from the perspective of the mentor Billett (2003) found that whilst it could be enriching, pressures of time and a general lack of support made work far more intense for the mentors and this was not always appreciated by the organisation or the mentees. The issue of the pressure on assessors in terms of time that it takes to assess and also the particular difficulties of language and the recording of assessment within NVQs were considered in the research. The NVQ is viewed as an important and integral part of staff development within Homecare. The preparation of assessors, designated time for assessment and a valuing of the NVQ by the organisation are elements of a delivery system that is working towards overcoming Billett's identified challenges.

In exploring how people learn at work Guile and Griffiths (2001) identified asking, collaborating and observing and suggested that most educational models ignore the context of learning. They suggested that close collaboration between student and workplace supervisor could connect formal and informal learning. The NVQ accommodates this participative form of learning in the workplace where an assessor is working alongside the candidate. They also advocated close links between the employer and the education providers as useful. Matlay (2000) identified the importance of the employer/education link in relation to the implementation of NVQs in small and medium sized businesses. He reported how employers felt isolated in implementing the qualifications if there was little support from education providers and a more positive view of the qualifications where this was provided. The Homecare/Centre model incorporates both of these principles to ensure that delivery has optimum chance of a guided integration of learning and assessment of competence.

This section has established the social nature of learning and begun to explore the key concept of support for learning in relation to the Homecare/Centre model. The assessor/candidate relationship is at the core of this support for learning through NVQs. The section has explored the importance of considering the training of assessment staff, the need for a focus on how knowledge is developed within the workplace and how it can be integrated with practice. It has raised the issue of whether teaching has been sidelined within assessment driven qualifications, the challenges of implementing workplace assessment for assessors and the potential benefits of a close education provider/organisational link.

### 3.1.2. The influence of personal background on learning

With regard to the learning opportunities available being mediated by personal circumstances Illeris (2003) saw workplace learning as part of a more general shift in society, where people can avoid the income drop that is related to ongoing study while still achieving qualifications. In the social care sector the NVQ pathway has provided an opportunity for progression without leaving work for full-time education. Illeris (2003, 2006) described workplace learning as part of a move towards a knowledge society and his view was that competence developing initiatives are one way forward. He recognised that it is not enough to assume that learning is socially constructed wherever groups of people gather in a workplace. Consideration has to be given as to how and why individuals engage with that learning and also why they might not engage and the factors that helped and hindered in management of vocational workplace learning and teaching. He suggested that for learning to happen there needed to be a different type of connectivity, one between social learning and the understanding of individual identity in terms of motivation, provision and delivery.

The importance of the individual's biography and disposition is recognised (Billett, 2003; Billett et al., 2005; Billett and Pavlova, 2005; Hodkinson et al., 2004; Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004) in workplace learning research and these authors develop the idea of the individual's autonomy and agency which is intertwined with thinking, acting, working and learning. What was being explored was the importance of the individual, their lives and how their motivations to learn were affected by many personal factors. Illeris (2003) described an adult learner who was, 'Not very inclined to learn something of which they cannot see the point on the basis of their own life situation' (Illeris, 2003: 167). This motivational aspect had been noted in practice and the research provided an opportunity to explore more fully how different aspects such as schooling experiences, family background, work and life balance, attitudes to employment and experiences of employers influenced candidates and their engagement with the NVQ process.

In consideration of what the factors helping or hindering learner engagement Norman and Hyland (2003) explored the notion of confidence in their paper describing the personal (in my terms) or dispositional (in their terms) barriers to widening the participation within disadvantaged and under-represented social groupings. They found anxiety, low self-esteem and lack of confidence to be barriers to learning that require attention from the education provider. This consideration of the issues that might affect individuals within the workplace and their potential reluctance to engage with learning, due to unrewarding prior experiences, was a backdrop to understanding the importance of workplace assessors in reducing anxiety and building confidence. Confidence required consideration in relation to the observable

changes in behaviour that assessors in the workplace could be identifying as indicators of competence although not specifically referred to within the NVQ standards.

Kember (1999) explored other reasons for students being more likely to fail to complete qualifications and found that those students (not vocational students in this case) that externalised responsibility for their qualification were less likely to be successful. He looked at the balance of part-time study with family, work and social obligations and found that with support, flexibility and advice the students who complete are those that have fully accepted personal responsibility for their course or qualification. The issue of ownership of the qualification was also present in a study (Pillay et al., 2003) that investigated younger and older workers. They found the largest group of workers in both age groups viewed work as a way to earn money and not much more. Their commitment to learning and qualifications was influenced by their personal attitude to work. The motivation to engage in learning is a complex issue for every individual and became a strand for exploration of staff perspectives within the research.

In exploring the barriers to engaging with learning in the workplace identity has been explored as a key concept in relation to understanding why individuals do engage. Wenger (1998) identified identity and its relationship to learning. He considered the aspect of the individual in relation to learning within communities but he also recognised the individual as a part of a wider societal structure.

Building an identity consists of negotiating the meanings of our experience of membership in social communities. The concept of identity serves as a pivot between the social and the individual. (Wenger, 1998: 145)

This understanding of identity as a ‘pivot’ that allows us or excludes us from access to communities of practice became an important feature for consideration in relation to individual biography within the research. An understanding of why individuals engage (or choose not to engage) would be of benefit in terms of approaches to staff development in strategic workforce development, organisations and individual homes. What encouraged NVQ candidates within Homecare to engage in the NVQ and what might be preventing others became a focus for the research.

Collin (2009: 33) found a ‘close relationship between learning, organisational commitment and work-related identity’ that resulted in a positive benefit to the workplace. In her work she conceptualised identity as being a way of understanding the connections between personal motivation and engagement at work and in workplace learning. She explored identity as being ‘constructed at the intersection of the social and the individual’ (Collin, 2009: 24) and as a way of understanding why learners do or do not engage with workplace learning that

related to their work-related identity. The connection between workers and organisations was of interest in this research. How did Homecare staff view their organisation and how relevant was that to engagement with the NVQ? Billett and Pavlova (2005) looked at work as identity-forming in terms of self respect, self worth and usefulness but showed that people would forgo their aspirations in the pursuit of a balance between work and life outside of work and this balance of motivations was another focus for the research in terms of individual engagement.

Other researchers (Billett 2001; Fuller and Unwin 2004; Hodkinson et al 2004) described potential barriers to engagement such as working hours, class, ethnicity, language, literacy, status, gender and age and how all of these may impact on the access the worker has to guidance and support. They also identified that the focus on learning that occurs more naturally in the workplace could endanger opportunities for a group of workers of lower status to engage in more formal learning. The complexity of the issues that can prevent engagement clearly required careful consideration. A fuller understanding of some of these issues could help develop an approach that encouraged engagement in spite of the many hurdles being identified.

### 3.1.3. The organisational context of learning

A number of writers (Billett, 2001a, 2001b; Bryson et al., 2006; Collin, 2009; Fuller and Unwin, 2004; Lave and Wenger, 1991) have explored the organisational context as an important factor in relation to workplace learning. Fuller and Unwin (2004) outlined expansive and restrictive practices in workplaces.

We suggest that there are two broad categories of expansive and restrictive features: those that arise from understandings about the organizational context and culture (e.g. work organization, job design, control and distribution of knowledge and skills) and those relating to understandings of how employees learn (through engaging in different forms of participation). (Fuller and Unwin, 2004: 130)

They suggested that expansive environments gave opportunities for deeper, more creative and inquiring approaches in the workplace. They came to the conclusion that in this type of expansive learning environment there is more opportunity for individual and organisational development to become congruous. Expansive practices shift and change according to the learner and the context of learning creating a dynamic workplace that is different for different people and so potentially more attractive to more learners. Evans and Kersh (2004) extended Fuller and Unwin's (2004: 130) original 'expansive/restrictive continuum' to include the recognition of tacit skills that sit outside of specific learning programmes. They observed that this requires a very individual approach to the learner from a skilled facilitator as the tacit

skills identified vary from person to person. The people are important in this approach to expansive learning but there are also issues that are separate from individuals and related to organisational context, these include the strategic and policy positions from which organisations function. An organisational approach to learning that is participative and inclusive is more likely to be defined as expansive if employees understand and are active and committed to the implementation of the approach (Fuller and Unwin, 2004).

Billett (2001b: 210) described the organisational approach to workplace learning as the 'invitational qualities' necessary in organisations for workplace learning to attract the interest of learners, incorporating observations on the need to provide clear learning strategies, training for mentors and encouragement and support within individual workplaces. He suggested that workplace context and structure could contribute to the learning that can be accessed (and that this is not always an even distribution). This understanding enabled consideration of how the workplaces in Homecare differ, whether individual homes and assessors facilitate more learning and teaching and, where there is more NVQ achievement why that might be.

In summary this section (3.1) has discussed social and participative workplace learning as a background to the development of effective support for learning in the workplace through NVQs. Trained and committed assessors who are part of an organisation with a clear strategic approach to learning, and supported by a valuing of workplace learning that is demonstrated through an acknowledgement of the effort it involves, gives an organisation the best chance of success in establishing workplace learning. Personal and work-related identity has been considered as influential with regard to the personal readiness to learn and as a way to understand why learners engage or why they do not. It has been established that individual motivation to learn is key to engagement but that there are ways to facilitate higher levels of engagement through a participative approach to learning at work. Organisational commitment to learning through a strategic approach that values and facilitates learning as part of 'expansive practice' (Fuller and Unwin, 2004: 130) was also seen to be an important part of workplace learning. These key concepts became an important way of understanding how the theoretical underpinnings of workplace learning could contribute to a model of enhanced NVQ delivery and enabled a reflection upon the Homecare/Centre delivery as a part of this deliberation. These themes supported the formation of the interview strategy that is described at greater length in Chapter 4 and the themes are revisited in Chapter 5 and 6 alongside the empirical data and the key concepts that have been identified within this chapter.

### **3.2. NVQs and competence**

This section builds on the background to NVQs, the NVQ assessment model in social care and the current issues in the social care sector that were explored in Chapter 2. It addresses criticisms of NVQs as they apply to the social care sector and the importance of delivery of the NVQ as part of expansive workplace practice (Fuller and Unwin, 2004). The section explores how competence is interpreted within the NVQ context and is integrated into workplace practice as part of a process that supports learning. The section identifies how a more integrated approach to competence assessment could usefully incorporate staff development in the workplace through the use of the NVQ. It considers the development of the learning process through the importance of close collaboration between assessor and candidate as a part of this integrated approach that considers context as part of staff development. It explores how the development of professional level skills and knowledge, values and reflective learning and confidence could be a part of improving staff development through the NVQ in the social care context. The review of work in the field is explored alongside the Homecare/Centre delivery model and builds upon the concepts in 3.1 to establish the key elements of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery.

#### **3.2.1. NVQs criticisms past and present and the context of social care**

Recent years have seen a review of NVQs that has enabled a fresh look at the criticisms that were well documented in the previous two decades. This section re-visits some of the more general criticisms and updates the argument using this new evidence. The section explores NVQs within the particular context of social care and uses the new evidence to build on the argument presented earlier in this chapter, that NVQs can be usefully employed within an organisational context when implemented strategically and thoughtfully.

The general criticisms of NVQs have been that they are behaviourist, output focused, government driven (Grugulis, 2000; McAdam and Crowe, 2004); atomistic, bureaucratic (Ashworth and Saxton, 1990; Hyland, 1994); time intensive and complicated (Spielhofer, 2001); low in status (Miller et al., 2002); and a poor preparation for further learning (Miller et al., 2002; Wharrad et al., 2003; Williams, 2000). Grugulis (2002) observed that the NVQ reduced requirements in some sectors where previous qualifications covered broader subject areas before the introduction of the NVQ. She maintained that there were fundamental problems with the NVQ due to the structure of the qualification and that NVQs contribute to a stasis of knowledge and skills and a reproduction of weaknesses. This was due to the focus on workplace behaviours where ‘optimal skills’ may not be measured, only those that are present and observable in the particular workplace. She argued that qualifications do not

necessarily mean an increase in skill and that therefore certificate issue is not a measure for skill development. Senker (1996) argued that the NVQ in engineering covered only two thirds of the previous apprenticeship curriculum. Criticisms about lowering of standards of skills were also found in other sectors where apprenticeships had been well established such as construction (Callender, 1992) and hairdressing (Raggatt, 1994). However Senker (1996) also acknowledged that there have been 'numerous successes' reported and quoted Rosenfeld (1999) (another piece of research from the University Care NVQ Centre) as one of those successes.

### 3.2.2. A fresh look at NVQs

West (2004: 5) presented a retrospective review of NVQs summarising the criticisms in three broad categories of 'technical', 'moral' and 'market'. The paper examined the criticisms of NVQs in a broader academic context finding that many of them could also be applied to other qualifications. Roe et al. (2006: 19) described the paper as conveying 'a range of arguments which are not exactly a defence of NVQ but which question some of the more fundamentalist criticisms'.

West (2004) defined 'technical' as the ability of the NVQ to provide reliable assessment. He argued that criticisms of atomisation of performance into 'standards' and the associated bureaucracy and jargon were not so different from other forms of more accepted curriculum based and academic courses and that there 'was nothing unique in the NVQs limitations' (p.11). West dealt with the criticism that the lack of a syllabus and associated learning resources made the NVQ an ineffective tool by suggesting that the NVQ had never set out to provide these resources, that the intention was to separate outcomes from process to be more easily applicable across a variety of contexts nationally. He suggested that, with hindsight, it would have been useful if awarding bodies had made explicit the need for more context specific resources but suggested that a mandatory syllabus would have made NVQs 'undeliverable in most workplaces' (p.12).

West (2004) defined 'moral' criticisms of NVQs as being in three parts; can NVQs facilitate learning, do NVQs sufficiently address knowledge and understanding and is the NVQ only useful for assessing lower levels of skill? Firstly, West dealt with an implied criticism that vocational means less educationally justifiable. This he addresses by noting that 'in most advanced industrial countries vocational topics *have* (original emphasis p.13) been seen as a legitimate means of achieving educational goals. The question is in what form they should be presented and delivered in order to extract valuable learning' (p.13). He described how NVQs were never intended to provide a complete educational package but to assess competences to valid industry standards. West suggested that 'NVQs can involve deeper learning but the extent to which they do will depend on matters other than their design -

matters such as the circumstances under which they are studied and the pedagogic skills of teachers and instructors.' (p.14). In this West identified the context and the people involved in the process as important factors.

Secondly West addressed the issue of knowledge and understanding noting that NVQs have been required to include the assessment of these components since 1995 but that it was not clear whether the inclusion of specific standards have added much to the assessment process. He observed that employers noted their satisfaction with employees improved knowledge through engagement with NVQs but he wondered about how to unpick knowledge and understanding from performance both philosophically and in practice. He suggested that it might be necessary to assess theory separately but that knowledge and understanding may be seen as part of competent performance.

Thirdly, West addressed the issue of whether the NVQ was only suitable for assessing lower level skills. Here he cited professional groups that have adopted the NVQ at higher levels such as Accounting Technicians and Probation Service. He suggested that the idea of assessing through an approach that involves a variety of situations and a strong component of supervised practice has long been the case in law.

If one asks whether the NVQ approach of requiring performance to practical workplace standards is inimical to professional development, one must answer that it is not – indeed this kind of approach is common in the professional arena, though it is generally accompanied by theory and knowledge being directly taught and separately assessed (p.17).

West (2004) defined 'market' issues as some commentators' concerns about the cost of the implementation of the system in relation to the uptake of the qualifications. He suggested that the aim of a single system of vocational accreditation has not come to pass and concludes that NVQs are a 'minority of all vocational qualifications taken in the country' (p.19) but also concludes that there is 'no evidence that the delivery of NVQs is more dependent on public funds than are other vocational qualifications' (p.20).

In conclusion West (2004) stated that 'Levels 2 and 3 are the 'heartland' for NVQs' and that, although this is not what was originally intended, 'NVQs may well be the only kind of public qualification which can realistically be used for certificating on-the-job experience and instruction' (p.21). He questioned whether this was enough to support NVQs in the future and suggested that on balance it probably was, especially as it has become established and regulated in a number of sectors including social care.

Roe et al. (2006:14) presented both a review of the NVQ literature and primary research based on a survey of 1500 employers and 25 in depth interviews sponsored by the DfES.

Their quantitative data supported a negative view of the NVQ. They identified problems with the assessment of competence, jargon and bureaucracy, sufficiency of technical knowledge and skills, understanding and acceptance by employers and a declining uptake of qualifications that was destined to fall further if not for regulation in some sectors. However, their qualitative data gave a more mixed result. Roe et al. (2006: 14) argued that West's (2004) dispassionate review of NVQs puts forward a 'modifying viewpoint' through a consideration of the practicalities of implementation of the NVQ system. They finally agreed with West that 'NVQs occupy a legitimate, and arguably rather important, niche in the constellation of vocational awards.' (Roe, 2004: 22)

What West (2004) and Roe et al. (2006) suggested is that the implementation of the NVQ is heavily dependent on the context, the support for the qualifications within organisations. Social care is one of the areas where the NVQ has been regulated into practice, removing organisations' and candidates' opportunity to choose another qualification route. It is timely to question whether the NVQ prepares staff to deliver the optimal care delivery outcomes that are fundamental to the government vision of the social care provision of the future (Department of Health, 1998, 2000, 2005, 2008; Department for Education and Skills and Department of Health, 2006), as the sector moves into a new era of regulation both in terms of the qualifications system (Qualifications and Credit Framework) and regulation (Health and Social Care Act 2008). Understanding can be drawn from these commentators about how the NVQ can be used to support learning in social care. Some studies in the care sector suggested that there were already examples of good practice in implementation of NVQs in this regard.

Gospel and Lewis (2010: 1) undertook a study in 2003 and replicated it in 2008. They examined the impact and limits of regulation of qualifications in social care recognising that regulation made the sector unique with regard to NVQs. They found that in 2008 there was more training and qualifications offered but that many organisations failed to integrate training into human resource practice in pay awards and career progression. Gospel's (2010) research covered factors that prevented staff from engaging with NVQs; personal, interpersonal and organisational issues such as time constraints and the academic demands of NVQs for a workforce that had not had positive experiences at school, had deficiencies in basic skills and where there were weak financial incentives and limited career prospects (pp. 16-20). They also identified a shift from internal to external assessors from 2003 to 2008 whereas Homecare continued to develop internal assessors and verifiers during that period. Funding initiatives were identified as being intrinsic to the increase in training offered to the workforce. The research identified criticisms of the NVQ but found that 'for all their faults, NVQs provide real benefits to employers and employees' (p.21).

Cox (2007) researched lower grade staff in NHS trusts and the validity of general perceptions and criticisms of the NVQ. She found that, when used creatively by organisations in conjunction with a further or higher education partner and committed assessors and experts in the workplace, many benefits to the NVQ were identified. She reported learning occurring through this approach and suggested that this could be useful in other organisations and as part of strengthening the perceived value of the NVQ. The study was restricted to levels 2 and 3 (foundation degrees are used for development of higher level skills in the NHS rather than NVQ level 4) where she reported that 'NVQs have increased in use and gained currency as a mark of professional competence' (Cox, 2007: 24). Positive views of level 2 and 3 NVQs were present in other research (Gospel, 2010, Rainbird, 2004b; Roe et al., 2006). No research was found about level 4 qualifications in social care.

Cox (2007: 5) puts forward a useful summary of the arguments that echoed many of West's (2004) categories. She suggested that criticisms of NVQs could be classified as being of content, process and outcome.

- Content: the basis of the development of the award in functional analysis that leads to a deconstruction of skills and tasks into micro-behaviours. Also the lack of learning necessary in the acquisition of the NVQ, no curriculum, no textbooks, no obligatory learning resources.
- Process: the bureaucracy, the language and the consistency of the assessment process.
- Outcomes: the question of whether they are a valuable qualification to employees and employers?

Cox (2007) reported a mixed, but often more negative response to criticisms across sectors but suggested that the picture in the care sector was different. She identified that where delivery was integrated into expansive workplace practice (Fuller and Unwin, 2004) it worked best for employers and employees (these issues are discussed in more detail in section 3.4).

Evans et al (2006) identified that in care work the NVQ has provided a framework of qualifications that had been beneficial but that one of the key problems of the NVQ system is the separation of learning from assessment. This is a key issue in that it has begun to be asserted that the NVQ can be used as way of developing learning. What is suggested is a shift in attitude away from acquisition towards integration of learning related to and embedded within practice. It was engaging with the criticisms of the NVQ system and framework that brought a focus upon the integration of a learning process within the workplace and reflection on what would constitute a more satisfactory approach to NVQs in organisations. The issue of the level 4 qualifications is not well addressed in this section. This is due to a lack of relevant research upon this qualification within social care although Grugulis (1998) refers to problems with the NVQ at higher levels generally. This identified

gap was significant and the issue of the learning of the most senior members of social care teams required consideration within this research.

### 3.2.3. An integrated model of competence

If the basis of the NVQ is competence it was necessary to more fully understand the concept of competence and competence assessment. How NVQs might be better integrated into assessment was explored in this wider field. Norris (1991) identified two constructs of competence. His behaviourist construct attempted to break down performance into a set of measurable criteria and had clear links to the NVQ framework. His generic construct of assessment anticipated wider evaluation of the personal qualities that were seen to relate to competent performance in a practice setting.

However, writers in the field had begun to identify that a broader evaluation of the concept of competence was happening more generally in relation to personal capabilities. Hodkinson (1992) suggested that it was possible to move away from a behaviouristic model towards a more interactive model that focused on beliefs and understanding rather than purely performance. He argued that the assessor candidate relationship within this interactive model is central to the negotiation around what competent performance represents.

The consideration of Hager's (Beckett and Hager, 2002; Hager, 1994, 2000, 2004a, 2004b, 2007) work on competency standards and vocational education has been key to the synthesis of work in the field over many years. Hager is an Australian author who has written extensively about competence assessment and the place of vocational education and training at a time when Australia and the UK have been struggling with many of the same issues.

Beckett and Hager (2002) explored the idea that workplaces are full of hidden cultural expectations and values that are related to assessment of practice within the setting and how it is almost impossible not to bring these into assessment. They argued for an integrated approach to competency standards that recognised the necessity for an assessment process that incorporates tasks, abilities and setting and takes account of a learning process.

Competence is then the inference from a diversity of evidence, via judgements of fitness, rightness or appropriateness. Such judgements are saturated with values, and in that way, they are not only context-bound, but culturally driven. They can be claimed as objective, even although their provenance is in subjective judgements made amidst the culture of specific workplaces on materially evidential grounds which will stand up to public scrutiny. These judgements are inferences of embodied capability to certain public standards. (Beckett and Hager, 2002: 57)

This inference of competence that Beckett and Hager (2002) explored is one that is mediated by people through the use of the standards but not wholly dependent upon them. They viewed it as inevitable that the particular context and culture of the workplace is influential and that claims for the objectivity that competency standards are intended to imply are in fact imbued with the subjectivity of judgements embedded within the practice area.

Beckett and Hager (2002) suggested that a vocational curriculum that encompassed a 'learning process' and one not solely focused on performance could be of benefit. Hager (2004a) posited that outcomes of performance are impossible to distinguish from personal capabilities but that if this was acknowledged then 'understandings of competence could be possible and even educationally desirable' (2004a: 431). This argument would seem to be especially significant in beginning to understand how a broader notion of competence assessment is integral to using vocational qualifications usefully within a workplace. Was personal capability part of what was being looked for within the use of the NVQ assessment process and would this indicate that assessment that incorporated a 'learning process' was being used? This argument echoes the position explored in section 3.2.1 where West (2004), Roe et al. (2006) and Cox (2007) examined the importance of context and organisational support.

Recognising that the assessor role in NVQs is closely aligned to the establishment of a learning process that can incorporate broader assessment of competence Burchell (1995) considered the perspective of the assessor of NVQs. She attested that it was difficult and undesirable for assessors to try to untangle knowledge of a 'whole range of contextual factors and their knowledge of the person being assessed' (Burchell, 1995: 255) through a matching of practice to behaviourist outcomes. She raised issues regarding the difficulty of instituting performance changes that contribute to 'good practice' when the expected performance was so clearly and unequivocally described and how the language of the NVQ was in danger of 'trivialising as greater precision is sought' (Burchell, 1995: 255). She used Hodkinson and Issitt's (1995) idea of an interactive model of competence and identified that broader competences identifying general principles and areas of practice for consideration could become the basis of a useful dialogue between assessors and candidates in the exploration of a deeper level of understanding and of a gradual professional development.

This view was supported by Wolf (2000) who argued that assessors of NVQs continued to use their judgement of the individual and their personal idea of what the standards demonstrate in relation to the assessment of competence.

The more experienced the assessor, the more they are operating in a familiar field, and the more they have internalized a model of competence (which may or may not be the same as other people's) the more 'active' their judgemental

aggregation becomes. Nor is this in any way a practice confined to vocational competency testing in the UK. (Wolf, 2000: 71)

This embedding of practice within the practitioner's assessment where it is almost impossible to differentiate personal and NVQ judgements of competence is significant.

The awarding bodies look for vocational competence in an assessor and require a qualification in assessment but only recently has there been a requirement for a professional qualification or one in teaching and in this context Eraut's (2004: 220) comment about 'appropriate staffing', in relation to the calibre and preparation of staff undertaking NVQ assessment, could be seen as worthy of consideration in relation to both Homecare and Centre staff. An important factor would be the achievement of clarity in relation to using the NVQ system judiciously without undermining the fundamental principles of NVQ assessment.

Norris (1991) argued that a generic concept of the assessment of competence was possible. Beckett and Hager (2002), ten years later, argued that broader assessment was happening because the relational aspect of judgements and context made it inevitable. They also linked the access to this integrated form of assessment of competence as being especially important to 'new professions and aspiring professions' (Beckett and Hager 2002: 59). This had particular relevance to this group of social care workers who are struggling to locate themselves within a professional landscape.

### **3.3. The development of staff in social care**

This section examines some of the areas where it might be possible to contribute to the development of staff in social care through the use of a more integrated approach to the assessment of competence using the NVQ. The integrated approach is explored as developing the learning process through a broadening of the approach to competence assessment. The assessor role is key to potential success and the collaboration between assessor and candidate is examined. The potential for development of professional level skills and knowledge within the social care workforce is considered recognising that the opportunities for development are often different at levels 2 and 3 than at level 4. Further consideration is given to the development of values and reflective learning and confidence in relation to broadening competence assessment. This is not meant to be a comprehensive list of development opportunities within the social care workforce. Many of these broader competences, like Spencer's (1983) soft skills discussed within this section, would be defined and explored within the particular workplace. Finally a model of delivery of the NVQ is considered as influential in providing expertise and help to workplaces who are attempting to incorporate a broader range of competences into workplace practice.

### 3.3.1 Development of professional level skills and knowledge

Much of the literature refers to the development of the ‘professional’ and this literature base was drawn upon to explore staff development in the care sector. Whether or not social care workers are classified as professionals has not been explored within this research and is not central to the thesis. Social care workers are here seen as characterised by elements of what it is to be a professional, such as ‘professional level’ skills and the term ‘staff development’ is used as opposed to ‘professional development’. What has been concentrated on are the aspects of practice that are relevant within the social care workforce in terms of a pathway of staff development and how that can be facilitated. Hodkinson and Issitt (1995: 9), in relation to competency assessment, stated that: ‘a model is over-simplified and ultimately fails’, and their view relates closely to Norris’ (1991) first behaviourist construct interpretation. When a qualification system is embedded into a sector through regulation it is important that it works to the benefit of staff undertaking it and ultimately the service-user.

Hodkinson and Issitt (1995) concluded that there is a need to work with the concept of competence and NVQ assessment in order to produce that can address some of the more problematic issues more fully. They suggested that a way forward was to ‘synthesize the competence approach into a holistic reflective practice relevant to the challenges and complexities of the twenty-first century’ (Hodkinson and Issitt, 1995: 11). They suggested that competence should not be primarily concerned with summative assessment but should also ‘aid learning, clarify expertise, aid assessment and make more transparent the nature of professional practice’ (1995: 65). They proposed that this could be facilitated through a holistic approach both to assessment as part of the development of the reflective learner and as an approach to the learning process in the workplace. This would indicate the need for guidance, feedback and supervision of practice and significant collaboration and communication between assessor and candidate. This is easier to provide for level 2 and 3 NVQ candidates where assessors can be located in the workplace and regularly work alongside their candidates to develop their skills and evaluate their practice. The problem with level 4 is that candidates working at this level are largely unsupervised. This means that there are limited opportunities for close participation and guided learning. This potentially reduces the opportunities for development at the higher level and required consideration in relation to the different levels of NVQ.

Grugulis (1998) recognised problems in relation to higher-level NVQs for managers and identified that the assessment system does not work well at the higher levels of practice. Taking social care home managers as those most likely to have developed professional level skills and who are undertaking the higher level awards her position required consideration within the research as to whether these qualifications were the most appropriate or in fact

serving their purpose. Grugulis (1998) asserted that the higher level NVQs were not a sound preparation for a more academic route of learning. These two considerations were explored in this research with participants who had experience of the level 4 awards.

Eraut (2004) and Guile and Griffiths (2001) highlighted difficulties with the integration of knowledge and practice in NVQs. They suggested a need for connectivity to improve the link between knowledge and performance at work and Eraut's (2004) view was that the NVQ could provide a bridge for this link if implemented effectively. The integration of the two aspects of knowledge and performance comprises the achievement of competency but they are not wholly limited to the expectations of the standards, they are context and workplace bound.

Barnett (1994: 75) explored the problems of assessing knowledge when 'its nature means that it will shift and change over time focusing on knowledge that will do for today will not do for tomorrow'. This idea that knowledge evolves as part of the changing demands of the workplace context is an important one in relation to a broader assessment of competence where assessors can shift their demands of candidates as, for example, changes occur in legislation. His idea that professional knowledge is characterised by 'debate' that is internal and external to the workplace and profession would be an indicator of professional level engagement with knowledge. Barnett (1994) also referred to understanding and explored whether it is observable. He argued that it is understanding, the combining of thought and action in workplace practice, that is a demonstration of true competence. He criticised the NVQ model for not giving enough room for the development of understanding. Indeed much of the knowledge and understanding within the NVQ is expected to be observed in practice.

Spencer (1983) related competence to soft skills and explored the idea that it was the 'nuances of professional level skill that enable some persons to perform a task more effectively than others' (1983: 11). He argued that every occupation needed to identify soft skills that were relevant to their particular area of practice. The position of an NVQ assessor working alongside a candidate provides opportunities for feedback that reflects more nuanced practice that is closely related to the context of care.

In relation to the assessment of competence Sargeant (2000: 644) undertook a quantitative and qualitative study of knowledge of social care practice and competence from the perspective of both candidates and their assessors. He found that broadly the NVQ candidates in his research scored better in relation to his 10 generic abilities than those who had not engaged in NVQ development indicating that the NVQ was improving practice. His generic abilities were in social care practice (devised by an independent reference group of 'occupationally competent practitioners') and were researched with candidates working

towards an NVQ level 2 award to determine self-efficacy in relation to 15 different care activities:

- Can distinguish between good and bad practice
- Can advise other staff when their practice needs improving
- Knowledge of where to get help or advice when not sure what to do
- Can deal with unfamiliar or unexpected situations
- Understanding of why boundaries are place (sic) on occupational role
- Knowledge of when permission is needed from a more senior person before undertaking a task
- Understanding of the part played by other staff and care workers in the care of the client
- Realising when more training is required to undertake the task competently
- Absence of confusion about what one is supposed to do
- Can apply care values. (Sargeant, 2000: 649)

It is worth exploring the work of Sargeant (2000) as central to a drawing together of many of the aspects of an integrated model of competence assessment and he identified self-efficacy, values, competence and the importance of the assessor role within his research. Firstly he found that the self-efficacy of experienced NVQ staff was higher than that of experienced staff without NVQs. This reinforced research (Rosenfeld, 1999) that showed that employers also felt that this was the case. Secondly Sargeant found that candidates undertaking the NVQ had a better understanding of the values underpinning good care practice and were more willing to challenge perceived bad practice. These aspects of competent practice of the developing practitioner were being clearly identified. It takes confidence to challenge and he found this confidence came from having a clear definition of expectations of values from the standards within the qualification. Thirdly Sargeant identified that:

As workers progress through the NVQ system, growing awareness of their own limitations and the need for reliable sources of information on good practice encouraged them to: a) reflect on the appropriateness of their previous and current approaches to care activities and b) deal positively with new and unfamiliar situations. (Sargeant, 2000: 657)

It requires a personal confidence to undertake some care tasks or to realise when one might not be equipped to undertake a particular task. Most NVQ units require candidates to ask advice when unsure and to only act within their role boundaries and competence. This is vital in workplaces where the potential for carers acting outside of their expertise is significant and can put service-users in high-risk situations and indicates that reflection on practice is part of learning through the NVQ in care. Fourthly Sargeant found that the close relationship between assessors providing feedback and guidance and the national recognition of the award all contributed to candidates preferring the NVQ to other types of learning. Knowing what you are supposed to be doing, getting feedback on how you have performed and what you know and the recognition of a nationally recognised award might all be seen as factors that could increase confidence and competence in practice.

### 3.3.2. Values and reflective learning

Hodkinson and Issitt (1995: 63-65) described a professional as someone who had developed expertise that involved professional growth, independence and empowerment ‘within a moral and ethical dimension’, a ‘critical autonomy’ involving the use of reflective practice and who was focused on providing a service. This raises the issue of values. Central to the NVQ in care at all levels has always been an acknowledgement of the importance of values.

Rosenfeld (1999) identified that candidates and employers refer to learning about values through the NVQ. Expectations in relation to values assessment rise with each level of the award. Attitudes are assessed; values such as dignity, choice and self-awareness are evidenced through performance. The understanding of why these are important in care is also assessed through a testing of knowledge underpinning practice. This is not simple and the best assessment recognises this with careful and thorough exploration with the candidate in relation to practice.

Winter and Maisch (1996) explored commitment to values as part of their core assessment criteria for social work. They identified seven core assessment criteria for professional competence in social work that incorporated values:

- Commitment to Professional Values
- Continuous Professional Learning
- Affective Awareness
- Effective Communication
- Executive Effectiveness
- Effective Grasp of a Wide Range of Professional Knowledge
- Intellectual Flexibility (Winter and Maisch, 1996: 56)

(Executive effectiveness relates to complex decision-making.)

They were explicit in their expectation that social workers should act with ‘understanding of, and commitment to, professional values in practice, through the implementation of anti-discriminatory, anti-oppressive, anti-racist principles’ both in order to ‘counteract tendency to act oppressively’ and out of ‘respect for dignity, diversity, privacy, autonomy’ (Winter and Maisch, 1996: 56). The values they mentioned were embedded into the first care NVQ assessment standards and have remained important through their various iterations (see section 2.2) and reflective accounts of practice are one evidence-gathering method. Winter and Maisch’s (1996) work was an integration of NVQ competency judgements and the higher education approach of critical analysis, judgement and understanding that contributes to the consideration of how the NVQ system can be broadened to be inclusive of the higher-level competences of professional practice. The question of whether the NVQ was preparing the social care workforce for practice at this level was one that required careful consideration within this research. Particularly in relation to the NVQ level 4 qualifications for managers.

Within NVQ assessment there is an increase in expectation of the candidate as they progress from a knowledge and understanding of the basic principles to an ability to empower and advocate on behalf of individuals. The higher levels of competency (levels 3 and 4) are congruent with Hodkinson and Issitt's (1995) description involving understanding complex dilemmas and having a clear direction through them supported by a sound theoretical and value-based understanding. The consideration of how a worker develops this understanding of values, where they originate and the environments in which they flourish became a matter for some consideration in relation to understanding how professional level skills and knowledge can be fostered through the NVQ.

Ghaye (2008) identified values as a central component to all reflective events in care suggesting that, whether we put our personal values into action or not, we should be thinking about why we act as we do. He suggested that it was possible to build a reflective healthcare organisation through a re-consideration of reflective practice as reflective learning. He considered that thoughtful, flexible, informed care delivery occurred where reflection was paired with action that in turn brought about practice improvement. Ghaye's ideas were drawn on in the consideration of how reflection could build competency in practice echoing Hodkinson and Issitt's (1995: 11) view that holistic reflective practice was a means of integrating competence within staff development.

Sargeant (2000), discussed earlier in this section in relation to professional skills and knowledge, also included values in his research about the effects of NVQs in social care on the practice and knowledge of care workers (level 2) and found that:

The comprehensive exposition of the value base within the NVQ system, coupled with explicit accounts of practice requirements and associated performance criteria, contributed more than any other type of learning support to their appreciation of the components for good care and their ability to embed them in practice. Many respondents commented that, as a result of their participation in NVQ, they understood for the first time the importance of the value base informing care practice and were able to see how they needed to change their practice to achieve the performance criteria.  
(2000: 654-657)

This implies that previously there was not an explicit understanding of values and that practice had to change following the learning. Ghaye (2008) might interpret this as reflection, the identifying and awakening of values previously not stimulated by or attached to the work in hand. This reflective learning occurred through the medium of the NVQ and implied that broader principles of competency assessment were present within the NVQ.

### 3.3.3. Confidence

NVQ research mentioned confidence in articles relating to NVQs and their benefits (Fearfull, 1998; Rainbird et al., 2004a; Rosenfeld, 1999; Sargeant, 2000) but it was dealt with summarily with little discussion of what it was, what was happening to increase it and what the effects were. Although competence and confidence were often connected in discussion of NVQs there was no explicit link being made in the research. Confidence is considered here as an aspect of competence that is present in candidates' and assessors' perspectives of the benefits of participation in the NVQ. It is explored as an area that might be part of an integrated assessment of competence that is developed in the relationship between assessor and candidate in the workplace through reflective learning and as a part of the learning process.

Spielhofer (2001) found that the NVQ encouraged students to think and then alter their work practices, he saw it as an internal personal reflective part of the learning process. Billett (2000) described the effects of guided learning at work.

It seems that as we think and act we learn. Not all the learning is generative of new knowledge; much of it is strengthening what is already known. (Billett, 2000: 282)

This led to a consideration of the possible connections between a strengthening of existing knowledge and the effects that this might have upon the individual, in how they perceived themselves and how others perceived them in practice.

Researchers on NVQs (Rainbird et al., 2004a; Rosenfeld, 1999; Spielhofer, 2001; Thomas and Grimes, 2003) referred explicitly to increased confidence. Other writers (Fearfull, 1997; Sargeant, 2000) referred to confidence but also increased motivation, a more professional attitude, greater understanding and knowledge, a more developed sense of good and bad practice and self-efficacy. These could also be taken to be descriptors of the effects of confidence. Sargeant (2000) identified the positive benefits of NVQs as being a coherent explanation of the inherent values of care, the steady progression through an award in a workplace, feedback through which gaps in learning can be identified, a nationally accepted level of expectation of the worker and transparent job role benchmarking. There are observable changes to behaviour that could be incorporated into a general sense of increased confidence without explicitly naming the term.

Norman and Hyland (2003) focused specifically on confidence in relation to lifelong learning exploring whether it was a trait or an emotion, a characteristic or a feeling, external or internal and whether it impeded or aided learning. They identified the importance of the understanding of confidence by the workplace mentor in order that learning was supported. Descriptors of confidence are a mix of feeling and observable behaviour. Self-belief is an internal feeling but poise is external and observable. Confidence is variable in that it can be demonstrated in certain situations and not in others and is described as growing at times. The factors that enable the developing of confidence and its relationship to the assessment of competence were of interest within this research as to whether it might be seen to be a part of assessment and assessor support in the workplace through the NVQ.

### **3.4. Delivery**

Having discussed an integrated approach to the assessment of broader competence and the importance of assessors to this approach the next area for consideration is the delivery of NVQ and its impact. In section 3.2.1 Gospel (2010) was identified as finding that there was a need for NVQs to be further integrated into Human Resource practices within social care organisations. Cox (2007) linked successful implementation of the NVQ to expansive workplace practice. Purcell (2001) in a study of accounting technicians (an area of substantial take up of higher level NVQs) suggested that the implementation of the NVQ was key to whether criticisms were applicable, foregrounding the notion that delivery systems were key to their success and usefulness. The challenges of delivery systems and the organisational structure in which NVQ programmes were implemented were explored in the research in the hope that better understanding could assist workplaces in the implementation of strategic and useful systems that support candidates in the delivery of the NVQ. Was an NVQ centre, led by staff with an understanding of the principles of good assessment, teaching and learning, as well as experience and understanding of the NVQ system, able to facilitate the use of the NVQ in a way that overcame rigidity and bureaucracy. The problem might not be primarily the structure of the NVQ but the delivery of it and if so this had implications for a model of enhanced NVQ delivery.

In the Homecare/Centre model, where the contact with the Centre is mainly (at levels 2 and 3) about NVQ practice, exploration of the social dimension of learning, teaching and assessment in the workplace, assessors and managers and their perspectives became important. The relationship to Beckett and Hager's (2002) integrated model of assessment emerged as particularly relevant in relation to the development of a learning process around the assessment related to the NVQ. Social learning in the workplace could be seen as a way of combating some of the criticisms about NVQs previously identified in that candidates have an experienced person close at hand to learn from, be taught by and to refer to. The

assessor has an investment in their performance and competency to practice because they will be delivering care under their supervision in the long term. The relationship in this model of delivery becomes not just a judgement of competence but an opportunity to work with someone to secure a level of care that is expected, a way to communicate the broader competences and values that many managers might hope for within their team. It also becomes a way to incorporate the context-specific learning that comes from an immersion within the workplace. The question of whether social care workers developed as professionals through the NVQ was not explored as a core concept but as one allied to the nature of the development of competence and as potentially important to future research in the area.

In this section it has been established that there are ways of working with NVQs and competence that can encompass learning and development in a range of broader competences that are related to the workplace and the expectations of the practitioner in the practice setting. The development of professional level skills and knowledge, values and reflective learning and confidence have been explored as part of this integrated assessment process. The impact of a model of delivery of NVQs has also been explored as an important element of this integration. The section has considered the importance of staff and the collaborative nature of employer and education provider involvement, and how it might be possible to use the NVQ with assessors to develop learning and professional level practice in a workplace setting. This research was focused on exploring whether there was evidence within the participants' experience of assessment of these broader competences in the context of the Homecare/Centre delivery of the NVQ. Was there evidence of an 'interactive model of competence...holistic rather than behaviourist' that is facilitated by a mentor or facilitator (Hodkinson and Issitt, 1995: 131), and that is part of learning as a social activity that was identified in section 2.1?

### **3.5. Participants' and employers' perspectives**

This section summarises research that provided a broad basis for how NVQs are viewed, establishing what other studies reported about participant and employer perspectives in relation to what is important to consider in establishing a model of enhanced NVQ delivery.

#### **3.5.1. Research on participants' perspectives**

Positive experiences of the NVQ model were reported in both candidate and employer experiences (Cox, 2007; Gospel, 2010; Rainbird et al., 2004b; Rosenfeld, 1999; Sargeant, 2000; Spielhofer, 2001; Naylor, 2004). Wolf (2000) stated that:

The key factor determining whether a qualification is attractive to an individual is the extent to which it will increase their work or career prospects. (This is not to deny that people study from other motives too, but this is the most important one, and certainly the dominant reason for pursuing a *vocational* award.) (Original emphasis. Wolf, 2000: 134)

At present the NVQ is the recognised qualification in terms of career progression and as such it will continue to be popular. Where the level 4 is concerned the key point will be whether it is enough to secure status on a par with nurses and social workers and in relation to the current review of the social care sector this is still far from clear.

Spielhofer (2001), undertaking research on NVQs in the banking sector, identified that candidates felt personal benefits from undertaking their NVQ, they valued the qualification and it gave them confidence to go on to further learning but that they were disappointed about the level of new skill acquisition and questioned the value of the NVQ to their careers. There was some evidence of improvements to practice that occurred following reflection on their work (as mentioned in section 3.3). He identified one of the major problems with the implementation of the NVQ was the limited form of delivery chosen by the bank, solely concentrating on acquired skills and their accreditation and not on potential professional development. Although carried out in a very different sector, this issue of how NVQs are delivered became a feature of the research into the potential of the NVQ to accommodate a broader assessment process when implemented as part of a strategic delivery system within an organisation.

An example where this approach to NVQ delivery and assessment proved useful, with close support and supervision, was outlined by Thomas and Grimes (2003) who said that students found that, incorporated into a degree programme in hospitality, the NVQ level 4:

Added significant value to their learning experience. In the main, the units are helping students to increase their overall skill portfolio, gain formal recognition of competency in a range of key work related skills, gain confidence in skills and in some instances gain new positions of responsibility in their organisations. (Thomas and Grimes, 2003:390)

In the care sector NVQs were helping a section of the workforce gain qualifications, helping them to re-think their relationship to learning and to developing careers. Rainbird (2004a) studied health care assistants in a secure care home undertaking NVQ level 3.

In this context many of the healthcare assistants spoke of the empowering nature of taking part in formal learning opportunities, especially the NVQ level 3 in care. This was because it gave them confidence, status and legitimized their role in relation to clients, relatives and the qualified nurses. (Rainbird, 2004a: 47)

Naylor (2004), in exploring care NVQs in radiography, found that they were viewed positively and that candidates were motivated to undertake the awards. However there were still issues impeding progression for some candidates in relation to their age and costs of going on to a professional level training. She identified the need for support for candidates to succeed, in terms of help and time allocated within the workplace, further developing the idea that organisational.

Sargeant (2000), previously discussed in section 3.3, identified research evaluating care NVQs at a national level but little research at the local level where the link between progression and enhanced practice was assumed rather than proven. This remains an under-researched area in relation to care NVQs. His study was carried out with social care workers and he found that they valued the NVQ more than any other course, appreciated the structure and found it increased their understanding of good practice, ability to recognise oppressive practice, awareness of boundaries within the care setting and ability to challenge poor practice. This study reflects Hodkinson and Issitt's (1995) thinking about an empowered reflective practitioner indicating that the NVQ could be contributing to this development of professional autonomy, identifying a need for further research to clarify emerging links.

This section reflects the significant lack of empirical research in the area of NVQs but the research that does exist found evidence that the NVQ is valued as a qualification, that there were personal benefits to undertaking the qualification in terms of empowerment, confidence and status. This links to the development of work-related identity a concept previously identified in section 3.1. The delivery system was again identified as important in terms of the implementation of the NVQ in the workplace as previously explored in section 3.3, establishing these concepts as integral to the establishment of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery

### 3.5.2. Research on employers' perspectives

The establishment of the NVQ system was built upon a movement away from training provider-led decisions about the content of vocational programmes to a shift towards employers identifying and leading the assessment content through Sector Skills Councils. Rosenfeld (1999) found a lack of data in relation to employer perspectives in social care however Roe et al (2006) as discussed in section 3.2.1 added to research on the general view of employers. Skills for Care, the employer-led authority on the training and development needs of social care workers, has been working on this with National Minimum Data Sets in Social Care to gather information on sector qualification levels and migrant workers to inform future workforce re-design. In this section I have taken a broad interpretation of employer perspectives allowing for as much of the existing literature to be

included as possible. Thus the views of assessors as representatives of employers and of service-users as the customer are included. External support for the NVQ system is identified as being important to effective delivery. Changes in individual performance resulting in improvements in quality of care, knowledge and awareness are noted together with candidates achieving a better understanding of what constitutes good practice and employer observation of the beginnings of reflective practice.

The issue of delivery systems arose again in relation to the employer perspective. Roe et al (2006) identified time for employees to undertake the qualification and support from external providers as important agents in the delivery of the NVQ. Matlay's (2000) research into micro and small businesses indicated low implementation rates of NVQs and linked this to a lack of support external to the business. Ryan (2002) supported Matlay's position in relation to poor external support for assessment and verification within Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in engineering that did not have internal resources to meet the demand for NVQs resulting in poor take up of the qualifications. In a study of five companies he concluded that the relationship between training agents and colleges was pivotal to the success of the NVQ model, with a one-to-one relationship between company and training individual being identified as an essential resource. He also identified the need for careful and strategic thought being given to the implementation of a scheme at regional, national and operational level. Fearfull (1997), in a study of a larger organisation working across a wider area of both nursing and social care, found that in spite of some initial resistance from qualified nurses they had been impressed with the results of the level 2 and 3 NVQ in terms of quality of care. She noted the commitment across the organisation as a significant factor in its success although she found that the implementation was not without its challenges such as bureaucracy and time previously raised in section 3.3.

In the field of social care Rosenfeld (1999) countered the idea that NVQs solely accredited existing competence through researching the views of employers and found perceived improvements in quality of care, performance, knowledge and awareness. Hauxwell (2002) described the positive effects of NVQs on relationships between surgical theatre staff and an increase in levels of motivation in more experienced staff resulting from the cross boundary working. Cox (2007) identified that employers in care were largely satisfied with the impact of the NVQ upon learning and practice in the sector and Gospel (2010) reported the same but indicated that further integration into human resource practice would be helpful.

Sargeant (2000) (previously discussed in 3.3 and 3.5.1.), also researching in a care environment, compared self-evaluation of self-efficacy with observed assessment by independent and occupationally competent assessors giving assessor/employer as well as candidate perspectives. He found some correlation between the self-assessed and the

observed components indicating that employers and employees had a similar experience of the benefits of NVQs. He identified that experienced NVQ workers had 'a more developed sense of the concept of good practice and a more discriminating approach to the sources of knowledge and understanding they used to model their practice' and could 'point to examples of practice modified by experience of progression through the NVQ system' (Sargeant, 2000: 648-649). The changes covered a range from Health and Safety issues to value-based awareness and his findings indicated that the further through the NVQ system the care workers progressed the more likely they were to realise the gaps in their understanding and the need for further training. This was a study intended to open up discussion and exploration of the effects of progressing towards NVQs. It was in no way conclusive but pointed to the identification of the beginning of reflective practice in practitioners that led to greater awareness of a range of issues in relation to their practice, including values and confidence that were discussed in section 3.3.

Assessing the impact of NVQs on client-care is ethically difficult and not a theme often present in the literature. Although service-user involvement in the research would be beneficial the ethical issues in obtaining informed consent from service-users are difficult to overcome and was not attempted in this research. However Godfrey (2000) overcame these issues and is an exception worth mentioning here for this reason. Using structured interviews with elderly clients (as part of her study into the impact of training in residential homes) she found that training had little effect on the view of service-users, who responded to the personal qualities of staff in a way that appeared commensurate with experience rather than training.

In this section the delivery system of NVQs has again been highlighted as integral to the success or otherwise of the NVQ model, both commitment by the organisation and external support building on the discussion in 3.4. Personal benefits of the NVQ have been identified as encouraging workers into learning and a valuing of the qualification linking to the development of personal and work-related identity as explored in section 3.1. Also identified are the beginnings of reflective practice as candidates begin to see where their own practice could improve and consider how to achieve that end (as discussed in section 3.3). This reflection was found to include personal values and confidence in relation to work. Exploring organisational benefits of NVQs and workplace learning was an important part of the research and led to consideration of whether Rosenfeld's (1999) view would be borne out and there would be reported improvements to workers' knowledge, awareness, performance and in the quality of care delivered.

In summary to this chapter there has been an exploration of research that underpins both workplace learning and NVQs and an understanding of what it means and of what it

comprises. Interpersonal, personal and organisational aspects of workplace learning and teaching and NVQs were identified within the literature and these were incorporated into the interview strategy. Key concepts within these themes have been identified as the social nature of learning, personal and work-related identity and expansive practice. How they can impact on NVQs has been identified in the NVQ specific research in sections 3.2 and 3.3. There has been an introduction to the competence debate and consideration has been given to how it is possible to extend the usefulness of the NVQ system through the assessment of broader competences such as the development of professional level skills and knowledge, values and reflective learning and confidence. The importance of the assessor role and the delivery model has been a consistent thread in the research discussed. The chapter has outlined some of the thinking and exploration of the research that was prompted by the research purposes and has been brought into sharper focus in relation to how the NVQ can be used to facilitate competence, support learning and staff development. The key elements of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery that can be drawn from the discussion in this chapter and which are explored in Chapters 5 and 6 in relation to the empirical findings of the research are:

1. Strategic implementation of the NVQ
2. Workplace assessors who integrate assessment into practice
3. An enhanced assessor role that supports a learning process
4. Attention to learner and work-related identity
4. An integrated approach to the assessment of competence
6. Strong relationship between organisation and an education provider
7. Professional development strategy for home managers
8. A management approach that supports learning

## **4. RESEARCH APPROACH**

This chapter shows how the exploratory study undertaken in the first year of the doctoral programme influenced the research design. Next is a section that provides an overview of the research approach and methodology that includes the rationale for the decision to employ a qualitative approach that held participant narratives at the core of the research. The principles of narrative research used and how they informed the research is introduced and is further explored in later sections. Reflexivity is discussed; both how it became an integral part of the research process and how it was specifically employed in seeking to ensure that the voice of the participants was represented within the research. The chapter outlines some of the key considerations that arose as part of the study such as insider research, ethics, confidentiality and anonymity. The final section explores the process of the research, the selection of participants and the analysis and interpretation of data. It shows the centrality of the participant narratives and how these narratives were explored in relation to themes of the research originally established from the literature base, sub-themes that were identified from the participant narratives and inductively identified themes that arose from further analysis. It shows how the balance between participant and researcher perspective was achieved and how the analysis and interpretation of the three sets of themes contributed to the research findings. It also shows how the identification of a model of enhanced delivery to inform practice was drawn from the research findings to offer guidance to practitioners.

### **4.1. Exploratory study**

This was a project undertaken in the first year of the doctoral programme. The study examined the potential use and value of a qualitative strand of evaluation in contrast to the more quantitative approach that had been a feature of the Centre evaluation to that date. The study raised issues for reflection on the deepening of understanding into research that being a practitioner-researcher in one's own area of practice can provide. These are explored more thoroughly in the sections on insider research (4.4) and reflexivity (4.3).

The exploratory study moved the research approach away from more structured interviewing towards a more responsive approach influenced by Rubin and Rubin (2005). This responsive model recognised the central importance of the participants' perspectives, the importance of the style of interviewing and of self-reflection on behalf of the interviewer. It acknowledged the development of a research relationship and the ethical implications that arise from this relationship and recognised that the search for a depth of understanding requires flexibility and sensitivity to complexity. This is not a concrete or fixed approach to interviewing, either in its application or in the expectation of the outcome. It is in line with Hammersley's (1992) idea that qualitative researchers are more likely to have an inductive approach to research

that does not set out to prove an hypothesis but to generate one through the process of research. This idea was an important one in the analysis and interpretation of the data and accommodated an exploration of the findings that could inform workplace practice.

#### **4.2. A Qualitative research approach with narrative at its core**

The influence of the exploratory study indicated that a qualitative approach would best enable the research purposes to be addressed. This section explores how general principles of a qualitative research approach were used within the research to examine the perspectives of both assessors and candidates participating in NVQ qualifications and workplace learning and an examination of the Homecare/Centre model of delivery of NVQs. The section shows how narrative research and narrative inquiry (both in general terms as described by Chase (2005) and as more specifically used by Clandinin and Connelly (2000)) influenced the design of the research in order that the participants' voices were preserved and honoured within it. There is an explanation of how narratives were used to explore themes that arose across participants in order to draw the most from the research findings. This section provides a general overview of the research approach with more detail provided in later sections.

The research was undertaken within Homecare and based on interviews with staff in the organisation in order to fulfil the research purposes to explore the perspectives of the staff involved in NVQs and workplace learning in Homecare and the Homecare model of delivery. A broadly qualitative research approach that held narratives of participants as central to the research was devised. Interviews were semi-structured and questions were based around the key concepts identified in Chapter 3. The interview questions were designed as a guide to areas that could be of interest but the intention was to allow the candidates to lead in the direction that they wished. The conduct of the interviews took into account my previous practitioner experience of the participants and my understanding of NVQ delivery in the organisation. Practitioner experience and a reflexive approach allowed for a richer understanding of participants' perspectives as part of continuing conversations but the structure of the interviews was also designed to incorporate a shift in the way of listening to accommodate the new role as a researcher.

An intense period of familiarisation with the recordings of interviews and reflexive engagement with the data allowed the richness of the narratives to be heard as individual and distinctive. The next challenge was to see how these individual narratives might be drawn together alongside the themes of the research to show similarities and differences of perspectives between participants in a way that respected and honoured their contributions. This involved the juxtaposition and consideration of each of the participant narratives with the

original themes of the interview strategy (drawn from the key concepts in the literature) to explore what had been said. It also involved the identification of sub-themes within the original themes. Perspectives within the sub-themes that were similar were grouped together to show consistency and those that were different were used as opportunities for further thinking and exploration of the findings. The balancing of each perspective was considered carefully in relation to the original interview data and participant narratives in order to represent the variety of perspectives present in the data. This stage involved a level of researcher interpretation of the data and a reflexive consideration of voice that is further explored both in this section and later in the chapter.

At this stage further inductively derived themes were identified that were not encompassed in the original themes and sub-themes. This construction of participant perspectives around the original interview themes, the sub-themes and the inductively derived themes became the basis for the presentation of the outcomes in Chapters 5 and 6. The research process culminated in a broad consideration of the key points raised by the participants that related to the concepts explored in Chapter 3 and led to the identification of features of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery.

I visualise this research as a large bubble, created by the merging of several smaller bubbles that contain each individual narrative. The bubbles are pliant and yet resistant, they sustain their own characteristics yet sometimes merge with others where constituents are similar. Some bubbles hook onto the side of other bubbles again presenting something new. This delicate yet malleable structure has enabled juxtapositions to be experimented with in order that the most can be shown and drawn from the research. The process of this will be shown in section 4.6.3.

Initially general principles that would guide the research were established. Mason (1996: 3) recognised a varied approach to qualitative research. However she came to a view that some common strands joined most qualitative researchers across endeavours. It was her view that researchers were, ‘grounded in a philosophical position which is broadly ‘interpretivist’ in the sense that this type of research is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced or produced’. This was important to understanding of the new position as a researcher in Homecare and the responsibility to move outside of practitioner understanding to a researcher position. Mason (1996) said that methods of data generation should be flexible and sensitive to the social context and that the approach would be based on analysis and explanation that would involve an understanding of ‘complexity, detail and context’ (p.4). This principle prompted the valuing of the understanding that came from being a practitioner in the organisation and the realisation that balancing this with the new researcher role would obtain the best from the research.

Mason (1996) posited that qualitative research should be systematic and rigorous, flexible, contextual, ethical and involve reflexivity (p.5) all of which were important tenets in the research process at all stages. She said that the research should produce ‘social explanations to intellectual puzzles’ that are in some way ‘generalizable’ and not ‘idiosyncratic or particular to the limited empirical parameters of their study’ (p.6). This had been a deeply held hope from the beginning of the research, a recognition that it was important to be able to draw the most from it to be able to contribute to practice, not just within Homecare but also more widely within social care.

With a desire to represent participant voice within the research I read with interest around narrative research. Whilst accepting Bridges’ (1999) point that not to try to ally ourselves in qualitative methodology to one of the classical versions of truth might leave ourselves open to allegations of research without rigour, I believe in accordance with Riessman (1993) that stories are interpretive and variable. The stories will alter according to who is telling them, when they are told and the audience to whom they are being told. The stories I heard would be the individual’s version of the truth as they interpreted it within their current context. It would still be a relevant story of a part of their experience and therefore valid and authentic and, in the context of their telling it, truthful. This respecting of participants’ stories was a principle that I adopted as a researcher and reflexivity enabled me to keep this under review in relation to the rigour of the research. The researcher’s responsibility is to recognise these tensions and to reflect upon them in the construction of the texts in a careful and cautious manner. The story that is told in this research is the result of a considered approach to data analysis and interpretation, an inquiring, questioning and reflexive approach. As researchers, we listen, interpret, retell with our own set of filters in the same way as research participants. This research demanded exploration of both quantity and richness of data in order to represent a complex situation.

Riessman (1993:64) suggested that individuals selectively reconstruct their experiences within the telling to achieve a better fit with how they perceive themselves or how they wish to be perceived. This represented a fundamental understanding about narrative research and suggests that the way that people tell stories changes for a myriad of different reasons such as mood, audience or political climate. This was an important consideration in terms of the position as a practitioner researcher. It required awareness of the potential for the participants to tell the story they thought was expected or desired. Stating that as a researcher everything was of interest, the good and the bad, the full story as they saw it may have gone some way to ameliorate the situation. Reflexivity enabled cognisance of any tensions felt or experienced in the interviews that related to authenticity of the accounts. The knowledge of participants in a wider context enabled careful consideration of this element of

the research but it remained a tension and potential weakness within the research and is discussed further in section 4.6.3 on confidentiality, anonymity and insider research. However Riessman (1993) also enabled a view of how it was possible to understand the participant narratives as a researcher and how the practitioner might be put to one side.

Chase (2005) distinguished narrative inquiry from the sociological and anthropological approach to life history that went before and from the more generic 'narrative' in later research approaches. She (2005: 651) described narrative inquiry as a 'subtype' of qualitative inquiry and contemporary narrative inquiry as 'an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods-all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them.' This emphasis on biography together with the key concepts explored in section 3.1 of the importance of personal and workplace identity led to the structuring of the interview questions to draw out the participants on a broader perspective of work, school, family influences and workplace learning as well as a more specific focus on NVQs. It was this drawing on understanding from research in workplace learning that offered something new in relation to NVQs. Much of the previous academic discussion had been around competence and assessment with little focus on the importance of the personal (the individual undertaking the qualification), the social (the people that influence learning), or of the importance of the organisation (in the strategic implementation of learning) from a specifically NVQ perspective. Personally I was also hopeful that practitioners would identify with some of the participants in the research, see their struggles and their successes in a way that was not well represented in other research.

The importance of maintaining the individuals as central to the research led to thinking about how this could be best represented. Chase (2005) defined the main difference in the narrative inquiry approach as being the treating of the research participants as narrators both during the interviews and in the interpretation of the findings. This important difference in approach was defining in my epistemological approach to this research. It guided the compilation of the research outcomes chapters through a commitment to holding participant voice as central whilst balancing it with a researcher voice to draw the most from the findings. Individual narratives and parts of narratives are presented and then added to with researcher and some practitioner perspectives where it is considered helpful to the development of understanding and thesis development.

At the interview stage Chase's (2005: 661) description of the researcher who moves from being a researcher asking questions of a participant to one of listener and the participant as narrator was particularly important. I wanted to understand participants' perspectives in a way that had not been accessible before as a practitioner. I had had glimpses of what people

thought and felt but not the opportunity to try to understand the complexities available as I would in the researcher role. Chase (2005) suggested the focus on narratives enabled a concentration on ‘biographical particulars’ rather than generalities that would open up an opportunity to make the most of individuals’ experiences.

It was not just in the shift from participant to narrator that narrative inquiry had something to offer. I was keen to ask ‘good questions’ (Chase, 2005: 662) to invite the expected story but Chase (2005) also suggested that whilst attending to the stories was important the narrative researcher needed to recognise and to invite the unknown story that absorbed and interested beyond what was expected. I was conscious of trying to let the interviews flow as the participants directed them, towards the areas of their concerns and interests. In my position as a practitioner in the organisation I wanted the participants to tell stories of the challenges and problems they were faced with regarding NVQs as well as the positive aspects. As a practitioner I tried to resolve problems whereas a researcher I wanted to understand more about them. This approach of inviting the unexpected story meant openness at later stages too. Drawing from within all participant narratives in the analysis and interpretation of the findings enabled identification of new inductively defined themes for consideration. Confidence, values and reflective learning and professional level skills and knowledge development were all identified at this stage and are explored within the findings. This approach also enabled the identification of the elements of a model of enhanced delivery of NVQs as a culmination of the research process.

Chase (2005) described five analytical lenses used in narrative inquiry that are worthy of exploration in relation to the principles of this research. The first lens Chase described (2005) shows narrative as ‘retrospective meaning making’. This places the participant at the centre of a story that is not a chronology of events but a purposeful, interpretive, thought and emotion laden account that expresses a personal point of view. It is a story that draws together previous experiences and allows for interpretation of those experiences and an understanding of events. This helped in a realisation of how the participants could be helped to tell their stories and how it was then possible to construct and make meaning from their narratives. I set up the interviews with the intention of facilitating the telling of these stories and maintained an inquiring and reflexive approach to narrative construction and interpretation.

As the second lens Chase (2005:657) described narratives as ‘verbal action – as doing or accomplishing something. Among other things, narrators explain, entertain, inform, defend, complain and confirm or challenge the status quo.’ It is a form of creative performance that allows a story to form and to express experience and self to an audience. This frees the researcher to move from more factual questioning to questions that enable more of the

participants ‘voice’ to be heard. Chase (2005) suggests that the participant/narrator accomplishes ‘credibility and believability’ ‘through the telling of their stories and their representation of that ‘voice’ is an important part of the telling of the story. This principle was particularly important at the listening stage within interviews when exploring and extending participants’ stories.

As the third lens Chase (2005: 657) suggested that ‘stories are both enabled and constrained by a range of social resources and circumstances’. This is the understanding that participants have from within the groups that they are located within, such as families or workplace colleagues. This lens enables the researcher to ‘attend to similarities and differences across narratives.’ This was particularly important to me when trying to draw an understanding from across the participants’ narratives and establish patterns in relation to themes and sub-themes. It was through trying to understand the influence of workplaces, colleagues and families that commonalities and differences could be explored and the findings were structured to represent these perspectives. The practitioner understanding of Homecare was helpful in understanding the workplace but it was also important to remember that this might constrain as well as help understanding and reflexively engage with that tension.

As the fourth lens Chase (2005: 657) described narratives as ‘socially situated interactive performances – as produced in this particular setting, for this particular audience, for these particular purposes.’ This interactivity means that the story told is a creation between the narrator and the listener and where that interaction takes place may influence the narrative. The position of practitioner researcher made this principle a particular consideration and this lens enabled me to think about the personal influence within the interviews and outside of them. This is discussed more fully in section 4.4 on insider research.

The fifth lens used by Chase is the suggestion that narrative researchers are narrators themselves as they produce research and present their findings. Finding the balance between the voice of the participants and a research voice was particularly important when presenting the individual narratives in the findings and in grouping parts of narratives together where commonalities were found. This led to a delineation within the findings to show where evidence is presented and where researcher perspective is included. The awareness of the power within this position where at times I was representing participants’ views but also at times stepping beyond them to come to interpretations about the research required consistent attention to ensure that I upheld my position of trust as a practitioner researcher. There was also a need for attention to the detail of anonymity and confidentiality, a protection not just of the participants but those they mentioned in their narratives. Careful attention was paid to how the participants might feel to see what they had said as part of the

interactive performance when it was read within a more formal context of a research report. This was beyond the details of the consent agreement but something that I felt pledged to honouring personally as a researcher in the organisation. This is discussed more fully in section 4.5. Reflection upon motivations and position to ensure they did not overwhelm what was found in the research was needed. Chase (2005: 664) describes the ‘researcher’s authoritative voice’ and suggests that researchers have a different interest in the narrative than that of the participant when it comes to interpretation not out of disrespect but out of a responsibility to tell a different story. It was clear that there was a balance to be found in the representation of the findings that would involve sensitive handling.

Chase (2005: 663) described how at the analysis and interpretation stage narrative interpretation moves away from ‘a traditional theme-oriented method of analyzing qualitative material. Rather than locating distinct themes *across* interviews, narrative researchers listen first to the voices within each narrative’. This proved to be an important step in the interpretive process but where Chase describes her research process as starting with themes then moving to individual narratives the process of this research was the reverse of Chase’s. I started with individual narratives and moved towards understanding how each narrative contributed to the exploration of the themes, identifying sub-themes and inductive themes. The notion of the centrality of the individual narrative to the research remained important when placing it in relation to other narratives to portray diversity of perspectives. This was an area of consistent deliberation during the analysis and interpretation phase of the research and is discussed more fully in section 4.6.3.

A further expectation for the research was that it would have an, ‘explanatory, invitational quality’ (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 185). I have tried to explain, to guide, to show and to help connections to be made, to attend to those who have commented on the work in order to improve the quality and to encourage understanding. I arrived at a view of the findings through a dialogic and reflexive engagement with the narratives and literature and through thinking about and explaining the findings as clearly as possible. Keeping the individual narratives at the core of the research presentation would enable practitioners to more easily identify with aspects of the research and establish how it might be useful in their practice.

I have lived, enquired and at times struggled with the principles described in this section to produce research that represents people undertaking NVQs in workplaces. I have tried to draw from existing workplace learning and NVQ research and my own findings to uncover new, accessible information that can help people improve their own approach to learning and help others learn at work. At all times I have tried to hold the participants at the centre of the story, to understand that it is their expertise that informs and guides, their words that best describe their experience. This has been balanced with an understanding that the individual

narratives may not tell the whole story, that there is also much to be learned from themes that arise across narratives. Not to draw out the most from these themes would also not make best use of the time and effort invested in the research by the participants. I have been intent on honouring the participants' contributions by a systematic, rigorous approach that makes full use of the nuances and subtleties that can be gained from the individuals, from the themes that arose across interviews and from a deep practitioner understanding of the participants and their organisation without overestimating the position of the researcher as narrator.

#### **4.3. Approach to reflexivity**

This section summarises the approach to reflexivity within the research. It explores the importance of reflexivity as a part of the process of engagement with the research at all stages. I have used work by Malterud (2001) where she defines some key terms in ensuring a rigorous and robust approach to qualitative research and to show how my own research process encompassed reflexivity in relation to each of her terms.

Mason (1996: 164) described the qualitative researcher as a 'thinking, reflexive practitioner'. The significance of the lived experience of the researcher is a common strand in qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Mason, 1996) and of particular note in narrative inquiry (Chase 2005). I explored the impact of the researcher on the research more widely within the qualitative research field through auto-ethnography (Ellis and Bochner, 1996) and reflexivity (Hellawell, 2006; Ely, 1991; Malterud, 2001; Savin-Baden, 2004). This was in order to more fully understand reflexivity in relation to qualitative research and to position myself in relation to the research. Malterud (2001: 484) presents a useful understanding of five terms that underpin her approach to rigour and quality in qualitative research. She presents reflexivity as one of these terms but I would argue that it is integral to all of them and I have explored her terms with my own research approach to reflexivity in mind. I show how it applied to the stages of my own research together with some other work that has been key to my understanding of building a rigorous and reflexive approach. She ascribes a metaphor to each term that was useful in my understanding of the process of this research.

Reflexivity is the first term Malterud (2001: 484) explores and the metaphor she uses is 'the knower's mirror, an attitude of attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction, especially to the effect of the researcher, at every step of the research process.' The systematic attention to the context of knowledge construction can be seen in the development of this research. Firstly I engaged reflexively with the exploratory study to build a research approach that would fully address the research purposes. I worked reflexively with individual perspectives in creating narratives, in the analysis and interpretation of those

narratives in relation to themes, sub-themes and inductively defined themes and in the identification of a model of enhanced delivery of NVQs. This process can be seen in the example at the end of this chapter of Graham and in the Appendices (2, 3, 4 and 5).

Reflexivity helped me to develop an awareness of the implications of my location within the research. It pushed me to consider how the participants might view being interviewed by me and how my practitioner position might lead me to assumptions or misconceptions. It helped me to value the stories that I was being told where there was potentially practitioner resistance to hearing more challenging views. The issue of the power relationship needed careful consideration. My practitioner position required a close relationship with the organisational team and the participants might have viewed this as challenging in relation to being open in the context of the research activity. There was potential for conflict between the roles that needed preparing for. I thought through some of the potential scenarios in order that I could be better prepared and was always conscious of the return to the practitioner role following the research. In actuality few of these problems seemed to occur. As far as it is possible for me to judge the participants seemed open, relaxed and honest about what they told me. Part of this could be that one candidate referred to an openness of organisational management to honest feedback. He felt that he was able to talk freely to external auditors (and by his own implication to me) without fear of reprise. Another participant talked openly about a difficult situation that had influenced her with no expressed concern about including this in the research. My own commitment to confidentiality of information and anonymity may also have been a part of their openness. My carefulness in relation to inclusion of more of the narratives in the findings was in part related to honouring my implicit commitment to the participants. I was concerned that I upheld their fundamental right that the research did not adversely affect them in any way. This is discussed further in section 4.5.

The second term Malterud (2001: 484) explores is ‘preconceptions’ for which she uses the metaphor ‘the researcher’s backpack’. This she defines as ‘previous personal and professional experiences pre-study beliefs about how things are and what is to be investigated, motivation and qualifications for exploration of the field, and perspectives and theoretical foundations related to education and interests’. The strong link to practice has been of benefit to a deeper understanding at times but it also required careful reflexive consideration as a part of the research process in order that long held perceptions or misconceptions could be challenged. One of the areas where this was evident was in making sense of my response to criticisms about NVQs. Reflexivity has helped to confront instinctive bias, be honest about its existence and work towards a more balanced view. Initially I felt defensive, discomfited, undermined and emotional and this crept into the work and was picked up in discussions. The process of becoming more widely informed and of leaving

some of the practitioner behind through a challenging of my stance enabled a more objective position to be adopted. This is not just an intellectual shift; the reflexive work has helped me become stronger, more deliberate and less emotionally connected presenter, researcher and practitioner. Malterud (2001:484) suggests that preconceptions are ‘not the same as bias, unless the researcher fails to mention them’ and reflexivity enabled me to keep my own preconceptions under review.

The third term Malterud (2001: 484) explores is ‘theoretical frame of reference’ and the metaphor for this is ‘the analyst’s reading glasses’. She describes this as ‘the theories, models, and notions, applied for interpretation of the material and for understanding a specific situation.’ It enhanced my understanding of the connections between the areas of research and what an understanding of workplace learning can offer to the practice and implementation of NVQ assessment within workplaces. This term informed understanding of Chase’s (2005) notion of the authoritative voice of the researcher and the balance that needed to be sought between the participant and the researcher as narrators. It was my responsibility to make best use of the understanding I had gained from theory and research to draw the most from the participant contributions.

The fourth term Malterud (2001: 484) explores is ‘metapositions’ and her metaphor is ‘the participating observer’s sidetrack’ through which the researcher creates ‘strategies for creating adequate distance from a study setting that you are personally involved in.’ As an insider to this organisation this was an important position to attain. A questioning of the subject area was an important part of being able to inquire into it.

There were strategies that I employed in order to do this. Cunliffe (2003: 987) suggested ways that reflexive inquiry within organisational research is aided by ‘oppositional logic’ by which it is possible to ‘surface the unsaid, problematise the said, highlight contradictions and tensions, consider the constraints and opportunities of insider/outsider research and reflect critically upon the dynamics within interviews.’ I employed these strategies in order to make the most of the interviews and the findings and to reflexively monitor when interpretation might be going too far. Listening is not purely aural, it involves sensing what is meant through what is said or not said and inevitably we interpret as we listen and re-listen in order to make meaning. At times I made interpretive statements and it was through employing some of Cunliffe’s strategies that I scrutinised this process to ensure that interpretation stayed within what was reasonably inferred from the interview with the participant.

For example in section 5.2.1 Joan and her approach to being encouraged to learn and progress at work is described. She used the word ‘fought’ to describe how she resisted a manager’s encouragement. It seemed that this highlighted something important as a sub

theme of how people view and react to what could be considered to be a very positive management approach. It exemplified the complexity of understanding the individual in order to engage them in their development and how important it was to match the approach to the person. Her manager had persisted and this had to some extent been successful in that Joan had progressed but it had not really changed her attitude to her progression. She described herself as remaining a reluctant and somewhat unconvinced learner and one with little faith in her ability to learn but also as someone that ultimately did engage and could enjoy the learning process. In representing this within the findings it was important to me not to make interpretations that were not consistent with what Joan had said but to also represent the subtlety of what she described and what I knew of her and her relationship to the learning she had undertaken in relation to the NVQ. We engaged in the interview with many years worth of shared learning and assessment experience between us that was referred to at times. Joan's attitude influenced how she approached the guiding of assessment and learning of others as a manager herself. Her personal experience meant that she understood the reluctance of learners to progress and she took this into account perhaps more than other managers and assessors who did not have the same experiences. Some of this was my interpretation in drawing together the findings from her narrative but the important thing for me to consider was not to take this further than could be evidenced. The process of re-listening or reading transcripts potentially takes us further away from the experience of listening in the interview and allowed me to take a metaposition in relation to what I heard in order to understand what Joan was conveying in her narrative of her personal identity and attitude to workplace learning. The next step in this was to explore other narratives where personal attitudes to learning could be contrasted to Joan's perspective and the construction of 5.2.1 is built around this approach.

Cunliffe's (2003) concepts were useful in the interpretation stage where I was drawing on the individual narratives to highlight areas of similarity and difference in the construction of new knowledge. Reflexive engagement identified some tensions as to what could be included that was based on the interview itself and what was interpretive and this was of particular importance when I was constructing the outcomes. For example in drawing together parts of narratives from the participants the individuals were less well represented. The danger of this was that the researcher voice would become predominant. Employing a reflexive approach of challenging selections, questioning why some parts of narratives and not others were included helped in choosing carefully to ensure fair representation of the participants. The drawing together of parts of narratives in relation to the themes and sub-themes that were identified (see Appendix 4 and 6) was a key part of this stage of analysis and interpretation. This process ensured that the selection summed up several participants views or alternatively represented differences.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described this quality as 'wakefulness'.

It is wakefulness that in our view most needs to characterize the living out of our narrative inquiries, whether we are in the field, writing field texts, or writing research texts. (Clandinin and Connelly 2000:185)

My 'wakefulness' meant that I stayed attentive to the tension between participant narratives and the researcher narrative as described above in the Joan's example. As a practitioner researching my own practice area reflexivity fulfilled an important role in keeping me 'wakeful' to this tension of assuming too much from my subjective experience of Joan as an NVQ candidate and assessor and was especially helpful in the construction of the research outcomes chapters. Reflexivity prompted me to keep returning to the individuals' interviews to ensure that I was honouring the participants' perspectives and not assuming too much. Clandinin and Connelly (2004: 147) suggested that the issue of voice arises in relation to both the researcher and the participants.

One of the researcher's dilemmas in the composing of research texts is captured by the analogy of living on an edge, trying to maintain one's balance, as one struggles to express one's own voice in the midst of an inquiry designed to tell of the participants' storied experiences and to represent their voices, all the while attempting to create a research text that will speak to, and reflect upon, the audiences' voices. Voice, and dilemmas created by the consideration of it, are always sorted out by the exercise of judgement.

This exercise of judgement became a crucial one in the compilation of Chapters 5 and 6. The choosing of particular parts of individual narratives to represent understandings gained, the juxtaposition of similar and different narratives were always based upon the original interviews and the transcriptions. I ensured through careful reading and reflection that what I selected represented what the participants had told me before using it in relation to the themes that were being explored or that it was a reasonable interpretation within the researcher narrative. Where my interpretation became more pronounced I was careful to ensure that what I was making was a reasoned inference and was supported by the understanding that came from within the narratives.

Chase (2005) described the researcher as potentially a narrator in his or her own right (discussed in section 4.2) and I saw this as putting myself in a metaposition. It was important to the research purposes that the perspectives of staff remained central but that as a researcher some distance from their stories was obtained. Continuous reflexive engagement and questioning of assumptions and interpretations enabled the original narrative to stay central to the story of the research. I used reflexivity to ensure this principle was held to especially when summarising participants' positions in the findings.

The final term Malterud (2001: 484) explored is ‘transferability’ and the metaphor she uses is ‘external validity’ which is understood as ‘the range and limitations for application of the study findings, beyond the context in which the study was done.’ Reflexivity was integral to arriving at a point of transferability within this study. The systematic reflection upon the findings, the referral back to narratives, the thinking about the findings in relation to key concepts all contributed to a final stage of thinking about what the Homecare/Centre delivery model could offer to practitioners more generally and resulted in a model of enhanced delivery being considered. Recognising that allowing this reflexivity to happen often involved the emergence of a fuller understanding of the issues within the research. Savin-Baden (2004) offered interesting insights into how reflexivity can be used to move from analysis to interpretation within research and how being explicit about this process can provide an insight into the research and the understandings that come from it. She (2004: 365) suggested that using reflexivity can help the researcher move from ‘simplistic themed research categories towards in-depth interpretation’ and this was what happened at this stage. Through repeated listening to the interviews and referral to the participant narratives, by allowing tacit stories to be heard more could be drawn from the research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000:47) referred to how it is working at the boundaries of research that tests the researcher and opens up new thinking in relation to the research. I found myself drawn to the data that challenged my thinking, to those participants whose narratives contained more nuanced and complex accounts of issues in relation to NVQs, competence and identity. It was through careful consideration and reflection of the empirical data and of this data in relation to the key concepts that these came to be some of the most interesting parts of the research process, the presentation of the findings. This in turn influenced the evolving nature of the research process and the development of a model of NVQ delivery that could be referenced back to key concepts *and* also identified within the empirical data.

Knowing the participants proved a challenge on occasions but has provided an added insight and enabled a closer questioning. We were picking up on the guided development that we had been working on over the years; extending a conversation (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). The research was set in the middle of this ongoing conversation and could not be wholly divorced from it but I had a different purpose now as a researcher. I explained earlier how Chase (2005: 664) described the ‘researcher’s authoritative voice’ and how the researcher’s purpose is different and set within a different context to the narrators and participants. It was important to recognise when these factors were influences, reflect upon them, be open to interpretations that could be taken from them, attempt to unpick personal motivations and prejudices and come to conclusions that were more fully representative of the complexity of the research experience. I have tried to do this through using journals, supervision, notes and writing. To aid understanding I present an example of one of the occasions when the reflexive process impacted upon my understanding of the research. The reflexivity was

prompted by a feeling of discomfort in relation to the different roles of practitioner and researcher.

### An example of the reflexive process

An example of Malterud's (2001: 284) idea of how the 'researcher's backpack' of preconceptions can be dealt with effectively through reflexivity is given below. The original data can be found in Appendices 2,3, 4 and 5. These Appendices show how the individual interview transcript (Appendix 2) and the narrative created from that (Appendix 5) were used to identify particular findings in relation to the interview themes for each individual (Appendix 3). Appendix 4 shows all of the parts of participants' narratives and identifies the sub-themes that were established across the narratives. This was a systematic and process driven part of the analysis but does not reflect the nuance and subtlety of the reflexive process as it worked through into the presentation of the data and it is this that I wish to explore further in this example.

Reflexivity became an important part of the process of the data analysis at this stage. I had a lot of experience of Joan as an NVQ assessor and knew that this role that was not relished by her. She often said that she and her candidate were short of time to meet and this meant that candidates took longer to complete than in other workplaces. Initially I was cautious about the Joan's view that a candidate should do more work themselves on their NVQ. In Appendix 4 page i I identified that, 'This needs thinking about. I felt prickly in this part of the conversation.' The reflexive component in the interpretation led to representing a more complex experience than my initial response had prompted. I heard a sense of being aggrieved that the burden of assessment lay with the assessor and her frustration about the candidate not keeping to targets set. My response was that assessment needed to be given a place in the priorities of work and that it is right that managers/assessors should take a central responsibility in assessing staff competence. Chase (2005: 660) describes this as common to researchers in narrative as they move from:

Interviewer-interviewee relationship into one of narrator and listener. This involves a shift in understanding the nature of interview questions and answers. The researchers often illustrate this shift by telling about how they initially ignored, grew impatient with, or got thrown off track by interviewees

On reflection I realised that initially I responded to what I expected to be said rather than what was actually said and that my response was more one of practitioner than researcher. I pushed myself to challenge my reaction. In fact Joan had raised a valid point that candidates and workplaces can benefit from a wider use of assessment methods. The emphasis on observation of practice (often recorded by the assessor) that I (as a practitioner) had been suggesting repeatedly as a way of simplifying assessment can mean that the candidate has little opportunity to participate in the achievement of their qualification and it is onerous for

the assessor. Reflexivity had enabled me to draw out more from this exchange and to truly value what had been said, to respond to it as a researcher.

Reflexivity also enabled me to challenge my own preconceptions through a wider consideration of the NVQ assessment process. A strength of the NVQ portfolio approach is that there is a variety of ways that assessment can be carried out and that these can be negotiated between candidate and assessor according to individual and workplace requirements. If a candidate wants to improve their written skills that can be included in the plan but is not a part of the NVQ assessment itself, it is a broader interpretation of competence (as explored in Chapter 3). Similarly reflective accounts can be planned for to increase reflective practice if that is an area for development, but again it is not prescribed. Also within this thinking there was an importance in acknowledging that NVQ assessment *is* time consuming and this was implicit in the example given by this assessor in terms of feeling that the work was falling mainly to her rather than the candidate. This is a criticism of NVQs explored in Chapter 3 and it stood firm within this research too. These issues prompted a deeper level of thought and analysis about the NVQ process that was relevant to the research as a whole.

To sum up the process of reflexivity - it is about a shifting or change and the process of being open enough to acknowledge and accept that change is required. I have tried to identify the impact of myself within the work. This has been a process that has required reflexive thinking in order that the usefulness is continuously monitored bearing in mind Alvesson et al's (2008: 495) position that 'successful reflexivity' must be about 'making a productive difference'. For me reflexivity has been a rich and welcome addition to the robustness and rigour of the methodology when considering my position as an insider researcher in the organisation.

#### **4.4 Insider research**

Some of the issues of being an insider researcher have already been mentioned in section 4.3:

- The researcher position might be difficult to adjust to
- Participants might say what they thought I wanted to hear
- The practitioner position could lead to making assumptions or misconceptions
- There might be personal resistance to hearing challenging stories
- My close practitioner relationship with people in the organisation might challenge openness
- Potential conflict between the roles of practitioner and researcher, establishing a metaposition as a researcher but recognising that participants may not fully appreciate the different roles
- Practitioner position could make me biased about NVQs

- Knowing the candidates presented both challenges and added insight

This section focuses on researching within an area of one's own practice as an aspect of the methodology. The history of myself as a practitioner within Homecare was one that could be seen to allow me certain advantages in terms of information and familiarity with the organisation. I had established trust, professional respect, an understanding of many of the pressures and problems of work in the social care sector and in the organisation itself before the research began. However there were tensions allied to this relationship as well as advantages. I could be viewed as having a position of power in relation to managers in the organisation. As a practitioner I liaise regularly with both organisational and home level managers about staff progress on the NVQ. Participants might think carefully about what information was shared. Within the NVQ system there are opportunities for progression for interested assessors to move to become verifiers and this could also be seen as an area that could influence engagement.

Hellawell (2006:487) suggested that 'ideally the researcher should be both inside *and* outside the perceptions of the 'researched'.' and it was this that I bore in mind. I did not want to lose the potential advantages of being a practitioner but I recognised that in order to research there would be times that I had to set that to one side. This would be necessary personally in order to assume this new role responsibly and ethically but also to help participants understand the different role. I had to account for the possibility that my position upon the slide rule of Hellawell's (2006) continuum could change if participants confused the roles. Within the interviews at times participants asked for specific guidance or advice and whilst aware that this was not strictly part of my research role I answered these questions and noted the shifting of roles for consideration later on. This process of noting is what Hellawell (2006:492) described as a route into the 'secret garden of reflexivity' discovered through an appreciation of a researcher's position. What follows is an illustrative example of this process in action.

A participant began her interview with a detailed examination of a problem experienced in assessing a candidate. There are inevitably those candidates within the programme who will not, cannot, or choose not to, change their practice that is then judged as not meeting the NVQ standards. These problems are NVQ related in that the candidate cannot be assessed as competent but from that point the issue becomes a management issue to be dealt with within organisational procedures. It is a situation that has arisen several times and as a practitioner I was adept at giving appropriate advice to the assessor. However this advice was not a part of the researcher role. At the time I was worried about the blurring of roles but later reflected that in fact what had been highlighted was one of the regular problems

experienced in relation to assessment and a model of managers assessing competence in the workplace.

Managers are aware of more than a peripatetic assessor in a brief observation of workplace activity and the assessment can be a more meaningful activity and yet it sometimes raises issues. Managers may have not taken full account of behaviours that do not meet workplace or national standards until assessing the NVQ. Assessing a candidate sharpens the focus on candidates' competence. It is never an easy situation and it is important to support the assessors making these critical judgements about members of their team. I gave advice not consistent with the researcher role but also realised that the example being described did highlight some of the difficulties with NVQs even if this was not a conscious sharing of research-orientated information on behalf of the participant. It became a part of the research as highlighting some of the issues connected to assessment and as it resonated with another similar example from another assessor weighted the evidence that showed that assessors were identifying problems in staff performance through the NVQ. Put together these two examples led to my fresh consideration of the complexity of NVQ assessment, how seriously the assessors viewed their assessment tasks within Homecare and the benefits of integrating assessment into workplace practice. This line of analysis culminated in providing evidence for elements of a model of enhanced delivery. My insider knowledge both complicated and helped clarify in relation to this example. It allowed me to hear the story I felt the assessor was telling in terms of some of the challenges of assessing NVQs responsibly.

#### **4.5 Ethics, confidentiality and anonymity**

Mason (1996: 29) described the research ethics as 'asking yourself difficult questions – and pushing yourself hard to answer them.' She suggested that a researcher should try to be prepared for ethical issues that may arise. A fundamental ethical principle of the research was that it was designed to have no negative impact upon the candidates' progress towards their qualifications and this required early consideration. One of the first ethical decisions made was that in recognition of potential tensions only one of a pair of candidate and assessor was interviewed and this was outlined in the University ethics approval agreement.

I prepared the participants and myself both in the briefing sessions about the research and at the beginning of each interview. I outlined their rights to stop the interview at any time, to say if there was an area they did not want to discuss and by explaining confidentiality and anonymity. I considered power issues and tried to ameliorate these by explaining that as a researcher I was engaging with the participants in a different role. I tried to encourage openness by stating that I was interested in both good and bad and how a full and open discussion would be welcomed. However preparation in theory is very different from practice

and the ethical dilemmas that confronted me as a researcher were individual to my own practice and to the particular research as Mason (1996) suggests will be the case. These became my hard questions that needed to be answered. Some of them were answered instinctively in telephone calls or in interviews then reviewed later but others required more applied and concentrated effort to resolve. My personal position was to err on the side of caution with regard to ensuring the comfort of the participants when they read the research and this will be further explored in the sections on confidentiality and anonymity and can be seen in the Appendices 2, 3, 4 and 5 where personal and identifying information has been excluded. This was undertaken in order to comply with the commitment made on the University ethics approval form and the participant consent form (see Appendix 6) that stated that 'Any identifying factors will be removed in the final text'. In addition the agreement with the organisation-level manager of Homecare stated that 'staff would not be identifiable in any presentations' which referred to any research report that would be available or go back to the organisation and the participants.

I had approached an organisation-level manager of Homecare informally with the initial proposal and returned to discuss the research more formally and to negotiate access. Ethics approval was carefully thought through, sought and gained, permissions were requested and explained and briefings were held to explain the research to all who might be involved. The organisation-level manager gave written agreement and this gave a clear outline of my expectations and how ethical issues would be addressed. I had explained my intention to interview participants perhaps more than once and given a timeframe for the research. I explained my expectation of returning with the research and how we might present it to the employees after submission of the thesis. The consideration of what was included and participants' reactions to seeing information in print or presented to them was a general ethical principle but also closely held.

#### 4.5.1. Consent

Mason (1996: 166) suggested that 'informed consent is complex' and that the researcher must be careful with the presentation of data that may have been shared with the researcher in the spirit of the 'extended conversation' (Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 108) that they may not wish to be known more widely. Although I had gained consent from all participants when I reviewed the open nature of the interviews and the transcripts where families, other staff members and colleagues were very specifically referred to (although not named) I felt unsure that the true extent of consent had been appreciated. This meant that I became vigilant in the use of some of the information in transcripts and narratives. Where families were mentioned less positively I summarised and tried to ensure that the identity of the participant was less obvious. In some situations I did not use data that could have identified a participant because of its reference to family members or colleagues that might prove uncomfortable.

#### 4.5.2. Confidentiality

Arranging interviews in practice situations was easier for the participants but potentially meant co-workers might identify their engagement in the research. Every time I arranged an interview in practice I raised this issue with the participant but finally decided to let them make the decision about location. The confidentiality of information shared needed to be closely guarded; I wanted the participants to feel safe and to achieve that I needed to be cautious and aware of my personal conduct during the research. Another aspect of confidentiality was that as a researcher with a long history as a practitioner with this organisation it was possible for me to identify some of the people who were referred to in the interviews, even when names were not mentioned. This gave me an insight into others' actions and behaviours that I had not had before and was information that could potentially change my view of them and how I worked with them. For example one assessor referred to another assessor who she felt had not supported a candidate well. I knew who this assessor was and it could have altered my view of them but in recognition of the fact that this was one perspective and that I was not aware of the situation from all sides I put this information on one side. I did however take the point for the research that some assessors may not support candidates as well as others. I kept all of this under consideration, acknowledging the tensions and working through these research issues. This enabled me to give time and space to reflect that in turn influenced the research process through an increased understanding.

#### 4.5.3. Anonymity

In terms of anonymity, on the consent forms I had guaranteed that 'The staff will not be identifiable in any of these presentations.' and this was a challenge in a small organisation. It meant that I took a decision not to transcribe and use data from the organisation level managers as they would be too easily identifiable. The presentation of the data involved particular issues in relation to anonymity. In undertaking research within a small organisation I was very aware of the need to protect the participants from being identified and protect the organisation from identification. This meant that particular situations have been excluded or are made less transparent in the presentation of the data. Some quotations have been shortened to reduce identifying features or stories and I have consistently tried to imagine how I would feel if I was a participant reading the information set out on the page. Identifying phrases and discussions have been removed and sometimes generalised with consideration throughout of not losing what had been said within the interviews or of layering upon it further interpretation that was not justified. Once the findings had their first rudimentary shape a further checking of text took place to deal with anonymity. As part of this process I considered the following in producing the final Chapters 5 and 6 as they stand within the dissertation and the appendices:

- Editing for identifying comments and removing them
- Where it was possible to group some points as a range of views on a particular aspect rather than several individual perspectives to decrease individual participant visibility in the text
- How a participant would view the selection of material from their interview, my interpretation and representation of their views and whether what was presented honoured the essence of their contribution
- Considering how other staff within the research organisation might view what is said by participants

This process of attention to the detail of honouring contributions and taking care about how the research would be read was not so much explicitly contained within ethics approval processes or consent process but was the personal position I took in relation to the data generated for the research. It was a direct result of asking myself the difficult questions that Mason (1996) suggests are part of an ethical research position.

#### **4.6. The Research Process**

In this section I explain how the research was carried out as was outlined in section 4.2. The interview strategy and participant selection is described. The section on analysis and interpretation shows how the methodological position held individual narratives at the centre of the research. The section shows how the narratives were then explored in relation to the themes of the interview strategy, sub-themes that arose in analysis and interpretation of the findings and the further inductive themes that emerged at a later stage of analysis. This resulted in the identification of elements of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery at the final stage of interpretation when the findings were reviewed for ‘transferability’ (Malterud, 2001) as discussed earlier in the chapter.

##### **4.6.1. Interview Strategy**

The research focused on the perspectives of assessors and candidates regarding NVQs and workplace learning and the Homecare/Centre model of delivery. The main tool was semi-structured interviews that took place during the timeframe of NVQ assessment, beginning with assessors who had previous experience of assessment at the start of the research process, interviewing candidates in the middle and returning to assessors at the end. The themes identified in the workplace learning and NVQ research (interpersonal, personal and organisational) informed the formulation of the interview strategy. Although there was a structure to the interview approach (see Appendix 1) I resolved to allow the participants to lead during the interviews in order to provide space for their perspectives to surface.

Participants had a wide variety of experience of NVQs, personal experience of undertaking qualifications at one or several levels as well as being assessors of the NVQ. I encouraged participants to address all of their experiences by asking questions that continued a line of discussion or prompted further explanations even when I was unsure of the direction they were going. The strategy involved staying with the conversation as it developed rather than the list of questions in the strategy. The process of this can be seen in the transcript (Appendix 2) where Joan talked at some length with minimal prompting and questions were posed that were intended to encourage her to elucidate and expand.

Being a practitioner of many years within the research organisation I was privy to information that a researcher new to the area may not have been, this made complex interviews with participants who had a lot of experience of NVQs at different levels and in different roles easier. However I also brought with me judgements about people, a range of different experiences of assessors and managers and a reflexive approach to the research allowed me to keep reviewing this. In the interviewing stage I had to reflect upon and manage some of these personal relationships in order that I felt myself to be as open and as inquiring as possible with all the participants.

I prepared a table (see Appendix 1) that represented the main interview themes to cover three main phases, introductory, main questioning and exit stages. The questions in the first column were connected to the research purposes and the themes drawn from the literature and were organised to cover:

- Biographical data
- School and other educational experiences
- Family life and support with regard to learning
- Understanding of learning and workplace learning
- The impact of people at work in connection with learning about work
- Experiences of teaching at work both as teacher and student
- Experience of the organisation's attitude to teaching and learning
- Experiences of NVQs at different levels and in different roles
- The NVQ model
- The delivery system
- Comparison of NVQs with other types of workplace learning.

The questions were intended to draw out data related to the candidate and the assessor perspectives. Some of the participants had experience of being in both roles and during the interviews I was conscious of enabling discussion of both types of experience. In the second column there was a list of questions to act as reminders, questions intended to open up

discussion or to encourage further exposition of detail or feeling. In the third column I had outlined the purpose of the questions making links back to the theoretical basis of the questioning rooted in the literature.

I piloted this new approach with two interviews outside the planned sample using the strategy as a guide. This method provided richer and much lengthier interview texts than I had gathered from the exploratory study and allowed for the conversations to flow and develop according to the participants' interests and the direction they followed. The pilot interviews also enabled a building of my confidence and opportunity for developing reflexivity within the process.

#### 4.6.2. Participant selection

The research was based around one cohort of new candidates from Homecare. There were 10 participants in the main study. Four were interviewed twice, these were manager/assessors whom I returned to in order to elicit the full range of their experiences that encompassed candidate, assessor and manager as well as their experience with a candidate at the start and nearing completion of the award. The levels 2 and 3 NVQ candidates and their assessors were in one group and the level 4 candidates were in another starting on a different day. It transpired that there was only one level 4 candidate in the group who, after the research was explained, agreed to be involved. Other level 4 experiences were gathered from the assessors involved with candidates in the level 2 and 3 cohort who had also undertaken their level 4 qualifications.

Once the consent forms were gathered four candidates had volunteered and all were included in the research, one level 4 candidate, one level 3 candidate, two level 2 candidates (one from overseas). More assessors than candidates had offered to participate and selection was based upon those who were not assessing the candidates who had offered to be participants. Four assessors were selected. The rationale for this was to not confuse stories and to help participants feel comfortable discussing their perspectives. It was a pragmatic decision that represented candidates from each NVQ level and an overseas candidate. Due to the embedded nature of NVQs in the organisation many of the participants were able to contribute their experiences as both candidates and assessors. Candidates were interviewed after some months of participation in the NVQ in order that they could comment from experience.

In addition to the participants selected from the cohort I asked Homecare for access to occasional workers and new members of staff still within the probationary period. These staff members would not be undertaking an NVQ themselves but would be able to give their

perspectives on the opportunities for workplace learning and the NVQ. From the list that was given to me I was able to make contact with and interview a participant in each group.

I also interviewed the organisation-level manager of Homecare, the operations manager and a human resources worker as background to the research. This was because I anticipated an examination of the organisational aspect of the study in terms of human resource development, the systemic application of organisational philosophy into practice and factors that influence what Fuller and Unwin (2004: 130) describe as an ‘expansive learning environment’. These interviews were more about organisational context and approach and do not constitute part of the sample. The focus of these interviews was in support of the research purposes from an organisational perspective. The University ethics approval recognised that these participants would be treated differently as it would be impossible to anonymise these people in such an organisation. There was never any intention to create narratives from their contributions, but these interviews provided a dimension of further understanding. Most interviews lasted around one and a half hours.

#### 4.6.3. Analysis and interpretation

This section explains the way in which the data was worked with in line with the methodological position, considerations and principles set out in section 4.2 of a qualitative approach that held narrative at the core but considered the participant narratives in relation to the themes of the research. It also shows (with reference to Appendices) how the findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6 came to be constructed, how they are connected to the findings and were representative of what was found within the research.

##### The construction of narratives

The listening and understanding stage was a crucial one in moving from the practitioner into a researcher role. It was also a key step in moving the research away from expecting answers to research questions towards understanding the participants as ‘narrators with stories to tell and voices of their own’ (Chase, 2005: 66). Recording and transcription of the long interviews had been vital because I did not want to be distracted by taking notes (see Appendix 2 for anonymised transcript, Joan). These were the basis for the construction of the individual narratives and were listened to and read repeatedly in order that they became fully embedded in my understanding of what each participant was saying. The narrative in Appendix 5 represents the interview with Joan. It shows how I have taken the transcript and

begun to organise it so that it tells a story about her personal identity, her own learning, the learning of others in the home she ran and her experience of the NVQ with several candidates including some of the challenges she faced in the organisation, the home and in relation to assessment.

Individual narrative then considered in relation to each of the interview themes

This stage involved another stage of engagement with the individual's narrative and the research purposes. Working from the narratives (see example in Appendix 5) I considered what had been said from a variety of different angles. I identified how the participant had commented upon the interview themes (interpersonal, personal and organisational aspects of NVQs and workplace learning) in a way that was linked to the research purposes of establishing staff perspectives (see Appendices 2 and 3) and the Homecare/Centre model of delivery.

There were several considerations at this stage and I have used Appendix 3 to show some of this process. Potential direct quotations were identified in bold, italics are my comments on the text and plain text is my summary.

1. It involved a selection of which parts of narratives applied to each of the themes and the identification of sub-themes. This was not always clear or straightforward for instance interpersonal could also be allied to organisational. This meant that evidence often applies across sections within chapters and across chapters. The evidence has a cumulative element and the chapters are intended to be read together to appreciate this.
2. It allowed for the identification of further inductively identified themes. So on page i under organisational you can see my comment '*Does this fit with having a value base?*' Values had not been identified as an inductive theme at this stage but this was recognised as significant and would arise in other interviews.
3. It involved recognising where there were links between participants (pages ii, iii, iv, v, vi).
4. It enabled a gathering together of parts of narratives to scrutinise any inconsistencies and consider how and where to present these fairly and fully in the findings.
5. It enabled me as a researcher to review the parts of narratives and record my feelings for reflexive consideration. For example on page i I recorded 'this needs thinking about. I felt prickly in this part of the conversation'.
6. It also enabled me to identify which parts of the interview might need more careful thought. For example on page iii (under workplace learning) there was a situation where I was asked to give advice inconsistent with the researcher role that required some reflexive consideration and resulted in a deeper understanding of the

challenges of assessment for the manager/assessor and which then took its place in section 6.5.

Examining all of the participants' perspectives in relation to each theme.

As a researcher my understanding of the individual narratives was augmented by returning to them to seek out differences and similarities of experiences and selecting what and how to represent these in the findings to present a balanced and fair picture of what I had found. It involved the identification of sub-themes across the narratives that could be grouped together to explore more specific issues or for brevity in the presentation of the data. Thus in Chapters 5 and 6 the perspectives of candidates Pat and Paula will often be found together as they were undertaking their level 2 award. Stacey and Graham had both undertaken levels 2 and 3 and had both contrasting and similar experiences. Alfie, Peter and Holly had experiences of levels 2,3 and 4 and were assessors and managers with similar views of the NVQ and of Homecare but contrasted with Joan whose position was less positive. This stage of analysis involved bringing the parts of narratives together to get a sense of what all of the participants were saying about each of the identified themes and sub-themes identified in the interviews. In Appendix 4 it is possible to see how the final column of Appendix 3 for Joan that related to NVQs was taken directly into a text that has all of the participants' comments on NVQs contained within it. This was a way of identifying findings in common and also identifying differences across all of the participants from the original selection of themes, sub-themes and quotations. It sometimes necessitated returning to the narratives and the transcripts to ensure that the nuances of the selections were supported in the original interviews. Again potential direct quotations are in bold, my summary of the participants' words is in plain text and my comments are in italics.

Participants' perspectives could be compared and contrasted while holding firm to the fundamental principle of honouring the participants' voices within the research. This approach to analysis allowed for a consideration of both the individuals and the themes of the research, allowing for individual perspectives to be included but without losing the representation of views across all of the interviews. Researcher perspective is included in Chapters 5 and 6 and is separated from evidence from participant narratives. This is in line with Mason's (1996: 6) view that research should have a 'wider resonance'.

At times the types of evidence within chapters varies. Throughout the analysis of narratives I looked for commonalities of expressions and experiences, counting them at times to be clear to what extent a particular view was present. This enabled a description at the beginning of sections that described whether most, all or some of the participants had explored an idea. Due to the nature of narratives and the interview strategy some participants were more expansive in relation to particular areas that meant that evidence is at times more heavily

weighted from particular participants' perspectives. At times when the evidence for a particular theme has been built on from previous sections or across both outcomes chapters (part of this process is indicated by the numbering in the text relating to elements of the enhanced model) there is more grouping and summarising of the evidence. For example evidence in section 5.2.1 about the social nature of learning contained connections to the subsequent sections of 5.2.2 the influence of personal identity and 5.2.3, the organisational context for learning. There was evidence in the first section of participants accommodating personal identity and of home and organisational level support for learning contained within 5.2.1. This continues into Chapter 6 where previous evidence on the social nature of learning also applied to how participants had engaged with NVQs.

Grouping and summarising of some of this evidence was partly due to issues of presenting the narrative evidence in a manageable way for the reader, partly to manage length of presentation and also in order not to belabour any particular point by presenting several participants' parts of narratives on the same issue. This data was firmly grounded in the evidence from the participant narratives and was achieved by comparing responses by way of tables (an example of one is shown in Appendix 4), reviewing narratives (Appendix 5) and at times returning to transcripts (Appendix 2). The relationship between an individual story and the generalisable is a fundamental tension in the presentation of research (Clandinin, 2007; Savin-Baden, 2004).

The researcher perspective in the findings chapters is presented in several ways. It is included to give some interpretation or comment on the narratives, give reasons for inclusion of the narrative content, give context to the narrative, to make statements about contrasts or similarities or introduce a quotation as illustrative of a particular perspective. Where it is possible to separate this out from evidence based on narratives sections this has been done by indicating that it is 'researcher' or 'practitioner' perspective

Looking at the narratives to establish any further themes inductively.

This stage involved identifying any significant new themes inductively that might need further exploration. I explored professional level skills (6.6), confidence (section 6.5), reflective learning (section 6.4) and values (section 6.4) after they were identified as having significance across narratives. Getting a view of what the data meant in relation to others' research involved further reading around all of these themes.

Participant and researcher narratives and how understanding the Homecare/Centre delivery model contributed to the development of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery.

The initial presentation of material in Chapters 5 and 6 enabled another way of working with the data to take the findings onto another stage of interpretation. For example where participants expressed a view of their schooling or family experiences this was placed in Chapter 5 (5.2.2) under the influence of personal background on learning. The link between this data and workplace learning research on personal and workplace identity resulted in the inclusion of element 4 in a model of enhanced NVQ delivery (attention to personal and work-related identity). I will illustrate this process in relation to a very small part of the interpretation and analysis process. This example illustrates the stages of the research and also the reflexivity principles that were explored in Section 4.3.

Early in the data collection process I had ‘personal’ as a theme for exploration with the participants. Personal factors were identified in the workplace learning literature as described in Chapter 3 and the interview strategy (Appendix 1) was constructed so that I asked about school and other learning experiences. Family attitudes to learning emerged at this stage of the interview as being relevant to progress. Family situation surfaced as important to current attitudes to learning across several of the participants. Later, as a fuller understanding of personal and work-related identity became better understood in the representation of the research across all of the narratives and in relation to further reading, personal identity became a sub theme in the representation of the data. In grouping together some of the narratives that alluded to personal identity it was possible to see how it influenced many of the participants in the study within Homecare and it then became one of the key elements of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery.

In Graham’s narrative in relation to the ‘personal’ theme he described his schooling, his family’s valuing of learning, his attitude to undertaking the NVQ and it not being linked to financial gain and his personal priorities that were predominantly his life outside of work. He recognised that at times his attitude was inconsistent and there was an ambivalent relationship to learning and to the NVQ that was characterised by him having done level 3 of his own volition for ‘a feather in my cap’ and not because of organisational demands. He described how he had achieved two NVQs helped in part by his assessor’s facilitative and individual approach to his learning that had enabled him to stay engaged with the NVQ process.

From Graham’s interview I gathered a number of things, some that were stated but others, such as attitudes that were implied. His attitude when talking about school was that he felt let down by teachers and, although this was stated in part, it was the way it was said that implied the depth of this feeling. This is an excerpt from the original transcript.

Whereas at school. If I heard once ‘You’re a very clever lad but you just can’t get it out on the paper’ If I had a pound for every time I heard that I wouldn’t

have to work. I got really sick to bloody death with hearing it. It was constant, absolutely constant.

As part of the data analysis I went back to my field notes from the interview as I read through the transcript. I made notes that related to how I had felt, issues for further reflection, themes that were emerging and emboldened parts of the transcripts that I thought would be useful quotations. In the column for my comments in relation to this part of the interview I made the comment that,

Again this is said in a very angry tone, the attitude of teachers at school clearly had a deep effect upon G.

I then constructed a narrative for Graham (an example of a narrative is in Appendix 5). At the next stage I gathered together parts of narratives, identified quotations, started to analyse and interpret the data under the ‘personal’ theme (see Appendix 4 for example that relates to NVQs). I summarised Graham’s attitude to school by recording,

Felt he did quite well at school but could have done better. Sense of under achievement and real anger expressed.

This is based on Graham’s narrative and was constructed carefully ensuring a fair representation of what had been said. Graham felt he did well. This was not my judgement of his achievement. He felt he could have done better with better support. To record his words without the feeling expressed would not have done justice to the data. In this way I stayed with the content and emotions even when creating a researcher narrative of participants’ views and experiences. In the final stage I represented Graham’s attitude to school alongside some of the other participants and connected his experience to that of Stacey where I had identified similarities. They both had better learning experiences at college than at school. It could be argued that some of the depth of understanding of the negative effect of schooling has been lost in this form of presentation. In the text I represented their perspectives by stating that,

Graham and Stacey felt they had done reasonably well at school but had not fulfilled their potential (p.140).

In drawing together the research story the feeling of anger is not represented in this brief allusion to his narrative. However to balance this I chose a quote that to me summed up Graham’s negative attitude to school and his more positive experience of college lecturers.

I think I got more from the worst one of them than the best of my teachers at school. (p. 140)

From a researcher perspective I understood Graham's narrative as having meaning related to his learning identity, the personal motivators to learn or not to learn. It highlighted the importance of people, environment and attitude to him as a learner. It had meaning across several of the themes around which the interview strategy had been constructed. It had personal, interpersonal and organisational content and consequently was drawn into my thinking about the story of the research in relation to all of these themes.

Graham's narrative also had resonance with other participants' descriptions of their learning (Stacey and Joan) that enabled me to begin to see interconnectedness between their stories and some of the other participants' narratives. It contrasted with those participants whose engagement with learning was less ambivalent (Pat, Stacey (at a later stage of learning) Paula, Holly, Alfie and Peter). This drawing together of people and their stories brought about a picture of the NVQ learner that helped the theme of personal identity begin to take shape. The participant narratives were at the core of this process. In Appendix 3 it is possible to see on page i at the top of the NVQ column how I have commented on how assessors can draw support from each other where the process is embedded in the organisation. This contributed to the identification of how the elements of support for the NVQ in Homecare could aid understanding of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery.

It brought me back to one of Mason's (1996) principles that a qualitative researcher should be able to draw on the data to attempt to wider social explanations. Josselson (2006) suggested that the building of a secure foundation of knowledge within narrative research rested upon the need to accumulate interpretations. It was important to draw across the data to show that consistent themes across participants can assume significance. Polkinghorne (2007: 483) identified that the interpretation stage in narrative research was a very important one in understanding the research being undertaken in a wider setting.

An interpretation is not simply a summary or précis of a storied text. It is a commentary that uncovers and clarifies the meaning of the text. It draws out implications in the text for understanding other texts and for revealing the impact of the social and cultural setting on people's lives. In some cases, narrative interpretations focuses on the relationships internal to a storied text by drawing out its themes and identifying the type of plot the story exemplifies; in other cases it focuses on social and cultural environment that shaped the story's life events and the meaning attached to them.

It was with this in mind that I selected what I could draw from the research and how to represent those findings within Chapters 5 and 6, constantly reflecting upon and balancing the researcher's voice with the original participant narratives. Attempting to see what I might have missed or got wrong, interpretations that I may have overlooked and to honour and respect the participants' voices within the presentations.

This section has demonstrated how I have worked with the data presented in the interviews and compiled narratives that have uncovered and clarified meaning. It shows how I have used the staff perspectives expressed in their interviews to create narratives and to identify significance not just to their own environment but also to a broader practice environment through a model of enhanced NVQ delivery.

This chapter has set out the qualitative methodology of the research that retained the participant narratives at the core of interpretation and analysis and has shown how these stages contributed to the construction of the findings chapters. It has summarised some of the processes that were involved in moving the data that is presented in the Appendices 2,3, 4, 5 and 7 into Chapters 5 and 6. It has outlined some of the considerations of reflexivity, insider research, confidentiality, anonymity and voice and explored the challenges and rewards of the research in relation to these points.

## **5. RESEARCH OUTCOMES: Workplace Learning and NVQs**

This chapter presents the findings from the research concerning staff perspectives in relation to learning in the workplace. It explores the three themes of the social nature of learning, the influence of personal background on learning and the organisational context of learning that were identified as important factors for consideration in workplace learning. The method of construction of this chapter (and Chapter 6) has been described in Chapter 4 as a large bubble, created by the merging of several smaller bubbles that contain each individual narrative. The themes and sub-themes are explored through the individual narratives. This at times means that data is duplicated between chapters as it has been drawn on in different ways to show perspectives in relation to different themes. Due to the nature of the narratives and the interview strategy some participants commented on a particular area more than others which at times means a section is more heavily weighted with evidence from particular people. Also there is a building of evidence within sections and across both chapters (cross referencing numbers provide an indicator for part of this process) as has previously been described in section 4.6.3.

The analysis within the chapter is presented in three ways with parts of narratives and quotations from narratives used to highlight particular perspectives (see Appendix 7).

- Evidence from individual participant narratives on themes and sub-themes is presented.
- Where similar or different views were identified in narratives they are grouped together to present the data on each of the themes and sub-themes. This is partly in order to make the findings chapters more manageable but the principle of inclusion was that it was summary material based on narrative content.
- The meta-narrative of the researcher perspective is presented as part of the analysis and interpretation process and gives a perspective on the data, the themes and model of enhanced NVQ delivery. Appendix 7 gives an example of the different types of evidence and interpretation included in this chapter. The researcher perspective in the findings chapters is presented in several ways. It is included to give some interpretation or comment on the narratives, give reasons for inclusion of the narrative content, give context to the narrative, to make statements about contrasts or similarities or introduce a quotation as illustrative of a particular perspective. Where it is possible to separate this out from evidence based on narratives sections this has been done by indicating that it is 'researcher' or 'practitioner' perspective

The chapter concludes with a discussion of the key concepts previously discussed in section 3.1, how factors affecting the social nature of learning, personal and work-related identity and

the organisational context can contribute to the success of workplace learning. The data is discussed in relation to how workplace learning research can help understanding of the participants' perspectives of NVQs and workplace learning within the context of the Homecare/Centre model of delivery and how this contributed to the development of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery. As such this chapter is important to the contribution to the contribution to knowledge within the research.

Here some of the elements of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery that are identified from the evidence within this chapter are listed. The key concepts from workplace learning research are identified in brackets.

1. Strategic implementation of the NVQ (expansive practice)
2. Workplace assessors who integrate assessment into practice (support for learning)
3. An enhanced assessor role that supports a learning process (support for learning)
4. Attention to learner and work-related identity (personal and work-related identity)

Numbers in brackets in each of the following sections cross-reference and signpost to where the empirical evidence that supports the identification of each element can be found.

Inevitably the evidence links to both further sections in this chapter and Chapter 6 particularly element number 8 (a management approach that supports learning). These elements will be built upon and added to in Chapter 6 where the focus is more on the NVQ and summatively explored in Chapter 7.

### **5.1. Participants**

I have used the broad term 'management role' to describe participants who are part of the team in the homes.

**Holly** is in a management role. She has achieved her NVQ levels 2, 3 and 4 in care. She is an NVQ assessor. She was interviewed twice.

**Alfie** is a management role. He achieved his NVQ level 2 qualification before joining Homecare and subsequently both his level 4 qualifications. He is an NVQ assessor. He was interviewed twice.

**Joan** is in a management role. She has achieved both NVQ level 4 qualifications and is an NVQ assessor. She was interviewed twice.

**Peter** is in a management role. He has achieved NVQ level 2, 3 and 4 in care and was working on his second NVQ level 4 qualification. He is an NVQ assessor. He was interviewed twice.

**Stacey** is a residential worker. She has achieved NVQ level 2 and 3 and is an NVQ assessor. She was interviewed once.

**Paula** was undertaking her NVQ level 2. She was interviewed once.

**Graham** has achieved his NVQ level 2 and was undertaking his NVQ level 3. He was interviewed once.

**Pat** was an NVQ level 3 candidate, originally from overseas. She was interviewed once.

**John** was an occasional worker, originally from overseas. He was interviewed once. He had no personal experience of undertaking an NVQ.

**Tracey** was a new employee both to the organisation and to care. She was not undertaking her NVQ. She was interviewed once.

Some of the detail in these sections has not been referred to for anonymity reasons.

## **5.2. Learning in the workplace**

This section explores the factors that influence learning in the workplace and is divided into three parts, the social nature of learning, the influence of personal background on learning, and the organisational context for learning. Parts of participants' narratives in relation to each of the themes and sub-themes are identified and particular examples are drawn on some that highlight themes in more detail. Due to the nature of the evidence there is a cumulative picture that emerges of support for learning that develops in this section but it is split into three in order to focus more explicitly on each area and is drawn together in the discussion section 5.3. The numbering in brackets relating to elements of the enhanced model indicating how the evidence across sections interrelates.

### **5.2.1. The social nature of learning**

This section explores the participants' narratives on the factors that they considered affected the social nature of learning. Workplace learning often involves other people and several of the participants had experiences of being learners and teachers/assessors in their working environment. There was a lot of rich data that required the nuances of each participant's narrative to be represented where the participants commented on the influence of others at work. There was also a lot of evidence that related to NVQs as a part of the social nature of workplace learning which makes this section more detailed than some of the others. Where examples have been chosen that represent a more common view this is identified. More detail of the NVQ assessor/candidate relationship is dealt with in Chapter 6 where the focus is on NVQs but inevitably some of the examples and experiences described here related to these relationships.

The focus of the evidence in this section supported the identification of elements 2 and 3 of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery, the integration of learning and assessment into practice that workplace managers and assessors can provide and an enhanced assessor role that

supports a learning process. There are links to other elements of a model of enhanced delivery and the evidence was not always linked specifically to the NVQ assessor role but where it was not it provided data on the type of support for workplace learning being identified. Through this exploration I began to understand the variety of individuals' approaches to learning and to assessment. It became clear that this was not straightforward in that each person had complex personal experiences and pressures that could impede or enhance engagement in learning (element 4 of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery) and this is further explored in section 5.2.2. Strategic organisational and management support evidence is also identified and this is further explored in section 5.2.3.

The importance of people who foster and encourage learning and progression was a thread within most of the interviews. Joan's narrative described a manager who had helped her develop in her career but she described a resistance to this encouragement that presented an interesting perspective. Her description made it clear that an encouraging approach might not necessarily be welcomed and this tension is worth considering especially in relation to the personal issues discussed in the next section. Managers and assessors cannot know how their approach is being received in relation to a person's history in relation to learning or their self-perception.

In her narrative (see Appendix 6) Joan remembered a manager in a home early on in her social care career:

I got pushed by the manager of that home, 'You can do it, you can do it'. I fought against it all the way, but went to Senior, then went to Grade 4, went up to Senior up the scale, then acted up as Deputy Manager. (4,8)

Joan's narrative described 'fighting' as an internal conflict that engaging in development brought about. It was a manager who understood her potential and who almost pushed her into development identifying that she was both willing and yet reluctant and who found a way to lead her into progressing. Joan stated that she did not perceive many benefits to her work from undertaking her level 4 qualifications in the way that she saw a difference in the level 2 candidates during assessment, but she had enjoyed the social nature of working alongside other people when undertaking the award. She could not see that her performance had improved and she felt that no one had told her that it had.

From a researcher perspective this identified a need for positive and explicit feedback to those undertaking a level 4 qualification. Joan was an important example to represent in the research as her experiences were much more equivocal than those of the others at her level (Alfie, Peter and Holly) and this was stated in her narrative. Her personal experience was of being encouraged but I also interpreted Joan's description of 'fighting' as a an internal

reluctance and caution about the benefits of her learning that was a key point in obtaining a more nuanced understanding of the motivations of learners in engaging in social learning and how managers and assessors had the task of understanding this before they could offer appropriate support.

Following on from Joan's reflection in her narrative on herself as a learner it was interesting to see how she then behaved as a teacher and assessor. In this role Joan had brought determination to helping her candidates succeed and she talked of learning to do things from her own experiences of being taught:

From my experience and from what I have learned. It's from watching really, staff working alongside you, seeing the way in which they interact with residents and staff and the right way of doing things. (2,3,5)

And of how she took a role in that facilitating learning:

Well let them do it, talk them through it, tell them how the rest of us do it and let them do it themselves and find out. (2,3,5)

This participative experience was seen by Joan in her narrative to be a positive experience for both assessor and candidate. She talked of two workers in the home who were thinking of doing their level 3 qualifications but how they could not quite push themselves to do it (4). She was not pushing them in the way she had been pushed by her manager recognising their reluctance and their personal situations. She stated that she understood their reasons for not engaging with further learning (4).

The researcher perspective of this was that Joan's own experience brought with it an understanding of the challenges and difficulties of learning and her story told of her putting the candidates and their personal needs first in a way that she had not always experienced herself. However Joan had progressed with the pushing from her manager and it may be that she was limiting their potential development by not encouraging them more. This understanding of the individual is not straightforward.

In contrast with Joan's approach Graham's narrative told of an assessor who encouraged him to go on to the level 3 NVQ even though it was clear that his personal situation might make it difficult (2,4,8). Graham was a participant whose narrative described a reluctant engagement with the NVQ. He questioned its general usefulness. He thought it ought to be linked to a monetary incentive that would have been a motivating factor for him. However he had undertaken one qualification and had started the second that he saw as benefits of the job that had currency in the social care sector.

It was evident from his narrative that his assessor's approach enabled him to sustain the work on the NVQ partly due to her understanding of his limited capacity due to his personal situation. From a researcher perspective Graham's narrative explored many interesting themes around barriers and motivations to learn, what makes it easier or harder and what can encourage a candidate to engage in spite of a reluctant attitude.

Graham's progress through was slow but he said that his assessor kept him to task through assessing him in practice (2,4) and helped him keep going. He described her as having just the right approach. He was qualified about the NVQ but not about his assessor. Assessment had been a fairly positive experience:

Well I get on with her for a start. She understands me quite well. She is like 'Bring your stuff tomorrow and if you don't I'll give you a slap.' And there is no sitting back; she is... always got to hand it in and keeping me on my toes and pushing me. Which to be honest I need because the NVQ is so far away from my list of what is important at the moment and she has been helpful, giving me the OK at work sometimes to be doing it. Knowing that I haven't got much time at home. (4)

This showed how important the workplace relationship was and how working in the right way with each individual could make the difference to them achieving the award or not. It was possible to see that with an assessor who left more to Graham there would not have been the same success and the assessment relationship could quickly become strained and difficult. Other participants reported having had these difficult assessment relationships at times (this was established through an examination of each narrative in relation to this point highlighted by Graham) and so Graham was an example of a candidate/assessor partnership that had successfully worked with an awareness of the challenges.

Graham's narrative told of firm views about the induction programme which he often took a role in. He suggested improvements that were based upon an increase in the work shadowing and teaching alongside the work (2,5) that would increase the sense of joint participation. He felt there was too much emphasis on individuals reading policies alone. He had concerns that the people who needed teaching in the workplace were often the ones who did not engage with the NVQ and he stated that everyone ought to have to do it. He thought it would raise standards of care and enable a standardisation of expectation about levels of acceptable care and caring.

From a researcher perspective he recognised the importance of the social part of learning and although sceptical about the NVQ he thought it was useful. Listening to Graham's general scepticism about the learning available was important as he presented some of the challenges and problems associated with workplace learning and its implementation.

Another aspect of social learning that emerged from the narratives was that of learning from bad learning experiences as well as good ones Peter described this. (8):

He was my role model initially but as time went on I thought I couldn't learn so much from him because what I saw him doing was not really inspiring.

This was raised in other narratives as well (Stacey, Paula, Alfie).

An experience of practice Peter did not think was acceptable within his personal value base had taught him how to be accountable. Others expressed the same experience. Peter said:

I thought it wasn't nice to treat someone like that.... It was a number of things.  
I thought this is not the sort of person who should be leading me.

He went on to experience a manager who he described as 'the best manager I have ever worked with' and who worked 'by the book'. He had perceived it as being a solid place from which to work but also recognised that it was possible to be more flexible and that this was potentially a more desirable state from which to lead although not personally easy for him.

From a researcher perspective it seemed that learning from bad experiences brought learners an understanding that they then translated into better personal practice. There was a discriminating approach to learning being used.

Peter was explicit in his narrative about his personal philosophy as a teacher in the workplace in a way that was inferred by others. He described himself as a sharer of knowledge and someone who would help people to develop up to, and potentially beyond, his own ability (2,3,5,8):

I believe that if you have knowledge it is not for you to sit on it. If you can get someone to your standard then you have not held anything back from them. And also you could get someone to your level and beyond.

He described how he balanced what he was prepared to offer in terms of learning with what people said they wanted (4):

If you want more then I will teach you, if you don't then I will give you what you need for your role and that's it.

This was not an approach that took into account those that might say they do not want more but could be encouraged into doing more, as has been seen with Joan and Graham, but Peter went on to explain that how he worked was very far from following his own advice. There was a mismatch between what he said was his approach and the description of his actions. This needed careful thought in representing his narrative. He described a situation

when he kept gently encouraging a staff member in the hope of improving engagement at work. It was a long process over many months and he seemed to have little confidence that he was getting anywhere (4). He had been getting supervision from his manager in relation to this issue, which had been helping. His situation was indicative of the sustained determination needed to address these issues in the workplace and how sensitive management support can help reinforce with different techniques or approaches (1,8).

Peter's approach to his own learning was quite different. As a learner Peter wanted honest feedback from his manager and was not satisfied with being told that he was a good manager, he wanted to know how he could be better (4). He had not shared that with his manager but intended to do so in order that he could make the most of his supervision. Open dialogue was important to him. He said of praise 'it's nice to get it but I don't need it', showing a strong sense of self and self-confidence. The complexity of understanding each individual as a part of the social nature of learning was becoming increasingly apparent in the analysis.

In Paula's narrative it was evident that it was not assessor experience that was important but a joint engagement in the process. Where some of the participants' narratives described experienced mentors, supervisors, assessors and managers Paula (level 2 candidate) described a sense of shared learning with an inexperienced assessor that had been an enjoyable aspect of her assessment process (2,3,4,5). She said:

You learn from people. I love working with people and learning.

She had a much younger assessor and was enjoying the sense that they were 'learning together' as the new assessor learned to assess (2, 3). This assessor made her own inexperience an attribute in the assessment process.

Paula's narrative told of a previous attempt at the NVQ level 2 in another organisation with two assessors. The assessment approach with that organisation had not proven effective and she did not achieve. She stated that she felt strongly that Homecare would not allow this to happen when she registered an interest with them in doing the award (1). This told of the importance of strategic support for learning in terms of staff confidence that their efforts will not be wasted.

Paula's narrative told of learning in relation to her NVQ that had focused around reading and research in relation to legislation, medication and confidentiality. The learning had been both self-directed and directed by her assessor in relation to both knowledge and performance. She reported it having been very useful in relation to understanding that she was working to the required standard and how important it was that she understood the boundaries of her role (2,3,4,5). She said that working alongside her assessor helped her in this process. Her

reflection upon her own learning in relation to new information was enabling her to understand her own practice better. Paula said she valued the supervision she received in Homecare and she had not received that level of support in any other care organisation (1,2). She said she thought that at times the only way to learn was to be ‘thrown in the deep end’ and recounted an occasion she had learned from through dealing with an unpleasant situation and how realising that putting the service-user first enabled her to get through it. She said it was an important part of teaching to realise when to back away and let the learner learn from their experience through reflection (3).

Where Paula’s learning had been reflective and focused on a strengthening through reading and information, Pat’s narrative (another level 2 candidate) told of how she had undertaken some learning and teaching in previous jobs and she said she thought that people learned from watching and seeing other people work (2,3). She tried to pass on advice from her own experience to new employees and remarked on learning from bad experiences as well as good ones like Peter. She left a job prior to working in Homecare because of a lack of support. Pat was another example of a participant really enjoying the assessment of her NVQ and the close contact she was having with her manager and assessor that was a result of the NVQ process (2,3,5,8). This identified a theme that other participants also explored. In a home where she worked alone for much of the time she appreciated the guidance and learning that came with the qualification (2,3,5,8). Other staff members were teasing her because she was taking it so seriously but she was very pleased with the learning and took this in good spirit. She described positive family interactions that were a result of her studying as another part of her social learning outside of work.

The two level 2 candidates (Pat and Paula) identified how valuable it had been to spend time with their manager that was specifically focused on their development in relation to the NVQ. To have access to the levels of experience accrued by these managers in an individual way was seen as most helpful and a sense of value was transmitted through their involvement in the process of assessment (2,3,5,8). From a practitioner perspective the manager of the home would not necessarily supervise the candidate as the responsibilities are devolved to different levels and so it was important to recognise that this was unusual in some circumstances.

Holly’s narrative told how she had progressed through her NVQ as a candidate and was anticipating another level 4 NVQ at the time of the interview but was open about having enjoyed a course that she had undertaken at college in a different way (4). She said the environment of teaching and classroom participation and involvement had suited her; she had found it very inspiring and done very well on the course. She felt that it was the close link to learning and practice at work that had made the college course so useful for her and she

described a feeling of isolation when she had undertaken her NVQ, as she had not had the workplace support of an involved assessor or the classroom support of fellow learners (2,4). Although proud that she had achieved her NVQ it had been a less satisfactory learning experience for her. Holly's comparing of learning approaches and preference highlighted another aspect of the need to offer different types of learning.

Although Holly's narrative told of not being successful at school the training on offer within Homecare had been one of the things that had attracted her to the job (1). The sub theme of the attractiveness of an organisation that facilitated learning in the workplace arose with other participants (Stacey, Alfie, Peter, Tracey) and was established through careful examination of the narratives of which this was a representative example (8). Holly described how being an NVQ candidate had motivated her to be an assessor, a task she had found easy and rewarding. There were opportunities presented within the NVQ scheme to develop not just as a learner but also as an assessor (7,8) and Stacey also shared Holly's view that this was a positive part of the delivery between Homecare/Centre. Holly had assessed several candidates and recognised that individual motivation was key to progressing through the award but she also pointed out that lack of motivation took its toll on the assessor who was trying to encourage progress (4):

I have had one or two individuals who, for whatever personal reasons, have not been motivated, have made excuses up for themselves, not getting the work done, that was quite bad.

This was not a perspective I had really absorbed before hearing Holly, Joan, Stacey and Peter commenting upon it (3, 4). From a researcher perspective having a motivated assessor/manager with a learner who is blocking progress was very frustrating for the assessor and an example of another aspect of the challenges represented when engaging in workplace learning and assessment. It was possible to see how support for assessors when they came across these challenges might be the key to keeping them motivated and how the close contact between an education provider and the employer to discuss these issues could be helpful. From a practitioner perspective it could also be addressed through a network of assessor support such as the assessor/verifier workshops held in Homecare. This was another level of social learning support.

Holly's narrative told of her enthusiasm as a learner that she took into her management role. This had emerged in the analysis process as it became apparent that Holly, Alfie, Peter and Joan all had similar approaches to the facilitation of learning in their homes (8). The evidence contributed to the development of element 8 in a model of enhanced NVQ delivery. Holly gave very specific examples of this and is used as a representative example. She told of how keen staff were to undertake the NVQ and how resources meant that some had to wait (1,8).

She described her approach to teaching and described a wish to inspire and motivate. She was passing on her knowledge, creating an environment in which staff were free to ask questions as many times as they needed to and encouraging staff to seek clarification when unsure. She checked that learning was being absorbed and used and recognised enthusiasm to learn and teach in others and encouraged and taught them how to use those skills. In the home she tried to use all of the opportunities for learning and teaching, described structured and planned teaching in staff meetings to fill gaps in practice noted in the workplace and of using individual supervision for a more personal approach to individual development. Her narrative described how mutual engagement in a learning process was having positive results in terms of team building and motivation. (2,3,4,5,8)

Holly displayed understanding of individuals in her team:

We've got one or two characters there who don't believe so much in themselves so it's my responsibility and part of my role to highlight what they are good at.

She talked of building on the self-esteem of staff by working on areas where they were lacking in confidence and by praising them. She felt she had won the team's respect through this approach. This example represented others' awareness of learning as more than assessment but of working with individuals to improve more general aspects of competence in practice. (2,3,4,5,8)

John and Tracey both commented on the supportive and well planned nature of their induction to the workplace and the helpfulness of staff attitudes to their learning. Their experiences as occasional worker and new member of staff meant their experiences did not encompass much more workplace learning or the NVQ so there was not much in their narratives regarding the social nature of learning.

Stacey's narrative told of her personal experience of being both types of candidate, motivated and reluctant, and of having experienced both types of assessors, one who she found difficult to work with and one with whom she progressed well. Her narrative represented many different aspects of experience of engaging in workplace learning and is used as an example here. She described a change within herself that moved her from having little interest in learning while undertaking her level 2 NVQ to a person intent on learning, making the most of all opportunities and proud of the work she was achieving at level 3 (4). She subsequently took this learning forward and became an assessor. She reflected on several managers and assessors, recognising their different attributes in terms of teaching and encouraging and one person in particular:

She was such a lovely person and she really got me enthusiastic about things. She taught you about things you liked and everything else about the job. She booked you on training courses for the things you enjoyed and so you really tried and she did that with all of us, and the one thing you were not that keen on she tended not to push us in that direction. OK when they are ready we will be pushed in that area but not at the moment. She was fabulous, she taught me a hell of a lot about care and about myself, how I learn and what I want from life. She made me think.

This very individualised understanding made an impact upon her development and later when she talked of her role as an assessor she had a clear idea about what made a good teacher (**2,3,4,5,8**):

Openness, approachability, recognising individual learning modes. Teachers who are willing to learn and take on others ideas.

She showed that persistence was beneficial and rooted in understanding and close working alongside individuals:

I will keep going over things and in different approaches each time to make sure they know what they are doing. There is nobody that I haven't been able to teach yet. (**4**)

The determination to adapt and persist with people was evident in the narratives of all the assessors; they discussed trying different approaches towards candidates in terms of being positive, encouraging effort, success and praise (**2,3,4**). They also reported times where there was a need for firmness with staff and recognition that some behaviours were not acceptable. Alfie and Joan described how starting the NVQ had identified performance issues, how they addressed these issues by planning further training so that expectations of performance could be achieved. Both of the candidates had gone on to successfully complete their NVQ with the support and guidance of their assessors who were also their workplace managers. From a researcher perspective the association between perceived poor practice and assessment of competence was an important consideration in relation to the delivery of NVQ assessment by workplace assessors (**2,4,5,8**).

Participants' narratives identified managers and assessors who gave great support and encouragement to staff (**8**). It was possible to see this role modelling of a positive experience influencing their ongoing approach. In one representative example Alfie told of a manager who had inspired him to learn, whom he admired and who had given him time and support to develop.

Alfie described himself as a keen and committed candidate, wanting to improve his presentation skills as well as his knowledge. He recognised a need to present himself in a

'professional' way and used his friends as a part of his social learning as well as colleagues to try to address these issues:

I thought I have really changed as a person. There I was staring at a blank screen and two hours later it all came to me and I was typing away, very slowly, but I thought I used to write everything now I type. And the way I write is so different, much more professional...because handing work in I thought I am not professional... So I asked my friends, 'I want this but I want to say it in a professional way, what can I change?'

From a researcher perspective this creativity as a candidate to find what was needed from whatever source was a thread within the interviews. Candidates and assessors were together and separately identifying gaps in knowledge and performance and finding ways to address them. They were showing how useful working alongside each other could be to learning in the workplace. Managers and assessors were trying to understand individual needs and trying to support and encourage and often struggling with this but some were succeeding even with candidates who identified themselves as reluctant candidates. It was clear that the internal motivation of a candidate to learn was key to successful progression but that this could be ameliorated by appropriate support (**2,3,4,5,8**).

This section has been about social learning, the people involved in supporting learning and development at work and some of the considerations that emerged from the empirical evidence. The narratives are nuanced and show how integral the relationship between assessor/mentor/manager can be in supporting social learning, personal identity and organisational factors. The evidence was not wholly about NVQs but there were many explicit links. It provided evidence towards the types of support that participants perceived as useful in their development. As such this section and the narratives contained within it are also connected to the evidence in Chapter 6. Some of these were support, supervision, contact with managers, an understanding of personal motivations and situations and management support that was focused on motivating and inspiring people to learn. What was found was that working alongside each other was a valuable part of learning and NVQ development and this supported element 2, the integration of assessment into practice. Element 3, an enhanced assessor role, was supported by the evidence in that teaching and learning was embedded in this relationship between participants and that learning not just assessment was being supported, not only in relation to NVQ standards but nonetheless incorporated into that process.

### 5.2.2. The influence of personal background on learning

This evidence presented in the previous section explores some of the personal identity issues of the learners engaged with NVQs in the workplace, how they arrived at and were

prepared for learning in this context and what they hoped for their futures. Some evidence has already been presented in the previous section in terms of how social learning was facilitated through an understanding of individuals and this section compares and contrasts some of the participants' experiences. It was more factual and less nuanced evidence and is presented in a way that reflects this with less extensive narrative evidence. What this enables is a building of a picture of the participants as learners and this is what is outlined in this section. These narratives more fully describe what was found in workplace learning research and tell of experiences from their personal perspectives. Some of the personal factors that affected the participants were identified as sub-themes at the stage of analysis and interpretation. In this section the sub-themes examined are the impact of school, family, personal identity (how people viewed themselves) and work-related identity (commitment to the organisation, job satisfaction, motivation to participate) and family identity (culture), how participants related to gaining a home life balance and their aspirations and regrets. This section demonstrates the extensive influences and factors that affect the learner in the workplace and what needs to be considered when attempting to engage staff with learning. The evidence contributed to the development of element 4, the need for attention to personal and work-related identity.

#### School and previous educational experiences

Exploring the sub theme of educational experience enabled an understanding of the individual's relationship to learning and a contrasting of past experiences and attitudes with those held currently. The contrast in many of the situations was powerful and some examples are shown here that represent what the narratives told of both experiences that were similar and those that were different.

Most of the participants' narratives told of not doing well at school, not being ready for education at the time and one described hating school. This story of failing in the school system was a consistent thread through the interviews except for the two non-UK born and educated participants (Pat and John) who reported positive and successful school experiences. John said that he had loved school. Both of these two non-UK born participants had professional qualifications that they were not using in the role within which they were being interviewed, one through choice and one through lack of opportunity (**4**).

Most of the participants did not blame school for this lack of success. Their narratives described big and difficult classes and far from ideal learning environments or of not being ready or motivated. Graham said that the school could have done better for him. Holly was clear that she was disengaged because she did not get to go to the school of her choice. Alfie and Peter expressed regret at not having done better at school, of not having made the most of the opportunities presented to them. Graham and Stacey said they had done

reasonably well at school but not fulfilled their potential. Paula and Tracey said they had not done well at school and Tracey said, 'actually I couldn't wait to get out of school and when I was out of it I couldn't wait to get back in it', this summed up many participants' attitudes.

Graham and Stacey's narratives stated that they were capable of achieving more at school but through their own choices did not do so. Stacey described almost immediately realising that a mistake had been made in not working harder and went on to rectify the situation at college. What was apparent from Stacey was that her school experiences did not necessarily deter her from learning and she addressed it later by seeking out learning in other ways.

Graham was more ambivalent but his family situation was also very different.

Several participants described a complete change of attitude to education at some point in their lives (4). Graham and Stacey described a change in attitude as soon as they left school and found that college was a much more congenial educational environment. They described a difference in attitude from teachers and tutors towards them as adult learners. Graham said:

I think I got more from the worst one of them than the best of my teachers at school.

Graham described his very vocational course at college:

I was doing something that I saw as useful.

For some it was longer before they came back to learning. Peter's narrative described his perceived lack of success at school and how this still had an influence on him with regard to learning. He was demanding of himself in how he presented written work showing how key these early educational experiences can be in establishing a learning identity in later life. Alfie described his work before finding himself in a care environment as a variety of 'jobs' and how when entering care he almost immediately starting to work on NVQs and progress within a career. His narrative told of how it was only since he started working in care that he wished he had done better at school. Holly, Alfie and Peter all described their experiences of work-related learning as changing their attitude and Holly summed this up in her narrative:

I was not ready for it then, whereas I can't get enough of it now. Study mad, training's my thing.

The interpretation of the narratives showed a commitment to their own learning that with assessors/managers translated itself into a commitment to others' learning as well and all went on to demonstrate a dedication to furthering the learning of others (3,4). Joan was very

committed to the learning of staff within the home that she worked in however there was a sense of reserve about her support that made her appear more equivocal about the benefits of learning and qualifications, both for herself and others.

This section has outlined how the participant narratives described previous educational experiences and gives a picture of the workers in this care environment and what their learning experiences had been prior to working in care. The participants that were UK educated had a very mixed experience of school although some went on to do better at college. Some were not keen learners at school and some of them brought their experiences and difficulties with them into the workplace. They were not a group of well-qualified workers (with the exception of the non-UK educated participants). When exploring the nature of what prompts a person to engage in workplace learning their previous learning experiences could well be a significant aspect to their engagement. For some it appeared that it had made them more determined, more receptive, but others brought with them a feeling of lack of success and a suspicion about learning. To be cognisant of how school experiences can effect workplace learners could be a step towards understanding ambivalences or challenges that are experienced when trying to engage learners in learning at work.

#### Family influence

This section examines the sub theme of the issues relating to family, both how original family background influences current identity in relation to learning and how current family responsibilities impact on the uptake of and attitudes to individuals' development. Not all of the participants reflected upon the impact of their own family background.

In terms of original family background and how it influenced the participants John and Pat told in their narratives of being educated abroad so their experiences of schooling were different from the rest of the sample. They had both had education post-16. One was in care-work temporarily. Both described families that were very committed to education (**4**), how this had been carried with them into their own attitudes to learning and how they passed that on to their own families. From a researcher perspective it is difficult to say that these formative experiences of education necessarily impact on future attitudes. Some of the candidates who did not have particularly positive experiences of education (Holly and Alfie for example) went on to be committed learners and Holly's narrative explored how she hoped her daughter would make good use of her educational opportunities.

Five of the UK born participants reported family attitudes to education as having influenced on them. Stacey described parents who were supportive and encouraging and who were learners themselves. Her narrative told how this encouragement had given her confidence in her ability to learn and to go onto achieve in whatever area was chosen (**4**). Stacey had

confidence about her attitude to learning that was very different from Joan who described herself as coming from a family that were uninterested in her education (4). In interpreting Joan's narrative it was difficult not to draw an inference that related to her ambivalent attitude to her later learning but Joan herself did not make this explicit.

Graham's narrative described his family as not interested in qualifications and he thought remuneration would be the strongest motivation to undertake qualifications. His motivation to achieve level 2 had been that it was recognised in job advertisements and therefore important to achieve for future employability. However an inconsistency became evident when asked about why level 3 was undertaken:

I want to say because I was told to.  
Another feather in the cap I suppose.

Graham was aware of an inconsistency in attitude and action that was highlighted in his narrative and was an important one to consider. Joan had expressed a similar family background and also expressed a similar ambivalence to learning and progression (4).

From a researcher perspective it seemed that for some of the participants there might appear to be a connection between family culture and attitudes to learning in that the three participants (Stacey, John and Pat) with supportive family attitudes had a more secure attitude to their own ability to learn. The two with less family support seemed less secure in their approach (Joan) or disinterested (Graham).

The second part of this sub theme is how current family responsibilities influence engagement with learning. Three participants discussed how personal lives meant that sometimes opportunities that were available could not be grasped. House moves, changing jobs, having a family were all issues to be balanced when undertaking training (4). More travel was seen as problematic for Holly's family life and her narrative described choices being made about travel and potential career progression. Development was restricted for other participants because of the stages of life, small children, pregnancies, working partners for example. The narratives described how there was often a fine balance between home and work (4). These are some of the family related personal issues that can prove to be hurdles to any type of learning and certainly workplace learning and NVQ achievement and yet qualifications were completed showing that family pressures alone do not predict lack of achievement.

Tracey described how she had been drawn to the work because she could see that it might fit into her plans outside of work. In her narrative she said:

I am at the age where you're thinking family and things but the maternity is fantastic as well. Maternity package and, being shift work, I think it would be easier to come back to than it would be to a full time position that is nine to five.

This was of interest because it may make it more likely that higher percentages of staff will have more family responsibilities that make engagement with learning potentially more problematic.

Holly described an interest in learning and progression within jobs but always balanced with priorities at home. Holly and Alfie expressed a wish that they had gone onto undertake their nurse training but could not afford to do so due to personal and family commitments (7). From a researcher perspective this summed up the dilemma of mature learners whose financial commitments made a return to full time study impossible. In this respect the NVQ had been paid for and supported by the organisation so had been a valuable way for Holly and Alfie to progress but they still felt that they might have missed out in some way.

This section describes the influences that the sub theme of family has on workplace learning, from the valuing of education to not considering it to be of any importance. Participants discussed their parents and their own families as being influential in their attitudes to learning and the balancing of life, work and learning. The importance of family history and culture could be another element that contributes to individual learning attitudes at work and if explored with the learner could provide an opportunity for a shifting of previously held beliefs. The understanding of how current family positions influence the choices of jobs or whether to engage in career progression would enable managers to be able to foster progression but also to understand how it might or might not fit with personal situations.

#### Aspirations and personal identity in relation to work and learning

This section outlines a sub theme of some of the differences in aspirations in terms of career pathways. It explores how the participants' personal identity at work and relationships to learning were related to a sense of potential progression within the organisation or outside of it.

Alfie in his narrative wondered what development he could aspire to next, keen to carry on learning but with no clear pathway in that all qualification requirements of the job had been met. He was ambitious but also aware that he had achieved a good balance between work and home life and was reluctant to endanger this through career progression or a move to another organisation (7). Peter's narrative described his ambition to succeed and eventually to run an organisation similar to Homecare. He used some of the interview to question me with regard to courses he could do next that would help him to take this next step (7). Holly

described opportunities for progression and was considering those that might arise both outside and inside the organisation and she was thinking about the implications of the different routes to progression. The balancing of familiarity of Homecare as an organisation and career progression was an important consideration for participants' who were planning their next moves in relation to learning and promotional opportunities (7).

Stacey's narrative described how she was not sure that she would stay in care and had plans to run her own business based on some training she had undertaken with Homecare. John was enjoying his work in care but hoped to get a permanent job in the profession he was educated for and if that arose he expressed his intention to leave care.

There was a group of participants whose narratives told of aspirations that were more about quality of life and not about career progression. Paula was content that the job she was in was what she wanted and, although she had enjoyed and got a lot from her learning, was happy not to continue any further (4). Pat was very happy with the opportunities presented to her within her current role but had left a job because of pressure and was content with her current job and the opportunities and challenges presented to her within Homecare (4). Graham seemed ambivalent in relation to both work and learning and yet he achieved. He was in a position of reviewing whether career progression was for him in a balancing of home and work (4). John was in care as a temporary measure and did not see his future in this environment (4). Tracey was enthused by her short time in care and was keen to progress and saw it as a flexible job but one with a fulfilling aspect to it and one in which she might progress (4). Most of the participants portrayed commitment and loyalty to managers, the team, the home and the service-users.

This sub theme described a group of participants with a broad agenda with regard to further learning and progression. Some saw their development as potentially taking them outside of the organisation, some were happy in their current role and some were unsure as to where they could go next. The balance of life and work in the decisions they were making was evident throughout the narratives and demonstrated some of the motivations and disincentives to engage in learning. The understanding of what is motivating learning is key to harnessing the potential to learn at work and aspirations are a key part of this. Discussions about more long-term career trajectories could enable managers to help learners to realise individual ambition through workplace learning but also to recognise if this was not a part of their individual plan.

This section has begun to examine some of the factors that might contribute to how learning in the workplace is approached or viewed from the perspective of the participants. Less positive experiences of school and family seemed to have an influence on identity but did not

preclude engagement with learning. However the nature of the sample (an NVQ cohort) meant that many of the participants (except John and Tracey who were not NVQ candidates but had experience of broader workplace learning) were (or had previously been) formally engaged in learning. The evidence is therefore weighted towards those that made a decision to undertake a qualification and is not representative of those who choose not to participate, the picture for those members of staff might be quite different. All of the participants were thinking about and balancing personal motivation to progress with personal situations. The importance of understanding all of these issues in relation to personal and workplace identity prompted the development of element 4.

### 5.2.3. Organisational context for learning

Having explored the social and personal aspects of workplace learning the other theme that remains is the influence of the organisation. Again this section builds on the evidence presented in the previous two sections and some of the links between strategic and management/assessor support have already been explored. Many common themes emerged in narratives that mean the construction of this section outlines and summarises these perspectives. This section brings the focus on this aspect through the lens of workplace learning to show how element 1 was developed but the evidence also showed how the strategic implementation of the Homecare/Centre model was supported by a framework of support and manager/assessor approach (elements 2,3,5 and 8). The key concepts previously examined in Chapter 3 highlighted the importance of the organisational context for learning. In this research there were two aspects of the organisation, the individual homes and Homecare the central organisation. Thus in ascertaining the staff view of the organisational impact on workplace learning both features needed to be considered. Another organisational dimension is the close association between Homecare and the Centre in relation to the delivery of the NVQ. In this section assessors'/managers' perspectives are more predominant, partly because their experience was broader in relation to individual home and organisation and partly because the level 2 and 3 candidates were all very positive in their narratives with regard to the organisational context, praising their assessors and the organisation as doing all that could be expected and more in terms of support for learning. Element 8 is built on in Chapter 6 but is also strongly evident in this section (**1,3,5,8**).

All of the participants' narratives described a strong, clear message of support for staff development that came from the organisation-level managers to all members of staff (**1**). In spite of some criticisms this view was the foundation of all the narratives in relation to this theme. In spite of squeezing of budgets training continued, this was summed up by Joan:

Well I think they are very good. We had a meeting Wednesday talking about how we can cut back on things generally. We are getting close to the end of the financial year, that's coming up. I said, 'I don't like to cut back on the training, you know I am offering it all the time.' I am sometimes surprised because budgets are sometimes tight and yet they are still encouraging us to do more things. They are offering more training; yes they are still paying out for us to do stuff. (1,8)

Joan, Alfie, Peter and Holly commented on the importance of the relationship between the Centre and Homecare. The participants did not comment on why this might have been successful but from the researcher perspective the sustained commitment to a developing relationship and consistent staff members may have contributed. Other employers' delivery has sometimes been subject to reactive planning that is responsive to funding priorities. This enabled a culture to become embedded that could be seen to contribute to its success. (1,6).

There were strong expressions in narratives of loyalty and commitment to Homecare as an organisation that was a significant in most of the interviews (1,4). Joan, Alfie, Peter, Graham, Pat and Paula expressed how important the warmth of professional relationships was to feeling content within an organisation. Time, personal disclosure and time to chat about issues that were not necessarily work-related were described as being linked to this. Supervision of managers was viewed very positively; the feeling of being listened to and supported was appreciated. This was something that Holly, Alfie and Joan described in their narratives and were keen to develop within their teams as they could see that this personal connection helped a feeling of team spirit and increased morale. All of the managers expressed that they valued that experience with the organisational management team. Holly and Alfie's narratives described positive recognition from management as being important to them and increasing staff morale when it reported to the teams in the homes (1,8). Joan, Alfie and Holly expressed loyalty to the home and the team but not so clearly to the organisation (8). Holly, Peter and Tracey described how the organisation's training policy had an impact on joining the organisation and in one case promises of training had influenced a return after a period elsewhere (1,8). From a practitioner perspective the evidence indicated that the organisation had created a culture of co-operation and trust that enabled staff to feel that needs were being addressed and investment in teaching and learning was a part of this. In Holly's words Homecare had developed a 'learning culture' both in the organisation and in individual homes (8).

There were two narratives that described a less positive view of organisational management. Joan's narrative stated that some situations were dealt with too severely and this affected morale and restricted staff aspiration. Staff were concerned about taking promotion that left them more exposed to risk. She felt that organisational management had been reduced considerably, that resource was stretched too thinly and that there was too much to do. Joan and Holly both felt that communication could be improved, telephone calls and being kept

informed. Holly mentioned the need to be able to 'offload' and how at times this was not available. She had been able to feed this back to the organisational management team and she viewed them being open to feedback as positive (1,8).

With regard to the management in the individual homes the narratives all indicated that learning was taking place. Managers were said to be encouraging development and proud of their encouragement of people. (3,8) Managers had a positive view when staff expressed ambition and wanted to progress (4,8). Alfie recognised that there had been a cultural shift in the workplace since he became manager of the home:

Over two and a half years the team are much more responsive to going on stuff. They go with more of an open mind. I think it is from the culture of going on things and coming back with a positive view... Without being forced to go, encouraged. Asked to go on things they wouldn't have done and now they are pleased they have done it. And they do ask to go on courses now. And rather than putting people forward they are requesting to go on courses.

There was improvement in workplace practices, engagement and contribution:

I think the staff are more confident in their roles, they are becoming more knowledgeable and more confident. I have noticed at team meetings that there is much more interaction, people give their views and disagreeing more too. Because they have an increased knowledge and competence they feel they are coming from a point where they can disagree and give you a reason why, so I think that people have developed there. (3,5)

Most participants, both candidates and assessors, at some point during the narratives reflected on how learning occurs in the workplace, these were typical remarks from Paula and Stacey (8):

Seeing the way in which they interact with residents and staff and the right way of doing things. Seeing what is most beneficial and pleasant for the residents really.

By being inquisitive, asking questions. I was always watching managers thinking I could be good at this work.

Tracey gave the new employee slant on learning at work in the organisation (8):

Everyone's always said 'Come to me if you need help. Always double check you know. Don't do anything unless you're confident with it.' It's just been fantastic.

She had a positive view of the induction process:

I did two weeks in middles and then I started on shifts. But I wasn't actually on a shift so I can observe how different people like to be showered or washed, what their individual procedures were in the morning and at night, before I was included in as a member of staff. Because obviously everyone's different and they all have their different needs and ways that they like to have things done. Different procedures that I'd read actually started making sense as they started talking about it. So it wasn't one person standing in front of you talking at you for three days. It was different people coming in telling us about their experiences as well and making it personal if you like and getting more involved in things.

Graham was less positive about the induction. He felt that reading policies at the beginning was of limited use until there was more familiarity with working processes with which to understand the application of policy. He felt that earlier work shadowing would provide a more satisfactory induction. (5)

Joan observed that learning in the workplace happened from watching, working alongside, telling and showing and letting them try, talking them through how others do it and always encouraging them to ask questions (3, 8):

I say to all of them, 'don't be afraid to ask if you don't understand what I am saying. Ask me, don't go off and try to do if you don't understand what you are doing and then wish you had asked how to do it. Keep asking me.'

Pat, Paula and Graham, who were undertaking NVQ levels 2 and 3, described in their narratives a positive view of support from both the organisational management team and from the individual homes' managers 1,8). Although Stacey had experienced a less positive relationship with an assessor in Homecare this experience was not widespread indicating that most of the assessors were giving the necessary support. John reported making good use of the learning available to him within Homecare, supplementing induction and mandatory training with personal research (1,2,3,8). Paula's narrative (level 2 candidate) described her positive view of the supervision system in Homecare. She had worked in several other organisations and had never been supported so well. She remarked upon regular supervision that was focused on her personal development and the fact that she could request supervision if there was a particular matter that she wanted to discuss (8). Alfie and Peters' narratives described assessors whose committed support had influenced them beyond the completion of the NVQ, into wider learning in relation to practice and had become role models for their future in relation to learning and teaching as well as care. (8)

Alfie, Joan, Peter and Holly were in management roles and their narratives all described very positive environments for working and teaching and there were commonalities between these stories. These participants described supportive, of flexibility of support, of feeling listened to and of encouragement from the top of the organisation down to the staff in the homes. Some of them mentioned the Human Resource team, operational, supervision and

CSCI (Commission for Social Care Inspection) inspections as being part of this encouragement. There was loyalty expressed, a feeling of having been treated well and having done well as a result. Holly and Alfie's narratives described how they enjoyed being in an organisation that is respected as a high quality provider of care. Eight participants' narratives discussed the support of senior managers, their positive view of people succeeding and moving on and encouragement to progress and develop within the organisation. Although there were expressions of loyalty in the narratives Joan and Holly expressed some criticisms and Alfie discussed this freedom to talk openly to auditors (1,8).

All of the managers' narratives identified an approach to home management that Alfie described as 'track suit' management. He differentiated between managers who worked on the floor alongside their team and those more likely to be found 'suited up' and in the office. All of the managers felt that working alongside their team was an important part of their style. They needed to show that there was nothing they would not do, nothing they expected others to do that they would not do (8). Joan said:

I still feel like a support worker, part of the mob.

Joan's narrative described her personal management approach as being based upon what she saw herself and not reports from others. She tried to be flexible but recognised that there were boundaries and felt uncomfortable asking too much about staff and their personal lives. Her tips for good management were to be, 'fair, firm, friendly, approachable, to respect and look after staff and never ask them to do anything I am not prepared to undertake myself.' (8)

The managers' narratives all told of how reliant they were on their team and how they need to be available to them and their concerns. Holly found it very difficult to find the time to work 'on shift' but made it a priority because she viewed it as essential (8). She described the need to understand co-workers and how this helped her get the best out of them, knowing when they were struggling and how to help them through it. Joan described her awareness of the boundaries of managing and the need to maintain a certain distance in order to manage well. (8)

The managers all mentioned in their narratives their openness about mistakes, a need to be able to discuss errors in order that they will not occur again. They felt that it was important that people were allowed to fail and learn from failing. Alfie noted that this was possible in the current team due to the level of trust and support but that could change as a manager he had to be attuned to those changes. (8)

Alfie's narrative described his own learning process with a manager whom he had found inspirational and it was here that again the importance of interpersonal relationships was raised in terms of workplace development. He described how he learned how to deal with difficult situations positively and how he learned from an open and interactive communication about different aspects of management. He tried to pass this on by encouraging courses, giving staff clear guidance about change and approaching development positively. He described his openness to feedback from staff, encouraging them to talk any difficult issues through with him. (3,8)

From a researcher perspective the evidence indicated that his own management and teaching style closely reflected his experience. This summed up what was present in all of the managers' narratives and was particularly resonant with Holly's perspective. These managers were asking for feedback as well as giving it. They were not flinching from giving difficult feedback but they knew that it was sometimes difficult to take and they tried to put it in a positive frame and acknowledge the need to learn. Alfie's narrative told of how he used personal experience to explain without implying he was always right or perfect. He also described situations where he let the will of the team be exercised even if he did not think it was the course of action that he would have applied. He was willing to try another approach to see how it worked out and was open to listening to different opinions and ways of doing things. Alfie said,

It's not right to have a team that just does as it's told. The flip side is they argue, which is good, it's good to be challenged to make you think have I done that right, could we do things differently? ... You do have lots more time discussing things with people, but I prefer it that way, the team meetings are much more lively now. (8)

Peter was much more intent on leading in a way that was related to a sense of accountability and responsibility and this made sharing control very challenging for him. (8)

It seemed that there was a question related to teaching within these interviews. From a practitioner and researcher perspective it seemed that teaching as a separate entity, or skill, had not been explicitly embedded within the organisation; it was not a part of management team job descriptions. As a practitioner I was used to asking what assessors would do to raise candidates' competence levels and receiving a response that they would send them on training. Many assessors did not recognise that they would inform, question, guide and advise regarding the gaps in understanding and how they might be addressed. There did seem to be something fundamental within social care where the role of teacher was not being developed or recognised. Nurses are taught that teaching is a part of their role in the workplace and teaching is an accepted pathway of progression and the associated qualifications are well regarded. It seemed that there was not this focus in social care

although lately some employees in Homecare have begun coaching courses and this experience was reported in two of the narratives. (3)

Most participants interviewed disassociated themselves from being called a teacher. A typical response from Holly was:

I sort of see teaching as someone standing up in front, in a classroom type setting.

However there was evidence of workplace teaching practice. When asked whether the role modelling, feedback, coaching, supervision, observation, instruction, information-giving roles were viewed as teaching participants agreed, but half-heartedly. Most agreed that the workplace was a teaching environment. Trainer, mentor, supervisor, coach were all acceptable descriptors but not teacher. Alfie described anxiety and nerves at undertaking a formal teaching role on the organisational induction programme but the gradual growth of confidence after undertaking the teaching several times. (3,8)

Holly's narrative told of how she managed teaching in the home by creating a culture where there was no shame in not knowing and how using team meetings as a forum to discuss and explain encouraged this. She felt her team knew that her door was always open to them. There was evidence of strategic planning in relation to teaching with strengths being identified and then teaching devolved through the staff team as skills in certain areas were developed. She described swapping roles around the staff team to encourage development. She hoped that she was an inspirational manager in that she is hard working, well qualified, loyal and demonstrates respect for all the staff. She discussed how understanding people was key to her approach, that people were sometimes lazy and how to confront that without it becoming confrontational. She said it was possible to be a firm manager when she had the respect of her team (3,8).

In his narrative Alfie explored whether different ethnic backgrounds employed in the home had an impact on the culture and any impact on the learning and teaching environment. In his narrative he said how he found that it made the workplace more interesting, he was keen to learn about Ramadan and other festivals. He had observed that if English was not the first language then there could be issues about inappropriate use of language and recording was sometimes difficult. He had some experience where the home culture was 'much more bubbly and loud' and service-users had experienced this as shouting and this was a cultural difference that needed to be resolved so that the service-users were comfortable. He had also noticed that there were interesting comparisons made to how care was managed in care workers' countries of birth but felt this was discussed as a matter of general interest and that people were happy to adapt their ways of working. He told of an increased number of part

time carers who are studying and working for 20 hours per week. He was full of praise for them as carers although most did not intend to make their career in care (3,5,8). From a researcher perspective this represents a development in social care where investment is being made in training staff that may not in the long-term stay in care environments. Alfie's view was an important observation in terms of creating culturally appropriate care within a workplace.

Alfie's narrative told of teaching through a discussion with regard to race:

I was having another conversation with someone who was saying that people from another culture are all bad and I was saying how can you say that? We had quite a discussion on diversity and discrimination... A couple of days later she said, 'I thought about what I said to you and deep down that is my belief but I do see that what I said to you was wrong.' So going back to discussions, seeing how people from different cultures don't get on or maybe from the same country but from different areas just don't like each other we have had conversations with them explaining this to me. Things aren't cut and dried. It's seen as black and white people, and it's not that at all, that has paled into insignificance really it has.

This quote gives voice to the theme of underpinning values as a part of integrated assessment that will be further discussed in section 6.7.4. From a researcher perspective it shows how staff are having to deal sensitively with issues of prejudice in a way that does not alienate workers but allows for reflection and consideration of strongly held beliefs. This evidence of working with what is naturally occurring in the workplace and using it to facilitate teaching was a common thread in the narratives and part of integrating assessment and learning in the workplace. In an environment where there has always been cultural diversity it was interesting to see how the issues that arose from this were being addressed and open conversations were being held that shifted perspectives and enabled people to understand what was appropriate in terms of expressing personal beliefs in a professional environment. These are the types of teaching opportunities that are crucial in the development of appropriate professional values and behaviour and yet are rarely talked about. (2, 3,5)

This section gives voice to a view of the organisation from the people who work within it in relation to workplace learning and teaching, a picture that has both positive aspects and areas where the participants perceived areas of difficulties. In spite of a reluctance to claim the title of teacher there was plenty of evidence of teaching occurring in the workplace. A participative approach to observing and working alongside learners, questioning, creating opportunities for discussion and learning, letting people try and learn from experience were all described. As a learning environment most of the participants were positive about what was available with one criticism of the induction process. Teaching skills were discussed in terms of planning teaching, openness to challenging teaching situations and a responsiveness to using workplace situations as teaching opportunities. The narratives

supported the view that in general the learning and teaching environment within Homecare facilitated learning and supported staff development. Some concern about organisational level support for managers was expressed in terms of time and stretched resources.

Some of the ways that this was encouraged bear examination in terms of workplace learning strategy for other organisations and the idea of being responsive to learning opportunities in the workplace is something that resonates. A flexible and intuitive approach to the identification of learning opportunities and in creating teaching opportunities that supported learning. These are the people facilitating a culture of openness within which learning and teaching can take place and is encouraged and the perspective of managers, assessors and candidates has been included to show how this can impact on the learning and teaching environment and practices. The importance of the strategic support of learning at all levels was clear within the research and the way that this was passed down was seen to be consistent at all levels as well. It was about providing an environment that was personally supportive and encouraging and this involved a commitment of time to staff in the workplace.

### **5.3. Discussion in relation to workplace learning**

In this section the themes and related key concepts previously explored in Chapter 3.1 are discussed in relation to the research findings within Homecare to draw out further understanding of how they can contribute to a model of enhanced NVQ delivery. The section explores issues regarding the social nature of learning and the support of learning in the social care workplace, the influence of personal history and identity and how these can be mediated by guided learning strategies, access to opportunities to learn and expertise in the organisation. Whilst recognising that this is a small study with a limited number of self-selected participants this section begins to identify the key elements that an organisation might consider in relation to establishing the most conducive environment for the engagement with NVQs and a model of enhanced NVQ delivery. The evidence in this section contributed to elements 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8 of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery.

#### **5.3.1. The social nature of learning/support for learning (relates to evidence in 5.2.1)**

The social and participative nature of learning (Billett, 1998, 2001c, 2002; Lave and Wenger, 1991) was considered in section 3.1 and is evidenced within this research. It provides a focus for the support for elements 2 and 3 but also links to elements 1, 5, 6 and 8. Assessors, managers and candidates described how experienced people supported their learning and helped development in the workplace. People promoted learning in Homecare. Even when there were negative experiences of interpersonal relationships a committed candidate could use the experience to spur them on to learn and develop. There were many

reports of good support, of assessors and managers who understood their staff and worked with them to support learning and help them achieve qualifications. Examples of both formal and informal learning were given; planned teaching that occurred in supervision and in team meetings and unplanned teaching in the normal routine of work in response to issues as they arose.

The importance of an experienced person working alongside an inexperienced person supporting learning was clearly present within the research showing social and participative learning within Homecare. It was clear that assessors and candidates were meeting regularly and learning, assessment was being planned and taking place. Candidates appreciated the time and effort that their assessors were investing in their development with many other calls on their time. Many of the assessors expressed commitment to the support of learning at work and candidates reported their appreciation of the support. There was evidence of an approach to learning at work that supported candidates to arrive at conclusions for themselves. This was evidenced through facilitated discussion of difficult subjects such as racism and the expression of beliefs that were not appropriate in the workplace. There was evidence of encouragement and support between staff at similar levels and between different grades of staff. The encouragement of a reflective approach to the support of learning about values was present and will be more fully discussed in section 6.5.

There was evidence of teaching in the workplace being planned and undertaken that contested French and Bazalgette's (1996) view that this skill had been forgotten in workplaces but there did seem to be an opportunity for raising the profile of teaching. Several candidates reported learning from observing, listening and asking questions (Guile and Griffiths, 2001). Modelling good practice in the workplace was seen as one of the important benefits of being part of the work team and working alongside staff and there were many references to learning from these occasions at work. Both formal and informal learning (Lee et al., 2004) were reported in the narratives. Formal learning was reported in classroom environments on inductions and in sessions held centrally in the organisation. Informal learning was reported in the workplace where assessors initiated sessions on policy and practice that was particular to the workplace and supports research (Billett, 1998, 2001c, 2002; Engeström, 2004) on the importance of the context of supporting meaningful learning.

There was a positive view about learning and motivation to improve in many of the interviews. Sfard's (1998: 7) metaphor for participative learning was strongly present within the research in relation to the collaborative process of learning at work. When performance deficiencies were identified managers gave examples of how learning was supported in the workplace, with both a structured approach to specifics as well as a more reactive approach to issues arising in the workplace. These situations were approached with sensitivity and

determination to elicit change with managers taking responsibility for their part in some of the problems encountered and making plans about how to move forward positively. In the assessment of competence assessors were identifying learning gaps and Eraut's (2004) concept of the need for connectivity between the assessment of performance and the more formal support for learning that is necessary at times was shown to be working within Homecare. Examples were given where home-level managers removed candidates from NVQ assessment in order that performance issues could be addressed. Once these candidates were considered to have had the necessary support they were re-engaged with the NVQ for assessment.

Although there was evidence of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) in Homecare it seemed that this is an area for further development. It was more evident in the assessors' references to the NVQ assessment community within Homecare than for candidates. Workplaces were described that shared some of Wenger's (1998) identified features of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire (Wenger 1998: 130). These were described as a sharing of practice standards and peer encouragement to learn and improve, but it was not as strongly evidenced as other concepts identified in 3.1. Some references were made to candidates joining together to work (at level 4) but this was not common practice and Sfard's (1998) learning as acquisition metaphor was more widely present for candidates at level 4. There was also evidence of this at levels 2 and 3 where candidates referred to the benefits of independent study, reading and research. From a practitioner perspective it would be possible to encourage and foster further networking about support for learning within Homecare in this regard. In NVQ terms the assessor is key to understanding how workplace learning and teaching becomes most effective and makes the most of all opportunities for development. Through approaching learning supportively and facilitatively there are opportunities for encouraging candidates that would otherwise be reluctant to engage.

Assessors were shown to be making continued attempts to draw staff members into further engagement at work and learning and there was recognition from both assessors and candidates that this was happening. Illeris (2003) commented on how competence-developing initiatives could be a way of engaging students with learning through an understanding of their identity and motivation. Motivated assessors found candidates who are not keen to progress very frustrating and so in turn was the opposite, when assessors were slow to respond to keen candidates. Several participants reported both of these situations having occurred within and outside Homecare. Assessment relationships became strained when there was not convergence of motivation. The benefits to engaging were perceived as both personal and organisational. It was felt that the complexity and effort involved in assessing the NVQ was not fully appreciated by organisational-level managers, a

finding that Billett (2003) reported in his research. Assessors reported undertaking most of their assessment work at home outside of work hours but accepted this as inevitable when faced with the pressures of work. Assessors were seen to have to cajole at times but at others to encourage and direct was all that was necessary. The participants generally approved of Homecare's policy of always making the NVQ optional supporting Illeris' (2003, 2006) point that learners' motivation to learn was paramount to engagement in workplace learning and there was no feeling of coercion in any of the narratives.

The close relationship of candidate and assessor is potentially one way of shifting an individual's view of themselves and helping them to engage with learning even when they are stating and showing their reluctance. The collaboration between candidates and assessors in the research was not consciously adopted in terms of helping candidates to engage in learning but a naturally occurring part of workplace practice. There was ownership of the qualifications by some of the candidates that was a feature of other research in the field (Pillay et al., 2003, Kember, 1999) as an indicator for achievement. For the one candidate who seemed to have less ownership it was his committed assessor had been key to achievement of the qualification. The acceptance of the pressures of home life and a commitment to find a way for the candidate to remain engaged with learning had been essential.

Moving on from the consideration of what holds people back from learning and the challenges of encouraging reluctant candidates to engage is the question of how to keep them engaged once they have committed themselves, sometimes still reluctantly. Managers and assessors altered their approaches to engage staff members when aware of difficulties and adapted when initially unsuccessful. This related to Billett's (2000, 2003) research about the importance of providing training for mentors in order that support for workplace learning could be improved. It was not possible to identify that the training of NVQ assessors had influenced this approach specifically, as it could have come from other learning and experience, however there is a focus upon the flexibility of learning to support individual candidates that is integral to the NVQ and within the delivery by the Centre.

Several of the assessors commented on the benefits of the close relationship with the Centre staff and supported the view of the importance for employers to have a person experienced in NVQs to facilitate. This had been identified as an important factor in NVQ delivery by other authors in the field (Matlay, 2000; Purcell, 2001). The NVQ delivery within Homecare is a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Homecare has constituent members of a community that is already embedded in the organisation. Assessors, verifiers and myself from the Centre meet regularly regarding assessment updates, and workshops where assessor practice monitoring and development takes place. There is a structure already in

place that could be grown in terms of development of strategic organisational learning about teaching. Rather than trying to impose something new, the offering of opportunities to make more of what already exists could extend interest and enthusiasm for the concept of workplace learning and the opportunities available to make the most of learning and teaching at work. This might also encourage new or hesitant assessors to engage if they felt that they were joining an established and supportive group that would help them learn.

From the empirical evidence there was much to support the key concepts established in 3.1 in relation to the social and participative nature of support for learning in the workplace. The importance of the context in making learning meaningful, the participation of assessors who are not only taking account of the context of learning but who are attuned to the needs of the individual candidate and have understanding about how to facilitate different types of learning were all evident. The Homecare/Centre delivery was also seen to be a useful part of the learning support in the workplace. In this section there was a focus on elements 2 and 3 but there was evidence that other key elements (elements 1,4,5,6 and 8)were present within the Homecare/Centre delivery.

### 5.3.2. The influence of personal background on learning/personal and work-related identity (relates to 5.2.2)

The focus for this section is on how theory and empirical evidence combined to develop an understanding that contributed to element 4 (attention to learner and workplace identity).

Wenger (1998) describes how identity is constantly being re-negotiated and Collin (2009) explores how both personal and work changes can contribute to that re-negotiation. In working closely with learners within the workplace a very individualised approach can develop and those not intrinsically motivated to achieve (Illeris, 2003) can access learning. This research indicates how attitudes shifted, how a personal biography, history or belief system about learning changed through time or through the availability of appropriately targeted opportunities and support for learning. Candidates described their changes in relation to learning over time and assessors reported the changes in candidates that their support facilitated.

With regard to personal biography (Billett, 2001b; Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004) and identity (Collin, 2009; Wenger, 1998) the research shows that most of the participants had a generally negative experience of schooling and some came from families that did not value ongoing education and training. Considering their prior experiences the candidates might have been expected to be reluctant to engage in the NVQ. There was some evidence of this

reluctance but there was also evidence of commitment to learning and enthusiasm for it expressed by both candidates and assessors.

What candidates are struggling with in relation to engaging with learning is one of the interesting issues here and it seemed to be a combination of low self-confidence or self-worth and previous experiences of learning, always balanced with the individual agency that Illeris (2003) and Billett (2001b) refer to, an internal balance that is built around the question of 'Why bother?'. Some of the personal issues discussed above can account for an initial lack of motivation. Family history and background, personal life changes and stresses, a potential lack of motivation to progress in a career may all impede election to engage and yet assessors still managed to coax progress and learners still allowed it to happen, some reluctantly but some eagerly. Billett's (2001b) emphasis is on improving the quality of the workplace learning opportunities in order to increase the chances of the individuals electing to engage. It is here that the assessor was seen to make a difference. They improved the quality of the workplace learning through support of the learner. The organisational support was also a part of this improving the quality of the workplace learning on offer so that learners were willing to participate in the NVQ. It was evident for those in the sample that it takes an understanding of the individual and a relationship where pushing is perceived not as harassment but encouragement. It is worth remembering (as Alfie and Pat stated) that not all the encouragement happens within the workplace. Friends that read manuscripts, offer suggestions, engage in discussions helped learning.

Collin (2009) explored the notion that identity might be a way to understand the gap between the individual affordances that Billett (2001b) describes and what essentially motivates some people to engage with learning and development. It seemed as though sometimes family background and personal identity held candidates back from a full appropriation of work-related identity and from the opportunity to negotiate within the workplace (Collin, 2009). What may be worth considering is how to help learners engage through understanding the reasons for a lack of participation and how to overcome it. Billett (2001b) describes how it is largely fruitless to encourage engagement if there is no personal will but if asking why there is no will there does not seem to be a straightforward answer. The concept of identity could be the bridge to understanding this issue and if this is the problem then addressing how to engage people in learning is a question of dealing with issues of personal identity that are obstacles to engagement.

The issue of identity was borne out in relation to schooling as well. Although most were not successful at school there was little blaming of schools or teachers, there was a personal responsibility taken for the lack of achievement. The lack of success was shown to stay with participants long after they left school and some of the candidates remained conscious of

their performance at school. Some of the participants discussed how difficult it was for them to leave behind historical perceptions of themselves even when they had more recent evidence of more positive engagement with learning.

The home managers reported aspirations beyond the current regulatory framework of NVQ level 4 and yet were unclear about what might be available to them. It was clear that full time education on a professional level course would not be a possibility for these participants who had financial responsibilities that would preclude the cost. The pathway for development for home managers after achievement of their level 4 was not clear to the participants but what was clear was their continued determination to find a way to continue learning. Identity issues followed the participants in relation to learning and the familiarity of the NVQ could be seen to be a hurdle to engaging in other forms of learning for some of the managers.

Wenger (1998) explored identity as being as much about non-participation as participation, what people choose not to do tells its own story. The participants in this research were the ones that presented themselves for the NVQ. Some learners expressed their ambivalence to learning, some due to pressures outside of work but one had been concerned about her age and another about the lack of financial motivation. These were the candidates who put themselves forward for the NVQ and it would indicate that it might be similar issues that are holding others back. Work-related identity seems to be a good way of understanding this difference in attitudes and could be further explored with those who chose not to engage. It would indicate that there might be many other more reluctant learners in the workplaces, something specifically stated in one interview. While the required level of qualification through regulation remains at fifty percent of the workforce this may continue to be the case. With a greater understanding of the importance of personal motivation (Illeris, 2003, 2006) it might be possible to persuade and involve those who are holding back. The personal features identified within others' work also featured within this research. These were, biography (Billett, 2001b; Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004); fear, anxiety, family and work life balance (Kember, 1999; Pillay, 2003). Relationship building in the workplaces has been discussed at length in the previous section in terms of relationships that can overcome challenges for individuals.

For some learners it was evident in narratives that there had been an ongoing negotiation of their own identity in relation to workplace practice and learning that resulted in participation but not always without hesitation, reluctance and some level of scepticism. In the narratives there was a clear expression of the support for learning from organisational management. All the participants reported high levels of encouragement and access to learning opportunities. Collin (2009) discussed work-related identity as being aided by support and encouragement by management.

Some candidates achieve in spite of significant personal and professional hurdles but some fall at the first one and then there are those who shift, who start with a more sceptical attitude and who are gradually drawn in to the process. As a practitioner I see candidates whose whole demeanour in the classroom shifts; from nervous, slightly aggressive reluctance to learn to interested, engaged and keen to go on to learn more. The assessors reported seeing changes in attitude, confidence and engagement, reporting more discussion, helping others to learn and an increased interest in workplace decisions. This could be due to increased confidence (Norman and Hyland, 2003; Rosenfeld, 1999; Sargeant, 2000) (this will be explored further in section 6.5). It could be a personal shift in the way that they see themselves that allows this change or maybe it is a combination of both. What does seem clear is that the assessor can make a difference here. It might be that the better assessors were more likely to have volunteered for the research but I am not convinced that this is the case. In terms of NVQ assessment they were mixed in relation to their approach but they did all have similarities as managers and in terms of commitment to doing a good job. This appeared to help them to focus on each of their staff members very much as individuals and look at how they might help them do better with a knowledge that the workplace, the staff team and the service-users would all benefit.

Many personal factors emerged from the research in relation to what inhibits and promotes learning at work that have links to the previous and next sections in this chapter. Identity and biography were seen to be key to understanding engagement. School and family experiences could be seen to have a long lasting effect in terms of the identity of the individual and their willingness to engage in learning. The balance of home, life and work could be seen to be present in the equation of engagement. The concepts explored in section 3.1 were established within the empirical findings and the relationship of learner and work-related identity was identified as a key element of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery (element 4).

### 5.3.3. The organisational context for learning/expansive and restrictive practice (relates to 5.2.3)

This section focuses on how the organisation influences learning engagement both at organisational and home levels in Homecare and the focus was on element 1 but the evidence also contributed to evidence for the development of elements 2,3,5, 6 and 8.

In relation to the managers and the working and learning environments they were striving to create, it is worth considering again the work by Billett (2001b: 214) but this time in relation to 'invitational' workplaces. I have previously explored his view that the quality of learning

opportunities influences the engagement of individuals and here the organisational factors that contribute to the quality of Homecare workplaces are examined. In reviewing the 'expansive and restrictive continuum' (Fuller and Unwin, 2004: 130), it is possible to identify many aspects of the expansive workplace within Homecare in relation to the valuing of team work and a sense of the workplace offering a community of practice, managers as facilitators of workplace development, pathways for career development, opportunities for a variety of different forms of development and recognition of workers as learners at all levels.

There was evidence of loyalty to the organisation and several expressions of how valuable the warmth of the staff relationships were to a positive working environment. There were experiences of being listened to and supported expressed by all of the participants. The advantages of working within a small organisation were identified by some of the participants, there was a feeling of community expressed, more particularly by the managers who engaged more regularly with each other across the organisation. Experiences of a feeling of organisational identity were more limited at level 2 and 3 learners but one participant reported a recent developmental experience within another home indicating that there was a focus on developing staff within the organisation.

What was demonstrated was how aware each of the managers was in relation to both individual and team development. Managers expressed a belief that staff should be allowed to make mistakes without excessive resort to discipline but to focus on what could be learned in order that mistakes did not happen again. Being an assessor helped them to focus on some of the areas in need of improvement and it was possible to clearly identify the social side of the learning and teaching environment.

There were many references made to the support available for training and one organisation-level manager stated that they 'might as well give up' if they stopped training the staff. This message had been clearly communicated to the staff and an example was given of a managers' meeting where end of year budgets were tight and being closely monitored but training was still being approved as evidence of this ongoing commitment. There was evidence of encouragement of different types of training and a broad attitude to what was relevant to the workplace. The feeling of top-down support from organisational was present throughout the narratives. There was repeated evidence from managers about their focus on providing opportunities within the homes for learning to occur, the facilitative approach adopted by these managers might be seen as being a part of the invitational setting. An environment where if mistakes were made they were used as learning opportunities and where staff could be heard and make contributions that were taken seriously in terms of the work of the home may add to this. There was little doubt in the research that all the participants regarded Homecare as providing a supportive learning environment and staff at

all levels reported that learning was valued and committed to in terms of financial support as well as encouragement and help from co-workers. The valuing of the NVQ was felt by all the participants. The close relationship with the Centre was viewed positively and the workshops at the University were seen as a tangible example of workplace support.

Collin (2009) describes how an employer who is attuned to how work-related identity can shift at times of personal and workplace change and who is prepared to accommodate and react positively and flexibly can benefit immensely by retaining commitment rather than finding themselves with employees with 'intention to quit, absenteeism and general dissatisfaction' (Collin, 2009: 33). For most participants these seemed to be personal struggles rather than a lack of flexibility on behalf of Homecare. The family friendly policies were viewed very positively but the balance between work and personal life was evident in many of the narratives and carefully considered by the participants.

There was evidence of support for learning at organisational and home level in Homecare. Assessors and learners all appreciated the opportunities for learning and development and were mostly active in making the most of these both for themselves and others. Strategic implementation of a culture to support learning was found to be evident and provided evidence for the development of element 1 and 8 although there was also evidence that supported elements 2 and 3.

This discussion section has summarised what has been found in the research in relation to the original research purpose to explore staff perspectives on factors that inhibit or support learning through NVQs in the workplace. It has related the findings to the exploration of the workplace learning research previously discussed in Chapter 3.1 and identified some key elements connected to the social nature of learning, personal and work-related identity and expansive workplace practices that contribute to evidence of delivery between Homecare/Centre. The evidence has been shown to apply across most of the elements of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery but the key elements that have been focused upon are:

1. Strategic implementation of the NVQ (expansive practice)
2. Workplace assessors who integrate assessment into practice (support for learning)
3. An enhanced assessor role that supports a learning process (support for learning)
4. Attention to learner and work-related identity (personal and work-related identity)

These will be added to in the next section and summatively explored in Chapter 6.

## **6. RESEARCH OUTCOMES: NVQS**

The method of construction of this chapter (and Chapter 5) has been described in Chapter 4 as a large bubble, created by the merging of several smaller bubbles that contain each individual narrative. The themes and sub-themes are explored through the individual narratives. This at times means that data appears in both chapters as it has been drawn on in different ways to show perspectives in relation to different themes. Due to the nature of the narratives and the interview strategy some participants commented on a particular area more than others which at times means a section is more heavily weighted with evidence from particular people. Also there is a building of evidence within sections and across both chapters (cross referencing numbers provide an indicator of part of this process) as has previously been described in section 4.6.3.

The analysis within the chapter is presented in three ways with parts of narratives and quotations used to highlight particular perspectives (see Appendix 7).

- Evidence from individual participant narratives on themes and sub-themes is presented.
- Where similar or different views were identified in narratives they are grouped together to present the data on each of the themes and sub-themes. This is in order to make the findings chapters more manageable but the principle for inclusion was that it was summary material based on narrative content.
- The meta-narrative of the researcher perspective is presented as part the analysis and interpretation process and gives a perspective on the data, the themes and model of enhanced NVQ delivery. Appendix 7 gives an example of the different types of evidence and interpretation included in this chapter. The researcher perspective in the findings chapters is presented in several ways. It is included to give some interpretation or comment on the narratives, give reasons for inclusion of the narrative content, give context to the narrative, to make statements about contrasts or similarities or introduce a quotation as illustrative of a particular perspective. Where it is possible to separate this out from evidence based on narratives sections this has been done by indicating that it is 'researcher' or 'practitioner' perspective

This chapter offers more evidence towards the elements 5, 6, 7 and 8 of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery. The key focus of the evidence is in showing how the staff perspectives of the Homecare/Centre model showed how element 5 of a model (an integrated approach to the assessment of competence previously discussed in section 3.2) was developed. It presents evidence of integration by showing how participant narratives

described assessment of NVQs and how this identified the development of professional level skills, reflective learning and values and confidence.

At the beginning of this section the further elements of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery are identified in relation to the data discussed, the key concepts underpinning the research cross-referenced back to where the empirical evidence is to be found (numbering next to text).

The first two sections provide the perspectives of the assessors and the candidates undertaking the NVQ. The third section draws on some of the differences outlined in section 3.2 in relation to level 4 candidates. This considers the significantly different delivery system to levels 2 and 3 candidates who have assessors in the workplace. It also explores the level 4 qualifications as part of the professional development of social care home managers. Sections 4, 5 and 6 draw on the inductively identified themes of values and reflective learning, confidence and competence and professional level skills and knowledge development explored in section 3.3. These three sections add further evidence to themes already explored in Chapters 5 and 6 in relation to personal and social learning and teaching. There are also significant links between this evidence and assessors' and candidates' perspectives on NVQs as set out in sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.3. A final discussion section draws together some of the key concepts established in section 3.2 and 3.3 to show how an integrated approach to competence assessment was largely found to be present in the Homecare/Centre delivery system and identifies some further key elements of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery that are added to those that have already been established in Chapter 5. The previously established key elements were:

1. Strategic implementation of the NVQ (expansive practice)
2. Workplace assessors who integrate assessment into practice (support for learning)
3. An enhanced assessor role that supports a learning process (support for learning)
4. Attention to learner and work-related identity (personal and work-related identity)

The adding of further key elements to a model of enhanced NVQ delivery arose from the engagement with the empirical data and literature discussed in 3.2. The first two additional elements (elements 5 and 6) are identified in relation to an integrated approach to competence assessment that supports a learning process through close assessor/candidate collaboration and delivery between Homecare/Centre. In addition there are two elements identified (7 and 8) from the empirical evidence that have links to concepts described within sections 3.3 and are linked to expansive workplace practice (Fuller and Unwin, 2004). Element 7 is explicitly linked to the particular situation in adult social care organisations.

The key elements to be added are:

5. An integrated approach to the assessment of competence
6. Strong relationship between organisation and education provider
7. Professional development strategy for home managers
8. A management approach that supports learning

The links to the key elements of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery are indicated next to the relevant sections of data as numbers in brackets.

Participants are listed at the beginning of Chapter 5. Some of the detail in these sections has been excluded for anonymity reasons.

### **6.1. Assessors' perspectives**

This section explores the assessors' perspectives of the implementation of NVQs in Homecare. It was constructed by comparing and contrasting participant narratives on the sub-themes of the value and the challenges of the NVQ assessment process. There are also links in this section to the delivery system between Homecare and the NVQ Centre. The themes identified were important to understanding how assessors working alongside candidates in the workplace as they do in Homecare can achieve an integrated approach to the assessment of competence (element 5 of an enhanced model of NVQ delivery). The evidence in this particular section also provides the data that is then discussed in section 6.7.3 on professional skills and knowledge development and is summarised there.

There were five participants with assessment experience interviewed for the research (Holly, Joan, Alfie, Peter and Stacey). All of them had assessed both levels 2 and 3 NVQs in the workplace and all were working as current assessors. However Peter had been interviewed primarily as a level 4 candidate and most of his interview focused on this experience rather than directly on the NVQ. As a result the findings represent four assessors.

#### **6.1.1. The value of the NVQ in Homecare**

All four assessors' narratives told of how they thought that the NVQ was valued and stated how valuable they found the NVQ in relation to staff development and learning. Narratives told of how NVQ assessment supported and encouraged learners whilst recognising many of the challenges of NVQ assessment. More part narratives are included in this section in order to show the more nuanced perspectives regarding the value of the NVQ that was expressed.

Stacey was explicit about the value of the NVQ when she said:

They didn't, they absolutely didn't [value the NVQ] but I think now it is a common thing for people to be doing NVQs that it is a qualification. You get a

lot of marks for it now. Especially in care. They are asking for NVQs now. It is the perfect award to go for because it is practical as well as written. Not just one or the other, which makes it more interesting.

She said that there had been an improvement in the presentation of the standards the last time they were revised in that they were clearer, simpler and easier to understand and that for the learner the day a month at the Centre workshop should be enough for them to complete their side of the qualification.

Stacey was a new assessor in the organisation and was relishing her engagement with teaching and assessing candidates and was considering whether it might be a part of how she could see herself progressing in her career (3). She discussed the process of assessment, how she supported candidates, how important that can be and what she has learned from undertaking this role:

She has learnt from me that I am not criticising her, just trying to show her that another way might work better...but it was the praise. No one else had given her the praise and she said, 'No one has ever praised me for that.'

Specific feedback on candidate performance was being given that she felt she had never received and was encouraging for her:

When I started to assess her she had been with another assessor she didn't have an ounce of confidence, she got it all wrong. I don't think this person knew how to communicate with her. When I took her over she had such bad low confidence. By the time I had finished with her she was arguing with me saying I was wrong. Her confidence increased all the way through which was absolutely great, to the point where she said she wanted to do level 3. (3,5)

Stacey described some of the challenges and successes that are part of NVQ assessment, the effect on candidate progress but also on candidates' confidence when they were working with an assessor whose learning support skills were poor. Stacey described in her narrative how she managed to turn the situation around and helped the candidate develop into a more assertive and involved student who wanted to continue with her learning:

I am quite good at teaching people. I manage to answer the way they can understand – which funny enough I learnt from NVQ.

She stated how her own attitude had changed, how she had reflected on her learning processes and motivations and undergone a transformation in attitude, learning, work, teaching and assessment, between undertaking levels 2 and 3 and her assessor award. She linked some of this to her engagement with her NVQs as well as part of a maturing process (3,4,5). From a researcher perspective this valuing of assessment as a role that facilitated

skills development and is worthy of note when considering keeping assessment within the workplace.

Stacey described the attitude of candidates to the awards:

The girls are really proud of themselves and to see their practice improve, especially from level 2 to level 3, you see them thinking about it and that has to be a benefit to the service-users

It opens their knowledge, gives them more confidence to go forward to interact with the service-users, thus improving communication with them. And the recording of information is very important and sharing it encourages best practice. Girls who have the NVQ qualification think and act in more depth than the ones who don't have this qualification (4,5)

From a researcher perspective these two points indicated a strengthening of knowledge and improvement to practice that is not just personal but one that impacts upon improvement to the workplace more generally. Along with other assessors she identified the development of confidence and professional level skills and knowledge in workplace practice in relation to NVQ assessment:

I think its value is the confidence I see in the individuals. If they want to apply for other jobs it stands them in good stead. Also good practice, it makes you think about good practice, you can't just say you did it. You have to explain step by step how you did it.

In the above quote Stacey makes an implicit link between confidence and competence within practice that will be explored later in the chapter:

I said maybe next time don't go for something academic like the NVQ go for something more practical like I did. There is academic work but the emphasis is on the practical side.

She was referring to another course she had undertaken as practical and the NVQ as 'academic'. The written work, the planning the demonstration of knowledge was all a challenge to this group of learners as assessors but also as learners. (3,4,5)

Joan's narrative explored how she saw the impact of undertaking the NVQ:

For level 2 people you can see improvement in them afterwards...it makes them think about what they are doing, they are not just doing it because it needs to be done...'Why are you doing it?' It was very good for her.

She said it helped the candidate realise that the process could be enjoyable and she was proud of her achievement (2,4,5). She felt that for both her recent candidates it had been a case of assessment of pre-existing competence in that:

They already knew the job...it was, for them, putting it into words.

Joan's narrative described how the NVQ process helped identify a problem with one candidate's performance and required training. In doing this performance improved.

From a researcher perspective this focus on performance and finding it lacking had focused attention on a development need. She identified a need for further learning in the workplace to be able to demonstrate competence and had agreed a plan to achieve that learning. This example was given considerable consideration during the presentation of data. It was a useful example of how the NVQ influenced reflection on competence but was reduced to protect anonymity of a learner who was not a participant in the research. The ethical issue of relating potentially difficult data that related to those who had not given consent meant that more detail was not considered appropriate. **(2,3,5,6)**

Stacey's narrative told how she completed her own NVQ, not without difficulty, and it coincided with a desire to develop that had been ongoing. She also noted that there had been a change to the culture in one home in relation to the undertaking of NVQs. Initially no one had wanted to do them and now all the staff were keen. This is an assessor view that supports the candidate view expressed elsewhere by the candidates Graham, Pat and Paula and reflects the importance of committed organisational support that is important strategically but also that it is followed through in individual homes. Holly's narrative described how she applied for promotion partly because she was keen to assess the NVQ, telling a similar story to Stacey, of wanting to be an assessor for development. She described a queue of staff keen to undertake the NVQ and her personal commitment to helping them to with the qualifications but of being restricted because of a lack of assessors in the home. **(2,8)** From a researcher perspective the importance of the home manager being attuned to working with NVQs indicated how important support from managers is to implementation.

Three assessors' narratives (Joan, Alfie and Stacey) reflected on improving practice in the homes on undertaking the NVQ. Alfie reported an impact on the management and functioning of the home in more specific detail than the others. He described a synergy between standards of practice and those within the NVQ so that performance issues began to be addressed prior to registering on the course. He used the NVQ as a training tool, a way to show potential learners that they would not be proven competent if they did not modify their practice. He said this was a very positive way to address deficiencies. He described recording of information as an example of this. There had been poor recording in the home and he had found it difficult to improve practice. Following teaching about recording and being shown how they would be assessed the situation began to improve:

They know they might have to use it as evidence, but also understand the importance...when carers realised that they would not achieve the qualification unless the standard of care improved it slowly began to rise. (2,3,5)

He had also seen improvements within the team in dealing with professionals outside of the organisation. He reported how increased understanding of what competence to the NVQ standards meant when work that was produced did not meet the standards expected of the qualification or the workplace could not be used as evidence for their award. He linked this understanding of the NVQ standard and why it was important to improved performance. (2,3,5) Alfie's narrative described the realisation that an induction had been lacking when assessing a candidate. Further training had been initiated in response to the situation and performance improved. From a researcher perspective this was another example of the NVQ standards providing an opportunity for reflection on candidate performance. It prompted feedback, planned teaching and review and showed how an integrated approach to assessment was working within Homecare (2,5).

The concern that improvements might only last as long as the assessment lasts is often raised in criticism of competence assessment but this was not Stacey or Alfie's experience. Alfie described in his narrative how consistency in practice had helped the team begin to work as a more cohesive unit. He saw them helping each other out and pointing out when improvements could be made, he thought this was viewed as helpful rather than critical and was having an impact in improving morale. He described how the team was having a social evening and linked this to the improved team spirit in the home. He also identified how the development of professional level skills and knowledge were being fostered within the workplace using the NVQ. Better recording and reporting, sharing of good practice in the workplace, team working, more positive approach to work, better interactions with professionals were all established here as developing skills that are part of developing professional practice. (5) From a researcher perspective the evidence in Alfie's narrative showed that the candidates were drawing together and sharing learning and development in relation to the NVQ and becoming more of a community of practice as a result. (5,8) Alfie's narrative identified an integrated approach to competence assessment in his focus on a learning process that runs parallel to NVQ assessment and is negotiated with the candidates.

#### 6.1.2. The challenges of NVQ assessment

Joan, Alfie and Peter's narratives reported a struggle to maintain NVQ assessment skills between periods of inactivity but Holly found it easy to slip back into the assessor role. Three of the assessors remarked on how much the assessment process had changed since they

first began as assessors. Joan and Alfie stated that they felt that the burden on the assessor had increased and there was some resentment of this. Alfie referred to this as a reason for slow progress of candidates at times when, as a manager, priorities had to shift. All of the assessors commented on the time it involved to assess a candidate. Examples of some of the challenges are shown in this section.

Joan's narrative described what it was like to assume the assessment role, how difficult she found the process and how time consuming it can be:

I don't want to let them down and that has always been my main thing.

At first my thoughts about the NVQ were, 'Well it's not going to last, it will be another thing, it will come and go.' But then I began to see that there is something going on that makes people do something.

Joan stated that there was a danger in concentrating too much on assessor observation of practice, in that sometimes candidates want to be more involved and to undertake some of the work themselves:

We have got one candidate who wants to be doing more written work. It is level 3 but they don't want it done all on observations, they want to do some work.

From a practitioner perspective tailoring the assessment process to meet the needs of the individual is part of the process of competent NVQ assessment but this comment was recognition of a push in Centre strategy to gather more evidence from observations of practice, which carry greater weight in terms of assessment value. From a researcher perspective Joan's view was considered carefully and included as a fair criticism. (3,5)

Three of the assessors' narratives reflected on the difficulties of being a workplace assessor. The feelings were similar in that they all raised the issues of the time that it took to meet with learners, plan the work, observe and then write up observations and complete documentation. Even well motivated assessors struggled at times with the pressures of the job. The problem of integrating assessment into already busy workplaces was one that arose in all of the assessor narratives. As a practitioner I often pointed out to assessors/managers the advantages of being able to monitor staff performance in a way that can be of benefit the workplace. (5).

As a way of exploring this further I asked whether the participants thought that having an outside agency assess might be advantageous. This was in order to gather more detail on the participants' perspectives of the challenge of NVQ assessment as it is delivered within Homecare. In their narratives Alfie and Holly thought that in some ways this might help and it

would be one less job when the management role was stretched. It would solve the problem of learners waiting to undertake their qualification when existing learners were slower than expected. However both said that the relationship between the candidates and workplace assessors was an advantage to assessing and to managing staff performance that in turn benefited the workplace. All of the assessors said that what was needed was more designated time to assess. Stacey summed this up:

You just don't get the time I can't do any of it at work. It's usually what I can get done here or at home. Especially when I was doing my assessor's. I was doing hours at home. So much so I was eating drinking and sleeping NVQ at one point, just to make sure I knew what I was doing to assess. And that was very difficult and that's why people don't like doing it. I've got people at work who have got families, they cannot sit at home and do their NVQ. The only chance and opportunity they get is here. (1,5,8)

From a researcher perspective this highlighted one of the problems of NVQ assessment and workplace learning, it happens in busy workplaces and as a result sometimes gets put to one side for more urgent issues. This is a potential reason for assessment being contracted outside of the workplace and is recognition of one of the main challenges of an organisation that retains NVQ assessment as part of staff development.

Stacey and Alfie reported sustained change to performance across many staff members in the team but Joan expressed concern that the improvement was short-lived in relation to Health and Safety. From a researcher perspective her awareness of the slipping of standards also showed a continued management awareness of standards post NVQ assessment and potentially that the performance expected at NVQ assessment was being used as a benchmark in practice. (2.3.5)

In this section exploring assessors' perspectives on NVQs through their narratives and the sub-themes that arose from these narratives it was possible to see how two of the assessors valued the opportunity for development through being NVQ assessors and how this could help staff develop skills that could be of benefit to the workplace. Within the narratives it was considered that the NVQ improved practice with specifics being referred to such as an increase in knowledge, confidence, recording, dealing with professionals. The problems of time, maintenance of assessment skills, the burden of the assessor and the difficulties associated with integrating assessment into practice were all acknowledged within the narratives as challenges with regard to NVQ assessment in the workplace. Two of the assessors' narratives identified times when the NVQ had focused attention on a development need and teaching that had been required as a consequence prior to assessment. Alfie described the workplace integration of the NVQ standards into practice and the effects on the staff group that he linked to this integration. This provided the basis for the development of element 5 of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery.

## **6.2. Candidates' perspectives of NVQ levels 2 and 3**

This section deals with the candidates' views of the NVQ. All of the participants (except John and Tracey) had been NVQ candidates during their association with Homecare. There were three current NVQ levels 2 and 3 candidates interviewed for the research (Paula, Graham and Pat). Alfie had undertaken his NVQ level 2 elsewhere and commented on that process. Paula started her NVQ with another employer but had a very bad experience and not achieved the qualification. Stacey, Holly and Peter reflected upon their experiences as candidates at levels 2 and 3. Joan had only experienced her level 4 assessment within Homecare. The data in sections in 6.2 concentrates on the evidence presented by the current levels 2 and 3 candidates (Pat, Paula, Graham) but draws on some experiences of the other participants of NVQs at levels 2 and 3. It is possible to see the many connections back to the previous data drawn upon in section 5.2.1, 5.2.2 and 5.2.3 to illustrate the social, personal and organisational factors influencing workplace learning, where parts of narratives referred to NVQs. In this way these chapters are cumulative in building a picture of the participants' perspectives. The sub-themes that were identified within participant narratives were the level 2 and 3 candidates' views of the importance of good assessor support, their perspectives on the challenges, the value and the strategic implementation of the NVQ.

### **6.2.1. The importance of good assessment support**

This sub theme arose in all three of the participants' narratives of their experience as candidates. Paula, Pat and Graham (current level 2 and 3 candidates) described assessors who adopted the right approach for them. Paula and Graham's perspectives have already been presented in section 5.2.1. Some participants' narratives described when assessment was poor (only one in Homecare). Participants ascribed learning to these situations and Stacey's narrative told of her reaction to a situation in Homecare:

She [the assessor] would say 'you can't do that. You wouldn't know how to do it.' So deliberately I would find out. I would look back at the previous reports that had been written and asking people quick questions here and there just how to do it. Just to prove her wrong.

From a researcher perspective this example shows how determined candidates can be to learn and achieve. It illustrates issues relating to personal, interpersonal and organisational factors explored in section 5.2, showing how an environment that is not conducive to easy entry to learning can be created but also how individuals determined to achieve can succeed in doing so in spite of organisational/interpersonal challenges. (8)

Pat reported in her narrative that she had found the process very difficult to begin with and valued the help of her assessor in the workplace (2,3). She said that working together presented opportunities for observations of her work. Pat's narrative explored a view of alternative delivery systems. She had seen other candidates go through the process with external assessors and thought the experience less satisfactory. Graham had a mixed attitude to the NVQ but his narrative described how his assessor helped create a learning environment that helped him to achieve his level 2 and go on to undertake his level 3. From a researcher perspective he is an example of the processes of assessment being used to good effect when dealing with a candidate who was less committed to the qualification due to external commitments.

Although all of the candidates reported initial difficulty with the NVQ they said their assessor helped them and none of them reported ongoing difficulties. This was a strong thread within the interviews and provided more evidence of an integrated approach to competence assessment within Homecare but needs to be read with consideration of the challenges to this form of delivery that have been raised by assessors earlier in this section. (1,2,3,5,8)

#### 6.2.2. Challenges of the NVQ for candidates

This sub theme was identified from the candidates' narratives at the analysis and interpretation stage and focuses on some of the issues about NVQs raised by participants who had undertaken levels 2 and 3. Pat and Paula had found the NVQ a challenging but rewarding process and said nothing negative about their experience. This means that their evidence is not represented in this section where Graham and Stacey expressed more about the challenges. Holly had found a college course more rewarding but appreciated the opportunity to learn.

Graham in his narrative was more negative about his experience of the NVQ. The language and the repetitive nature of the structure of the qualification irritated him. Graham reported learning about theory behind practice but did not feel that it had helped improve practice. He saw the NVQ as a benefit of the job that was hard to turn down. Graham expressed a contradictory experience of the NVQ stating that it had helped his understanding but that the detail of the qualification devalued his experience. He felt there was too much repetition and that people who had never 'done the job themselves' had written the standards. He said he and other staff found it:

A chore. But I am not dismissing that having it can be a good thing.

Graham's narrative reported that the NVQ stated the obvious at times and candidates can feel that it is too simple, straightforward and patronising. He said:

They are either things that you are never ever going to come across or are out of your hands anyway. Because they are for people higher up or outside the organisation. Or they are things that are so simple easy and straightforward and everyday that you feel like a bit of a plank.

And yet he also said:

I think my understanding has been helped by the NVQ.

From a researcher perspective this view of development shows some of the ambivalent attitudes of candidates to engaging with NVQs and personal challenges to engaging with learning. Graham's perspective was a comment on the behavioural nature of criterion-referenced assessment that was discussed in section 3.2.1. Knowing that being offered development was positive both personally and for the workplace more generally but it still required commitment and work that can be difficult to commit to. If the learning environment is not one of positive encouragement with assessors who are committed to making the process a useful and straightforward one, candidates will not engage. (3,4)

Candidates' narratives (Pat, Paula, Graham and Stacey) showed how they balanced the demands of the qualification with other parts of life. Graham stated that 'NVQ is so far away from my list of what is important at the moment'. He was dissatisfied that there was no monetary incentive to undertake the qualification.

Stacey's narrative told of how she began her level 2 not long after she began to work with the organisation and had not been very engaged in its attainment. Her approach to her learning shifted and she described some of the personal changes that brought this about:

I couldn't be bothered to do this in my own time. I was much younger. I didn't particularly want to sit at home doing an NVQ. But by the time I got to my level 3 some time had passed I had grown up a lot...and I wanted the award. When I started level 3 I thought, 'Here we go', but I found level 3 a lot more interesting than level 2, despite the fact they are very similar. I just found it more interesting more in-depth. I had to research more, learn about my subject more. Level 2 they practically spoon-fed you. Level 3 I had to use my brain to think about it, it was more interesting. And it has taught me an awful lot about teaching people...When I got to level 3 I was determined that whatever was put it would be mine, even to the point if people asked me if they could look at my workbook to see how I had done it I did not want to show them. I was thinking 'If you copy any of my answers that's mine, that's all my work, I have had to try hard for that.'

Her narrative told of how her personal attitude and a feeling of a qualification being too easy for her (like Graham) had contributed to her not fully engaging with the process at level 2 but this changed at level 3 which she said she needed to strive for. From a researcher perspective I would note from this evidence that where regulation requires a low-level qualification disenchantment can prove a hurdle to the commitment to learning. Where workplaces fail to attune themselves to aspirations and abilities to allow higher level development there could be a danger that employees with potential and ambition are stifled and become disengaged. Stacey's example shows how important it is that the candidate is committed to the learning on offer. Where there is a lack of interest in the qualification there is also a danger that there is a de-valuing of the qualification within the workplace. It could also lead to very able people leaving the field due to the perception of there not being a qualification of value. In areas of social care where residential worker development is regulated to level 2 this could be a real disadvantage to the calibre of staff employed in the sector. (3,4,8)

#### 6.2.3. Value of the NVQ for candidates

This section explores the sub theme identified in narratives of the value of the NVQ. Graham's more negative experiences have been discussed in 6.1.2. Paula and Pat were both very positive about the NVQ and this section focuses on their experiences; They found that the NVQ helped them develop knowledge and understanding. They had both been in care environments for some years and reported new learning within a level 2 qualification. They both had very encouraging assessors and were in learning environments that matched their personal interest in achieving with the right level and type of support. Although Paula was initially worried that she might be too old she really enjoyed the NVQ and stated that she developed new skills in relation to learning about work as well as new learning. She described how she had done this:

Researching, actually. I bought a book, a very thick book. Doing the research make me use my brain again. And actually realising I know more than I thought I knew. It was putting things into words, which gets your brain working again. Legislation, things like that. I mean not all of it applies to us in Homecare, but just reading through the Human Rights, etc. I did not realise how much it covered. Out of interest, I have gone onto CSCI website and had a look at that. It makes you think as well. You hope you are doing things right, but when you actually read through it, you think, 'Yes, I am doing it right, that is what they mean.'

She stated how she was both acquiring new and reinforcing existing knowledge. She added to her knowledge in a way she had not done prior to the course and this was someone with considerable care experience who might have been expected to have level 2 knowledge

already. She was reassured that her knowledge was valuable and sound and thought it had changed her practice. Her pleasure in this new learning was palpable in the interview:

It made me think more, interacting with people, communication, etc. Why you do it.

I think it makes you feel good... that you are actually doing a good job and giving a good service.

It made her consider accountability and consequences of actions that are a part of developing professional skills (5). This was a view also expressed by Pat in her narrative. Paula said:

It makes you really aware of what you could end up, or where you could end up, should I say, if you do not do it properly.

She stated that she valued the qualification personally, felt the organisation valued it and was able to reflect upon the implementation of the in Homecare/Centre and compare it with previous experiences:

It was just a disaster. Absolute disaster...they found me another assessor, but she was useless.

Pat described how she had not found the process a simple one:

I am not finding it easy, but it is not as hard as I thought it would be. Perhaps it is because I have worked in care for a long time. The knowledge is there, it is just bringing it back out again. I know the knowledge is there, but then saying that I keep learning new things every day.

She had been prepared for the process to be harder than it had been but it was still a challenge, she could see that she already had most of the knowledge but she was also re-defining knowledge and it was being reinforced in practice (5). Pat stated that even though she had a professional qualification the work was so different that the NVQ had helped her learn and improved her practice; she mentioned food hygiene and the use of cleaning products in particular. She described how there had been teasing in the home about how seriously she had been taking her learning and the implementation in practice but she was resolute in her attitude that:

Every day you just keep learning.

Peter in his narrative reported a feeling of pride in that he had worked his way up through the organisation and undertaken every role and NVQ. The work had been hard at times but the support from the organisation, managers and assessors had been consistent (**5,8**).

#### 6.2.4. Homecare/Centre delivery

This sub theme was identified in the NVQ candidates' (Paula, Pat, Stacey, Joan, Alfie, Peter, Graham) narratives where they identified the importance of both organisation level and home level strategic support for the NVQ. There are links to evidence in section 5.2. Further evidence focusing on this sub theme is presented in this section.

Pat's narrative described how she had been confident that her previous bad experience of NVQ assessment would not be repeated within Homecare:

I had seen their training. It made me feel confident that it would be done properly.

This confidence in the wider organisation of Homecare, not just the individual home, was repeated by Paula and by all of the level 4 candidates.

Pat, Peter, Alfie and Paula stated in their narratives that they valued the time that they were given away from the workplace. Pat summed up the benefits of the workshops at the Centre:

If you are away from all that, it is easier to set your mind around it, because you know that is what you are there for. You can have your break; go for your lunch and things like that. It focuses your mind.

Pat and Peter described how the break from the routine of work, the benefits of being in a different environment and understood of the value of the time given by Homecare. This also reflected the importance of how the close collaboration between education provider and organisation provided meaningful time and support for the delivery system to be effective. (**6,8**)

Joan explained the personal help she received from me as the co-ordinator of the programme. She reflected on my approach of pushing staff on through a positive approach and encouragement but also not accepting 'can'ts'. She said that more confident assessors helped her to develop her own skills and encouraged her when she was becoming disenchanted and discouraged. (**6**)

From a researcher perspective the benefits of having a close contact with an education provider were identified in Joan's and other assessors' narratives. This was a theme that at first I struggled with representing in the data. As it referred to me personally I initially

excluded the comment feeling that it presented a view that may have been influenced by my role as practitioner researcher. However in looking again at the interviews with this particular perspective it was clear that it represented not just one view but the view of several of the participants. It was included but comes with a caveat that the consideration that my researcher/practitioner position may have unduly influenced these statements.

Pat, in common with Stacey, reported in their narratives how the attitude to NVQs in the home had altered with a change in manager. Although Pat had worked in the home for some time they had not been encouraged to do the qualification before or recognised its usefulness. She described how there was now a queue of staff waiting to undertake the qualification (8).

Section 6.2 has outlined some the challenges and value of the NVQ candidates told of in their narratives. It was found that candidates' experiences of assessors in the workplace were generally positive but that sometimes it was very difficult if an assessor was not committed to the candidate and the process. It was clear that candidates could even learn from the bad experiences and, when motivated to achieve, the determination often obtained a positive result for them. Experienced care workers reported new learning at level 2 and one reported new learning about how to learn in a way that brought satisfaction. The NVQ was perceived as being valued by Homecare and by the candidates. The delivery system between Homecare/Centre was experienced positively with candidates valuing their time away from the workplace to concentrate on their qualification. All of the participants' narratives stated that their experience of Homecare was of an organisation that valued and supported their learning and development. Candidates reported changes in attitude to NVQs when managers of homes changed. Evidence from the assessors that an integrated approach to assessment of competence, NVQs and workplace learning more generally present within the interviews can be seen to follow through here in evidence from the candidates. There was consideration of learning and development needs, the importance of working with the individual and their approach to learning and strategic organisational support. In addition the development of professional level skills and knowledge has been further evidenced with candidates reporting better understanding of accountability issues and how broader legislation impacts upon care practice. The challenges of the NVQ delivery system within Homecare should not be overlooked however and examples of the tensions that are present when employing this approach require careful balancing by organisations. This section provided evidence for the development of element 5, 6 and 8 of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery.

### **6.3. Candidates' perspectives on NVQ level 4**

This section deals with level 4 NVQs as a separate issue in relation to the sub theme of candidates' perspectives. This was identified as a specific issue in section 3.2.1 on the criticisms of NVQs and is examined here as requiring more considered reflection as a theme in response to these criticisms and how they apply to the adult social care environment. The evidence contributed to the development of element 7 of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery in raising the issue of whether the qualification as it is delivered meets the professional development needs of home managers in social care. The delivery and the demands at level 4 are somewhat different from levels 2 and 3. The level 4 qualifications are very demanding, most candidates will have to undertake two awards and there is a great deal of personal research involved. With little teaching as a part of the Homecare/Centre delivery candidates are required to learn about theories, models, government reports and research and apply it to their practice. They are complex qualifications for deputy and home managers who already have jobs that are stressful and pressured. Homecare supports the level 4 candidates with a day a week study leave but they are very unusual in this and most providers will provide the study day a month for them to attend the monthly planning workshop but little more.

The delivery of the NVQ level 4 in Homecare has been more variable than that at levels 2 and 3 and it is worth setting the context for understanding this in order to make more sense of the data. Three of the participants' (Holly, Joan, Alfie) had achieved their level 4 awards and one (Peter) was currently undertaking his with the Centre. Alfie's narrative gave more detail than most of the participants and there is more of his experience in this section as a result. These are managers and deputy managers, without nursing or social work qualifications, who have achieved promotion through the organisation in recognition of accrued experience, ability and usually a succession of NVQs. Over the years there have been several methods of assessment within the NVQ Centre, and these managers were representative of these different stages. One candidate had achieved the award with a manager acting as his assessor (Alfie). Another had gathered most of her evidence with observations of her practice from a line manager (Holly) who did not work with her consistently and the assessor was a member of the Centre team. The final two (Peter and Joan) had been assessed by a Centre assessor who visited them in their workplace during the course of the award to undertake some observations but had observations supplied by their line manager. From a researcher/practitioner perspective a closer involvement of senior managers is an issue of time and resource but there are opportunities for this supervised development between managers, at the same level but with more experience, to act as mentors. The isolation of the home manager role, when undertaking level 4 qualifications, makes the integration of new knowledge and practice potentially less developmental.

There was some evidence of candidates using other managers in the organisation as resources for teaching and learning and of organisational support for the qualifications and the people engaged with them. In his narrative Alfie said:

There were things that I had to write about that I had to go away and learn and I spent quite a lot of time in the library. I borrowed books off central office, I had discussions with people. We used to have NVQ day at the office once a month. There were three or four of us at that time; we would lend each other books. So I learned stuff by researching that I didn't need to know for the NVQ but I learned it anyway. And I think I got into the habit of going and finding out information rather than just picking up the telephone and saying to people, 'I have got this problem.' Actually researching stuff... it's made me more motivated. I think it gave me a bit more interest; it made the job more interesting as well.

Alfie told in his narrative of being a deputy working with a manager committed to staff development and teaching whereas many of the level 4 candidates are working as managers with no direct supervision. Although Alfie stated that the NVQ was about accreditation of learning rather than new learning he described a teaching process at work when undertaking his level 4, with planned new learning in the workplace. From a researcher/practitioner perspective evidence at level 4 includes testimonies from their line manager, these are often thoughtful and detailed but are not the same as having a person to relate to and receive direct feedback from in the workplace. Having a very involved and helpful assessor in the workplace had benefited the Alfie's development but it was not without a struggle.

No I think some of the NVQ is demonstrating what you have learned...I was given set tasks in the home with the new manager. We looked through all the units so that when we came to cover it we could say that for nine months I had been doing the rotas, rather than reacting. So we looked ahead, so that I already had evidence of certain stuff. I was able to write reams and covered everything in detail and met all the criteria without having to look at stuff and think "Oh I am going to struggle to meet this. (2)

The level and type of organisational support was discussed in more detail, describing how continued assessor support was facilitated by the organisation even when there were difficulties:

The organisation was very, very pleased that I had done it. I did get a lot of support from them, I had separate time, separate from my supervision just for NVQ to plan, observation. I didn't have to push it was just done really. (7,8)

Peter in his narrative reported how he recognised a need for knowledge development and how this was met through work on the qualification. The level of the work had been higher than expected and he commented on how hard it had been to achieve the standard required. A lot of research had been undertaken and other managers had helped. The narratives reported a level of co-operation within the organisation with experienced managers helping

the newer managers to establish themselves in these areas. (1,7,8). Peter stated that he had to prioritise the qualification at times, needing to impose personal boundaries to have the time to complete when managers were encouraging further responsibilities that might have conflicted with progression. From a researcher perspective these opportunities were developmental for the manager's career and the opportunities presented meant a careful weighing up of advantages was in evidence which could have resulted in a delay or postponing of the NVQ. (2,3,5,7,8)

Alfie discussed the support of nursing students in the workplace and how important it was to him that they had a positive experience. Alfie and Holly felt that they would have liked to do nurse training. Financially three years at university were not possible. Alfie said in his narrative:

It's just something I would have loved to have done really, but now it's just too late, because financially there is just no way I could do it... If it wasn't a problem I would go and do it. I would still like to have that qualification.

This was interesting because there was still a feeling that the route to qualification had not quite met all needs. Alfie went on to say that it would have improved his confidence in dealing with service-users, relatives and professionals. Alfie had achieved both level 4 qualifications and was keen to go on to further learning but was unclear as to what the next step would be. Peter was also thinking about what would be next after the current course.

From a researcher perspective the lack of a clear progression path for these managers could be seen as preventing their further development. This is a key element for consideration within the development of the social care workforce and an area for future research. (7)

Joan in her narrative could not say that there had been new learning and felt that there had been little change to practice. Motivation to undertake the awards had been quite low and it had been difficult but as it was a requirement of the job it had been completed. Holly's narrative however reported how she was keen to carry on with the qualifications at level 4 which had been stopped because of workplace commitments; she viewed it as useful personal and professional development although she told of how she had preferred a college course that she had attended where there had been more opportunity for working with other students. She had found the NVQ delivery at level 4 rather isolating. (7)

In summary this section has drawn together some of the level 4 candidates' experiences that were reported in their narratives. Joan did not identify any new learning or any changes to

her practice that had been noted by others although she did report a very positive experience of undertaking the qualification with a colleague who was very supportive of her during the process. Most reported organisational support and value in gaining the qualification although Peter reported being offered opportunities that were difficult to refuse and having to prioritise the NVQ. There was evidence of professional level knowledge and skill development within the interviews but the lack of workplace encouragement, support and feedback would seem to have been missing. Alfie, who had a workplace assessor, had benefited most.

This was a mixed picture with regard to the level 4 qualifications and it was less positive generally than that at levels 2 and 3, although organisational commitment to managers is considerable in terms of time given to study. It is worth considering the usefulness of the NVQ at the higher levels, the evidence pointed to this not being because of the standards themselves but because the delivery at this level of management position does not lend itself to an integrated model of assessment. This section has provided evidence for element 7 of an enhanced delivery model but poses questions regarding whether the NVQ as it is delivered in organisations is the best form of development for adult social care managers, although it may be suitable for deputies where an involved assessor can integrate assessment in the workplace.

The next three sections explore inductively identified themes that emerged from a later stage of analysis and interpretation and are presented as a focus for an integrated approach to competence development (element 5 of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery). Some evidence linked to this element has already been presented and can be found in the sections in the cross referencing numbers within the text. These themes may not be the only ones that can be developed but were significant in this research in Homecare.

#### **6.4. Values and reflective learning**

Values were explored in the research described in section 3.3 and emerged throughout the candidates' and assessors' narratives, sometimes not explicitly, when participants expressed how they dealt with people and situations in a way that exposed underpinning values. Within the NVQ in care there is an expectation that candidates have an understanding of legislation, organisational policy and procedure in relation to their responsibilities to care and can challenge practice in the workplace. Here I have examined how values are connected to the development of the social care practitioner and explore the teaching about values that was happening in the workplaces.

##### **6.4.1. Participants' perspectives on values**

Managers' narratives (Alfie, Holly, Joan, Peter) reported their awareness of role modelling behaviours, of engaging in difficult discussions about values within care, about identifying when performance issues needed addressing, of different styles of leadership and management and of ways of bringing about change in staff teams. Values arose as one of the key teaching and learning issues and ways of addressing these important ideas without closing down discussion were seen as integral to staff development and performance improvement. Another area was awareness of legislation and how there was a shift through undertaking the NVQ where legislation supporting values became more fully understood. Part of giving the participants voice was in recognising the significance of what was being said across the narratives. This did not result from a direct question about personal and practice values but rose up as an implicit theme from discussion about particular situations and how they were dealt with and thought about. The approach to themes and narratives at the interpretation stage allowed this to be given due consideration as a common issue. Some of the contributions in this section were quite personal and potentially identifiable and have therefore been reduced to protect anonymity.

All of the participants' narratives reflected on their values at some point, not necessarily in relation to NVQ assessment but in relation to their work practice and some in relation to personal values and how they impact on work. Some had stories of when these values had been tested or to show how intrinsic they were to good care. Paula reflected on a feeling of reassurance from having the NVQ framework to judge her personal practice and how her research for her NVQ had made her more cognisant both of what she was doing right and the dangers of doing it incorrectly. **(2,4,5,8)**

Some candidates expressed the view in their narratives that values were 'common sense' implying that they felt that they were within themselves. Tracey gave a representative example of this. She was new to the organisation and had no experience of the NVQ.

When I went for my interview they were asking me things, I said, 'Well I've never been in care but I think common sense prevails and I would treat people as I'd like to be treated myself.' A lot of it is common sense.

This comment exposes her view of values as something inherent but the influence of the environment had brought them to the fore.

Peter's narrative had a story of personal values that showed how important they were to some and how important life decisions had been based upon them.

If I want to give something then I want to give it and I don't necessarily expect something back. I believe you have to give more than you receive for good to come to you.

Paula's narrative contained detailed stories of when her values had been tested and another showed how intrinsic she perceived values to be to good care practice.

Altruism was usually balanced by what participants got out of the job for themselves.

Graham's narrative gave an example when he stated that, 'to me it is a job' and reported frustration that when this was stated there was a feeling of being, 'Not as worthy because I didn't treat it like a religion or a lifestyle choice.' And yet he also said:

Money really isn't the motivation...working with people just gives you a better feeling at the end of the day...it's not something that just sort of made a few bob extra today but you have almost, well saved a geezer's life.

From a researcher perspective this view exposed a tension between an internal altruism driving continued engagement in care work with a more pragmatic approach describes a situation that many care workers would recognise. Yes the job is rewarding and yet seeing it as a vocation is both uncomfortable for many and does not recognise the fact that carers have mortgages and families and require fair payment for the job they do. This participant gave voice in his narrative to this balancing of the positive feeling of personal values and rewards and a cognitive understanding that doing a job was a functional necessity to support his family.

Paula's narrative reported how she came to understand not to judge people through her work. She stated that she did not always think this way but had learned about organisational values through induction to the workplace, working with people, from reading, communication and from the guided learning within her NVQ which led her to explore, research and read about legislation, think about discrimination, responsibility and duty of care. She believed that the philosophy of care was clear within Homecare and that this led her development of a complementary set of values. From a researcher perspective she had stood back from her practice and reflected upon it critically and incorporated her new learning into her practice, a personal and instinctive journey. This in turn was part of the assessment of her competence in relation to the underpinning values that are assessed within the NVQ in care.

John was an agency worker and in his narrative he stated that his own values in relation to care came from within himself. Although he was in the job primarily for money he recognised his own emancipatory urges, a sense of justice, a desire to help, care for and express his compassion. He viewed the organisation from a slightly dispassionate perspective and thought that the philosophy of the organisation was clear and embedded, in the main, within the actions of the staff. He felt he had been inducted into the organisation thoroughly with due attention to ensuring that values were addressed as intrinsic to the work. He had left one

organisation because he had witnessed neglect and had reported the issues and moved on. He was principled about his personal standards. He felt valued by the staff group, ‘this is one of the reasons I work here’. He described care as ‘the nobler goal’, a phrase that does much to encompass a sense of intrinsic values, a will to do good. (8) From a researcher perspective John was much more explicit than other participants about his motivations within the job and how it fitted in with his personal life, his values and his expectations of himself within a wider society.

Values emerged throughout Joan’s narrative. She described how determined she was to,

See people treated people fair and equally. I feel I am a very fair person and I can’t bear it when people are horrible to each other. I want to be treated as I treat others.

She expressed how she felt it is important not to be intimidated:

I don’t do it to anybody else and I don’t like it done to me.

This type of discussion of values was at the forefront of how many of the participants discussed their approach to practice both as carers and managers. Other participants’ narratives also explored embedded values that enabled them to navigate practice more effectively.

Stacey discussed in her narrative what had enabled her to learn to care well and in doing so gave a taste of her values,

I had to learn to be open because you can’t care for people if you are closed off yourself. So I had to learn to be open so these people could approach me and that is something I did and that helped me to become a senior...you can’t look at other people’s behaviour to see how things are going on, you have to look at your own and work out yourself what’s going on.

Her narrative told of her personal development, the importance of reflection, a confident ability to accept and seek feedback as a part of this process and a principle of personal responsibility. She made a link between these changes and the organisation’s recognition of this change through promotion.

Joan and Alfie’s narratives reported dealing with staff whose values were found to be different. Their examples made it clear that they had found it possible to alter behaviours that were not coherent with the workplace with careful handling. They described a workplace dialectic focused around the issue of values. From a researcher perspective teaching about values may not be formally delivered as part of the NVQ. If candidates are not having taught sessions this interactive approach to workplace development could ensure acceptable

working practices. What the evidence showed was that there was a significant amount of value-based learning and teaching in workplaces and that it was an area where there were work-based challenges in relation to ensuring that workers are conforming to workplace expectations. If values are embedded within competence then this is an important part of competence development.

As a researcher I reflected upon what the Homecare/Centre delivery model offered in the way of addressing values. Some of the candidates referred to the usefulness of the legislation questionnaire that they are set at the beginning of their NVQ. Paula described it in detail referring to how much she had learned. Some of the task involves finding out about legislation (some of it anti-discriminatory) then linking it to examples of workplace practice. This would seem to be an area where some planned specific teaching might be beneficial, whether in the workplace or out of it. The teaching that was happening in the workplace appeared unplanned and reactive to situations that arose at work. This approach to teaching about values seemed to be an intuitive one where participants responded to uneasiness but values is an area in workplace development that is very important. Is it necessary to make this form of development more explicit or is it a part of the broader competences that are being addressed in the workplaces and as such should be allowed to emerge and be dealt with in just such a natural process? (2,3,5,8)

Alfie in his narrative gave an example of one of these reactive teaching opportunities describing an opportunity that was used to challenge discrimination and teach about values without formal teaching:

It's a much softer approach about getting people to question themselves and coming to a conclusion that you would hope they would come to. Because you can't have people keeping those sorts of views and expressing them in the workplace because that would be damaging. I had one member of staff, inexperienced... I tried to explain to her how she was discriminating and I said, 'I know you can't see that but maybe you could think about that? What would you think if that was a relative of yours that had gone into a care home?' ...A few days later she said, 'I want to apologise about the other day, I feel really embarrassed.' I said, 'I was a little bit worried.' If you don't understand why you might discriminate unknowingly and she was. And I think that was a much better way of doing it, not making someone feel bad but making her realise Oh I have done that wrong but now I am going to do it the right way and I know I am doing it the right way.

From a researcher perspective this approach is not ignoring a difficult situation but neither is it a heavy-handed approach. It allows for a natural recognition to grow and for learning to embed. There was a process of instruction and guidance, supervision sessions were used to explain the problems in practice and assessors and managers described learning through a reflective process. (2,3,5,8)

Holly's values became evident in her narrative when discussing the teaching and learning practices in the home and how reflection on these values had led to an understanding of how it was possible to positively influence care practice through teaching and the creation of an environment conducive to learning and development. (2,3,5,8). It was possible to see how she viewed her values as a foundation stone to good practice as a manager but also as a teacher and assessor.

#### 6.4.2. Organisational Values

This was a part of the theme of values that arose in three participants' narratives and seemed significant in that if the organisation is clear in its communication of values this might be expected to filter down as an issue of some importance. Stacey's narrative explored the organisational interviewing process for staff. She described how many of the applicants were not suitable and showed how values were being assessed and how fundamental they were in selection,

In general staff applying to do the job want to do as little as possible, they have a very negative approach. Their attitude and ways of doing things is outdated and sometimes unsafe.

She had found that often agency staff came with this sort of attitude and how sometimes they could be worked with and their practice could be improved to a point where they would be considered as a potential employee but that often they continued to work as agency staff. It seemed that at selection values were being implicitly assessed as part of attitudes and behaviour.

The values of the organisation were exposed in an ethical issue in one narrative. This centred on staff involvement in strategic decision-making, environmentally friendly policies and pensions that gave a flavour of an organisation that was keen to try to behave ethically and co-operatively, giving staff input to organisational issues. This establishment of value-based practice was being incorporated from the top of the organisation. Values were being shown to be taken seriously and this approach potentially established expectations of more general organisational behaviour.

Joan had a very particular view of how she and other staff had been managed, balanced with a generally positive view of the organisation,

I get on well with Homecare... I am very happy and I think they are very supportive.

However her experiences were mixed and some of the less positive views were also represented in her narrative, areas where she felt that the values of the organisation were not what she would expect. There was an acknowledgement that the organisation did not always get it right.

From a researcher perspective what emerged across the participants' narratives was an approach to values that was embedded implicitly in practice both in relation to the management of service-users and staff. There were many examples of values related issues being dealt with sensitively and used as a way of developing learning in the workplace. The embedded nature of these values seemed a very important aspect of an integrated approach to competence development (element 5 of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery). The intuitive nature of the teaching and learning around values was reliant on this embeddedness. Participants were dealing with these issues not just because of organisational policy, legislation or the NVQ but were motivated by a strong sense of personal values. This was indicative of an integrated approach to competence assessment but also an enhanced assessor role and a management approach that took account of the importance of values as a part of competent care practice.

## **6.5. Confidence and competence**

Confidence was explored in section 3.3 and surfaced strongly within the narratives. Participants' narratives referred directly to the term, described perceived changes in behaviour as a result of assessment against the NVQ standards and related to this to developing competence in practice. Assessors said that candidates' confidence improved, candidates said it of themselves. In the descriptions from the participants it became clear that confidence was not just a personal experience but also a quality that could be experienced by others in the workplace, through exhibited behaviours that were classified by the candidates themselves and their assessors as increased confidence. Confidence was linked to an increased perception of professional level skills.

Joan in her narrative talked about how she was still lacking in confidence and how she had to make herself behave confidently:

I have no confidence whatsoever, still haven't got any...I do know a lot but sometimes I doubt myself.

She mentioned three key people who she worked with during the three qualifications she engaged in. She also discussed other people who had played significant roles in her career development, encouraging her to progress and keeping her convinced of her ability. As a practitioner this was my experience of her. Her lack of confidence was evident but she had

proved capable time and again. What she was able to do was to gather support around her at each stage to help her development. From a researcher perspective without these people she might not have continued developing and progressing in her career but what was also evident was that she had developed collaborative strategies that involved gathering other people to support her. (4)

NVQ candidates are often experienced staff and there has been criticism that the qualification's sole contribution has been to accredit existing learning. This accreditation when presented as evidence for a new award may also be a deepening and reinforcing of learning. Several candidates in their narratives reported a reassurance from the realisation that their performance met the required national standards and this was summed up by Paula who said:

You hope you are doing things right, but when you actually read through it, you think, 'Yes, I am doing it right, that is what they mean.'

All of the assessors commented upon how the candidates' reflection upon their practice helped them to increase their understanding and raised the standard of and interest in their work. From a researcher perspective this reinforcing of positive practice is significant. These are workers who had a less positive experience of education and came to these NVQs with the insecurities that brings. Many of the participants viewed accreditation with a qualification as important and valuable but it seems that this is not all that is being acquired during the process and that confidence was embedded in most of the improvements that were noted.

Alfie's narrative stated that there was a noticeable increase in willingness to contribute to workplace activity that was not present prior to undertaking the qualification, a confidence to practice? Joan and Stacey could see that candidates' increased knowledge of legislation and a better understanding of rationales and boundaries brought about a changed level of engagement at work that made them more meaningful contributors.

From a researcher perspective could an aspect of confidence be the reinforcing of practice that is viewed as of the right level and content by others in the workplace? Alfie's narrative suggested that that this was the case and it was not just between assessors and candidates but an expectation of competency that was being shared between peer members of the staff team. This building on previous knowledge that was personal learning and shared learning would seem to contradict some of the criticisms of the NVQ system as being behaviourist, teaching staff to behave in particular pre-defined ways without increased understanding of their role. It was evident from the narratives that this was not the case, new learning and development was taking place as well as a strengthening of current knowledge. (4,5)

In terms of learning as a social activity and of professional level skill development several of the assessors reported confidence as demonstrating itself in a willingness to argue their point of view and Alfie reported fostering this effect and saw it as the manifestation of new understanding and confidence that was useful in the workplace. He reported in his narrative how he encouraged the expression of dissent and sometimes would allow a course of action he did not necessarily agree with in order to nurture a culture where challenging norms and authority is accepted and welcomed. He stated that unless it was a dangerous situation that necessitated intervention staff trying things out was one way of doing this. His view, and that of Holly and Joan, was that lessons can be learned from mistakes and failure should be accepted and used, in as non-judgemental a way as possible, as part of this learning process. **(4,5,8)** From a researcher perspective these managers that created positives from potentially negative situations described teams of staff that were loyal, motivated and fully engaged at work encouraging a view that this style of leadership is a useful one in this particular environment.

There was evidence of how an integrated approach to competence assessment and NVQs had an impact on observed confidence in practice. The interaction and feedback from staff, encouragement from managers/assessors were linked to increased confidence and often aspiration. Some participants mentioned people who encouraged them or told them they could achieve, for example Alfie said:

Once I had been pushed a bit I thought I don't want to be the deputy for nine years, I do want to run my own house and it made me want to get on then.

Stacey, Paula, Pat and Alfie referred to the positive effect of spending time with managers and assessors with a focus on the detail of their work performance. Stacey commented that: 'She said no-one has ever praised me for that.' **(2,3,4,5,8)** With the evidence and feedback increased confidence could be said to be a consequence of this. The effect of feedback was less evident in the level 4 candidates because the management level of their qualification does not allow such detailed involvement of work-based assessors. They tended to report that their increased confidence came from their research and through establishing a secure foundation of knowledge and understanding of their work, although Alfie who had a work-based assessor reported similar benefits to candidates at the lower levels.

Alfie, Stacey, Joan and Holly reported how spending time with candidates enabled them to understand their individual challenges and over time begin to address them. Stacey reported in her narrative how the NVQ assessment process had enabled her development as a teacher and as a more confident professional, gaining confidence from her proven ability to successfully support and encourage a candidate and seeing improved practice **(2,3,5)**. From a researcher perspective the evidence brought them confidence to act **(2,3,5)**. It seemed that

the assessor's role affected confidence and development. Sensitive support and encouragement was reported to transform candidates, from reluctant to engage, to candidates keen to carry on beyond the current qualification. This transformation could be really important to the organisation. If employees lacking in the confidence to fully participate can develop into reflective, self-aware and knowledgeable members of staff whose care of the residents improves the organisation is able to develop them into more senior roles. (3)

Joan, Stacey and Alfie reported increased confidence from my engagement with them, through interactions in workshops and individual sessions, showing how important role modelling can be to all involved in the process, but also the importance of the close collaboration over time between education provider and organisation. They described how I had demonstrated how criticism could be presented in a positive manner, targets could be negotiated and how important support and encouragement were in helping staff develop. From a practitioner perspective this almost incidental learning would not be part of my intended learning outcomes and yet I would see it as an important part of my function in these sessions. (6)

In their narratives Alfie and Peter asked about what their next steps could be in relation to their continuing development, indicating a confidence and enthusiasm to learn. From a researcher perspective it was clear from the list of participants that most participants have gone on to gain more than one NVQ qualification with the Centre but there was also a slight reluctance (Peter and Alfie) to consider other types of learning, they were keen to carry on with the NVQ. This could be viewed as indicating a positive experience and confidence in the provision and/or the NVQ system itself. It could also be seen as evidence of how embedded the NVQ is in social care, offering a pathway that is closely allied to increased responsibility and job grade. In other areas such as health care it would be more common to pursue a different type of academic endeavour, the more traditional Higher Education route of social work or nursing qualifications. It may indicate that the confidence that is developed is somewhat limited to this type of assessment in that there may be less confidence in transferring to the traditional academic route and that the confidence that they develop is rather too firmly related to NVQs. It could also be indicative of a perception of a restricted career pathway for social care managers in terms of their ongoing development.

In relation to confidence there was a thread throughout the narratives of how important this quality is to both candidates and assessors in the workplace. It is recognised when it is not there and a link was made by some between undertaking the NVQ and an increase in confidence. Confidence is not however not a part of NVQ assessment, although it is implicit within some assessment criteria. It was viewed as an important quality in relation to the development of workers in the workplace by assessors and by candidates themselves. The

close working together of assessor and candidate within the workplace and the NVQ system can be seen to reap rewards with regards to confidence where it works well. Whilst confidence is a personal attribute the organisation also benefited. All four of the assessors remarked on the improvements in candidates' workplace performance linked to increasing confidence. Higher confidence levels were reported as impacting upon the candidates' interactions with service-users, their contributions to meetings, recording of information, how they dealt with medication, their understanding of confidentiality, their dealing with professionals, and general engagement in the activities in the home. These specifics, mentioned by several of the assessors and managers of the homes, should not be passed over too quickly. They outline some very important parts of the job role of a support worker and move them from being a worker who requires close observation of practice to ensure adherence to policy and practice in the workplace to one that can be relied upon to operate without supervision in a variety of circumstances. They indicate the gradual development of professional skills and knowledge that is embodied in the confident and competent practitioner and contribute evidence towards the development of element 5 of an enhanced delivery model that suggests that integrated approach to competence assessment is an important factor.

## **6.6. Professional level skills and knowledge development**

This is another inductively derived theme. The evidence was embedded in the data less explicitly but nonetheless was felt to be an important factor in relation to the development of the social care workforce. The issue of what professional level skills and knowledge are and how they are developed was not a part of the narratives and yet there are examples of these throughout this chapter and Chapter 5. The evidence particularly from earlier in this chapter in section 6.1 is not replicated here but is summarised from the narratives.

The evidence showed that performance issues were being addressed and assessors, through further learning and skills development, were developing competent practice. Assessors referred explicitly to a deepening of understanding of care values, of engagement with professionals and work teams a commitment to work. Both assessors and candidates as part of thinking about practice and understanding their role more fully inferred reflective learning. Assessors referred to improved recording processes and of sharing good practice amongst peers, identifying poor practice and showing how it could be improved. Participants referred to increasing their knowledge about legislation, their roles, their boundaries and accountability. This evidence was seen to be contributory to the development of professional level skills and knowledge and the evidence of how this was occurring is

discussed and theorised in section 6.7.3 It also has relevance to the discussion section 6.7.6 in terms of how the NVQ level 4 meets the need for managers' professional level development. (2,3,5,7,8)

## 6.7. Discussion in relation to NVQs

This discussion section uses the findings in Chapter 6 to develop an argument in relation to the key concepts that were explored earlier in Chapter 3 and the empirical evidence. The section builds on the discussion section in 5.3 to add to the key elements of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery. In this discussion, whilst recognising that this is a small study with a limited number of self-selected participants, I explore how the empirical data supports the view that there are elements of a more integrated approach to competence assessment within the Homecare/Centre model of delivery. This integrated approach is examined in relation to the use of the NVQ as a part of learning and staff development and the close collaboration of assessor and candidate. The assessment role, the perspectives of the staff assessing the NVQ and the benefits and challenges to themselves personally and to the organisation more generally is explored. As discussed in the introduction all the Homecare assessors are based in the workplace. Assessors' views on the manageability of this approach are important to sustained engagement with this model and if the burden is too great organisations may review delivery.

The key focus of the integrated approach to competence assessment is workplace context (Beckett and Hager, 2002) and the learning opportunities that are available and can be developed within that context. This section establishes how the broadening approach to the assessment of competence supports the development of skills and knowledge within Homecare. Some examples of development opportunities are drawn upon in relation to professional level skills and knowledge, values and reflective learning and confidence within Homecare. Next is an exploration of the particular issues around the level 4 NVQs in social care, in recognition of the differences in assessment approach and the importance of this stratum of development for the social care workforce more generally. This discussion is then returned to in Chapter 7. Finally in this section delivery is discussed. A model of delivery was established to be important to an integrated approach to competence assessment in 3.2 and here a model of Homecare/Centre delivery is considered in relation to that discussion.

### 6.7.1. An integrated approach to the assessment of competence (relates to evidence in 6.1 to 6.6)

The NVQ in social care has enabled a pathway to achievement of qualifications. Homecare used the qualification pathway and worked with it, engaging with an education provider in a

thoughtful and strategic way in order to extract the most worth from the process. The value of this approach has become evident through the research. There is evidence of an approach to NVQ assessment that is integrated into the workplace in the way that Beckett and Hager (2002) suggested. The broadening of the notion of competence in relation to authors' work explored in 3.2 presents opportunities for a wider interpretation of assessment and broaden skills development related to the national standards without undermining them. There was evidence of a learning process, articulated by both assessors and candidates that supports the idea that the workplace is engaged with the NVQ as an integrated part of practice development.

#### 6.7.2. The development of staff in social care (relates to evidence in 6.1 to 6.6)

The NVQ system is not perfect; it is bureaucratic and assessors remarked upon the burden of assessment, the time it takes, the responsibility they feel to candidates particularly when other priorities at work have to take precedence. Homecare and its assessors may have been able to use another qualification just as well but they have used the NVQ to good effect. Working as they have with the qualifications and the candidates has enabled the organisation to develop in relation to learning in a way that may not have been possible with courses delivered external to the workplace. None of the Homecare assessors were enthusiastic at the thought of not undertaking assessment of their staff. Although assessors struggled with time and some with inclination, some of them commented on the importance of the time spent with candidates and the development that was related to the assessment process. Candidates also appreciated the time spent with their assessors.

Assessors all commented on the amount of time that assessment takes (Billett, 2003; Wolf, 2000) and felt that at times this was not taken into account enough by the organisation. This seemed to be especially difficult at home manager level due to the many competing claims upon their time. However the candidates all reported the benefits of having time with their most experienced colleagues in terms of personal learning. A more integrated approach to competence and delivery of the NVQ, that incorporates the development of deeper understanding of the particular workplace context and the professional level knowledge and understanding and soft skills development required in that context, necessitates close involvement with practice and practitioners. There was evidence of this close involvement in all of the interviews where candidates and assessors referred to meeting regularly and the guided development and feedback that took place in these meetings. Hodkinson and Issitt (1995) suggested an interactive model of competence assessment and there were many examples of this being present within Homecare. Candidates and assessors referred to times when their assessors negotiated learning development and observed and fed back on

performance in ways that improved practice and helped them to identify areas of potential improvement. The close collaboration of assessors and candidates meant that assessors were seen to be drawing on what Wolf (2000) described as 'an internalized' model of competence that encompassed more than the NVQ standards and was particularly evident as part of the broader development of candidate competence in the workplace.

From a practitioner perspective further development of the assessor role through the understanding that the workplace learning research provides is an exciting prospect. For assessors to begin to understand a little about the social nature of learning at work (Billett, 1995, 1998, 2001b; Lave and Wenger, 1991), personal and work-related identity (Collin, 2009; Wenger, 1998) and expansive workplace practice (Fuller and Unwin, 2004) could heighten the usefulness of the environment for supporting learning. It is possible to see where learning environments could be further improved and how this could be done in conjunction with the NVQ delivery without increasing the burden of assessment and offering home managers further areas within which to develop. Some further learning for assessors about teaching processes and skills could help the assessors identify and value formal and informal learning opportunities (Lee et al., 2004) in the workplace. They might also begin to define particular learning and development needs for staff working alongside them in practice.

#### 6.7.3. Professional level skills and knowledge development (relates to evidence in 6.6)

This section is based on the inductively identified theme that emerged later in the data analysis process and was more embedded in all of the findings. As such this section gathers together some of the previously identified evidence and suggests that this is another of the broader competences assessed in the workplace. It also discusses how this learning might be occurring.

Beckett and Hager (2002: 57) identified how an integrated assessment process would incorporate 'tasks, abilities, setting' and that assessors would be judging 'fitness, rightness or appropriateness' in relation to a broader interpretation of competence than a more behaviourist approach might suggest. The importance of the development of professional level skills and knowledge in a way that is integrated into Homecare, the challenges and issues related to the particular workplace that enable the assessor to judge 'fitness' were considered in the research. Assessors and managers discussed the raising of competence during the assessment of the NVQ. Assessors referred to instances when their sense of 'fitness' meant that they realised there was a need for performance improvement. The assessors also identified performance both explicit and implicit within the NVQ standards that

improved as a result of the engagement with the NVQ. I would argue that the sum of these improvements contributes to what is expected of professional level skills and knowledge development. They cited confidence, engagement with professionals, the development of a reflective approach to values in the care setting, better recording processes and a deepening of understanding and commitment to the work and to the team at work. This adds value to the assessment process through the support of learning that is focused around service development, service need and the skills required of those practitioners meeting these needs.

The development of professional level skills and knowledge development was discussed in section 3.2.2 in relation to work by Hodkinson and Issitt (1995) who explored the idea of professional development through 'holistic reflective practice' (1995: 63-65). Reflective practice is embedded within the practice of many professional groups but was not explicitly present amongst these social care practitioners. Some of the participants had very limited experience of education outside of school and NVQs. Reflective practice as a concept of professional development was not explicitly in evidence in any of the interviews, but it was evident that participants at all levels were improving practice and increasing understanding through reflective learning at work. Consideration of the concept of reflective practice could be an area for further work in relation to the professional development of staff at all levels.

Assessors reported that candidates developed understanding and were actively reflecting on their practice and improving it as a result. Key to this developing of understanding was the connection between assessors and candidates and an interactive process (Hodkinson, 1992) that was addressing more than the NVQ and was taking into account the assessor's sense of the candidate's wider abilities (Burchell, 1995, Wolf, 2000) in the workplace. There was evidence of the candidates' more active engagement in workplace activities, of a sharing of good practice and advising others of how practice might be improved. Candidates identified learning in relation to legislation and understanding of responsibilities, accountability and consequences of actions in relation to job roles and boundaries. In terms of staff development there was evidence that the NVQ represented a challenge for some of the candidates at all levels but increased evidence of this at level 4. There was also evidence of potential disengagement with the NVQ if the candidate felt the award was too low for their abilities or job role. Where motivation and confidence had been low encouragement and success in the NVQ sometimes bred ambition (Fearfull, 1997; Sargeant, 2000) and some of the candidates expressed a wish to continue in their learning. NVQ assessment was an area where one participant was deliberating her future development from recognising her strengths in teaching and assessment.

Sargeant (2000: 657) identified how the national occupational standards provided a 'validated checklist of expectations' and as such these could be used to identify where learning was required. Many of Sargeant's (2000: 644) ten generic abilities were found to be present in this research. There was evidence from both candidates and assessors that new learning was being developed both in relation to explicit and implicit expectations of the NVQ. Candidates and assessors were found to be identifying good and bad practice, advising other staff, becoming more aware of boundaries, demonstrating care values and portraying less confusion about what to do (expressed by those who stated they felt reassured that their practice had been reinforced through assessment to national standards and increased confidence at work). These skills and knowledge could all be considered as contributing to professional level development.

Eraut (2004) and Guile and Griffiths (2001) discussed the need for connectivity between knowledge and practice and there was evidence of this through the assessor and candidate relationship. Some candidates discussed new learning through the NVQ process, the integration of that learning into practice and the use of new tools for learning such as the Candidates. Other candidates had a more mixed view of the learning from their NVQ, feeling that learning had been minimal at level 2 but more meaningful at level 3. Most candidates felt that the NVQ had increased their understanding and commented on learning about the theories behind care and legislation with some acknowledging a change in practice as a result but others were not so sure that changes in practice had occurred.

Barnett (1994) discussed understanding. He said that understanding can be observable but is not necessarily so. He argued that it was understanding, a combination of thought and action in relation to work that demonstrates true competence. He criticised the NVQ model as not giving enough room for the development of understanding. His view that knowledge is not a stable entity that can be defined as appropriate across all settings also corresponds with the integrated approach to competence assessment, in that it is aligned to context. There was evidence of learning that was specific to the workplace in many of the interviews. This included learning related to the particular service user group and how policy and legislation affected practice. There was also evidence of new understanding that was being integrated into workplace practice within the research. This was also present in Sargeant's (2000) research on generic abilities of social care workers that is discussed earlier in this section. The legislation questionnaire that is a part of the Homecare/Centre practice was specifically referred to as having increased understanding about responsibilities, role boundaries, accountability and health and safety. Exploration of organisational workplace procedures, by assessors with candidates on areas such as recording, beliefs and values were also discussed as a way of increasing understanding of the expectations of the workplace. Assessors reported observing improved practice that they connected to greater

understanding of practice issues. Both assessors and candidates reported the benefits of feedback, guidance and support in the development of areas of professional level skills. It seemed that a deepening of understanding was occurring through the process of engaging with the NVQ and with workplace assessors.

Sfard (1993: 7) referred to a need for learning to be both ‘acquisitional’ and ‘participative’. Candidates and assessors referred to both types of learning. Participative learning will be discussed under assessor support for learning later in this section. The less interactive part of their learning through the NVQ was more ‘acquisitional’. It was described as significant to the candidates and this more independent learning was valued. Candidates had bought books, looked at websites and undertaken significant research in order to further their learning. There was discussion of new knowledge that was not easy to access or to digest; of individuals researching and working, finding out new information and new ways of keeping up to date through using the internet, books and other people at work. Billett (2000) described refining and reinforcing of prior knowledge and this was reported in the interviews with candidates and assessors stating that there was increased confidence from this strengthening of knowledge and its relationship to the NVQ standards was reassuring to them.

Barnett (1994) refers to how open debate contributes to the evolving nature of knowledge within a profession. There was mixed reporting of this occurring within Homecare. Some managers referred to an open style that appeared to foster debate around the more general areas described by Sargeant (2000). Many of the candidates described being encouraged to ask questions, managers referred to being available for help with understanding and encouraged their staff to keep asking if they did not understand. Staff meetings were used as times for discussing new policies. However candidates reported learning about legislation and much of this particular learning appeared to be undertaken independently with little debate with workplace assessors. There was little evidence of debate beyond the workplace that Barnett suggested was important to professional level knowledge development.

The development of professional knowledge and skills presented a mixed picture within Homecare/Centre delivery. While candidates and assessors reported the ‘acquisition’ (Sfard, 1993) of knowledge and there was also ‘participative’ (Sfard, 1993) creation of new knowledge through workplace discussions in evidence, some related to the NVQ but some to wider workplace practice. From a practitioner perspective I think it may be this level of development that could be important to moving the professional level of knowledge development on in social care. More engagement inside and outside workplace and sector, as Barnett (1995) suggests would open up workplace discussions. This is also defined as a marker of expansive workplace practice (Fuller and Unwin, 2004, 130). However it is

possible to see ‘understanding’ as Barnett (1995: 75) describes it within the evidence from the interviews. Assessors and candidates reported on reflection on knowledge that improved understanding and impacted upon practice that counters Barnett’s criticism of the NVQ model in this regard. Winter and Maisch (1996: 56) suggest that ‘intellectual flexibility’ is the professional benchmark. Assessors who were given further development opportunities to engage at this professional level could be better placed to explore knowledge more flexibly with their staff.

#### 6.7.4. Values and reflective learning (relates to evidence in 6.4)

Values were identified in NVQ related research (Rosenfeld, 1999; Sargeant, 2000; Spielhofer, 2001) but the focus was not on how they could be developed in the workplace. The understanding of the connection between values and reflective learning (Ghaye, 2008) enables another dimension of how an integrated approach to the assessment of competence could encompass this development. Values were usefully employed by assessors to enhance understanding both in relation to the NVQ and in broader workplace learning. It is an area of development that could have a considerable impact in terms of providing a workplace where the service user’s well-being, safety, dignity and choice are respected and protected by all involved in their care. It was evident from the research that most participants had a clear sense of their values and how they applied to the social care environment. Ghaye (2008) explored how values were central to reflective learning and to thoughtful, flexible and informed care delivery. This highlights another dimension of the integrated approach to competence. There was evidence in the research of values being discussed at all levels in relation to personal and work-related values, roles and boundaries. Value based teaching and assessment issues were given as examples of workplace teaching that challenged managers and assessors. The NVQ was seen to have sharpened some workplace training but it was also present in workplace debate external to the NVQ. It has been possible to see the effect of values at organisational level and how staff have a strong sense of how learning valued by the organisation. The values were not necessarily identified specifically in relation to units of competence but to a more integrated assessment of competence which Beckett and Hager (2002: 57) might have referred to as ‘embodied capability’. Participants described how the exploration of values could be a personal journey prompted by consideration of new learning. Reflection used with a touchstone of embedded values (Ghaye, 2008) allows careful consideration of practice and how it can be improved and the NVQ can be seen to have contributed to this in relation to competent performance in care.

#### 6.7.5. Confidence (relates to evidence in 6.5)

The impact of confidence on staff performance was evident in narratives and was referred to by many of the participants. NVQ assessment was seen to influence what Sargeant (2000) referred to as one of his generic abilities of self-efficacy through the assessment related feedback and support. Reflection upon learning and integration of the learning into performance for which feedback was given affected confidence levels. Billett (2000) referred to a strengthening of knowledge and in Chapter 3.2 it was suggested that this might lead to an increase in confidence. It would seem that this was the case in Homecare. The acquisition of new knowledge and strengthening of established knowledge contributed to a sense of confidence within candidates. What candidates thought they knew had not been validated prior to assessment. The close support of assessors contributed to a strengthening of understanding that led to confidence. Assessors noted that confidence was generative and began to affect all types of other performance such as dealing with professionals and more active engagement in workplaces. Allowing staff opportunities for making meaningful contributions to workplace development and an acknowledgement of the value of this resulted in a feeling of empowerment in the workplace and was seen to improve morale, motivation and team work in some of the homes. There was another position where candidates did not find the qualifications developmental and approached them in a more 'acquisitional' (Sfard, 1998) way. This seemed to some extent due to personal pressures and priorities that meant that these candidates were not able to engage in a more 'participative' approach. It may also have been that they did not value the qualification or appreciate the learning opportunities that were available from them. This highlighted the importance of the candidates seeing the qualifications as worthwhile and echoed Illeris' (2003) view that some learners are not intrinsically motivated to achieve.

#### 6.7.6. NVQ Level 4 (relates to evidence in 6.3)

There was less evidence of an integrated approach to assessment at level 4 and the more limited assessment process supported the concern (Grugulis, 1998) about the suitability of the NVQ for higher-level qualifications. Due to job role and structure of the delivery model for level 4 candidates' contact with their assessors and interactive exchange in relation to practice was less developed. For the level 4 candidates much of their knowledge was sought alone and not through informal or formal teaching. The independent learning at level 4 was valued and seen as developmental but it was clear that it was also a challenge and a struggle. The lack of social and participative opportunities to learn might be seen to compound this struggle. Where one candidate had an assessor in the workplace his perception of development and learning was greater. The standard was high and often difficult to reach but the determination of candidates to achieve was evident. The idea of determination to succeed is not well represented in the literature where there tends to be a

focus on the reasons why learners do not engage and what prevents them from achieving rather than why they do.

Problems identified with higher level NVQs such as a lack of integration and not measuring appropriate competences (Grugulis, 1998, 2000; Swailes and Roodhouse, 2003) were largely not in evidence within this group of participants through self reporting, as they generally reported positive experiences from undertaking the NVQ. However the organisation-level manager of Homecare, who has always supported staff undertaking NVQ level 4, has always been qualified in his opinion of the level of development it produces. His perspective as a long-term manager of both nurses and NVQ qualified staff required careful consideration. He recently put on a taught course to attempt to meet some of what he perceived as areas for further development in managers' practice following the achievement of the level 4 qualifications. It seemed that it was not preparing his staff for his level of operational expectation and in this respect his view supports Grugulis' (1998, 2000) research in relation to the NVQ potentially not measuring appropriate competences. This is in spite of the Care NVQ Centre model being well implemented (according to the recent EV report), well resourced with well-qualified staff. This leads to a questioning of how effective the qualification is when undertaken in less favourable environments.

Social care managers are in a key position in the workplace. Their development has often been a succession of NVQs as they progress within their career. In the sample three of the four participants who had achieved their level 4 had progressed within Homecare through levels 2,3 and 4. They are accountable within work environments and the development of their professional level skills would seem to be particularly important. This issue will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 7.

#### 6.7.7. Delivery (relates to evidence in 6.2.4)

A model of delivery where the NVQ is embedded into Homecare and consistent support over many years has contributed to delivery with a high success rate. Purcell (2001) identified the need for an emphasis to be placed upon a delivery model that supports a system for increased integration of the NVQ assessment process to workplace practice and the Homecare/Centre model would seem to meet these requirements. It has been altered and adjusted over the years but the strategic support from organisational-level managers and communication between education provider and organisation would seem to support Matlay (2000) and Ryan (2002) who suggested that this was an important part of implementation of the NVQ.

Exchange of information about progress and Homecare's support and consistency of follow up does not allow for candidates to leave the NVQ without achieving unless they have valid reasons for doing so. In the cohort of participants one candidate failed to complete, she was from overseas and left the organisation to return home. Organisation-level management support and regular meetings between Homecare/Centre contributed to an exchange of feedback that meant a model was monitored, problems identified and action taken quickly with regard to specific issues.

Eraut's (2004) ideas about the need for connectivity between learning and the assessment of competence would seem to be related to the evidence from the narratives of the benefits of the Homecare/Centre model. Candidates appreciated the workshops and the time that it gave them to concentrate on the NVQ. Some of the assessors reported benefiting from my own contribution to the learning process and how to support candidates and learning which related to Billett's (2000, 2003) ideas about the impact of guided learning with mentors being beneficial. The commitment to training and supporting organisational internal verifiers (trained and supported within the Care NVQ Centre) makes Homecare unusual. This was seen as a development tool for staff interested in the NVQ but also a way of building NVQ awareness and ownership of a model within the organisation. Staff valued the opportunities that the NVQ delivery model offered them in terms of personal development into the roles of assessors and many reported the positive benefits to being workplace assessors that enabled close involvement with staff development through the use of the NVQ. Several examples of how the NVQ enabled assessors to identify areas where improvements to practice were necessary were noted. Assessors also identified how the NVQ standards helped staff develop, not just personally but in their relationships with each other and examples were given of the sharing of expected levels of practice amongst colleagues in the workplace.

The management level assessors interviewed identified a very particular approach to that involved being closely and personally involved in the day to- day care of the service-users alongside their staff. One manager summed this up as 'track suit' management. This approach is seen to be integral to an integrated approach to competence assessment where the NVQ is viewed as part of the strategic development of staff within the homes. The opportunities presented for the broader assessment of competence in these facilitative workplaces is not to be underestimated. There was a clear sense of being part of a team within all of the homes; there was a feeling of pride expressed about what had been achieved with regard to better functioning teams and acknowledgement of the management role in developing this. Many of the managers reflected on their management values and approaches and how reliant they were on the team. There were many references to how learning was facilitated in the workplace, in staff meetings, in daily work practice and when

errors occurred. Learning from mistakes was seen to be an important part of the work and some managers stated that it was important that errors could be discussed freely and openly in order that they would not happen again. One manager expressed a feeling of a lack of support when errors were under scrutiny.

Staff valued the monthly workshops that Homecare/Centre offer for levels 2 and 3 NVQs and this supported Naylor (2004) who suggested that time, help, delivery and organisational support were all intrinsic to effective NVQ models of delivery. The day a week Homecare allow for level 4 was also viewed positively although home managers felt that this was sometimes difficult to take when they were in busy workplaces. The candidate who was currently undertaking his level 4 felt that it was difficult to turn development opportunities down when they were offered.

Where workplaces are restricting staff development, to the regulated requirements of qualifications through the CSA 2000, this might be driving people away from the profession of social care through a lack of development opportunities. This was not evident within Homecare who offered continued staff development outside of the regulations (at level 3 for residential care workers) and it was clear that the approach to learning within Homecare was an attraction to new staff and added to a feeling of being valued in the workplace.

In summary to Chapter 6 I would argue that a model of delivery between Homecare/Centre incorporates an integrated approach to competence assessment that develops and supports a learning process through close collaboration between candidate, workplace assessor and the Centre. Assessors are working with candidates' development through the use of the NVQ in a way that is not restricted to the explicit competences described therein but also in relation to broader competences related to professional skill and knowledge, values and reflective learning and confidence. Social care workers undertaking their levels 2 and 3 NVQ would not necessarily take up another type of course so easily and it provides a re-entry point to learning with none of the negative connotations that studying has had for them in the past. This is not to be underestimated because there are reported fundamental changes to their practice that are initiated through their engagement with the NVQ. The development of candidates at level 4 is less clear, partially because of the different approach to assessment with the lack of close workplace supervision, guidance and feedback but there was evidence for most candidates of a useful learning process at work nonetheless.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The demands upon the social care workforce are only likely to increase over the next decades. Expectations of care are rising, service-users are being placed at the centre of care delivery and given the most important voice, the numbers of people using care services are increasing (Department of Health, 2009). It is vital that staff at all levels are properly prepared to deliver services that meet these challenges. Business benefits for staff development need to be very clear in an area where money is tight. Many residential care homes work as small businesses that have seen their profits drop, the regulatory demands increase and service-user expectations rise. This research adds to the debate as to how to achieve the government vision of a proud, professional and successful workforce by 2020 (Department for Education and Skills and Department of Health, 2006).

It is important that the position of adult residential social care is not overlooked within the reform of the social care workforce. The social care sector is heavily reliant on NVQs as part of a pathway of staff development. The focus of the CSA (2000) requirements is that social care staff should have competence-based qualifications. It is thus important that these qualifications appropriately support staff development. It is here that the contribution to practice lies.

Central to the thesis is that NVQs can have a significant role in staff development when there is careful consideration of the individual learner and integration of the assessment process into the organisation's practices and the workplace context. It was found from the participants that within the Homecare/Centre model there were opportunities for learning and development embedded and integrated that supported a learning process and NVQ assessment. The fresh look at NVQs in relation to a more integrated understanding of workplace learning, competence development and NVQs resulted in the development of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery that is useful to practitioners in the social care field. The general of this model have the potential to benefit other organisations engaged with NVQs and those organisations that are considering their strategic integration of workplace learning more generally.

The research purposes were to:

1. Establish staff perspectives on factors that might inhibit or support learning through NVQs in the workplace;
2. Examine the Homecare/Centre NVQ model and delivery approach in relation to the development of workplace learning.

It is pertinent to consider at this stage how far the research purposes have been met as a frame of reference for understanding sections 7.1 and 7.2. The research purpose to explore staff perspectives of NVQs and workplace learning was undertaken through semi-structured interviews and, although a small sample, rich evidence was uncovered through a focus on participant narratives. The position of myself as a researcher/practitioner must be taken into account in relation to what the participants were willing to share and a diversity of research methods or further interviews may have been able to extend understanding. An examination of the Homecare/Centre model of delivery was undertaken and practitioner understanding offered a particular perspective that took into account the complexity of understanding an organisation and NVQs but which presented its own challenges. The understanding of the organisation and how it supported staff resulted in the identification of some general principles that could contribute to enhanced delivery and this was more than was expected at the beginning of the research process. Homecare trained and supported workplace assessors but the Homecare/Centre research did not compare NVQ delivery in organisations that have a different approach and this is an area that would benefit from further enquiry. The Homecare/Centre research identified how qualifications that have been viewed as atomistic and behaviourist can be used to support staff development and how the approach to assessment can be key to the usefulness of the qualifications. The research found that while there is research evidence on NVQ levels 2 and 3 in social care there is little that examines the level 4 qualifications for home managers and considering their role and responsibilities this would appear to be a considerable gap.

The discussions in relation to relevant concepts in the literatures of workplace learning and NVQs are to be found within the discussion sections in 5.3 and 6.7. This chapter summarises the empirical evidence from Chapters 5 and 6 in sections 7.1 and 7.2 and provides an overview of how the research purposes have been met. It also sets the scene for understanding the development of an enhanced model of NVQ delivery which is explored in section 7.3 and which is the contribution to practice of this research. The contribution to theory is discussed in section 7.4 and outlines what this research adds to understanding of prior theoretical work on workplace learning, competence and NVQs. This chapter concludes with an examination in 7.5 of the reflexive research journey as it was experienced and reports on the struggles and achievements that were present in undertaking this piece of research.

## **7.1. Workplace learning**

This section summarises the empirical evidence in Chapter 5. The discussion section 5.3 has previously explored the findings in relation to theoretical and conceptual understanding contained in the workplace learning literature.

### 7.1.1. The social nature of learning (relates to 5.2.1)

The findings in this section were about social learning, the people involved in supporting learning and development at work and some of the considerations that emerged from the empirical evidence. Candidates and assessors were together and separately identifying gaps in knowledge and performance and finding ways to address them. They were showing how useful working alongside each other could be to learning in the workplace. Managers and assessors were trying to understand individual needs and trying to support and encourage and often struggling with this but some were succeeding even with candidates who identified themselves as reluctant candidates. It was clear that the internal motivation of a candidate to learn was key to successful progression but that this could be ameliorated by appropriate support. The narratives were nuanced and show how integral the relationship between assessor/mentor/manager can be in supporting social learning, personal identity and organisational factors. The evidence was not wholly about NVQs but there were many explicit links. It provided evidence towards the types of support that participants perceived as useful in their development. As such this section and the narratives contained within it are also connected to the evidence in Chapter 6. Some of these were support, supervision, contact with managers, an understanding of personal motivations and situations and management support that was focused on motivating and inspiring people to learn. What was found was that working alongside each other was a valuable part of learning and NVQ development and this supported element 2, the integration of assessment into practice. Element 3, an enhanced assessor role, was supported by the evidence in that teaching and learning was embedded in this relationship between participants and that learning not just assessment was being supported, not only in relation to NVQ standards but nonetheless incorporated into that process.

### 7.1.2. The influence of personal background on learning (relates to 5.2.2)

This section described a group of participants with a broad agenda with regard to further learning and progression. Some saw their development as potentially taking them outside of the organisation, some were happy in their current role and some were unsure as to where they could go next. The balance of life and work in the decisions they were making was evident throughout the narratives and demonstrated some of the motivations and disincentives to engage in learning. The understanding of what is motivating learning is key to harnessing the potential to learn at work and aspirations are a key part of this. Discussions about more long-term career trajectories could enable managers to help learners to realise individual ambition through workplace learning but also to recognise if this was not a part of their individual plan.

This section examined some of the factors that might contribute to how learning in the workplace is approached or viewed from the perspective of the participants. Less positive experiences of school and family seemed to have an influence on identity but did not preclude engagement with learning. However the nature of the sample (an NVQ cohort) meant that many of the participants were (or had previously been) formally engaged in learning. The evidence is therefore weighted towards those that made a decision to undertake a qualification and is not representative of those who choose not to participate, the picture for those members of staff might be quite different. All of the participants were thinking about and balancing personal motivation to progress with personal situations. The importance of understanding all of these issues in relation to personal and workplace identity prompted the development of element 4.

#### 7.1.3. The organisational context for learning (relates to 5.2.3)

This section gave voice to a view of the organisation from the people who work within it in relation to workplace learning and teaching, a picture that has both positive aspects and areas where the participants perceived areas of difficulties. In spite of a reluctance to claim the title of teacher there was plenty of evidence of teaching occurring in the workplace. The importance of the strategic support of learning at all levels was clear within the research. There was a commitment of time to staff outside of the workplace. Some concern about organisational level support for managers was expressed in terms of time and stretched resources. The support from the Centre as a reliable strand in relation to the NVQ support of assessors and in terms of a structured and strategic approach was also seen to be a useful element in support of ongoing learning. A participative approach to observing and working alongside learners, questioning, creating opportunities for discussion and learning, letting people try and learn from experience were all described. As a learning environment most of the participants were positive about what was available with one criticism of the induction process. Teaching skills were discussed in terms of planning teaching, openness to challenging teaching situations and a responsiveness to using workplace situations as teaching opportunities. The narratives supported the view that in general the learning and teaching environment within Homecare facilitated learning and supported staff development. Some concern about organisational level support for managers was expressed in terms of time and stretched resources.

There was found to be a flexible and intuitive approach to the identification of learning opportunities amongst staff. Some of the ways that this was encouraged could be useful to examine in terms of workplace learning strategy in other organisations.

## **7.2. The exploration of staff perspectives in relation to NVQs and their delivery**

The findings in Chapter 6 are summarised here as representing the original research purposes of exploring staff perspectives. The discussion in section 6.7 has previously explored the theoretical and conceptual links. Some of the criticisms and benefits of the NVQ model explored in section 3.2.1 were found to be present within the empirical research however new benefits were also established adding to the contribution of this research to practice and theory and were key in the development of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery which is discussed in section 7.3.

### **7.2.1. Assessors' perspectives (relates to 6.1)**

In this section it was possible to see how two of the assessors valued the opportunity for development through being NVQ assessors and how this could help staff develop skills that could be of benefit to the workplace. Within the narratives it was considered that the NVQ improved practice with specifics being referred to such as an increase in knowledge, confidence, recording, dealing with professionals. The problems of time, maintenance of assessment skills, the burden of the assessor and the difficulties associated with integrating assessment into practice were all acknowledged within the narratives as challenges with regard to NVQ assessment in the workplace. Two assessors' narratives identified times when the NVQ had focused attention on a development need and teaching that had been required as a consequence prior to assessment. One assessor described the workplace integration of the NVQ standards into practice and the effects on the staff group linked to this integration. The NVQ was seen to prompt discussion, teaching and learning in the workplace and increased confidence of workers was reported to encourage engagement in workplace activity. Some candidates found little new learning but the assessment process identified development needs in others. An increased focus on assessor observation was felt to diminish the opportunities for some candidates to be involved in the assessment process that could be potentially limiting. Sustained improvement to practice was reported but also identified as problematic in one area. Assessors thought that the NVQ was valued, inspired pride and confidence and more competent practice in candidates. This provided the basis for the development of element 5 of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery.

### **7.2.2. Candidates' perspectives on levels 2 and 3 (relates to 6.2)**

This section outlined some the challenges and value of the NVQ candidates told of in their narratives. It was found that candidates' experiences of assessors in the

workplace were generally positive but that sometimes it was very difficult if an assessor was not committed to the candidate and the process. It was clear that candidates could even learn from the bad experiences and, when motivated to achieve, the determination often obtained a positive result for them. Experienced care workers reported new learning at level 2 and one reported new learning about how to learn in a way that brought satisfaction. The NVQ was perceived as being valued by Homecare and by the candidates. The delivery system between Homecare/Centre was experienced positively with candidates valuing their time away from the workplace to concentrate on their qualification. All of the participants' narratives stated that their experience of Homecare was of an organisation that valued and supported their learning and development. Candidates reported changes in attitude to NVQs when managers of homes changed. Evidence from the assessors that an integrated approach to assessment of competence, NVQs and workplace learning more generally present within the interviews can be seen to follow through here in evidence from the candidates. There was consideration of learning and development needs, the importance of working with the individual and their approach to learning and strategic organisational support. In addition the development of professional level skills and knowledge has been further evidenced with candidates reporting better understanding of accountability issues and how broader legislation impacts upon care practice. The challenges of the NVQ delivery system within Homecare should not be overlooked however and examples of the tensions that are present when employing this approach require careful balancing by organisations. This section provided evidence for the development of element 5, 6 and 8 of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery.

#### 7.2.3. Candidates' perspectives on NVQ level 4 (relates to 6.3)

This section drew together some of the level 4 candidates' experiences that were reported in their narratives. It was a mixed picture with regard to the level 4 qualifications and generally less positive than that at levels 2 and 3. One candidate did not identify any new learning or any changes to her practice that had been noted by others although she did report a very positive experience of undertaking the qualification with a colleague who was very supportive of her during the process. Most reported organisational support and value in gaining the qualification although Peter reported being offered opportunities that were difficult to refuse and having to prioritise the NVQ. There was evidence of professional level knowledge and skill development within the interviews but the lack of workplace encouragement, support and feedback would seem to have been missing. The assessor who had a workplace assessor, seemed benefited most developmentally. Three of the level 4 candidates expressed a keen interest in undertaking further qualifications; two would have liked to do

their nurse training. It was reported that the organisation valued the qualification. It is worth considering the usefulness of the NVQ at the higher levels, not because of the standards themselves but because the delivery at this level of management position does not lend itself to an integrated model of assessment. This section has provided evidence for element 7 of an enhanced delivery model but poses questions regarding whether the NVQ as it is delivered in organisations is the best form of development for adult social care managers, although it may be suitable for deputies where an involved assessor can integrate assessment in the workplace.

#### 7.2.4. Values and reflective learning (relates to 6.4)

What emerged across the participants' narratives was an approach to values that was embedded implicitly in practice both in relation to the management of service-users and staff. There were many examples of values related issues being dealt with sensitively and used as a way of developing learning in the workplace. The embedded nature of these values seemed a very important aspect of an integrated approach to competence development (element 5 of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery). The intuitive nature of the teaching and learning around values was reliant on this embeddedness. Participants were dealing with these issues not just because of organisational policy, legislation or the NVQ but were motivated by a strong sense of personal values. This was indicative of an integrated approach to competence assessment (element 5 in an enhanced model) but also an enhanced assessor role (elements 2 and 3) and a management approach (element 8) that took account of the importance of values as a part of competent care practice.

#### 7.2.5. Confidence and competence (relates to 6.5)

In relation to confidence there was a thread throughout the narratives of how important this quality is to both candidates and assessors in the workplace. It was recognised when it was not there and a link was made by some between undertaking the NVQ and an increase in confidence. Confidence is not however not a part of NVQ assessment, although it is implicit within some assessment criteria. It was viewed as an important quality in relation to the development of workers in the workplace by assessors and by candidates themselves. The close working together of assessor and candidate within the workplace and the NVQ system can be seen to reap rewards with regards to confidence where it works well. Whilst confidence is a personal attribute the organisation also benefited. All four of the assessors remarked on the improvements in candidates' workplace performance linked to increasing confidence. Higher confidence levels were reported as impacting upon the candidates' interactions with service-users, their contributions to meetings, recording of information, how they dealt with medication, their understanding of confidentiality,

their dealing with professionals, and general engagement in the activities in the home. These specifics, mentioned by several of the assessors and managers of the homes, should not be passed over too quickly. They outline some very important parts of the job role of a support worker and move them from being a worker who requires close observation of practice to ensure adherence to policy and practice in the workplace to one that can be relied upon to operate without supervision in a variety of circumstances. They indicate the gradual development of professional skills and knowledge that is embodied in the confident and competent practitioner and contribute evidence towards the development of element 5 of an enhanced delivery model that suggests that integrated approach to competence assessment is an important factor.

#### 7.2.6 Professional level skills and knowledge development (relates to 6.6)

The evidence showed that performance issues were being addressed and assessors, through further learning and skills development, were developing competent practice. Assessors referred explicitly to a deepening of understanding of care values, of engagement with professionals and work teams a commitment to work. Both assessors and candidates as part of thinking about practice and understanding their role more fully inferred reflective learning. Assessors referred to improved recording processes and of sharing good practice amongst peers, identifying poor practice and showing how it could be improved. Participants referred to increasing their knowledge about legislation, their roles, their boundaries and accountability. This evidence was seen to be contributory to the development of professional level skills and knowledge and also has relevance to how the NVQ level 4 meets the need for managers' professional level development. This evidence links to elements 2, 3, 5, 7 and 8.

The empirical evidence in the previous sections prompted a reflection on the criticisms of the NVQ system and an identification of positive benefits of the NVQ as it is implemented within Homecare suggesting that the research had more to offer than an overview of staff perspectives. The next section explores the thesis set out in this dissertation in relation to a model of enhanced NVQ delivery that is the contribution to practice. The findings of the research in Homecare are related to the key concepts previously discussed and the more general relevance of the research to other organisations is identified.

### **7.3. A model of enhanced NVQ delivery**

As has been previously stated central to the thesis is the view that NVQs can have a significant role in staff development when there is careful consideration of the individual learner and integration of the assessment process into the organisation's practices and the workplace context. The development of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery, which is not meant to be prescriptive but represents general principles that could be applied is the contribution to practice. The research explores how one organisation supports staff development and learning but has relevance to wider audiences where NVQs are used.

The key elements of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery that were identified in Chapters 5 and 6 were based on the empirical findings and engagement with the literature of NVQs, workplace learning and NVQs (see discussion sections 5.3 and 6.7).

1. Strategic implementation of the NVQ
2. Workplace assessors who integrate assessment into practice
3. An enhanced assessor role that supports a learning process
4. Attention to learner and work-related identity
5. An integrated approach to the assessment of competence
6. Strong relationship between organisation and an education provider
7. Professional development strategy for home managers
8. A management approach that supports learning

Next the elements of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery within the research in Homecare are explored in relation to the relevant concepts previously identified and establishes the more general significance of the elements of a model to a wider audience than those solely interested in NVQs.

#### **1. Strategic implementation of the NVQ**

There were many ways of incorporating a strategic approach that the research into Homecare identified. Strategic implementation has been established as a key factor in the development of workplace learning within the care NVQ field (Fearfull, 1997; Godfrey, 2004) and is also underpinned by the concept of expansive practice (Fuller and Unwin, 2004) from the workplace learning field. The close co-operation between education provider and organisation was explored from a general perspective of NVQs (Matlay, 2000; Ryan, 2002) and identified as significant. The research into Homecare has developed understanding of

some of the factors that contribute to strategic implementation but these are clearly not limited to this type of organisation. The principles are applicable to any organisation that takes a lead and responsibility in the development of staff at a strategic level and follows that responsibility through into support of the learning and development process at an operational level. Many of the other elements flow from this approach and are sustained by the sound foundation that combines policy with a framework of support for learning.

## 2. Workplace assessors who integrate assessment into practice

The Homecare/Centre model of the assessment of workplace competence by workplace assessors has been found to have significant benefits. The assessor's experience of the context of delivery ensures a close alignment of that assessment to the workplace. Assessments are therefore underpinned by the specific knowledge required within the organisation and thus more relevant to practice. The benefit of feedback from experienced colleagues and managers was reported as a strength of the NVQ model in Homecare and corresponds with the work by Lave and Wenger (1991) on legitimate peripheral participation and Billett (2003) on the benefits of mentors in the workplace which both relate to the social and participative nature of learning.

Broader competence at work was also identified as part of this assessment. Team work, team morale, confidence, sharing of good practice were all described as benefits often not explicit within the NVQ standards. This supports the research on the assessment of competence and how it might be undertaken in a more holistic, less atomistic and behaviourist manner (Burchell, 1995; Hodkinson and Issitt, 1995; Norris, 1991; Wolf, 2000). The understanding of the context of workplace learning (Beckett and Hager, 2002) is integral to the broader assessment of competence that is a foundation for this thesis.

What was also clear was that assessment is a responsibility and time-intensive and in times when home managers have increasing levels of accountability and responsibility it is difficult to prioritise the NVQ. However if it is the responsibility of home managers to be confident that their staff are working within the expectations of the workplace context then this model of assessment is a way of ensuring that this occurs. The time spent has the potential for bringing with it many other benefits. It clearly communicates that staff are worthy of investment, it builds relationships, it opens up communication between levels of staff and it is an opportunity outside of the formal systems of supervision and appraisal to discuss work performance in detail within a framework of national standards.

For organisations that do not support workplace assessors there are ways of drawing in the context of the assessment through other involvement with the assessment process. This could take the form of some observation of performance through witness testimony or an

incorporation of learning opportunities within the workplace that support the more general assessments of knowledge, understanding or performance that will be carried out by peripatetic assessors. The important part is that the strategy is thought through within the organisation and supported in its implementation.

### 3. An enhanced assessor role that supports a learning process

Within Homecare there was evidence of strong and collaborative relationships between assessors and candidates that incorporated support for learning and development. This was the key thread within the interviews that contributed to the definition of this element. There was evidence of increased sharing of good practice at work that was connected to the NVQ and a clearer understanding of expectations of practice that had resulted from engaging in the qualification. The importance of confidence was a strong thread in the interviews and confidence development had become a part of the supported learning process. The assessor role was also seen as developmental for the assessors in Homecare. There was evidence that being an NVQ assessor contributed to the sense of professional responsibility, with assessors dealing with performance issues in planned and considered ways. Assessment is also a way of gaining another qualification that has currency outside of the workplace. The role of verifier is similarly viewed as a developmental opportunity for those in management positions. The role modelling of this practice and advice and guidance available from myself was alluded to in connection with assessors' development. Opportunities for development of NVQ networks, regular standardisation and updating of assessors with opportunities to discuss assessment and verification challenges are a part of the Homecare scheme that engages workplace assessors in NVQ development and could be implemented in other organisations.

This element of an enhanced assessor role related closely to concepts explored by Hodkinson and Issitt (1995) who argued for an 'interactive' approach to competence assessment and also to Hager (2004a) who posited that a learning curriculum with a supportive learning process could add value to vocational courses. The fostering of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1998) within the workplace as a conduit for staff development can be understood in relation to the network and delivery surrounding the NVQ within Homecare. The contact with both internal and external networks of support and engagement is a feature of expansive workplace practice (Fuller and Unwin, 2004). The NVQ delivery system in Homecare builds upon these networks. In relation to the general relevance of an enhanced assessor role I would argue that the involvement in supporting learning is an important part of professional level engagement and can add another dimension to the delivery of care. Passing on of knowledge and participation in the supervision of staff is also a part of the management role within social care. The NVQ system gives this support a structure around which it can be developed further but again a strategic

approach to the support of learning that is embedded within an organisation would not have to be reliant upon the NVQ for implementation.

#### 4. Attention to learner and work-related identity

Scepticism and criticism of the NVQ itself and external commitments proved not to be insurmountable problems in relation to staff engagement. Participation in the NVQ was enhanced by it being perceived as a worthwhile qualification and there was learning that was both congruent to practice and supported in the workplace. Significant learning was reported. There was evidence that a workplace assessor with knowledge of the individual and their circumstances could encourage engagement with learning. There was also evidence of a sense of work-related identity in Homecare that was related to the organisational support for learning.

The general relevance of working with learner and work-related identity (Collin, 2009) applies not only to NVQ candidates but also to other learners in the workplace. Identity has emerged from the research and the work of Hodkinson and Issitt (1995) and Billett (2001a) in relation to individual biography and affordances. An understanding of the nature of personal and work-related identity (Collin, 2009) helps in understanding both participation and non-participation in workplaces. When recognised, understood and addressed with the individual there is at least a possibility of engaging them in learning at work. The recognition and accommodation of personal demands through family friendly policies, a flexible approach to work and well-supported learning opportunities can help attract people back to learning and encourage a more involved approach to work which benefits the workplace and all those within it.

#### 5. An integrated approach to the assessment of competence

The Homecare/Centre model showed how the integration of the assessment of competence into the context in which the candidate was being assessed had benefits to candidates and to the workplace. Assessors and candidates reported greater confidence in engagement with professionals, a growing commitment to better practice, a sharing of what had been learned about better standards of practice, a willingness to engage in workplace decision-making and a sense of the workplace as a community. Better understanding about practice in relation to roles, boundaries and philosophy of care was in evidence and supported Sargeant's (2000) work in the care field. A firm grasp of skills, understanding and knowledge, participatively created, was how many of the participants developed and benefited from the NVQ and many valued the independent learning that was found to be closely allied to the generation and strengthening of knowledge. The NVQ has brought many of the participants back to learning after a long break and after some challenging previous experiences of education. There was evidence of the participants at levels 2 and 3 using the NVQ to develop their knowledge and

understanding of practice and managers and assessors acknowledged improvements in engagement in the workplace. Assessors and managers reported changes in behaviours and confidence in relation to workers engaged with NVQ levels 2 and 3 that resulted in more professional level engagement at work. Once committed to learning and offered the appropriate support there is a better chance of development and some of this can be facilitated through an understanding of what can be achieved in the workplace in relation to personal and work-related identity (Collin, 2009).

Key to the integrated approach is the context of the workplace. Learning and assessments are undertaken within an organisation with its particular set of expectations and are carried out within workplaces by assessors with an embedded sense of these expectations. Assessors can provide the integrated support that candidates need to make the links between knowledge and performance, potentially achieving the connectivity that Eraut (2004) and Guile and Griffiths (2001) support and also the assessment of understanding that Barnett (1994) argues is a marker of competent practice. Together with the expectations that an assessor may carry with them (either from within the workplace or from outside of it) (Burchell, 1995; Wolf, 2000) this means that the assessment of competence is rarely an isolated, behaviourist interpretation of standards.

The issue of professional level skills and knowledge development is a key issue if social care teams of the future are to be developed to have skills commensurate with the expectations of the service and knowledge and understanding that can be used flexibly and creatively in the social care workplace. The NVQ is the qualification that is embedded in the workplace and, when used for development rather than accreditation, it has been seen to have potential. It is the implementation that is key. The presentation of the award as valuable, relationships within work that foster and take responsibility for context-specific learning are all important elements for consideration. The research showed that the approach to assessment that was taking place within Homecare incorporated broader understandings that are present within practice but not necessarily observable (Barnett, 1994). These understandings were present in assessors' reporting of the changes that were evident in practice following engagement with the NVQ process but were not specifically assessed within the NVQ standards.

There was evidence of reflective learning and this was identified in the research in relation to values (Ghaye, 2008). Values were used as a way to challenge beliefs and discriminatory practice in the workplace through an open and facilitative approach to learning. A sense of values that is heightened through the engagement with care work provides an opportunity for learning that is not skill or task-based. It has been possible to see how workplace assessors have used value-based teaching to shift beliefs and change perspectives. The link to reflective learning (Ghaye, 2008) that was explored has great potential, not just in relation to

values but also in relation to other areas of professional development within the workplace. It has been seen that this group of social care workers are not experienced learners. The NVQ has given them an opportunity to have their experience acknowledged and their perception of themselves as effective workers strengthened. Social care staff generally enter into the workplace with embedded values that support a willingness to contribute to society and the NVQ has recognised the central importance of values to competence assessment that is present to be used creatively and reflected upon within assessment.

Reflective learning was also found to be present in relation to confidence where candidates and assessors reported an increase in confidence related to a strengthening of understanding that knowledge and practice had been validated and this emerged through the use of the NVQ standards as a benchmark for accepted practice. While Sargeant's (2000) 'validated checklist of expectations' (Sargeant, 2000: 657) was a fair observation at one level it did not fully encompass the effects of this on the individuals who have reflected upon their practice.

Confidence is the final aspect of an integrated approach that is explored in this research and has been previously found in other NVQ researchers' work about the effects of NVQ (Fearfull, 1998; Rainbird et al., 2004a, Rosenfeld, 1999; Sargeant, 2000). Support from assessors in the workplace enabled reflection on and reinforcing of practice that resulted in increased confidence. The confident, competent practitioner is what is hoped for and there was evidence that both obtaining the qualification and assessment and feedback on practice contributed to an increase of confidence in the workplace. Assessors made links to improved practice by way of a further engagement in workplace activity that they presented as part of confidence building and increased appropriation of work-related identity. In the participant narratives it became clear that confidence was not just a personal experience but also a quality that could be experienced by others in the workplace. Confidence was linked to an increased professional attitude and engagement.

NVQs have become the qualification of regulation but the implementation of the NVQ varies enormously. Whilst they are seen as a means to accredit existing competence there is a danger that opportunities for development are lost. In working with the researchers' ideas regarding an integrated model of competence (Beckett and Hager, 2002, Hager, 2004a) it is possible to see how the NVQ can be incorporated into a broader assessment that takes account of developing staff more holistically. Working with the reasons for non-participation as well as participation it is possible to understand learner and work-related identity that can foster development (Billett, 2001b, Billett and Pavlova, 2005; Collin, 2009; Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004). Combining the understanding of the individual with an expansive

workplace (Fuller and Unwin, 2004) could create staff development potential in any workplace.

## 6. Strong relationship between organisation and education provider

It seems evident from this research that one way for a vocational qualification to be successful is that the ownership of the qualification sits squarely in the workplace. In addition the support from an education provider was found to be useful. Homecare supports candidates with learning resources. Journals, books and training are widely available to all within the organisation. When candidates have had little current experience of study and are less familiar with the use of the Internet, they have not been exposed to the information available and how to find and use it. In itself this is a skill that can be acquired and used in the future. Having access to these resources in a familiar environment may reduce the anxiety of those unused to accessing materials for study. It was evident that learning about legislation and policy can be a valuable learning process not just in terms of knowledge but also in strengthening practice. Reading and inquiry had initiated new learning.

Sfard's (1998) learning metaphors are key to understanding individual needs in relation to learning. The participative approach to learning that has been discussed in relation to social learning is one approach. The acquisitional approach is not to be forgotten and has a relevance to the delivery of NVQs where the emphasis has historically been on performance and the knowledge that underpins that performance. This is no longer the case and knowledge requirements at levels 3 and 4 require research into models, theory and research. Ready access to resources supports this learning. The learning style of individuals may incorporate both metaphors and facilitate learning that can then be transferred to other learning situations.

There was very little awareness of evidence-based practice or research within the study and finding a way to integrate some of the available resources into workplace practice could be a way of further developing a creative interest in practice improvement. For the workforce to engage at a professional level with its peers (such as nursing and social work) necessitates an engagement with these issues at a strategic and operational level. The significance of learners having access to materials to support learning is clearly one that is applicable more widely across the sector.

The key features of the Homecare/Centre model in relation to this element again flow from the strategic manner that Homecare chose to implement NVQs within the organisation. The development and support of workplace assessors was significant to this. Congruence was found between an organisation and an education provider that has sustained and supported the NVQ and also the Centre over a seventeen-year period. Matlay (2000) and Ryan (2002)

identified the potential for improving the integration of NVQ into organisations through a closer contact between education provider and organisation. A consistent staffing presence on both sides during that time may have been a part of this. Sustained levels of communication, required action being followed through on both sides and a commitment to making the scheme work have been an important part of the success of the NVQ in this organisation, but are again not limited to the NVQ. A model of delivery between the NVQ Centre and Homecare provides a basis for practice that might be useful to other providers; particularly those who have contracted the NVQ assessment out of the workplace and might consider bringing it back in-house. However it is not reliant upon the NVQ. Relationship building between organisations and educational partners may be helpful to further the connectivity that is suggested by Eraut (2004) and Guile and Griffiths (2001) and could bring benefits to the meaningful integration of knowledge and practice in a number of courses.

## 7. Professional level development for home managers

All of the participants who had achieved a level 4 qualification expressed personal satisfaction with the award. However the learning reported was mixed. When learning and development was reported it was evident that it was the close support from a workplace assessor was significant. This is an important award in terms of professional level development but whether it is developing the managers in a way that will move the social care sector forward may be open to challenge. What is clear is the need for a pathway of development for social care managers that incorporates professional level skills and knowledge and is applicable across the sector. Most of the level 4 participants expressed a wish for further development on completion of their level 4 awards and had no clear direction. Although managers expressed confidence about work in the homes and organisation the issues about wider societal acceptance of the NVQ, as recognition of status, did not seem to be present. The lack of access to the GSCC register was not raised as an issue, pointing to a potential lack of awareness of the challenges to their stratum of work in a national context. It might also be possible to link this to the limitations that the NVQ level 4 has possibly compounded, with its focus on the more atomistic elements of performance through the assessment process that is not as integrated into workplace practice as it can be at levels 2 and 3.

## 8. A management approach that supports learning

The importance of those with positions within the homes was found to be an important aspect of creating a workplace that is open and encouraging to staff development. Some candidates reported changes in workplace attitude to NVQs when managers changed. Managers who used opportunities for learning in day-to-day practice were facilitating learning outside of assessment and creating an atmosphere of engagement and empowerment within the teams. A management approach that is facilitative of learning in the workplace and

managers that have the skills to be able to recognise personal and team development potential is part of the underpinning concept of expansive workplace practice (Fuller and Unwin, 2004) and can be seen to have relevance across all learning and learning environments. It is possible to see how the NVQ within Homecare has been used to spread an educational culture into the workplace and how this has been aided by the close collaboration of the Centre.

In summary, this section has explored the more general relevance of this research for both organisations and policy within the social care sector. The NVQ remains a set of standards that can be used atomistically and behaviourally but the research shows that features of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery enables the qualifications to be used to support learning. This does not need to be restricted to these particular qualifications. Incorporating an integrated approach to assessment of the NVQ in the workplace has been seen to be desirable and is not necessarily limited to those organisations that, like Homecare, have taken on the responsibility of workplace assessment themselves. The broader understanding drawn from the field of workplace learning can also be seen to support the potential for staff development in the sector.

#### **7.4 Contribution to theory**

Key to the contribution to theory is bringing together the theoretical concepts discussed in Chapter 3, sections 5.3 and 6.7 against a backdrop of understanding NVQs and the contribution to practice discussed in the previous section. It is in the drawing together of competence, NVQ and workplace learning research that the original contribution is found. The viewing of NVQs through the lens of workplace learning research offers a different perspective. What is also possible is a fresh look at workplace learning research through the lens of the NVQ and the enhanced model of NVQ delivery. The contribution to theory will be examined in two main areas. Firstly it is suggested that this research enables a re-examination of Hodkinson's (1992) interactive model of competence development and its application to the NVQ. Secondly it examines how features of an enhanced model of NVQ delivery add to understanding of Hager's (Beckett and Hager, 2002; Hager, 1994, 2000, 2004a) integrated approach to competence assessment, expansive and restrictive workplace practices (Fuller and Unwin, 2004) and how the understanding of identity can help improve learning support in the workplace (Billet, 2003; Billett and Pavlova, 2005; Collin, 2009; Illeris, 2003, 2006; Wenger, 1998). It is suggested that through due consideration of these aspects a broader assessment of competence becomes possible and this research has identified three areas where this was happening, values and reflective learning, confidence and professional skills and knowledge.

The basis for the development of the elements of a model of enhanced NVQ delivery that is the contribution to practice was built upon the empirical findings and research previously discussed in section 3.2.2. The Homecare/Centre research suggested that assessment other than that prescribed solely by the NVQ was a live and vital issue for the assessors. The question is what can be learned from this research that moves conceptual understanding forward?

This research contributes to thinking about competence assessment and NVQs. Norris' (1992) behaviourist construct of assessment was allied to the NVQ approach but his generic construct of assessment anticipated a much broader evaluation of personal qualities related to competent performance in a practice setting. Hodkinson (1992) identified potential for development of an interactive model of competence assessment but did not consider the NVQ as a useful vehicle for his approach. He did however suggest the assessors were integral to his interactive approach. I would contest that it is not the NVQ that is the issue but the approach to assessment that is key to understanding the usefulness of the NVQ. The Homecare/Centre research offers a view that these concepts can be used complementarily to enhance the understanding of the approach to NVQ assessment through a developmental learning process that links the understanding of theory and practice (Burchell, 1995; Eraut, 2004; Guile and Griffiths, 2001; Hodkinson and Issit, 1995). In turn this gives a particular emphasis to a broader assessment of competence that all of the authors suggest is desirable.

Hodkinson (1992: 31) stated that the NVQ system was a 'behaviouristic model of competence' and that the belief system that underpinned the approach is overly simplistic in that it assumes that the assessment of performance is straightforward. There is evidence in this research that this is not the case. Assessors have made nuanced judgements about staff performance that has taken into account understanding embedded in performance. Hodkinson (1992:34) suggested that the NVQ cannot be a part of the 'interactive model'. I would suggest that this research demonstrates many aspects of his interactive model. It has shown how the NVQ qualification has been used complementarily to support learning, the assessment of competence and underpinning knowledge and understanding in the workplace. Some areas for staff development have been identified in this research as features of learning that could be a focus for an interactive assessment approach; attributes such as confidence, professional skills and knowledge and values and reflective practice.

What the research shows is that this form of interactive assessment is not a straightforward process and involves considerable commitment to staff learning and development that is time intensive and complex. This is significant in that Gospel (2010) observed a marked change between his two periods of research as to how organisations assessed staff, with more NVQ assessment by external assessors in the later period. External assessment could present difficulties for assessors to fully assess workplace performance and underpinning understanding when they are occasional visitors to the workplace. Also an external assessor may not have the investment in ongoing staff development of that of a workplace assessor. Assessors in Homecare could see that external assessment would relieve them of a burden however the commitment to engaging with the NVQ in a way that enhanced their engagement with staff development was seen as advantageous. In thinking about Hodkinson's (1992) models in relation to this research it seems that it may be the approach to the NVQ that is the key to the quality of assessment rather than the standards themselves. Further research comparing workplace and peripatetic assessment could explore whether embedding NVQ assessment in workplaces is advantageous in terms of staff development.

Hager (Beckett and Hager, 2002; Hager, 1994, 2000, 2004a) suggested an integrated approach to competency standards that was mediated by people through the use of the standards but not wholly dependent upon them. In this he differed from Hodkinson in that he did not suggest that competency standards could not be used satisfactorily in his approach but that their usefulness was dependent on the people in the workplace who were using them. Learning support for individuals by assessors, the personal motivation of individuals and the strategic and operation level support for the qualifications were all found to be important in the Homecare/Centre research. Viewing Hager's model with the themes of the Homecare/Centre research it is possible to see how incorporating interpersonal, personal and organisational factors is an extension of his idea that competency standards are mediated by people and an enhanced model of NVQ delivery offers an opportunity to consider this broader interpretation. The elements of the model contributed to an approach to competency assessment and people at all levels of the organisation were central to its success: a strategic approach to the implementation of the qualifications (element 1), workplace assessors who integrate assessment into practice context (element 2), an enhanced assessor role (element 3), attention to learner and work-related identity (element 4), an integrated approach to the assessment of competence (element 5), a strong relationship between organisation and education provider (element 6) and a management approach that supports learning (element 8).

The Homecare/Centre research offers increased understanding of the features of expansive and restrictive workplace development (Fuller and Unwin, 2004). Cox (2007) made this connection in her research on NVQs in health but no research was found in social care. This research focused on social care and found that the NVQ can be used as a catalyst for an expansive approach (Fuller and Unwin, 2004: 130). Implicit within the research findings are a number of the expansive features identified by Fuller and Unwin (2004): shared understanding of the workplace as a community of practice, access to a range of qualifications, planned time off the job for learning, gradual transition to rounded participation, organisational recognition of and support for employees as learners, team work being valued, cross boundary communication and managers as facilitators of workforce and individual development. The Homecare/Centre research shows how the NVQ can be used as a part of the development of these practices and can aid the creation of expansive environments.

What was important from this was recognising how important the NVQ assessor was as a part of this learning process and the training and support of assessors is therefore crucial. Billett (2003) established the importance of training mentors in the support of learners but his work did not extend to how an organisation could support the mentor beyond the training. It was found to be a personally valued but also an onerous and time intensive role and a role that was unappreciated. The Homecare/Centre showed how training and ongoing support to assessors can be usefully facilitated by an education provider. Fuller and Unwin's (2004) work does not refer to a link between education and workplace that has been found to be a useful part of Homecare practice. Matlay (2002) and Ryan (2000) identified the importance of a supportive link between NVQ provider and the workplace as a key contributor to the quality of delivery. The Homecare/Centre approach of developing and supporting NVQ assessors in a community of practice was seen to have a positive effect and added another dimension to expansive practice. In this way a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) supporting the implementation of the NVQ can be seen to be a way forward in combating some of the challenges of workplace assessment. Essentially any qualification that provided similar focus and a drawing together of staff in pursuit of learning could have the same effect. A difference between NVQs and other qualifications is the assessment process that makes a clear link between assessment and observation of workplace performance by the NVQ assessor. Assessment that separates the two may not lend itself to be so well integrated into the workplace.

However if NVQ assessment becomes further distanced from workplace practice then the advantages of the process may be lost.

Another aspect that contributes to thinking in relation to expansive and restrictive workplace practice (Fuller and Unwin, 2004) is the valuing of qualifications by employers, staff and organisations and not just their availability. The NVQ model has been heavily criticised (although recent research (Cox, 2007; Gospel, 2010; Roe, 2006) goes some way in redressing this) but staff valued the organisational support of the NVQ qualifications in Homecare. The principle applies to the valuing of any qualifications. If the organisation, the staff and a wider learning community do not value the qualifications being undertaken, this could be seen as restrictive practice that undermines learner endeavours.

The complexity of understanding the learner who is being asked to engage in workplace learning cannot be underestimated. Illeris (2003) described an adult learner who was, 'Not very inclined to learn something of which they cannot see the point on the basis of their own life situation' (Illeris, 2003: 167). He (2003, 2006) also suggested that it is not enough to assume that learning is socially constructed but there was a need to examine how and why individuals engage and why they might not engage. The Homecare/Centre research has used identity as a way of understanding learner engagement. Wenger (1998) identified identity as a 'pivot' between the social and the individual. Collin (2009) explored identity as a way of understanding learning and work-related identity and suggested that identity was 'constructed at the intersection of the social and the individual' (Collin, 2009: 24). Billett and Pavlova (2005) found work to be identity-forming but found that employees would forgo aspirations to achieve a work and life balance.

It is accepted that an individual's biography, disposition, autonomy and agency (Billett, 2003; Billett et al., 2005; Billett and Pavlova, 2005; Hodkinson et al., 2004; Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004) is intertwined with thinking, acting, working and learning. Identity has been used as a way of understanding learning engagement within this research and establishes of a link between workplace learning concepts and an enhanced model of NVQ delivery. The way that assessors'/mentors' understanding of identity could improve learning support in workplaces is not well represented in workplace learning or NVQ research. The understanding of identity takes a place in an enhanced model of NVQ delivery and was drawn from the empirical evidence. This facilitated an integrated approach but was largely intuitive. Training for workplace assessors that highlighted this important aspect of teaching and learning could help even reluctant or ambivalent learners to engage in

development. The importance of workplace relationships shows that time spent getting to know staff and respecting their personal situations is an important consideration if managers/assessors are going to support staff. The research showed that although previous educational experiences, family history in relation to learning, current family responsibilities and aspirations influence learners they did not necessarily impede engagement when the appropriate support was offered.

This research has offered evidence of three areas of broader competence development; confidence, professional skills and knowledge development and values and reflective practice. This is covered to some extent in research on NVQ levels 2 and 3 in Care (Cox, 2007; Rosenfeld, 1999; Sargeant, 2000; Speilhofer, 2001) but not for NVQ level 4. These studies do not examine in any detail how support for this type of learning can be implemented in practice.

Researchers of NVQs (Rainbird et al., 2004a; Rosenfeld, 1999; Spielhofer, 2001; Thomas and Grimes, 2003) referred explicitly to increased confidence in engaging with NVQs. Other writers (Fearfull, 1997; Sargeant, 2000) referred to confidence but also increased motivation, a more professional attitude, greater understanding and knowledge, a more developed sense of good and bad practice and self-efficacy. Norman and Hyland (2003) explored the notion of confidence and found anxiety, low self-esteem and lack of confidence to be barriers to learning that require attention. This research offers evidence of how assessors/mentors can usefully support the development of confidence through a social and participative approach to learning. The consideration of the issues that might affect individuals within the workplace and their potential reluctance to engage with learning, due to unrewarding prior experiences, is a backdrop to understanding the important role of workplace assessors in reducing anxiety and building confidence that contributes a feature that expands upon previous findings.

Hodkinson and Issitt (1995: 63-65) described a professional as someone who has developed expertise that involves professional growth, independence and empowerment 'within a moral and ethical dimension', a 'critical autonomy' involving the use of reflective practice and focused on providing a service. The importance of professional level skill development for social care practitioners is not represented well in the research and is an area for further consideration. How do social care workers attain the skills that are required to deliver and improve service-user care and are the qualifications being used at all levels satisfactory in developing staff? It seems from this research that at levels 2 and 3 the NVQ as it is implemented in this organisation is working well. The big gap that this research offers some limited

evidence towards is whether and if so how the NVQ level 4 qualifications have equipped home managers with the professional level skills and knowledge to lead quality care provision.

While the general higher level NVQ research (Grugulis, 2002) is relevant it is not addressing the specific issues of the social care context and the particular role of home managers as quasi-professionals who are supervising the delivery of care with little input from the responsible social worker who is designated Care Manager. The model of level 4 NVQ assessment available to largely unsupervised managers is at the crux of this issue. If the link to practice is less integrated/interactive then is there a benefit to a competency-based course at this level (perhaps especially for managers who have no supervisor in the workplace, less so for deputy managers where integration might be more achievable)? There is a need for further research regarding this qualification, the approach to its assessment and its appropriateness and value in the social care context. Alongside this might be a consideration of whether a more traditional taught course might be an alternative or even a better route for the home manager level staff to develop their practice.

Winter and Maisch (1996) explored commitment to values as part of their seven core assessment criteria for social work and Ghaye (2008) identified values as a central component to all reflective events in care. He suggested that thoughtful, flexible, informed care delivery where reflection is paired with action brings about practice improvement. This research contributes to an understanding of how intrinsic and integrated values are to assessment of interactive/integrated assessment of competence. Two types of reflection on values appeared in the research. The personal reflection on practice, boundaries and responsibilities by candidates but also that prompted by assessor/managers through reactive teaching in the workplace. The examples of how assessor/managers encouraged reflection on practice on issues such as race and workplace behaviours can be seen to contribute to understanding of how to facilitate value-based development in the workplace.

Hodkinson (1992:37) stated that in order for critical reflection (that includes an examination of values) to take place time away from the job was necessary. He suggested that reflection happens best in a more formal teaching environment. I would argue that there is evidence in this research of critical reflection happening alongside and integrated into work through the close collaboration of candidates and assessors using the NVQ standards and broader workplace competences. It is not to say that teaching about reflection and time for reflection external to work is not useful or that it should not be incorporated into workplace learning. It *is* suggesting that the

assessor can guide reflection in the workplace and make links to explicit work performance and that this can be a helpful process. However, although there was evidence of engagement with reflective processes, reflection as a concept was not evidenced in this research as a process that staff were knowingly engaged with or had an explicit understanding of. It would seem that within social care the focus on NVQ development might not have developed reflection as much as it could and could be an issue for organisations to deliberate upon and address, particularly in relation to professional skills development. This could be an area where the suggestion of time away from the workplace (Hodkinson, 1992; Fuller and Unwin, 2004) could be useful. Reflection in work and away from work can be complementary and neither regarded as more useful or necessary than the other.

A model of enhanced delivery is redundant without people committed to enacting the features of the model in the workplace. The understanding of theoretical concepts related to NVQs, competence and workplace learning added new dimensions to the research discussed in this section when the lens of the NVQ delivery in Homecare/Centre has been used to take a fresh look at the qualifications. It has potential for a more generalisable application because the NVQ is not the only way that this could be implemented. Other qualifications or processes such as supervision in workplaces could benefit from understanding how an integrated/interactive approach with commitment to staff learning at an organisational and personal level can be put into operation.

#### 7.4.1 Next steps

There is a place for publication of the findings in order that it can inform both practice and theory. I intend to publish in sector specific journals (Community Care, Health and Social Care in the Community, Health and Social Work) and present at social care conferences in order that practitioners can benefit from some of the ideas about the implementation of NVQs and the ideas that have been useful from workplace learning more generally. I also intend to submit articles to the workplace learning journals (Vocations and Learning, Journal of Workplace Learning) in order that the specifics of NVQs when used in a specific and regulated sector can be appreciated with the increased understanding that the workplace learning research can offer.

In personal terms this research has inevitably changed both my understanding and approach to practice. Identifying the three main themes of personal, social and organisational has meant that when approaching organisations and individuals I have a very clear framework to discuss how learning and teaching support can be best implemented. The layering of understanding that lies underneath these themes

supports the implementation of more evidenced based practice that has proven beneficial.

### **7.5. The reflexive research journey**

The experience of being a practitioner researcher has been one of great pleasure. The sense of being able to give something back to this organisation has been much greater than I anticipated. The role of researcher has felt like a development of relationships in an entirely logical way as a culmination of a long period of joint work. Conversations that had been held in less formal ways were given time to develop and become focused and deepen in understanding. I am grateful to the organisation and the participants for giving me this opportunity to learn and to contribute to organisational knowledge in the process of developing my personal knowledge and in contributing to what is understood about NVQs and workplace learning.

I have learned such a lot from this process. I have moved from an understanding of ethics not based on much experience of research to a fuller understanding of what true anonymity and confidentiality means in this arena. There have been challenges presented in relation to the responsibility of how the participants were represented which lay firmly with me. I have tried to balance this with a careful reflexive approach to what has been represented to ensure that I have explored the perspectives of staff in Homecare with diligence throughout the process in accordance with the research purposes.

I believe that it is the practitioner researcher role that enabled me to come to a model of enhanced NVQ delivery that be returned to the organisation to inform future developments. Drawing on my experiences in working with Homecare and a gradual realisation of the robustness of the delivery method that had evolved between the organisation and the NVQ Centre over many years meant that a level of understanding was reached that may have been difficult for another researcher. Reading others research I have been struck by how easy it is to focus upon the negative aspects of NVQ delivery, their reputation precedes them in many ways. From working within an organisation committed to their implementation and to extracting the positive from the delivery it has been possible to give a fuller representation of the positive. That is not to say that the negative has been ignored. Indeed much of the data that was negative enabled a more robust defence of the positive that was found because it was possible to see the nuances of what people said and understand them better with a practitioner's understanding. I too have struggled with the NVQ framework and indeed it has its challenges but fundamentally, within Homecare, we found ways to work with those challenges, to reduce the bureaucracy and focus upon what was important to the organisation. We found a way of using the qualifications to contribute to the development of

learners' knowledge and skills and the assessment of competence. As a consequence we have built a small community of practice with assessors who are committed to developing and assessing staff and who co-operate in the ongoing development of a scheme that provides opportunities for development to both learners and assessors. I also believe that the scheme provides an arena that could be more widely used to develop teaching and learning practice within the homes. It is this that I hope to take back to the organisation as a part of the research.

## **7.6. Concluding remarks**

Adult residential social care is an evolving area in relation to staff development. What is suggested here is that it is time to move forward in our approach to the development of professional level knowledge and skills within the workforce. The regulation of the NVQ in the sector makes it useful to consider how professional level skills and knowledge can be incorporated into an integrated approach to competence assessment and this research identifies some of the ways that this could be achieved. Workplace learning has provided a lens through which to view the NVQ and a depth of understanding of what lies behind learner engagement, and the potential for the further development of social care workplaces through its adoption and incorporation within practice.

This evolution of the social care workforce is under review in the new qualifications and credit framework and in the review of the Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy (Department of Health, 2009) but the question is will it go far enough for residential social care workers in establishing a professional pathway? The delay of the extension of the GSCC register of social care workers is not advancing this situation. The issue of whether the level 4 qualifications fully equip managers to adopt professional level status is a related issue that is in need of addressing. This will need to be reviewed in the light of the new QCF qualification due to be at level 5. While this research was undertaken in one organisation I am confident that the understanding that the research brings is of much wider interest to managers, staff, teachers and trainers in the workplace and outside of it, and also to policy makers. My understanding of NVQs has shifted through my engagement with workplace learning and it is here that another key contribution of this research can be understood, that the understanding of how NVQs can work takes something back to the field of workplace learning.

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## Appendix 1: Interview questions/prompts

## Appendix 1. Interview questions/prompts

Phase	Question	Prompts	Purpose	Evaluation of questioning approach
Introductory	<p>Are you comfortable?</p> <p>Is there anything I can get you?</p> <p>Is there anything you would like to discuss about confidentiality or about the study more generally?</p> <p>Can I ask you to give me a brief description of yourself, name, age, nationality and a broad outline of your life to date?</p>		<p>To make the participants comfortable, to answer any questions, to confirm agreement to carry on.</p> <p>.</p>	.
Main questioning phase	<p>I wondered if you would start by describing your time at school?</p> <p>What other learning have you undertaken?</p>	<p>How did you feel about that?</p> <p>Was there anyone that you found very helpful at school?</p> <p>Could you tell me more about...?</p> <p>What effect did that have on you?</p> <p>Can you describe what you felt you gained through being at school/college/learning at work?</p> <p>What made you think that...?</p> <p>Could you explain what you mean by...?</p>	<p>Warming up and biographical information regarding teaching and learning.</p>	

	<p>Could you explain to me your understanding of learning? I wonder if you would share with me your experiences of learning?</p>	<p>How do you feel about learning? Can you give me an example of...? When you start a course, what is your attitude to the course? How do you learn best? What sort of a student are you? Do you think that learning to do with work should be paid for by your employer? What are your aspirations? How do you see your career progressing?</p>	<p>Explore personal understanding and experience of learning</p> <p>Personal approach.</p> <p>Ideological view</p> <p>Personal career view.</p>	
	<p>What has been your experience of workplace learning?</p>	<p>What would you say is your organisation's attitude to learning? What sort of learning have you experienced at work? What sort of learning experiences are available to you? Can you describe what</p>	<p>Explore workplace learning?</p>	.

		<p>the main things are that you have learned/gained from learning at work?</p> <p>Are you a different employee/carer because of any training or learning you have engaged in?</p> <p>Is there anything not available to you that you would like?</p>		
	<p>What has been your experience of other people in relation to your learning?</p>	<p>Could you expand on that?</p> <p>What was it they did that made you say they were...?</p> <p>Could you describe the influence of other people on your learning?</p> <p>Has there been anyone particularly supportive in your working life?</p> <p>What was it that made them so helpful?</p> <p>How would you describe their skills?</p> <p>What about outside of work, is there</p>		

		<p>anyone particularly supportive or helpful or particularly unhelpful?</p> <p>What is the general attitude to your learning outside work?</p>		
	<p>I wonder if we could move onto teaching</p> <p>Could you tell me your experience of teaching at work?</p>	<p>What is your understanding of teaching?</p> <p>What is your experience of teaching?</p> <p>Do you expect to teach at work?</p> <p>What do you expect to teach?</p> <p>When do you experience being taught?</p> <p>Could you describe an occasion when you felt teaching took place?</p>	<p>Personal and interpersonal experience.</p>	
		<p>Do you review situations that went well or not so well as a group?</p>	<p>Communities of practice</p> <p>Social learning</p>	
	<p>Does your organisation encourage teaching?</p>	<p>Could you tell me how?</p> <p>How do you feel about that?</p>	<p>Organisational approach to teaching.</p> <p>What teaching is taking place?</p>	

	<p>What is your experience of NVQs?</p>	<p>What do you expect to get from your undertaking the NVQ? What value do you think the NVQ will be to you? What problems do you anticipate? Can you describe what you have gained or learned from doing an NVQ? Can you see the NVQ having an effect on other people in the workplace? What is your view of the NVQ model?</p>	<p>Experience of NVQ, attitudes to the qualification. Value of NVQ</p>	
	<p>What is your experience of other teaching/training/learning in comparison to the NVQ?</p>	<p>Could you explain what that consisted of? Could you elaborate on that? What courses would you like to undertake? What value will that be to you?</p>	<p>Experience of other teaching  Value of other qualifications.</p>	
Exit Phase	<p>I would like to thank you for your contribution to the study. Would you be willing to be interviewed at a later date to follow up on the information</p>	<p>Do you have any questions about anything we have discussed today?</p>	<p>Encouraging participation and further engagement. Valuing of contribution.</p>	

	and your progress?			
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## Appendix 2. Transcript: Joan

## Appendix 2. Joan: transcript

### First interview

J = Joan/Participant

A= Audrey/Researcher

The interview began with a recap on what had been agreed and the areas to be covered.

A Could you tell me a little about your name, your age, whether you are full time or part time, how long you have worked for Homecare, and then a little bit about how you got into Homecare and a little bit about from your schooling?

J Oh blimey

A It's a longer track from you

I will be xxxx this month, xxxx next December. I have worked as a Manager for Homecare for xxx years this February as a manager all the time

J I came to Homecare from xxxx where I worked for xxxx years. Most of that time, most of that as a Grade 4, I heard about it from xxx and when the managers post was coming up here she let me know.

J I first applied for xxxx and another girl who worked at xxxx encouraged me to go for it but she also went for it and got it. I did a crap interview – hadn't been for an interview for nine years xxx said it was not good but xxxx wrote to me. At the time we did that, he said if you want to apply for a manager again I'll give you an interview. I got a mock interview with xxxx xxxx. At the time we did that but xxxx came up.

Got the job, been here ever since, what else?

A If you talk a bit about your school, your progress from school?

J At senior school I went for the 11 plus and failed that and ended up at a girls school in xxxx, stayed there until I was fifteen, left there, **didn't seem to do well there really – I couldn't pick things up, still can not really, that hasn't changed what ever it is, I suppose my parents are folk that never praise you...they didn't tell me I was crap but never took interest.**  
*Long section of personal work history excluded.*

J. So I started doing five to nine each evening, that's part-time obviously and then a permanent post part time and straight from part time to permanent. **I got pushed by the manager of that home, you can do it, you can do it, I fought against it all the way, but went to Senior, then went to Grade 4 ,went up to Senior up the scale, then acted up as Deputy Manager** for about eight months, then that place closed down for refurbishment and I was transferred to a place in xxxx, which is another xxxx. I went backwards again, people in wheelchairs and managed a place over there for about two and a half years

My father died and this kind of threw me, not knowing which way to turn for a bit, then this came up. I went for this, I felt I was in whirlwind. I didn't like the way it was managed, the way the management treated the staff, I didn't like that at all. **I didn't like the way the management talked to the staff** and that's where I am now here and I shall be here till xxxx

*Personal section excluded*

A Thinking about teaching and learning throughout your life it sounds as if there were a lot of issues about learning. Feeling like...?

J **I have no confidence whatsoever, still haven't got any**, only this last year. I have became more confident in dealing with conflict between staff. I'm not able to, like if I was a residential worker like everyone else I couldn't say to someone "Don't do it that way" or "Don't do that it's wrong". I can only do that now because I am a manager, it is my job to do it. **And because it is my job I do it and that's the only way I can do it. I can't confront people very well but because it's my job to do it I do it.**

A So it's not a case of not being able to do it, having a job role that says you are allowed to do it.

J Yes, yes and I have got to do it to sort things out and my pride won't let them fight amongst themselves down there. If one is not happy about the other I ask them "Can you sort it?" "Have a go" first but if that doesn't work I'll sort it. It is my job to do it, I won't shy from it but quietly shit myself but I'm thinking "Oh my God"

J I never show it, I am very calm, behind it all I'm thinking "Oh my God" but they never know what is going on.

A How did you learn to manage?

J I don't know

A Did somebody teach you?

J I don't think so. No they didn't

A You talked about quite a significant manager, in xxxx that really pushed you on, who pushed you to go further. She perhaps saw something, do you know what that was?

J She must have seen something. **I'm determined in a way. I like to see people treat people fair and equally. I feel I'm a very fair person and I can't bear it when people are horrible to each other.** The thing I am having trouble with at the moment, as I call it are piss takers. I will give anybody here anything, like if someone comes to me and says they want leave next week. I just say "You get it covered and you can have it."

**I don't like people taking the piss out of me** really and it is happening here I feel, it is a massive issue here with one person really and it is a very difficult situation is managing that issue for me here at the moment. It is driving me and the other team leader mad. It is very difficult situation to sort out.

A Do you think you learn from being exposed to these situations?

J Yeah and **you learn the right way to sort it out.**

A How do you learn that?

J I don't know. I haven't watched anybody doing it. Unless **it is the way I am treated maybe learning the way to treat others.** I had a bit of a rough deal with Homecare in the beginning and I told them so as well. **They said they can only learn by being told and by experience. But I felt I was used for them to learn. But I didn't forget it for years you know. But I get on well with Homecare. I am very happy and I think they are very supportive.**

Xxxx has been very good. I say I am doing this, this and this am I on the right track and off I go, everything went smooth. I would say I get **a lot of help from above, especially xxxx, she has been very good. I mean I can talk to her, we go to supervision, we talk about business and then it might be guinea pigs. we talk about xxxx and xxxx, we talk about them, she knows them, all those sorts of things, it just flows and I feel very comfortable.**

A Is that very important to you?

J It is, you know, **not to feel intimidated, I don't do it to anybody else and I don't like it done to me.** Some of the managers at Homecare are quite, *information excluded*. I find it quite difficult some of the time I have to be careful what I say. *Information excluded. I have to be one hundred percent careful of what I say, if someone comes up against me can I back it up?* This all goes on in my mind first, if I can't back it up with a sensible argument then I won't say it, I have to be confident that I can say something or I'll leave it.

A It sounds like you are saying you have learnt from other people

J Yeah

A You asked for advice and you have received it. You have also learnt from experience. You have also learnt from being treated in ways that you don't like and presumably ways that you like? In that way you learned what you like as a manager?

A In terms of NVQs what have you found out for yourself?

J What doing an NVQ or being an assessor or that?

A Being an assessor

J Being an assessor was quite interesting but you know the trouble I had at the beginning. When I started I couldn't quite grasp it but as **I always do take the hard way**, think it is going to be murder and it is okay in the end. **We got a lot of help from xxxx, xxxx and myself got a lot of help at the start. XXXX was a good candidate, xxxx was game for anything, xxxx would come up with a ton of information and give it to me and then I would have to**

learn for myself, you don't need all that, that's good but I'd filter through and I found that quite interesting. **I used to go into panic and it used to... it still does... take me about two hours to do an assessment** because I have to have it at home on the table. So I talk to myself. I say that is for that and that is for that and I take the whole time. I want that person to go through. **I don't want to let them down and that has always been my main thing**... I remember with xxxx's, you said to not let, I done xxxx first and I want to get xxxx through it so xxxx not let down and then do my bit. I struggle sometimes getting back into it after a break.

A So you have a real sense of responsibility?

J Oh yeah I do really but I find it hard with xxxx to stop asking, if you don't give it to me I can't assess it and you don't go through. That is what I am having at the moment. I kept dates when I last spoke, xxxx doesn't know that you have come to see me about something completely different today.

A Oh

J XXXX hasn't given it to me to access yet and it is next Thursday

A Oh

J So I don't know if I will have time to do it one day of next week. I will try if xxxx gives it to me but I have finally got to thinking if you don't give it to me I am not asking any more.

A So giving the control back.

J Yeah Which is what you have been saying and it came across very clearly when we started, it is your NVQ not your assessor's? You hand it in that's it. I have asked. I kept dates and I am not asking for it anymore.

A Have you got any ideas what that is about with xxxx? That candidate you have been working with.

J I have been saying it sounds like it is all on the assessor to do all the work, all on the observations. I think that is what xxxx has been hearing and that is why xxxx is waiting but when I did my NVQ nobody helped me. XXXX and myself we would sit there and just go through it. XXXX would give me ideas

and we would go away and then we would meet up and then we would work on it. I had no other help at all. I did it all myself. I think “No I had to do it myself”. I was in a panic over it. I found it very hard but I did it. Now you can do yours. XXXX is asking to do it. XXXX says that has got a lot of experience. I don’t know. XXXX can do what I have had to do now.

A So you have planned out the units with XXXX?

J I planned it, we did it at the last study day

A You have done your observations have you?

J No, because I did the observations first last time, you remember I did them on the PC and forgot about the knowledge. XXXX wrote about the knowledge so this time I said you do the reflective account, the knowledge the PCs. When you have done that I will read through it and the bits you have missed I will do my observations on that. Then if there is anything I don’t think you are coming across with I will do some questioning with you and that is the way we will do it and I haven’t had anything since. I thought it might be best if I did the observations last as I already know what XXXX does but I thought if XXXX then does bits that cross over it might be a waste of time. I thought might be better if XXXX does the reflective account and the knowledge and looks at the performance as well as much as XXXX can I will read through the whole lot and do my bit.

A Are written skills okay?

J They are okay. They are understandable. I have read through all the knowledge last time and they are understandable.

A Do you think XXXX will struggle. Do you think that could be part of the reason?

J XXXX hasn’t said.

A Oh right

J I have asked and I have said there are a number of ways, on tape. XXXX has read about it. I did give XXXX a book that I got about NVQ Level 2. I asked

xxxx to read the last time we started it. So it tells you in there that you can use different methods but I haven't asked since.

A But xxxx agreed to the plan originally?

J Oh yeah, yes xxxx did, I do keep saying "How is it going" and "Don't forget to give it to me" and "We need it by so and so"

A How does it make you feel?

J I am a bit annoyed because it means that the onus is on me to do it for next week, Thursday, and to do it at home. I can't do it here at all. I have to have it on the table at home, when it is quiet, on my own. I can do it when somebody is watching telly but I have to have to be able to talk to myself, to set it out, to know what I am looking for, to get it right. But it takes me, well you know the last observations I did took me two and a half hours because I want to get it right so I can picture things, not to dart about from one thing to another. It's a bit disappointing because it is going to drag on and I have got another member of staff on my back who wants to start it, wanted to start it this year as well but I have got too much on. She's quite annoyed that she couldn't start it but she has only been with the company since February and it is his turn and I said it is his turn, he has started it and he wants to do it and I can't manage to do two of you and he's doing it. I am managing the xxxx, I haven't got a deputy here and I have gone anyone else. It is important I help with the xxxx and keep things running here. She was quite willing to go and ask xxxx from xxxx

A For him to assess her?

J Yeah, yes we did look at xxxx, they will do NVQ and they don't charge, we looked at that. I spoke to xxxx and said "I can't possibly do it, I'm not going to knacker myself out because someone wants something immediately and xxxx said "No that's fine". But I said to xxxx they won't start you until April or May of next year and by then I should be free to start it. Again I have got to look at xxxx appraisal on Monday and it is not very nice what xxxx has written and I am a bit disappointed with that.

A Because xxxx has not had the training xxxx wanted

J Yeah and in xxxx appraisal it said “Do you feel supported by staff” and she said “No not really” and I thought “Oh dear” but I am not really bothered about it but I do feel annoyed. I will talk to xxxx about it because I do feel xxxx has been supported.

A Do you?

J I feel xxxx has had everything out of me that xxxx possible could but xxxx is the type of person who wants everything for xxxx, around xxxx. [The service users] are all used to traditional food. We do try them with curries, pastas and they will eat, they are not salad type people but xxxx has been giving them salad. It is all around what xxxx wants, it is not fair, and the other staff they are all traditional eaters.

A That is interesting, with an NVQ and that sort of an outlook xxxx wouldn’t get through anyway.

J No, no

A Because xxxx is not competent in giving people choice

J No, no xxxx doesn’t ask them what they want or consider what they might not want. Lucky enough I suppose, three no two of them would eat anything you gave them, two of them wouldn’t and the other is iffy.

*Section on service user excluded.*

A What about teaching in this environment – in the workplace do you think you have a teaching role

J Yeah

A And how do you do that? How does that teaching happen?

J I suppose **from my experience and from what I have learned. It’s from watching really...staff working along you, seeing the way in which they interact with residents and staff and the right way of doing things, seeing what is most beneficial and pleasant for the residents really.** It is no good just dragging them off to do things that they couldn’t possibly do, you know, we do try and get them to do things but because they have all been *identifying information excluded* it is very hard to try and get them to

do things for themselves and to get the staff to let them do it themselves. I know it is going to take all day, let them do it and see what happens.

A How do you get them to do that?

J The staff you mean?

A Yes, the staff

**J Well let them do it, talk them through it, tell them how the rest of us do it and let them do it themselves and found out.**

A So you watch them do you? It is a case of telling and showing?

J Yes, xxxx. We are a bit regimented here. I suppose it comes from me. I don't like to work in a shit hole and I don't want them to live in a shit hole. At my house I might not clean the toilets everyday but here it is done every day, it is clean, no smells.

*Service user references excluded*

J Another wouldn't, he would just put on anything that anyone gave him and that is when I said.

A And do you think you made your point about your standards?

J My standards are well known around this area and houses and you know.

A But xxxx still didn't apply it?

**J No and xxxx just pushes it all the time. I am up against that sort of thing all the time with one particular member of staff.**

A Did you consider making xxxx go back to put things right?

J No, no, what was xxxx doing at the time. Xxxx was doing something else at the time. I think we were getting close to the bus as well. Oh and again if I put something in the diary, the message book. When I write a message in the message book I might say to xxxx "Can you get the doctor?" and that happens with most staff I can consider it done but with one person it is not

done. With communication you remember last September, it seems **there may be a lack of interest in the job**, I do feel I am battling all the time. I had a meeting, not supervision, early this week or maybe it was last week, where I had to say “I can see you are losing interest in the job, you wander off, you disappear”. I think, “Where has xxxx gone now”

A Where?

J Up here, mobile phones, you know, that is a big issue at the moment, checking phones, I have tackled that a number of times in supervision. *Identifying information excluded* and I said ‘Right, don’t do anything. I note it down and keep an eye on it myself and until I experience it myself, until I see it and then that is when I can go in and say “Now, stop it!”

A What is the policy on mobile phones?

J We have got a paper that says we are not to have them but since then we had a manager’s meeting and we decided we are not to have them.

#### DISRUPTION BECAUSE A PHONE RANG

J Where was I?

A Managers’ meeting.

J Oh yes I said “I cannot stand it any more.” I need another memo to come out to say about the use of mobile phones and a policy of some sort, it is driving me mad. You see xxxx is a xxxx and has got xxxx and said to me “Look Joan, I need to keep it on” and I said “Yeah, you keep it on” It is family friendly I have to look after xxxx as well, xxxx comes out full time, xxxx is up a six, sorts the kids out comes to work. xxxx’s very rarely goes off, it’s on, xxxx doesn’t check it, xxxx doesn’t worry about it, if the kids want to ring here they do. That’s what I said to xxxx “You have got no family, if you want to use the phone use the phone here and if you are expecting a call on your mobile just say to the person you are working with “Is it alright if I check it, but don’t keep checking it all the time.

*Identifying section excluded*

**It is just a lack of interest in the residents in a way and that riles me because we are here to do a job** and I said to him “We are here to do a job, this is your main job here, if you do work elsewhere that is up to you. Time-keeping is up the chute. I said “You be here on time, I want you here on time, people that have slept in they want to go home, you be here, that’s it.”. Of course I let them go early, I have said to xxxx and xxxx says if I’m here they go. I let them go half an hour early if they are not doing anything. So I said “Why can’t you be here on time anything else out there doesn’t matter to me. I had that a couple of times at supervision and other staff can’t....

A What is stopping you taking it further?

J Nothing. Now I’m going to do it

A You’ve given xxxx time and...

J Yes and I written it down

A Yes, but you prefer not to do that by the sounds of things

J Yeah, but **I don’t want to be seen to pick on xxxx, I’ve given a fair crack of the whip. I really think I have.** I have had to do the same up xxxx.

#### *Identifying section excluded*

A Flexitime?

J Yes, well I said “If you keep saying these things to me you are going to have to write a statement, No,no,no, I’m not putting anything in writing” So what can I do. I’ve picked up that this has all happened before when xxxx was at xxxx, xxxx was taken into the office, I just had to do it to sort it out, I spoke to xxxx and...

A Dealt with it?

J Yes, hopefully, it went lovely.but up there they don’t want to do anything. One of the residents booked them to see a play thing and another member of staff said “You are finished at 4 o’clock do you want to go” and said

*Identifying section excluded*

A Difficult people?

J Yes, difficult

A What about the easier people, obviously you have got some difficult people, I don't want to downplay that but there will always be people who...

J Yeah, yeah

A People who feel you are always on their back. What about the easier ones, what do you feel about them? What do you feel your responses are in relation to their teaching and learning?

J I try and encourage people to do things but pushed xxxx to do the NVQ, working on the 3 but xxxx has got kids so that kind of thing. I don't push too much, xxxx still carries on and does the job. I gave xxxx things to do but xxxx is not the senior, xxxx doesn't want to be the senior, I don't feel I can load too much on xxxx. XXXX is not getting paid for it but I can rely on XXXXr if I am on holiday. They ring xxxx rather than ring Head Office. That is what is said to Head Office, xxxx needs to be appreciated for that, I am trying to encourage xxxx to be a senior. XXXX is just talking about it now. Trying to get through an interview to be where xxxx should be really.

XXXX's been in it a long time now. I do show appreciation to staff when they do good things but about teaching there is nothing I can teach xxxx because xxxx has been at it for years. XXXX is very confident, competent, very good at the job as well. XXXX likes things done properly, chasing up things, which shows up people who don't, they think they are being picked on. XXXX is about to pack up, xxxx. I've got an older xxxx who is xxxx, a member of staff xxxx is on a contract. I have had here for nearly xxxx because I have xxxx I have asked for an extra member of staff to help me out to take some of the load. XXXX come a long way since xxxx's been here. XXXX is a bit woolly about things but I have worked with xxxx a number of times recently and I have gone to do something and xxxx has said "I have done that" and I thought "Oh Blimey" XXXX really has picked up, You know xxxx would freeze up and say "Don't do that" and use me against each other. If we get a bank staff member in "Don't do that, Joan wouldn't like that." **They use me in a way but in a way I don't care any more. It looks like I am a bit of an ogre but I get what I want and I get the house run the way I want.**

A It is the way that you want. It is your own standards, not theirs, are you saying?

J Well that's the way they do it, they use me so they don't have to say, but it is the way. XXXX is quite up front and she will say "No, this is the way we want it, we want the house clean, we want their room nice, their clothes nice we want them properly dressed"

A What about the statutory regulations? What about the CSCI requirements for 50% of your staff to have NVQ – where are you with all of that?

J I am well in with that.

A Is that a good thing or a bad thing.

It is a good thing, **At first my thoughts n the NVQ were well it's not going to last, it will be another thing, it will come and go**, and it hasn't and I am quite surprised, it is very important when I look at it, you must have something, I am quite impressed that **there is something going on that makes people do something**. When I was at...I never did anything...well I went to college and did a course on xxxx, about a year, can't really remember, got a diploma for that. There was no NVQ when I was there. It kind of started off as I reached the other place but they didn't want me to do that because that would be very close to them, the management as I was coming from another large hostel. **I knew a lot, I mean I was acting up and they were very threatened by me that I knew an awful lot**, I'd say "if there is anything I could do in the office" and they would say "Oh no, no that's okay, they didn't want me to do anything and they didn't want their staff to do anything, there was no training on the boards, no offers of training. We used to sit and talk. "Have you done so and so?" "No," "Well it's out and about now" "There is nothing on the notice board." We used to have seniors meetings and they used to go mad. Have you heard of XXX, she was another senior and she was very upfront about it. **They didn't want the level 2s to have any training at all because they used to worry about their own jobs.**

A Right. Is that one of the things you learned about yourself, that I don't want to be like that?

J Yeah, definitely I couldn't stand it. The number of run ins I had with them and they tried it with me as well and I was quite surprised that I stuck up for myself the way that I did and they wrote a report and I read it and said "That was totally wrong, **I won't accept it and I won't leave this office until you destroy it. I kept on and on and I said I just won't have it , that's not true and I won't leave this office.**

*Service user information excluded.*

A What about Homecare as an organisation and training generally?

J Well I think they are very good. We had a meeting Wednesday talking about how we can cut back on things generally. We are getting close to the end of the financial year, that's coming up. I said I don't like to cut back on the training, you know offering it all the time. I am sometimes surprised because budgets are sometimes tight still encouraging us to do more things. They are offering more management training, but to carry on, we have someone from Hertfordshire to do, yes they are still paying out for us to do stuff. Yes they are very good.

A Yes and regards the NVQ do you think....do you see a difference in people ..do you think it is good for them personally?

J Yes, oh yes definitely. I do **for Level 2 people you can see improvement in them afterwards.** XXXX was very...although XXXX was very professional afterwards XXXX got very into it, XXXX definitely did improve and **it makes them think about what they are doing, they are not just doing it because it needs to be done...why are you doing it. It was very good for her.**

A So it makes them think and in turn become more professional.

J Yeah

A Anything else that you can see...do you think the resident experience or can see a difference?

J I don't know if they would experience a difference because XXXX was always game to go about and try anything with them.

*Identifying information excluded.*

A So being game is that about delivering good quality care?

J Yeah

A But is something that over and above or underneath it to support it....

J **Yeah it made her more confident..**

A Oh right

J Its been the same with xxxx, **it's made her feel that she can achieve stuff.** XXXX is very like me in that I say in interviews “You can’t do that, you can’t do that straightway as you know but I have said to xxxx with the Level 2 you can do it, look at xxx, we will all help you and **she enjoyed it and she was very proud of herself in the end.** The same with xxxx who was just here – very good....**both of them considering doing Level 3 but can't quite push themselves to do it** but they had a lot of support from xxxx. xxxx did do a lot for them but **they already knew the job...it was for them putting it into words.**

*Identifying information about staff and organisation excluded*

J XXXX **was always very encouraging saying things like “Yes come on, we will do that, we will find the information and we will do it.**

A So less of the common feeling of area but within the home you said “We will all help you”

J Yes

A Do you think that there is that sense within the home?

J Yes there is in this home, definitely a large deal of support.

A Yes?

J **We all look after each other, they look after me as much as I look after them.** They are good in that respect.

A And that comes through with teaching and learning as well as with other things?

J Yeah, yeah and we all get on very well and we are all very for the house, the residents and we are all very normal, no one is above themselves and no one thinks they are any better than anyone else. **We are all very similar** and as I have said xxxx has been in the job a very long while. We don't assume that the residents can't do, or won't do but when new people come in and someone says "I'm going to take him to xxxx" I think "Oh Blimey I wouldn't do that not with him" and that's when you have to say well we have tried that but if you do something on that scale but a bit easier and see what happens. But I wouldn't put the residents at risk.

A Oh no, no.

J I wouldn't upset them. We used to have a Monitoring Officer come in, you know xxxx from the NVQ, she wanted xxxx, I think he was xxxx at the time, *identifying information about service use excluded* and I said "Well give it a go" and she started to take him and he was in such a state. I wrote to her and said "No you are not doing it, he gets in such a state", he xxxx whatever he was, so leave him alone really.

A And did she?

J Yes, she did leave him alone yes.

J But I'm not having that. **Also its me having the confidence in myself Am I being unfair to him? Am I being lazy? I always question myself.**

A Right.

#### *Identifying situation with service user excluded*

J Are we saying this is right, am I being unfair? It is getting another view on whether that is the best course of action.

A Yes. That sounds fair

J Then there is things like *identifying situation with service- users excluded.*

A Right

**J I know the girls fairly well but I just can't make that decision. I don't know if it is up to me to say that**

A Right

J The other two they don't really care anyway whether they are on xxxx.  
That's what I am going through.

A You're in that position of responsibility but you are reluctant to take that decision?

J Yes, right, I can't decide about whether to give them the xxxx or not because there are two staff who don't agree with it.

A Do you understand their reasons for not.

J Not interested I suppose

A They don't agree but they are not interested?

J Right, yeah

A They have just said no, it's not an informed "No"?

J No

A They don't want an argument?

J No, just not interested

A Can you explain your reluctance to make those decisions? You can't make any sense of that yourself?

J No I can't

A It might be an absolutely fair choice not to make a decision? Who else might be more informed than you then?

J I don't know I don't want to say "No" and what if they get *identifying information excluded*

A But you're not really valuing their opinion?

J No I'm not, no because part of me thinks they don't care anyway.

A So who should make the decision

J I don't know if me and the Senior should up there but I wanted to speak to xxxx and ask her advice.

A So what will xxxx do for you to help you make that decision?

J She might talk some sense into me, tell me why they should be on it, I don't know why we can't do it – *Long personal paragraph excluded*.

A About your work?

J Yeah and about the amount I know and when she asks me things I know the answer and it's like at staff meetings I come out with the answer but **I do know a lot**. I've been in the job about xx years, I know a great deal, I've done a lot, I've resettled people from xxxx and I forget when I write down what I've done **but sometimes I doubt myself** and this is a doubt about the xxxx thing going on.

A So why do you doubt yourself?

J I'm not totally confident in myself

A So what do you think if you look back over your career because *participant personal information excluded*.

A Xxxx Isn't it. Is there anything you would do differently?

J I am very outspoken. I am very confident at home now. **I'm very strong.**

*Participant personal information excluded*

J I'm from a family that worked for xxxx and things like that and so did my Mum.

A Did he want you to better yourself?

J He has always pushed me to do things, **he has always supported me, saying “You can do, you can do it”.**

A So there was support at home when you have done courses?

J Oh yes, he has always supported me.

A And when you are assessing on your table?

J When I was doing my NVQ at one point I said “I can’t do this and he did sit down and what he does is he gets to the very bottom of it all and I don’t and he starts to talk to me about it. **“Why do you think that is that way” and in the end I think “I don’t want to go into that deep. All I want is to understand it and do that bit.** So after that one I didn’t ask him at all and I just went through it on my own. But **he did say that at the end of the NVQ we will go out and we will celebrate.**

A Oh

J **We didn’t, no, that what just “Oh I got to go out” xxxx was very good and said “Well done Mum.”**

A How did you feel about that?

J **Well I haven’t forgotten it.**

*Long personal discussion section about family excluded.*

J I done it and the Registered Manager I did it with xxxx

A And your A1

J With xxxx. Well **I had to do that to keep the job really**

A Yes, yes and I remember all the conversations we had about that, but you got through that very easily didn’t you?

J Yes, yes I did, I was shocked.

A You managed it and you were very organised and brought everything in on time.

J Yes we used to come every time, we never used to miss, might have missed one but that's all.

A Certainly remember you every month turning up.

J Every month we were there. Regimented. Yes because we knew we had to do it and that's why I do go because I know if I miss it I'm buggered because I think "Oh my God I won't catch up" and I was determined to do one a month and get it going so when I do things I try and do them properly like that. It's like when you said "Can I have some volunteers" I won't volunteer for this because I thought "When am I going to be able to do it?". I do worry about myself a bit and I worry if I am on an early shift and I am at home I can't oversleep and am I going to oversleep? I can't let anybody down and going through the NVQ I suppose I'm seriously trying to think if I learnt anything from it?

A And?

J And I don't know whether I did.

**A So you wouldn't think that someone would see a difference in your performance like you see a difference in the Level 2s?**

**J I don't think they have – nobody has said they have**

A So for you its more about showing what you knew and having the accreditation for that because maybe there wasn't anything to learn within that?

J No there probably was not

A And what about the management course you have been doing with Homecare and the University?

J Well I did that but what I came up against I had done in my course so bits of it I thought I could not do it. I got my course out and got the certificate

and read through things I'd done in my course and gave them to xxxx and said 'Can you look at that and see if its anything to do with what I have done already or should I do it again?' and I never heard anything. So out came the certificates and xxxx gave me a certificate he said "Here's your certificate" I said "I did not do it all" – he said "You did" – I said "I gave you the thing but I never heard any more", he said "You had done it already and its ok" So I got a certificate for that – for something I felt I had not finished. I enjoyed it, she was good.

A You were there but you just didn't do the assignments?

J No I looked back and all the names they mentioned I had already done them I was thought is there a point in me carrying on (identifying information removed), and this is my excuse all along, I thought "Is there any point in me doing that?"

A That's a very considered way isn't it, it sounds to me what you're describing as a very considered approach to things. That you don't just sign up to something regardless, you're thinking have I done this before? Let's have a look, have I done it? What do you think? You're asking someone else and you're telling me that all the time, that you look at the situation, you think about it, you reflect on yourself, you say could I, would I do it any different, could I do it any differently?

J I do see that all the time. Then ask somebody else and there's a real process. But **I never consider it being an intelligent way of working through things, I never think of it that way so I never think of myself being, you know, much good in a way but I have got a...**

A You said that right at the start about school didn't you, and talking about your carer training that you've done your (identifying information removed), your Level 4, you've done the Registered Manager Award, you've done other courses, as you know, there's a lot of learning.

J There is, yes, yes and yet I said earlier, I don't know how I know this stuff – it's weird, yes, it's the way I go.

A But you did say right at the beginning that at home there wasn't that reinforcement?

J No there wasn't.

A And you felt that right from school? I suppose going back to what we were saying earlier, do you think you could have been different with a different circumstance?

J I probably could because I am very interested in learning— I want to play the piano – but we did have a piano in the house (identifying information removed), I've got one running here, I've got one running there and I'm terrible, I would, I want the house tidy before us. If that's tidy, I'm happy, very happy. I leave it all tidy, I come in, I'm sleeping, I go back the next day *Personal information excluded* – my Mum was the same it happened to her – if I have achieved something like the washing etc. before work I am happy I've achieved something. **It does not take much to satisfy me at all, I don't need big things I need little things.** It's the little things that aggravate people around the house, when people don't do something, that aggravates me.

A It's not doing the shopping?

J Yes, it's not getting the things we have run out of, they will go and buy a load of rolls and ham but not have bread in the freezer for the residents. It's that type of thing, it does happen a bit, it's all for them and not the residents.

A So for you it's the little things that are important, the interaction of day to day things?

J Yes

A As far as formal teaching like inductions for the staff can you describe a little bit about that process here.

J We have an induction pack that we follow and there are bits that we go through with the staff to show them everything to make sure they understand and any policies to read they will read, and they will sign off that they have read and understood them. Now I am worried about one particular person I would never assume in the first place that someone does not know what they are talking about. I would assume as they have been through an interview and have worked in care for 4 years that they would know what they are talking about, because it is roughly the same in each organisation. It would

be the same, policies would be different, little things would be different but you're there mainly for the same thing. To look after them and do the paperwork. I work through the pack with them, it gives them a fair bit of information but not too much on the 1st day. **I always encourage them to ask me, I say to all of them don't be afraid to ask. If you don't understand what I am saying ask me, don't go off and try to do if you don't understand what you are doing and then wish you had asked how to do it. Keep asking me ask all the staff that are out there, it doesn't matter how many times you ask.** You're not working in factory any more each day will be different. You might do the same washing the toilets, hoovering, all that crap, but the residents, well they are people they will do something different each day. We know the residents well, ask us. We had one member of staff who was here 3 months she came up to me and said I am fed up of her telling me that this is not right and I said you have only been here 3 months – but she said I know my job, and I said no you don't and you wont ever know your job. People know there will be something different everyday, you never know this, I never will, so don't say you know it to me, and still listen to what she's telling you because she is right. I deal with new people and I make sure they grasp everything, but mainly stuff to do with the residents, the way they are, what they need, it's about them, paperwork comes second. Because they can always read it. I tell them to, look it up in the files. if its something new I always put it in and say read up on it. I put it on the front of the file what's in there so when ever I have an inspection I know where it is. I ask them to familiarise themselves with the filing cabinets as they will be asked where things are and if that came up on an inspection and I found out they did not know where to find it I would be cross. If I get a bollocking for something you should know then you will get it from me,

A You expect autonomy and responsibility about that sort of thing? You're not going to test them on it – you give them the opportunity themselves?

J Yes. If I put something in the diary I accept it to me done. It's like one of the staff, one of our residents (identifying information removed) and it might have been last week I said to a member of staff "Will you do that? Because he has been asking about it in the morning, could you sit and do this list and then in a couple of weeks help him?" (Identifying information removed) I said "Have you done your list?" and he said "No". He started again this morning, I said to the staff "Have you done his list?" and she said "Oh I will do it this Sunday." "But I asked you to do it last week he needs to know."

That aggravates the life out of me and I will be bringing that up, how long does it take to do this list.

A Let me check to make sure I have covered everything

J Have you done this particular one with anyone else?

A Yes it's just the case of going through things and making sure the learning and teaching the NVQ is covered. The personal and inter personal. I think we have pretty much covered everything for the moment. I think we can finish thank you for making the time.

J I hope there is not too much rubbish on there.

A No it's really interesting.

## Interview 2

Introduction, recap on last interview and how this interview will proceed.

A We were going to pick up on our conversation on management styles in this interview. I wondered about whether you felt that you had been an inspiration as a manager. However we started talking about higher-level management and how that influenced learning in the workplace.

J Homecare have always been very committed to learning, especially NVQs, they do push it, I have been encouraged by them to do it. But their way of working is to me not a good way at times with individual managers. I have had experiences that were not so positive (confidential information removed). They were shocked by my reaction. They did step back and consider their actions. They are very supportive and encouraging of training and I have been encouraged by them. I have been given opportunities not to do it, not the NVQ because I had to do that to keep my job.

A So it's a bit of a mixed bag?

J It is a mixed bag. I have had some very good experiences but recently it has been much less positive. I am now very wary of people coming into the building, we need support, we have been under a lot of pressure with staff and the changes we have had to implement. I sit with the staff and do the

new work and fathom it out amongst ourselves but it is a lot of work. We have had help from above and we have been on training sessions and stuff.

A Homecare has always prided itself on growing its own managers. Does this managerial approach effect how people view progression in the organisation?

J Yes it does, there are a couple of examples of that where I have had to talk to people about (*confidential information removed*) It has meant that one staff has considered leaving because of her experiences and another member of staff has been influenced by that too. It was damaging. I am not sure if it is taken on board.

Sometimes how we are treated is not valuing (*confidential information removed*)

Like making people work on the xxxx. We have to recognise that people have families and commitments and respect those too. I make sure that it is covered but that is all. I won't rota everybody on. You've got to consider staff, they could be working three weekends on the trot. I manage the rota so that it works for staff as well as residents.

(*Confidential information removed*)

J I love the work, love the job but...

(*Confidential information removed*)

A How do you feel you are managed in relation to failing and learning from mistakes?

J There does not seem to be that room at the moment. If I can't be trusted that is very poor. I might have been looking for another job.

(*Confidential information removed*)

A The other things I wanted to capture is specifically about your candidate's NVQ. Xxxx had two starts and I wanted to review this now xxxx has finished.

J Xxxx wanted to restart and I felt xxxx had come on. Xxxx is improving all the time now. (*Confidential information removed*). I said xxxx could restart

but it was very difficult, it was a lot of me asking, xxxx saying it was fine but then there would be nothing there. There was a lot of discussion and me giving xxxx ideas, a lot more than was written down really. But xxxx would come across as if xxxx had it all sorted but xxxx didn't. I would think xxxx had got it but then xxx hadn't. I had such an easy person before and it was quite a contrast. We had learned together. But with xxxx I had to keep pushing and pushing. Xxxxx would not get it down, I did the reflective accounts with xxxx in the end but it was still hard finding information in there.

A So you used the reflective accounts not just to assess competence?

J To find out what xxxx did know and language was quite difficult at times. Sometimes communication is good but sometimes I can't grasp anything. In supervision I might suggest something and xxxx would repeat what I had said. This happens all the time.

(Identifying information removed)

A But fundamentally you felt this time xxxx was competent?

J We started on communication and I couldn't assess it as it just wasn't there. It might have been different in another unit. Xxxx has improved a lot. Mobile phones were an issue but not now. I wanted to see it for myself before I went head on in. Now xxxx will tell me what xxxx is going to do. I do that too.

Identifying information removed

J The NVQ was a very difficult thing. I was forever asking xxxx how xxxx was getting on because I was determined to get xxxx through it because it was my reputation as well. I think that is why xxxx got through it because I was so pushy with xxxx. Xxxx would let it go on and on, leave things at home. I commit to doing things and do them.

A Was he competent in the end?

J Yes xxxx was, xxxx had it in him to do it, it was there but it was very very hard work getting xxxx to show it. It is now showing, xxxx can do it but I felt I had to be behind xxxx all the time. And now other staff take that

approach. We are like that here, we respect each other but want to get things done. I always tell xxxx has done really well. But then xxxx will slow up and stop and I have to speak to xxxx about it. I have to keep on moving him on. XXXX is doing well now and xxxx picks up on things and follows them up. XXXX is taking on more in the house. I want things done now though not in good time.

I get disappointed when I come in and light bulbs are out. I can't get angry because I am a manager. I keep things to myself and sort it out in supervision. I can't be shouting at people, I keep it in. They are aware of me as a manager too, they don't tell me stuff. Sometimes I have no idea. They wouldn't tell me personal stuff, some do but others don't. It's not my place to ask but I do say tell me and if I can help I will. It's part of supporting each other. I will help but they do respect my position.

*Confidential information removed.*

A So reflecting on your time as a leader what do you think are your tips.

**J To be firm, friendly, approachable. Help people trust you. I wouldn't ask them to do anything that I wouldn't do, I still feel like a support worker, part of the mob.** They can ask me anything and I think the friendly approach is better because they want to do things for you even if it isn't really part of what they should do.

A And in terms of tips for learning

**J Talk to them in supervision. Encourage them to do training, tell them they can do it. I will support, just ask. I do encourage and try to encourage them to move up as much as they could.**

*Confidential information removed.*

J One staff member wants to do Level 3, I am not sure whether they are ready yet. But I want to encourage him.

*Confidential information removed.*

A Staff loyalty? Have you inspired that?

J By being supportive, by accommodating where I can, we have a laugh, we have staff meetings, we have nice food, good chats, we respect one another we don't swear at each other or shout at each other. We have got on so well. I give a lot of information as well. Some managers do everything but the staff should be doing it. I say I don't care how it comes out just have a go, I will go through it with them. They do their own reports and learn through that. We do all the action plans together and fathom it out together, it was hard to understand. I don't pretend to be anything I'm not either.

A There is real collaboration in learning?

J Yes there is. I always say if I don't know and say I will find out and I always do. I never ever say I will find out and not do it. I never can't be bothered. Inside I might be really worried but they wouldn't see that. Then they would worry. They would never see the panic in me. But we all work well together.

*Confidential information removed.*

J Too much has been taken on up there but we are suffering. Not the residents but the staff don't have enough information.

A Well I think that is everything I wanted to cover. Is there anything you want to add?

J **No just that I have had a lot of support from you.** You know what a state I was in when I did my Level 4. Me and xxxx worked well together. You knew us and said of course you can do it, it's this and this and this. I was very grateful for it. I pass that on to others, if I can do it you can. I am not the most intelligent person going, I am practical but I did it.

A That is not my experience of you. I think you managed very very well.

J I quite enjoyed it in the end you know. I have taken my certificates home and I am proud of achieving it.

*Confidential information removed. Interview stopped.*

## Appendix 3. Joan: themes

Appendix 3. Joan: themes  
Original interview themes

	Personal	Interpersonal	Organisational	Workplace Learning	NVQs
<p>Joan Age, <i>position excluded for anonymity</i></p> <p>L4 Care RMA A1 Assessor</p> <p>2 interviews</p> <p><b>Potential quotations from transcript in bold.</b></p> <p>Researcher summary of participant narrative plain text.</p> <p><i>Researcher comment and identification of themes in italics.</i></p>	<p>School <b>Didn't seem to do well there really – I couldn't pick things up, still can not really, that hasn't changed what ever it is, I suppose my parents are folk that never praise you...they didn't tell me I was crap but never took interest.</b> <i>Personal sub theme schooling</i></p> <p>Stopped work for children. <i>Personal, sub theme family</i></p> <p>On Aspirations. <b>I got pushed by the manager of that home, you can do it , you can do it...fought against it all the way, but went to Senior, then went to Grade 4 ,went up to Senior up the scale, then acted up as Deputy</b></p>	<p>Was a manager who pushed her on, recognised something in her. <i>Theme social learning, sub theme influence of people</i></p> <p><b>I don't like people taking the piss out of me</b> <i>Inductive theme, values, managerial position</i></p> <p>How the right person helps, supervision, personal bond. <b>A lot of help from above... especially ??, she has been very good, I mean I can talk to her, we go to supervision, we talk about business and then it might be guinea pigs. We talk about ?? and ??, we talk about them, she knows them, all those sorts of things, it just flows and I feel very comfortable.</b> <i>Theme Social, Sub theme</i></p>	<p>Left previous org because she didn't approve of the way people were treated. <i>Is there a theme about people drawing lines about what they will and won't accept? Does this fit in with having a value base? Being principled?</i> <i>Inductive theme, values.</i></p> <p>Organisation being open to feedback, bad as well as good. <b>They said they can only learn by being told and by experience. But I felt I was used for them to learn. But I didn't forget it for years you know.</b> This openness is double edged. Damage has been done. <i>Theme organisational</i></p>	<p>Exposure to situations, <b>You learn the right way to sort it out</b> <i>Experiential learning.</i></p> <p>Learning what works for oneself and trying that out. <b>It is the way I am treated maybe...learning the way to treat others.</b> <i>Experiential learning</i></p> <p>On teaching at work <b>From my experience and from what I have learned. It's from watching really...staff working alongside you...seeing the way in which they interact with residents and staff and the right way of doing</b></p>	<p>On being an assessor Got a lot of help from another manager in being an assessor. <i>Where it is embedded in the organisation this support from people who choose each other is possible?</i> <i>Sub theme of Communities of practice?</i></p> <p>Still finds it very time consuming <i>Sub theme, time and effort involved. Commitment</i></p> <p><b>I don't want to let them down and that has always been my main thing</b></p> <p>Describes the tension between the candidate doing work and the assessor doing it. Her experience makes her want candidates to do it the way she had to. No help. Not about the learner and his needs first. Should be an agreed balance of work. <i>This needs thinking about. I felt prickly in this part of the conversation. Sub</i></p>

	<b>Manager</b> Theme Social-sub theme <i>influence of others. This seems a bit like Graham, Same sort of progression against her will almost.</i> Personal- Sub theme learning identity?  <b>I have no confidence whatsoever, still haven't got any and yet this is not really borne out by what she goes on to say?Inductive theme-confidence</b>  confrontation <b>Because it is my job I do it and that's the only way I can do it. I can't confront people very well but because it's my job to do it I do it.</b> Managerial style/Confidence Pride makes her deal with situations.  <b>I'm determined</b>	<i>influence of people and relationships.</i>  Finds other managers intimidating at times. Holds back because of fear that she must be completely right. <i>Sub theme personal identity. Inductive theme, confidence</i>  On being a manager <b>They use me in a way but in a way I don't care any more. It looks like I am a bit of an ogre but I get what I want and I get the house run the way I want.</b> <i>Inductive theme, confidence, managerial style.</i>  Feeling of parity in the workplace, similarity. <i>Managerial style</i>  Loyalty within the home is very strong. Gives a lot of information, shares the work, have a laugh, treats them well, makes them take	<i>support, this is a balancing view of the org. Negative in terms of support.</i>  <b>I get on well with Homecare. I am very happy and I think they are very supportive.</b> <i>Theme organisational, balance of positive</i>  Homecare <b>Well I think they are very good. We had a meeting Wednesday talking about how we can cut back on things generally. We are getting close to the end of the financial year, that's coming up. I said I don't like to cut back on the training, you know offering it all the time. I am sometimes surprised</b>  <i>Experience, guiding, observing.</i>	<b>things, seeing what is most beneficial and pleasant for the residents really</b> <i>Observing as learning.</i> <b>Sub theme of Integration of teaching and learning into everyday work.</b> <i>Broader than NVQ ass.</i>  Telling and showing and letting them try it out themselves. <b>Well let them do it, talk them through it, tell them how the rest of us do it and let them do it themselves and found out.</b> <i>Experience, guiding, observing.</i>  Difficult person to manage, doesn't listen, doesn't learn,	<i>theme of ways of assessing. Do I push obs too much?</i>  Pressure from staff to start NVQ. Sub theme Where it is implemented well staff are keen to do it. See the support given?  <b>At first my thoughts n the NVQ were well it's not going to last, it will be another thing, it will come and go</b>  <b>There is something going on that makes people do something</b>  <i>Higher grades worry about training lower grades</i> <b>They didn't want the level 2s to have any training at all because they used to worry about their own jobs.</b>  <i>Sub theme Impact on practice</i> <b>For Level 2 people you can see improvement in them afterwards.</b>
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	<p><b>in a way...I like to see people treat people fair and equally...I feel I'm a very fair person and I can't bear it when people are horrible to each other.</b>  <i>Inductive theme-Value base</i></p> <p>Wants not to feel intimidated.  <b>Not to feel intimidated, I don't do it to anybody else and I don't like it done to me.</b>  <i>Inductive theme-Value base</i></p> <p>Wants to be treated how she would treat others, <i>Inductive theme-value base again</i></p> <p><b>I always do take the hard way</b></p> <p>Stands up for her principles in a very strong way. (<i>Again like Graeme</i>), describes lack of confidence but the behaviour brings a</p>	<p>responsibility but then supports.  <i>Social, values, managerial style.</i></p> <p>Almost English lessons at times.  <i>Integration of assessment to practice.</i></p> <p>Feeling that the opportunity to learn through the work is very important. They sit down and apply themselves together, collaboration, learning together.  <i>Theme social learning, collaboration at work.</i></p> <p><b>If I don't know I'll find out and I do find out.</b>  <i>Theme responsibility of manager to teach and facilitate learning.</i>  <i>Integration of learning into work.</i></p> <p><b>They never see the panic in me.</b>  <i>They are protected</i>  <i>Managerial style being described.</i>  <i>Links to Alfie and Holly. This may</i></p>	<p><b>because budgets are sometimes tight still encouraging us to do more things. They are offering more management training, but to carry on, we have someone from the University to do, yes they are still paying out for us to do stuff.</b>  <b>Yes they are very good.</b>  <i>Theme, continued strategic support for training.</i></p> <p>Homecare, general support for learning and teaching from higher up.  <i>Theme organisation support for learning, strategic.</i></p> <p><i>Interesting contrast between above comments and below. Need to think about this balance.</i></p>	<p>doesn't take the work seriously.  <i>Managerial issue regarding competence.</i>  <i>Not got the value base.</i></p> <p><b>No and he just pushes it all the time. I am up against that sort of thing all the time with one particular member of staff. A particular situation that required discussion with Co-ord hat. Advice given. Need to unpick this carefully.</b></p> <p><b>There may be a lack of interest in the job</b></p> <p><b>It is just a lack of interest in the residents in a way and that riles me because we are here to do a job</b></p>	<p><b>It makes them think about what they are doing, they are not just doing it because it needs to be done...why are you doing it. It was very good for her. Is there a distinction in this between levels?</b></p> <p><b>It made her more confident.</b>  <i>Inductive theme, confidence</i></p> <p><b>It's made her feel that she can achieve stuff</b>  <i>Inductive theme confidence</i></p> <p><b>She enjoyed it and she was very proud of herself in the end</b> <i>Sub theme, valuing of NVQ</i></p> <p><b>Both of them considering doing Level 3 but can't quite push themselves to do it</b>  <i>Sense of J not pushing as hard as others, maybe her own reluctance/identity issues influencing here?</i></p> <p><b>They already knew the job...it</b></p>
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	<p><i>question to this. Inductive theme-values</i></p> <p>Reflection, questioning own practice and motivations.</p> <p><b>Also its me having the confidence in myself ...am I being unfair to him...am I being lazy and I always question myself. Is she describing lack of confidence or professional reflection?</b></p> <p><i>Inductive theme-reflection, confidence</i></p> <p><b>I know the girls fairly well but I just can't make that decision. I don't know if it is up to me to say that</b></p> <p><i>Inductive theme confidence, professional level skills?</i></p> <p><b>I do know a lot .....but sometimes I doubt myself</b></p> <p><i>Inductive theme confidence.</i></p>	<p><i>need exploration?</i></p>	<p><i>And what is needed as part of argument. Is this a singular experience?</i></p> <p>Wariness of management, staff are wary...feeling of being picked on...</p> <p>This is restricting staff aspiration, thinking of leaving organisation.</p> <p><i>Theme of organisational support, restricting development.</i></p> <p>Expectations of org that sometimes (xxxx) all staff should be rotated on. Mgr feels personal life just as important.</p> <p><i>Theme, organisation managerial style, resistance to higher mgt. Homes as organisations.</i></p> <p><b>What's happening above I don't like.</b></p>	<p><b>I don't want to be seen to pick on him, I've given a fair crack of the whip. I really think I have Not just listening with this, wondering whether I need to take a position professionally. Came back to it at end. Needs thinking about. There is something here about judging competence responsibly, how to deal with performance that does not match standards (NVQ and workplace)</b></p>	<p><b>was for them putting it into words. Sub theme of accreditation not learning?</b></p> <p>Very collaborative process with another candidate.</p> <p><i>Sub theme of integration to workplace/ co-operation helpful?</i></p> <p>Personal help from me appreciated. She learned from me the trick of pushing staff on, praise and not accepting can'ts.</p> <p><i>Sub theme of delivery between Uni/Homecare</i></p> <p>Having someone who is very motivated to achieve NVQ, learning makes a difference.</p> <p><b>another assessor Was always very encouraging saying things like "Yes come on, we will do that, we will find the information and we will</b></p> <p><i>Sub theme communities of practice or individual managers attuned</i></p>
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	<p><b>My husband has come from a family of profession identified all that sort of thing.</b> Personal theme, family. Inductive theme confidence.</p> <p><b>he has always supported me, saying “You can do, you can do it”.</b> Personal theme, family.</p> <p><b>Why do you think that is that way~ and in the end I think “I don’t want to go into that deep. All I want is to understand it and do that bit.</b> Values are about home and controllable issues. Won’t waste time on politics. Personal theme, sub theme family support</p> <p><b>He did say that at the end of the NVQ we will go out and we will celebrate..... we didn’t, no.</b></p>	<p>People not allowed room to fail, make mistakes.</p> <p><b>Too much has been taken on up there and we are floundering down here.</b> Little things like a phone call and info would be helpful. Even if no answers immediately. <i>Organisational mgt support lacking.</i></p> <p>Losing key members of valued staff because of organisational titting around severely affects morale. <i>Important not to lose this perspective on management but how much is a direct impact on learning?</i></p>	<p><b>me, don’t go off and try to do if you don’t understand what you are doing and then wish you had asked how to do it. Keep asking me Again more managerial style, accessibility of mgr, H and A both saying same thing.</b></p>	<p><i>to training issues?</i></p> <p>On own practice following the 2 NVQs</p> <p><b>You wouldn’t think that someone would see a difference in your performance like you see a difference in the Level 2s.</b></p> <p><b>I don’t think they have – nobody has said they have</b> <i>Sub theme, difference at L4. Important not to lose this sense of a lack of impact for Joan.</i></p> <p><b>I’m seriously trying to think if I learned anything from it and I don’t know whether I did</b> <i>And again</i></p> <p>Support for training especially NVQs <i>Sub theme of strategic organisation level support.</i></p> <p>Re candidate Restart with improvements following disciplinary issues. Assessment Still</p>
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	<p><b>xxxx was very good and said “Well done Mum.”</b>  <i>Personal theme, sub theme family.</i></p> <p><b>I never consider it being an intelligent way of working through things, I never think of it that way so I never think of myself being, you know, much good</b> <i>Sub theme identity.</i>  <i>Inductive theme confidence.</i></p> <p><i>She talks about her husband like RB’s wife talked about him at seminar. She had boys to get to cricket practice when he was writing his books in the evening. Maybe a male female thing? This is a female dominated profession, does it make a difference?</i></p> <p><b>It does not take much to satisfy me at all – I</b></p>		<p><b>Very difficult.....I had to keep pushing and pushing.</b> <i>Sub theme of difficulties of assessing a challenging candidate. Need to keep this balance in mind.</i></p> <p>Assessor driven. Felt it was her reputation as well. <i>Assessors are being judged too... of course but not sure I always appreciate this.</i></p> <p>NVQ made mgr realise how poor his communication was. <i>Sub theme of NVQ helping to establish problems in practice. Link to Alfie situation.</i></p> <p>Used reflective accounts <b>to find out what he did know</b> <i>Sub theme of integrating assessment into practice, assessment of staff in the broader sense not just NVQ.</i></p> <p>Difficult but not sure that it is language or him. <b>He does ever so well then he stops,</b> Sometimes after praise.</p>
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	<p><b>don't need big things I need little things</b>  <i>Mangerial style.</i></p> <p><i>Personal managerial style</i> is based on what she sees, not reports but then takes it to a disciplinary stage immediately.</p> <p>Flexible mgr, happy to help if she can but understands the boundaries about personal info etc. Would not ask about personal life.  <i>Personal managerial style</i></p> <p>Tips: to be fair firm, friendly, approachable, respect look after them, would not ask them to do anything she was not prepared to do.  <b><i>Personal managerial style. I still feel like a support worker, part of the mob.</i></b>  <i>Personal, sub theme of identity and managerial style.</i></p>			<p>Other staff notice a difference.</p> <p>J queries male female attitude to tasks. F wants it done now, M, no rush.</p> <p><i>NVQ helped identify performance issues, like with Alfie. Needs thinking about.</i></p> <p><i>Feeling of real consideration about different levels and readiness for that level.</i></p>
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	How to facilitate learning? Encourage anything, any training. Be positive, support.			
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## Appendix 4. Cross participant themes: NVQs

**Appendix 4. Cross participant theme:  
NVQs**

Original theme  
All  
participants.

**Potential  
quotations from  
transcript of  
interviews in bold.**

NVQs

## **Findings reported in Chapter 6**

### **Joan**

Being an assessor

Got a lot of help from another manager in being an assessor. *Where it is embedded in the organisation this support from people who choose each other is possible? Sub theme of Communities of practice?*

Still finds it very time consuming

I don't want to let them down and that has always been my main thing *Sub theme, time and effort involved. Commitment*

Researcher summary  
of participant  
perspective in plain  
text.

*Researcher  
comment/reflection  
and identification of  
themes in italics*

Describes the tension between the candidate doing work and the assessor doing it.  
Her experience makes her wants candidates to do it the way she had to. No help.  
Not about the learner and his needs first. Should be an agreed balance of work.  
*This needs thinking about. I felt prickly in this part of the conversation. Sub theme of ways of assessing. Do I push obs too much?*

Sub theme  
of time it  
takes to  
assess  
NVQs

Pressure from staff to start NVQ. *Sub theme Where it is implemented well staff are keen to do it. See the support given?*

**At first my thoughts n the NVQ were well it's not going to last, it will be another thing, it will come and go**

Reflexivity  
prompted  
by 'prickly  
feeling'

**there is something going on that makes people do something**

*Higher grades worry about training lower grades in previous job  
They didn't want the level 2s to have any training at all because they used to worry about their own jobs.*

Identification  
of sub theme  
Impact on  
practice

*Sub theme Impact on practice \_\_\_\_\_  
for Level 2 people you can see improvement in them afterwards.*

**it makes them think about what they are doing, they are not just doing it because it needs to be done...why are you doing it. It was very good for her.  
Is there a distinction in this between levels?**

**it's made her feel that she can achieve stuff** *Inductive theme, confidence \_\_\_\_\_*

Identification  
of inductive  
theme

**she enjoyed it and she was very proud of herself in the end** *Sub theme, valuing of NVQ*

**both of them considering doing Level 3 but can't quite push themselves to do it** *Sense of J not pushing as hard as others, maybe her own reluctance/identity issues influencing here?*

**they already knew the job...it was for them putting it into words.** *Sub theme of accreditation not learning?*

Researcher  
summary of  
participant  
perspective

**Collaborative process with other candidate.** *Sub theme of integration to workplace/ co-operation helpful*

Personal help from me (Audrey) appreciated. She learned from me the trick of pushing staff on, praise and not accepting can'ts. *Sub theme of delivery between Uni/Homecare*

Having someone who is very motivated to achieve NVQ, learning makes a difference.

**we were together for a while and xxxx was always very encouraging saying things like “Yes come on, we will do that, we will find the information” and we will** *Sub theme of communities of practice or individual managers attuned to training issues?*

On own practice following the 2 NVQs  
**you wouldn’t think that someone would see a difference in your performance like you see a difference in the Level 2s.**

**I don’t think they have – nobody has said they have** *Sub theme, difference at L4. Important not to lose this sense of a lack of impact for Joan.*

**I’m seriously trying to think if I learned anything from it and I don’t know whether I did** *And again*

Support for training **especially NVQs** *Sub theme of strategic organisation level support.*

Re candidate

Restart with improvements following disciplinary issues.

Assessment **Still very difficult.....I had to keep pushing and pushing.** *Sub theme of difficulties of assessing a challenging candidate. Need to keep this balance in mind.*

Assessor driven.

Felt it was her reputation as well. *Assessors are being judged too... of course but not sure I always appreciate this.*

NVQ made mgr realise how poor communication was. *Sub theme of NVQ helping to establish problems in practice. Link to Alfie situation.*

Used reflective accounts **to find out what xxxx did know** *Sub theme of integrating assessment into practice, assessment of staff in the broader sense not just NVQ*

Difficult but not sure that it is language or him.

**He does ever so well then he stops,** Sometimes after praise.

Other staff notice a difference.

Male female attitude to tasks. F wants it done now, M, no rush.

*NVQ helped identify performance issues, like with Alfie. Needs thinking about.*

*Feeling of real consideration about different levels and readiness for that level.*

## Peter

L4, quality of work higher, a lot expected, harder.

Needed to research, used other managers. *Sub theme, communities of practice, integration.*

Recognised need for knowledge development. *Sub theme identifying learning part of NVQ*

Recognises that qualifications need time and he has to prioritise for himself. Value of time given by organisation. Workshops helpful. Org pushing to cover work not considering NVQ progress. Prioritisation of care. Personal boundary setting. Ability to say no exercised. *Sub themes. Time, effort. Difference at level 4. Managers have this but lower levels do not. If you have a manager who does not prioritise NVQ it leads to slow progress. Attitude is key. Of course there are times that it has to be prioritised over NVQ but sometimes there are other ways of coping.*

Thoughts about changing to outside assessment, would be one less thing. time issue, but a hesitation. *Sub theme time, delivery, integration of assessment to work place*

## Graham

**The company doesn't really come into it. There is no incentive to do it**  
*However he has done two NVQs*

Money would have been an incentive

**they are either things that you are never ever going to come across or are out of your hands anyway because they are for people higher up or outside the organisation. Or they are things that are so simple easy and straightforward and everyday that you feel like a bit of a plank** *Sub theme, value of NVQ, not valued by G but there is ambivalence, see below. Sub theme learning/workplace identity.*

**I think my understanding has been helped by the NVQ.** *Sub theme of value of NVQ*

*Contradictory two statements above. Needs thinking about. Re-listen. Needs subtle presentation*

Has learned about ‘theory’ behind practice but this has not made a difference to his practice. Might help him if he wanted to go on to study at a higher level. *This is interesting. Not the norm. almost the reverse. NVQs helping prepare for higher learning NOT work.*

Too many very basic questions being asked and this is frustrating. *Again seems to be presenting different views, may have been of difference between L2 and 3 but didn't ask this*

Too much repetition.

Feeling that writers of standards have never done the job themselves. *Sub theme of difficulty of understanding standards and of lack of relation to job he does.*

Low priority of NVQ in personal life **the NVQ is so far away from my list of what is important at the moment** but assessor keeps him to task and gives him time at work. Being a new dad he doesn't have time at home. *Sub theme, personal, time, work life balance.*

Finds NVQ approach a difficult one, language, repetition, **overly complicated** Assessor is really important in interpreting. *Sub theme interpersonal, importance of assessor in process. Sub theme, language complicated.*

NVQs '**a chore**' I am not dismissing that having it can be a good thing. *Said this is how they were generally regarded in the home but still the ambivalence.*

Recognises that NVQs have helped identify poor practitioners but they can still refuse to do the qualification. *People can refuse to do it. G felt that it was those who needed it most who didn't do it.*

**It's a waste of time doing this job without getting all the extras** *This explains it somewhat, qualifications seen as an 'extra', a benefit of the job.*

## Paula

**It gave the likes of me the chance to get a qualification.** *Feeling of being given access. Sub theme of confidence?*

**but I thought I might be too old** *Again no expectations.*

**I have really enjoyed it actually.** *Real sense of having grabbed an opportunity and having made the most of it. Low key interview but no mistaking that it has been a good experience.*

**Researching, actually. I bought a book, a very thick book. Doing the research make me use my brain again. And actually releasing I know more than I thought I knew. It was putting things into words, which gets your brain working again.**

**Legislation, Things like that. I mean not all of it applies to us in Homecare, but just reading through the Human Rights, etc. I did not realise how much it covered. Out of interest, I have gone onto CSCI website and had a look at that. It makes you think as well. You hope you are doing things right, but when you actually read through it, you think, "yes, I am doing it right, that is what they mean"**

Sub themes, reassurance that personal standard is right. acknowledges learning attained, pleasure in learning, identifying learning in relation to legislation etc rather than practical competencies.

Changes to practice.

**It made me think more, interacting with people, communication, etc**  
*Inductive theme, reflection on practice.*

Reinforcing good practice.

**I always talk. I like talking, so I always chatter anyway. I always tell them what I am going to do, whether they talk to me back or not. I always tell them, "I am going to turn you over; I am going to wash your back; the flannel is a bit warm; the flannel has got cold cream on", etc. I have always done that. It has made me aware what a good thing that is.** *Sub theme,*

*reinforcing good practice, this is identifying that there is learning about competence and practice as well as knowledge.*

**I think it makes you feel good..... that you are actually doing a good job and giving a good service.** *Sub theme, knock on effect of confidence?*

**I lark with them a lot as well..... I suppose I like to lighten the mood, because I do personal things for him.**

**that is a good personal skill that you can make him laugh.**

**it reinforces what I am doing. I am not perfect, I am sure there are things that I do wrong, Confidentiality, as well. How important confidentiality is. Medication that was an interesting one to go through.** *Sub themes, areas of learning, practice, confidentiality, accountability (?professional level skills) meds.*

**why you do it.** *Sub theme of deeper understanding of practice?*

**It makes you really aware of what you could end up, or where you could end up, should I say, if you do not do it properly.** *Sub theme of accountability, professional level skills development, awareness.*

**Yes. I mean it has been hard work, but it has not been unpleasant. It has made me think. It has made me use my brain. Instead of, “yes I know what I am doing”, it sort of reinforced why and how I have learnt as well. You learn through experience.** *Sub theme of value of NVQ, rewarding.*

**I think doing the NVQ has made me realise it even more. I do know things. Sometimes you take in an information and you do not even realise you are taking it in** *Sub theme of reinforcing learning already gained.*

**Yes and you do not realise how much knowledge and experience you do accumulate. But you do and you learn from experience, even if it is a bad experience.** *Sub theme of learning from bad experiences links to other narratives, Peter, Stacey.*

NVQ is valued by the org. and personally. *Sub theme, value of NVQ, strategic implementation as well as personal value.*

Previous attempt to do NVQ in another org.  
.....was just a disaster. Absolute disaster.  
...they found me another assessor, but she was useless.

Homecare

**I had seen with their training made me feel confident that it would be done properly.** *Sub theme, confidence in delivery system and strategic approach of organisation.*

**I have really enjoyed it**

Much younger assessor but because she is well qualified there is no resentment.  
Learning together

NVQ

**I think it is good; it is interesting; it is well set out well.** *Sub theme, no complaints about language or complexity.*

This was the sort of comment that led to element 1 of enhanced model of delivery, strategic support.

Working with University

**If you are away from all that it is easier to set your mind around it, because you know that is what you are there for. You can have your break; go for your lunch and things like that. It focuses your mind. And help is there.** *Sub theme, delivery system, workshops*

**I am not finding it easy, but it is not as hard as I thought it would be.**  
**Perhaps it is because I have worked in care for a long time. The knowledge is there, it is just bringing it back out again. I know the knowledge is there, but then saying that I keep learning new things every day.** *Sub theme of learning, saying that she is learning new things but also the reinforcing of existing knowledge.*

## **Alfie**

Previous centre. 4 assessors not good. Lack of understanding of process. Poor communication. Identifying of bad practice but no teaching of good practice hampered devpt. Over production of evidence

*Sub theme, Homecare are getting it much more right than other places. This needs consideration. Links to Paula's story and Joan's previous experience.*

Good assessor in Homecare supportive, confident in her competence and opinion upheld. *Sub theme, importance of people, assessors.*

Enjoyment from success *Sub theme value of NVQ, pride in achievement.*

Mgr used units to plan development in advance of units. Plan ahead. *Sub theme, planned teaching and preparation for assessment. Sub theme integration into workplace practice. Benefit of workplace assessors.*

Writing, reflecting, learning *Sub theme, learning how to improve his skills. Determination to improve writing skills. Sub theme, reflection.*

Success led to ambition to do better *Sub theme, confidence?*

Time from organisation *Sub theme strategic implementation, valuing of qualification and effort.*

Pride from organisation, recognition *Sub theme, strategic implementation, valuing of qualification*

Regular meetings helped progress *Sub theme of interpersonal/support for learning.*

Qualifications that mean something *Sub theme of valuing NVQ.*

Timescales and targets good. *Sub theme, delivery system, strategic implementation.*

Waiting list of staff to get on, disappointed at time it takes. *Sub theme of managerial approach encouraging engagement. Slight hesitation here about this. As a practitioner I know this home is not good at focusing on getting people through, things always get in the way, candidates take longer than in other homes. Need to think and unpick this.*

Can't take on too many candidates. *Sub theme of time, effort and capacity (maybe also personal confidence as an assessor?)*

**Care has to be prioritised but how you do it is important.** *Sub theme of pressures of work and care needs coming first but also understanding of possibilities of prioritising at times*

NVQ helps awareness of performance issues, addressed prior to going on NVQ.  
*Sub theme of NVQs helping to establish care standards in the workplace.*  
*Managers judging staff to standards prior to putting them through assessment.*

Consistent practice helps teamwork *Sub theme of improving practice?*  
*Communities of practice developing?*

Candidates awareness of legislation. Awareness of rationale of care. *Sub theme learning stimulated by NVQ engagement.*

Objectives linked to NVQs but also linked to practice. *Sub theme, integration into workplace practice.*

Better recording of care evident, **they know they might have to use it as evidence but also understand the importance.** *Inductive theme of professional level skills development.*

Standards being maintained at the end of qual. *Sub theme relating to keeping standards up after qualification attained.*

Still feels that a prof qual might be better. *Sub theme of value of NVQ at higher levels.* *Think about this in relation to the level 4. Narrative resonates with Holly? Both would like to have done nurse training.*

Writing improved.'**Not a person from a council estate but a home manager'**  
*Sub theme of improving aspirations, personal theme.*

**NVQ has proved itself, its worth having.** *Sub theme of value of NVQ.*

Problems with candidate achieving consistent and sufficient evidence of practice. Identified through NVQ. Issues of not meeting role. More positive than punitive.  
*Sub theme of NVQ helping to establish where competence not met. Links to J experience here. Removed from scheme and given more training.*

Dealing with staff showed up gaps in ability. *Sub theme Reflection by assessor on own role in this situation. Managerial style, taking responsibility, a positive approach to a challenging issue.*

Also dealing with professionals. *Sub theme, clearly expressed improvement in practice, ?inductive theme, development of professional level skills?*

Now feels that candidate is showing his competence throughout work, supervisions, conversations. Thinks more managerially. NVQ made things more urgent to resolve issue and was an incentive for him to improve. *Sub theme, another practice improvement through NVQ and work place training that was identified as needed and missing. NVQ focused the need.*

Time a problem to assess. Problem picking up assessment after a break. Feeling that systems change a lot. Just meeting is a problem. Sometimes prioritisation of other work proves a problems. *Sub themes of time, difficulty picking up assessment.*

?Outside assessment. Relationship with assessor advantageous for assessment.

**'One less job'**

*Sub theme of delivery, initially keen in that it would be one less things to do but there is hesitation too.*

Observations over time possible (APL) with workbased assessor. *Sub theme of integration into work.*

More time to assess would help. *Sub theme, strategic integration. (hesitation from practitioner perspective here, assessors from this home do not come to workshops as regularly as others do, is this pressures in the home or low prioritisation?)*

Not much support between home assessors. New candidates doing well, 'will fly through' xxxx keen to complete, work through breaks and lunch. Productive.

Wants qualification. *Sub theme of workplace and learning identity, motivation, aspiration.*

Wait to start frustrating for candidates. Too many candidates for assessors.

Waiting list.

*Sub theme of strategic implementation (hesitation here as candidates take longer in this home so longer wait)*

Previously deputy not interested in personal development but now wants own NVQ. *Sub theme of managerial approach increasing interest and motivation of staff to learn and engage in NVQs.*

## **Pat**

Issue of committed mgr is key. Attendance at workshops valued. *Sub theme of organisational support, within the homes. This has come up before.*

All staff want to do it now. Only 2 at a time. *Sub theme, staff keen as they begin to see others work through successfully with good support, Alfie. This is from candidate perspective though not mgr.*

Other staff experience different from the way she is doing it at University. She feels it is not as good. *Sub theme, contrasting peripatetic with workplace assessment.*

Legislation worried her. Makes her think about what she is doing in the job. Very different from previous occupation, so new understanding necessary. *Sub theme, learning from NVQ, also development of prof level skills, inductive theme.*

Has improved practice. Food, cleaning products. *Sub theme, learning from NVQ process, specifics different from others.*

### **Loads that I am learning** *Sub theme, learning from NVQ*

### **Every day you just keep learning.** *Sub theme learning from NVQ*

Takes the learning into home as well. *Sub theme learning from NVQ*

Teasing at work about NVQ and changes in her practice. *Sub theme, noticed by peers, sense of community, learning rubbing off on others?*

Good understanding now but very confusing to start with. Assessor key. *Sub theme, interpersonal assessor support, mediating the learning process.*

Working together so there to watch, fire drill, cleaning. *Sub theme, integration of assessment in to workplace practice.*

Would not like an external assessor, worried about the clients, experience of this and it did not go well. *Sub theme, workplace assessors make observations more natural, external person in small homes is more difficult to manage naturally.*

Makes her feel professional, knows there is a lot to learn. *Inductive theme, professional level skills.*

### **Stacey**

**I am always ready to learn more I never stop working but I can't always be bothered to do it all and it sounds silly. I love learning things. I started hating NVQ with a passion when I did level 2 I was forced to do it. I didn't appreciate what was involved. I started off detesting it but ended up enjoying it. Different experience at level 2 and 3. Sub theme learning/workplace identity? Element of being told to do it not choice. Balance of interest and motivation.**

Learning to teach

**I am quite good at teaching people I manage to answer the way they can understand – which funny enough I learnt from NVQ Sub theme of assessor development through NVQ, Link to J re learning from me? Didn't pursue this further tho so might not be me. Reflection on strengths?**

**When I started level 3 I thought here we go but I found level 3 a lot more interesting than level 2 despite the fact they are very similar I just found it more interesting more in-depth I had to research more learn about my subject more. Level 2 they practically spoon fed you. Level 3 I had to use my brain to think about at it, it was more interesting And it has taught me an awful lot about teaching people. Sub theme of learning identity, was it Stacey that changed or was it that level was not right? Is wrong level de-motivating for people? More challenging more motivating for her. Again sub theme of learning to teach through the NVQ, others not making this clear a link.**

Difficulty with language of NVQ meant that she was pushed to interpret, to understand more. *Sub theme of language but different take here, language challenged her in a positive way.*

**Yes because the way they worded things was in complete double Dutch and obviously the candidate says what does that mean you have to think about it. Sub theme of assessor development. Interesting that out of a challenging issue she feels she has gained skills.**

Not keen that assessment should go to outside provider *Sub theme assessor development, she is in less senior position, maybe not such a pressure on her as on managers? Also is really enjoying it as a process, learning so gaining.*

**Level 2 I just flunked my way through but the time I got to level 3 I started level 3 just before I became a senior and I learnt an awful lot more from that Sub theme learning through NVQ. Level 3 at RSW level not what CSCI suggest but Homecare offer this as staff development. Implicit link between learning through level 3 and promotion? (need to re-listen to determine if this is clearer in interview)**

**No my level 2 no, I didn't put any effort in I was not prepared to listen to what they were saying** Sub theme of identity, being prepared, indicating it was about her rather than award?

On being a candidate

**I did level 2 I hadn't been in care many years. And they mentioned this award and I was thinking yeah this was not much work** Sub theme of difficulty of qualification, work involved. Similar attitude to Graham?

**NVQ 2 they kind of talk you into it, before the CSCI they wanted to get certain amount of people through.**

**I couldn't be bothered to do this in my own time. I was much younger I wanted to go out and party with my friends I didn't particularly want to sit at home doing an NVQ. But by the time I got to my level three some time had passed I had grown up a lot, the clubs were the same and I couldn't give a stuff and I wanted the award.** Sub theme of pressure from organisation due to legislation. Sub theme of Personal/Learning/Workplace identity again, readiness to learn, priorities might not be families but young and social life of course, not really considered this.

**they spoon fed you by giving you all the information you needed in the work book and you just had to find it, which really wasn't teaching you anything but looking for the passages to find out what you needed to .** Sub theme of resources/workbooks/artefacts interesting that the very things we had thought of as resources for learning were perceived as making learning too easy, not heard this before, people generally happy to have help. I wonder if this is why the legislation questionnaire seems so well received? It pushes people to independently seek information? When they spoon feed you you don't have to think about it you don't even have to understand what your writing as part of your answer. Sub theme of supporting learning for individuals, important to get level of challenge right for each one.

**...we called the NVQ Bull shit we use to keep the same answers for all the passages we kept I didn't learn anything from it when I look back it was completely baffling to me that I was so naïve and took out the passage and copied it across no one will notice that and we got away with it.** Sub theme of supporting learning, candidates who want to short cut were able to do so. Link to Graham who described staff view of NVQ as 'a chore'.

**....when I got to level 3 I was determined that whatever was put it would be mine, even to the point if people asked me if they could look at my work book to see how I had done it I did not want to show them I was thinking if you copy any of my answers that's mine that's all my work I have had to try hard for that** Sub theme of personal/learning/workplace identity, ownership of qualification, value of work put in.

**I am glad they don't push people but a lot more people are talked into doing the NVQ**

Example of making links between candidates, similarities in narratives.

Persuasion used but she doesn't see much change since the number requirements.

*Sub theme of strategic support, Homecare has always encouraged staff to do NVQ so no great shift since legislation.*

On time

**That goes for the NVQ as well you just don't get the time I can't do any of it at work. It's usually what I can get done here or at home, especially when I was doing my assessors I was doing hours at home so much so I was eating drink and sleeping NVQ at one point just to make sure I knew what I was doing to assess. And that was very difficult and that's why people don't like doing it. I got people at work who have got families, they cannot sit at home and do their NVQ the only chance and opportunity they get is here. Sub theme of time it takes to achieve the awards and how difficult it is at work.**

*Couldn't help thinking that most workplaces would not expect you to do work on a course in the workplace, that Homecare supports with time much more than other organisations. There is a culture of expectation of support to do what is actually a part of the job. Need to think about this as it is practitioner view more than researcher. Wouldn't have a sense of this if not working with lots of other orgs where no time is given at all and people come in on days off.*

On new stds

**new standards are much better in that respect they have not got to go home to do paper work, they have to do some but not quite as much and the work they have to do the information is on internet or in the work place and they can do it here. The time they have allocated that day should be enough time to get through that. Sub theme support for learning and strategic support and delivery (ref to 'here', means at Uni workshops) from organisation with enough time in Stacey's view. Sees the shift in emphasis to observation. Link to J's point here in that she viewed this as too much work for assessors.**

Example of where practitioner view needed to be

Positive for the workshop, at least people have a day a month. See above comment.

On assessing

**They have not thought about the poor assessor because the time constraints are even more on us** Sub theme of support for learning, link to Joan her, also Alfie and Peter also talking about time, full house of assessors.

Beginning to identify when a theme is occurring across participants.

What could improve, time and balance of workload.

**I think there should be more of a balance between the assessor and the candidate and the work load and the main improvement would be the time to do it.** See comments above about time, support for learning, org/strategic support.

Feeling that time assessing is time away from the residents. *Not heard this before but it links to prioritisation of work, sub theme of organisation strategic support and values (inductive theme)*

Thinks that a day a month for assessors to concentrate on assessing would be very helpful. *Sub theme, org/strategic support, first practical suggestion but workshop once a month is this?*

Areas of improved practice linked to NVQ.

**medications unit is a really big unit suddenly in the NVQ and they want these people to do the NVQ but they have not got the training behind them**

**to help and suddenly we are going to get in house mandatory training on medication**

*Sub theme of impact on practice, link to Alfie about impact of NVQ*

**Health and safety but they only tend to listen to you when you are there**

*Sub theme, improvements to practice not always is not consistent.*

On improvements in practice.

**when I started to assess her she had been with another assessor she didn't have an ounce of confidence she got it all wrong I don't think this person knew how to communicate with her. When I took her over she had such bad low confidence by the time I had finished with her she was arguing with me saying I was wrong, her confidence increased all the way through which was absolutely great to the point where she said she wanted to do level 3. Sub theme, interpersonal/socical/support for learning and understanding the individual candidate and what they need. Also inductive theme of confidence, adversely effected by poor assessor support. First occasion of report of poor assessor in Homecare.**

**I had to do a lot of work with her more than the others I had to translate some of the answer for her get her to think about things. But it was the praise no one else had given her the praise and she said no one has every praised me for that** Sub theme support for learning, workplace/learning identity, inductive theme, confidence.

Changes to practice

**she thought a lot more about what she was doing a lot more confidence in what she was doing, like writing messages .she came forward some viable suggestions.**

*Sub theme, Are we helping to create a more reflective worker? Inductive theme, confidence. Sub theme impact on practice, communication link to Alfie. she has learnt from me that I am not criticising her just trying to show her, that another way might work better. Sub theme, In enabling feedback people learn to take criticism, become more reflective (inductive theme) develop professional level skills. she was a difficult person with work with we had the tears the whole works .Sub theme, difficulty of assessment process. Assessment is really hard sometimes, mustn't lose this feeling, links to A and J and H and P. But also they aren't complaining, observing but also relishing it? Needs thinking, re look at narratives/interviews*

Example of reflexive engagement with findings, need to go back to narratives/interviews

On others change?

**Some I have,some I have not others it I've seen one person go for NVQ She got the award but she couldn't stand doing it, she was glad she got 2 but won't do another one.** Sub theme, some people do not enjoy it, won't continue, is this about personal/workplace/learning identity or about the NVQ?

**I said maybe next time don't go for something academic like the NVQ go for something like massage like did there is academic work but the emphasis is on the practical side.**

*Sub theme, Interesting view that NVQ is academic learning.*

**They see it as writing and that's a chore.**

*Muddled reasoning here about workload division. Re-listen and think. Aware of a scepticism, think about this, practitioner experience of Stacey needs reflecting upon.*

**I like the way it makes me look at people and teaching my approach and getting them through the awards.** *Sub theme of valuing the NVQ assessor position.*

**The girls are really proud of themselves and to see their practice improve especially from level 2 to level 3 you see them thinking about it and that has to be a benefit to the service users** *Sub theme of valuing of the awards, inductive them of confidence and reflective practice, sub theme of improving practice.*

**it opens their knowledge gives them more confidence to go forward to interact with the service users thus improving communication with them, and the recording of information is very important and sharing it encourages best practice. Girls who have the NVQ qualification think and act in more depth than the ones who don't have this qualification** *Sub theme of improving practice, service user communication, recording. Inductive theme of reflection.*

**I think it's value is the confidence I see in the individuals, if they want to apply for other jobs it stands them in good stead - also good practice, it makes you think about good practice, you can't just say you did it, you have to explain step by step how you did it.** *Inductive them of confidence mentioned across other interviews, identify ?Need to gather together these findings and explore a bit further. Inductive theme, Inductive theme of Values/Reflective learning too??*

On whether NVQs are valued.

**They didn't, they absolutely didn't but I think now it is a common thing for people to be doing NVQs, that it is a qualification, you get a lot of marks for it now, especially in care, they are asking for NVQs now. It is the perfect award to go for, because it is practical as well as written not just one or the other, which makes it more interesting** *Sub theme of value of NVQ.*

I have even thought about becoming an NVQ Verifier. I like NVQ, I enjoy seeing people achieve things. *Sub theme that NVQ scheme when delivered in the workplace allows for a progression on a slightly different route for assessors and verifiers.*

*So many great answers, was she sort of doing a job interview. Sort of scepticism, think about how positive this interview is. Last answer made me wonder about motivations. Remember her level2 experience too. Is my persona/practitionerl stuff clouding judgement here?*

## Holly

Difficult for a motivated assessor to deal with unmotivated candidate *Sub theme social/interpersonal/support for learning. This is the other side of the situation. Links to Joan, Stacey.*

Change in culture in the home from no one wanting to do NVQs to al wanting to do them. *Sub theme of importance of manager/strategic support. Links to Pat and Alfie.*

Would have liked tough experience with L4 behind her, next year would like to do next qualification. *Sub theme, personal/learning/workplace identity, timing of doing qualification important.*

L2, felt isolated prefers classroom learning *Sub theme, NVQ doesn't suit everyone, she preferred a more formal teaching delivery course. Link to Stacey.*

**I applied for promotion because I wanted to assess** *Sub theme, NVQ provides another development route for staff. A motivator in itself. Link to Stacey.*

Candidate motivated. Good understanding about NVQ. Feedback motivated him. *Sub theme of support for learning, assessor/candidate engagement, feedback etc. Link to Stacey.*

Frustration of lack of completion. Difficult to pick up assessment. *Sub theme, support for learning, easy to get thrown off and then once momentum is broken difficult to get going again. Link to Alfie comments about targets.*

Pressures of job mean even very well motivated assessor can struggle. *Sub theme, strategic support, time. Interesting to hear this from Holly who is a very committed and able assessor but even she struggles with time.*

Staff still want to undertake learning *Sub theme of managerial style here, Managers attitude is stimulating staff interest in learning that is not just NVQ, other learning too.*

Peripatetic assessment would be an advantage when pressure is on.

Prioritisation of workload.

Not knowing the staff would mean assessment would be less useful to workplace. Staff would get used to a new system. Would like a breather. *Sub theme of delivery. Difficult situation for these managers, the better they are at encouraging the staff to learn the more work they create, the more interest, the more pressure. Ambivalence about external assessment is same as Alfie.*

Assessing is like riding a bike. *Different to Alfie and Joan who both said that it was difficult to pick up again after a break.*

## Appendix 5. Narrative: Joan

## Appendix 5. Narrative: Joan

### Narrative: Joan

This is a narrative composed from two interviews with Joan. Joan gave a lot of quite personal detail in the interview that has been deleted for anonymity purposes. There was also information that was identifying about other staff and service users that has been removed due to confidentiality issues. Some information regarding particular situations at work that were not relevant to the research has also been removed. The narratives were then used to examine the themes and what the participant narratives had to say in relation to these themes. The narrative has been created in the third person.

At school Joan went for the 11 plus but failed it. She went to a girls' school until she was fifteen but didn't do well, she said she could not pick things up and still struggled. Her parents did not tell her she was not any good but they didn't praise her or take any interest.

Boxes indicate links between empirical evidence in narratives and evidence in Chapters 5 and 6.

#### Section 5.2.2

At senior school I went for the 11 plus and failed that and ended up at a girls school in xxxx, stayed there until I was fifteen, left there, didn't seem to do well there really – I couldn't pick things up, still can not really, that hasn't changed what ever it is. I suppose my parents are folk that never praise you. They didn't tell me I was crap but never took an interest.

Before Joan worked for Homecare she worked for another organisation where she went from working in the evenings for a few hours to being a deputy manager. The manager of that organisation really pushed her to progress, Joan thought she must have seen something in her but Joan fought it all the way.

#### Section 5.2.1

So I started doing five to nine each evening, that's part-time obviously and then a permanent post part time and straight from part time to permanent. I got pushed by the manager of that home, 'You can do it, you can do it.' I fought against it all the way, but went up to Senior, then went to Grade 4, went up to Senior up the scale, then acted up as Deputy Manager for about eight months. Then that place closed down for refurbishment and I was transferred to a place in xxxx, which is another xxxx. I went backwards again, people in wheelchairs and managed a place over there for about two and a half years

She progressed in that organisation with the manager's support. She described herself as determined and liked to see people treated fairly and equally. Eventually she left the organisation after she felt that she had gone backwards in terms of the care area but also because she disagreed with the way the organisation was managed and was treating its staff. She said she thought they felt threatened by her. The death of Joan's father was around this time and she described herself as being in a whirlwind.

Section 5.2.1

My father died and this kind of threw me, not knowing which way to turn for a bit, then this came up. I went for this, I felt I was in whirlwind. I didn't like the way it was managed, the way the management treated the staff, I didn't like that at all. I didn't like the way the management talked to the staff and that's where I am now, here.

Section 6.4.1

When she applied for a job in Homecare she thought she did a poor interview.

I did a crap interview, I hadn't been for an interview for nine years. XXXX said it was not good but XXXX wrote to me. At the time we did that, he said if you want to apply for a Manager again I'll give you an interview. I got a mock interview with XXXX.

She applied again and that was how she got into Homecare.

Joan said she had no confidence whatsoever. It was only in the last year that she had become more confident in dealing with staff conflict. She said she did not feel as though she did it well but did it because it was her job and she couldn't leave things.

Section 6.5

I have no confidence whatsoever, still haven't got any. Only this last year, I have become more confident in dealing with conflict between staff. I'm not able to, like if I was a residential worker like everyone else I couldn't say to someone "Don't do it that way" or "Don't do that it's wrong". I can only do that now because I am a manager, it is my job to do it. And because it is my job I do it and that's the only way I can do it. I can't confront people very well but because it's my job to do it I do it.

She described asking the staff to sort issues out themselves first but if that did not work then pride meant she had to intervene.

I have got to do it to sort things out and my pride won't let them fight amongst themselves down there. If one is not happy about the other I ask them "Can you sort it?" "Have a go" first but if that doesn't work I'll sort it. It is my job to do it, I won't shy from it but quietly shit myself but I'm thinking "Oh my God". I never show it. I am very calm. Behind it all I'm thinking "Oh my God" but they never know what is going on.

Section 5.2.1  
Section 5.2.2  
Section 5.2.3

There were situations that she had to resolve, like a situation with a social worker and with a particular staff member who was causing massive problems.

Also it's me having the confidence in myself. Am I being unfair to him xxxx? Am I being lazy? I always question myself.

He pushed it all the time, not doing what was expected, wandering off and using his mobile phone inappropriately. Joan said that mobile phones were a problem in the home. She was frustrated about the use of mobile phones in the house but could see that some people used them appropriately and that a ban on them would not be helpful. The staff member in question had made a joke of his use of mobiles with her not really understanding her point it seemed.

Section 6.1.1  
Section 6.4.1

It is just a lack of interest in the residents in a way and that riles me because we are here to do a job

She said how she was going to have to take the matter further.

But I don't want to be seen to pick on him, I've given a fair crack of the whip. I really think I have.

She wanted to be flexible and some staff needed to be able to respond to home situations but how sometimes it was difficult with staff who abused her flexibility. She was going to have to take the situation further but wanted to be sure she was being fair. Her confidence had risen at home as well. She described becoming very strong and although she always felt a bit less able than her husband educationally he always believed in and supported her. She was disappointed that the celebrations that were promised when she finished her NVQ never happened though.

Section 6.5

Joan said she did not think anyone ever taught her to manage unless she learned from how she had been treated but that she got a lot of help and support from her manager. She described being very comfortable with her manager, talking about all sorts and how she really understood Joan's situation and that was important to Joan. Joan said she tried to be firm, friendly and approachable, liking to see people treated fairly and equally. She did not like it when people were horrible to each other. She talked about her own feelings in managers' meetings.

Section  
5.2.3

Some of the managers at Homecare are quite. I find it quite difficult, some of the time they slam you down, so some of the time I have to be careful what I say. I have to be one hundred percent careful of what I say. If someone comes up against me can I back it up? And this all goes on in my mind first. If I can't back it up with a sensible argument then I won't say it, I have to be confident that I can say something or I'll leave it.

Section 6.4.1

She did not treat people that way and would not do it to anybody else. She described how determined she was to,

See people treated people fair and equally. I feel I am a very fair person and I can't bear it when people are horrible to each other. I want to be treated as I treat others.

She expressed how she felt it is important not to be intimidated,

I don't do it to anybody else and I don't like it done to me.

She said she thought she got the best out of people that way and they wanted to help her even if it was not part of their job. She did her best to be accommodating and support the staff but it was not always easy.

I'm determined in a way. I like to see people treat people fair and equally. I feel I'm a very fair person and I can't bear it when people are horrible to each other. The thing I am having trouble with at the moment, as I call it are piss takers. I will give anybody here anything, like if someone comes to me and says they want leave next week I just say "You get it covered and you can have it." I don't like people taking the piss out of me really and it is happening here I feel, it is a massive issue here with one person really and it is a very difficult situation. Xxxx is

managing that issue for me here at the moment. It is driving me and the other team leader mad. It is very difficult situation to sort out. I haven't watched anybody doing it. Unless it is the way I am treated maybe learning the way to treat others.

She described learning from experience of these situations.

You learn the right way to sort it out

She tried to base her approach to staff on what she saw herself and not reports from others. She never asked any staff members to do anything she wouldn't do. She thought there were boundaries for her as a manager and felt uncomfortable asking too much about staff and their personal lives but wanted to be flexible. She was aware of a need to maintain a certain distance in order to manage well. She thought it was important to be able to be accessible to staff and for mistakes to be learning opportunities.

Section 5.2.3

I still feel like a support worker, part of the mob.

Joan didn't think NVQs would last and was surprised they had:

At first my thoughts about the NVQ were, 'Well it's not going to last, it will be another thing, it will come and go.' But then I began to see that there is something going on that makes people do something.

Section 6.1.1  
Section 6.1.2  
Section 6.2.1  
Section 6.5

She thought there was something going on that made people do something and saw an improvement in them afterwards. More confident, professional and proud that they had achieved something. Joan's narrative explored how she saw the impact of undertaking the NVQ:

For level 2 people you can see improvement in them afterwards...it makes them think about what they are doing, they are not just doing it because it needs to be done...'Why are you doing it?' It was very good for her.

She said her approach helped the candidates realise that the process could be enjoyable and she was proud of her achievement

She had real trouble with NVQs to start with. She had to do her level 4 NVQs for her job but really applied herself to them. She

Section 5.2.1

could not say that there had been new learning and felt that there had been little change to practice. Motivation to undertake the awards had been quite low and it had been difficult but as it was a requirement of the job it had been completed. It took a lot of time. She couldn't grasp it initially but got a lot of help from another manager. She did not perceive many benefits to her work from undertaking her level 4 qualifications in the way that she saw a difference in the level 2 candidates during assessment, but she had enjoyed the social nature of working alongside other people when undertaking the award. She could not see that her performance had improved and she felt that no one had told her that it had.

Section 6.1.1  
Section 6.2.1  
Section 6.3

I don't think they have – nobody has said they have.

She had a lot of help from another assessor and colleague

Section 6.1.1

Yes because we knew we had to do it and that's why I do go because I know if I miss it I'm buggered because I think "Oh my God I won't catch up" and I was determined to do one a month and get it going so when I do things I try and do them properly like that.

Section 6.3

She described being regimented and keeping to the timescale because she worried that if she slipped she would never catch up. She said no one had ever said that they saw a difference in her performance though.

Section 6.1.1  
Section 6.3

Joan said that she had a way of working that was useful to her but did not see it as an intelligent way of working through things. She described having a lot of help from Audrey as well, encouragement, telling her she could do it when she was not sure she could. She described really struggling but enjoying it in the end. She said she was grateful for Audrey's input and passed it on to others saying if she could do it they could.

Section 6.1.1

Joan described her work as an assessor with her first candidate and working through the NVQ together with Joan encouraging her. She felt this had been a positive experience for them both. The sense of responsibility she had to her candidates.

Section 5.2.1  
Section 6.1.2

Being an assessor was quite interesting but you know the trouble I had at the beginning. When I started I couldn't quite grasp it but as I always do take the hard way, think it is going to be murder and it is okay in the end. We got a lot of help from xxxx, xxxx and myself got

Section 6.5

a lot of help at the start. Xxxx was a good candidate, she was game for anything, she would come up with a ton of information and give it to me and then I would have to learn for myself, you don't need all that, that's good. But I'd filter through and I found that quite interesting. But I used to go into panic and it used to... It still does take me about two hours to do an assessment because I have to have it at home on the table. So I talk to myself, I say that is for that and that is for that and I take the whole time. I want that person to go through. I don't want to let them down and that has always been my main thing. I remember with xxxx's..you said to not let....I done her first and I want to get her through it so she's not let down and then do my bit.

Section 6.1.2

She said that she struggled with assessment especially after a break, how it took her a lot of time and the candidate that she was working with was really difficult. He didn't bring his work or keep to deadlines and Joan felt that she was pushing him all the time. She was then pushed for time when he handed work in late.

I am a bit annoyed because it means that the onus is on me to do it for next week, Thursday, and to do it at home. I can't do it here at all. I have to have it on the table at home, when it is quiet, on my own, I can do it when somebody is watching telly but I have to have to be able to talk to myself, to set it out, to know what I am looking for, to get it right, but it takes me. Well you know the last observations I did took me two and a half hours because I want to get it right but I can picture things not to dart about from one thing to another.

In the end she had to back off and leave it more to him. Joan suggested that the message the candidates were receiving from the Centre was that the work was mainly completed by the assessor in observation of practice.

Section 6.1.2

I think that is what he has been hearing and that is why he is waiting but when I did my NVQ nobody helped me. xxx and myself we would sit there and just go through. She would give me ideas and we would go away and then we would meet up and then we would work on it. I had no other help at all. I did it all myself. I think "No I had to do it myself". I was in a panic over it. I found it

very hard but I did it. Now you can do yours. He is asking to do it.

She thought he believed that it was up to the assessor and was waiting for her to sort it out. That is what she thought he was hearing, that it was not his responsibility. It worked out well. It was a lot of hard work though. She had to use the assessment process to check that he really did understand what he was doing. His performance improved and he was able to complete his NVQ. She was much more confident in his performance now.

Section 6.5

Another candidate wanted to do more written work, there was a danger in concentrating too much on assessor observation of practice, in that sometimes candidates want to be more involved and to undertake some of the work themselves.

We have got one candidate who wants to be doing more written work. It is level 3 but they don't want it done all on observations, they want to do some work.

Another candidate was annoyed because she couldn't start her NVQ and it was taking so long to get the current one through.

Section 6.1.2

I have got another member of staff on my back who wants to start it, wanted to start it this year as well but I have got too much on. She's quite annoyed that she couldn't start it but she has only been with the company since February and it is his turn and I said it is his turn. He has started it and he wants to do it and I can't manage to do two of you. Yeah and in her appraisal it said "Do you feel supported by staff" and she said "No not really" and I thought "Oh dear" but I am not really bothered about it but I do feel annoyed. I will talk to her about it because I do feel she has been supported.

Section 6.1.2

Joan described how dealing with candidates' performance issues in the workplace brought up issues of competency that were required to be dealt with in the NVQ by describing a future candidate.

[The service-users] are all used to traditional food. We do try them with curries, pastas and they will eat, they are not salad type people but she has been giving them salad. It is all around what she wants, it is not fair, and the other

staff they are all traditional eaters. He doesn't ask them what they want or consider what they might not want.

She talked of two workers in the home who were thinking of doing their level 3 qualifications but how they could not quite push themselves to do it. She was not pushing them in the way she had been pushed by her manager perhaps recognising that their situation was different from her own. She understood their reasons for not engaging with further learning.

Section 5.2.1

I try and encourage people to do things but pushed xxxx to do the NVQ, working on the 3 but she has got kids so that kind of thing. I don't push her too much, she still carries on and does the job, I gave her things to do but she is not the senior, she doesn't want to be the senior, I don't feel I can load too much on her. She is not getting paid for it but I can rely on her if I can on holiday. They ring her rather than ring Head Office. That is what is said to Head Office, she needs to be appreciated for that. I am trying to encourage her to be a senior. She is just talking about it now. Trying to get through an interview to be where she should be really. She's been in it a long time now. I do show appreciation to staff when they do good things but about teaching there is nothing I can teach xxxx because she has been at it for years. Xxxx is very confident, competent, very good at the job as well. She likes things properly, chasing up things, which shows up people who don't, they think they are being picked on. She is about to pack up, xxxx.

Section 6.1.1

She had lots of experience and did not need teaching but Joan did not push her too much. She knew her personal situation and why she was reluctant. For two of the candidates it was about accrediting existing competence.

Section 5.2.1

They already knew the job...it was for them putting it into words.

She then described the process of working with another staff member and seeing her performance improve.

I've got an older lady, who is xxxx, member of staff, she is on a contract. I have had here for nearly xxxx because I have xxxx. I have asked for an extra member of staff to help me out to take some of the load. She's come a long way since she's been here. She is a bit woolly about

things but I have worked with her a number of times recently and I have gone to do something and she has said "I have done that" and I thought "Oh Blimey". She really has picked up.

Joan could see an improvement in the Level 2 candidates, it made them think about what they were doing and why they were doing it, it was very good for some of them and made them more confident and able to achieve.

#### Section 6.1.1

It is a good thing. At first my thoughts about the NVQ were well it's not going to last. It will be another thing. It will come and go and it hasn't and I am quite surprised. It is very important when I look at it, you must have something. I am quite impressed that there is something going on that makes people do something. Yes, oh yes definitely. I do for Level 2 people you can see improvement in them afterwards. XXXX was very, although she was very professional, afterwards she got very into it. She definitely did improve and it makes them think about what they are doing. They are not just doing it because it needs to be done. Why are you doing it? It was very good for her. Its been the same with XXXX. It's made her feel that she can achieve stuff. Both of them are considering doing Level 3 but can't quite push themselves to do it but they had a lot of support from XXXX.

Joan said she felt like a teacher, working with people and helping them learn from her experience. Watching what they did, letting them see how others did it, explaining and letting them try things out.

#### Section 5.2.1 Section 5.2.3

I suppose from my experience and from what I have learned. It's from watching really. Staff working alongside you, seeing the way in which they interact with residents and staff and the right way of doing things. Seeing what is most beneficial and pleasant for the residents really. It is no good just dragging them off to do things that they couldn't possibly do. You know, we do try and get them to do things. It is very hard to try and get them to do things for themselves, to get the staff to let them do it themselves. I know it is going to take all day. Let them do it and see what happens. Well let them do it, talk them through it, tell them how the rest of us do it and let them do it themselves and find out.

Joan described her personal managerial approach as

Being fair, firm, friendly, approachable, to respect and look after staff and never ask them to do anything I am not prepared to undertake myself.'

She said she high standards as far as the care of the residents' was concerned and expected the staff to meet those standards, no smells, everything clean.

We are a bit regimented here. I suppose it comes from me. I don't like to work in a shit hole and I don't want them to live in a shit hole. At my house I might not clean the toilets everyday but here it is done every day. It is clean, no smells. My standards are well known around this area and houses and you know.

It looks like I am a bit of an ogre but I get what I want and I get the house run the way I want.

There was a lot of staff support in the home though, staff looked after each other and wanted the best for the residents in the home, they were all very similar in attitude.

We all look after each other. They look after me as much as I look after them. They are good in that respect.

She thought she did know a lot but sometimes doubted herself, not being totally confident. Joan told of working through an induction pack with new staff and was always saying that they must ask and if they did not understand not to just go off not understanding, keep asking. She made sure they grasped everything. If there was something new she made sure she told everyone to make sure they knew about it because if they did not the responsibility lay with her.

Section 5.2.1  
Section 5.2.3

Joan observed that learning in the workplace happened from watching, working alongside, telling and showing and letting them try, talking them through how others do it and always encouraging them to ask questions (3, 8):

I say to all of them, 'don't be afraid to ask if you don't understand what I am saying. Ask me, don't go off and

Section 5.2.3

try to do if you don't understand what you are doing and then wish you had asked how to do it. Keep asking me.'

She talked to staff in supervision, encouraging them to do training and move up in the organisation with her support. The staff worked through things together and had a laugh. She tried to get them to have a go at new things and then help them improve what they had done. If she did not know something she said so but always found out about it and told them.

Section 5.2.3

Joan said that Homecare had been very committed to learning and especially NVQs, really pushing them. She had been in a meeting and in spite of budget issues they were still promoting training.

Well I think they are very good. We had a meeting Wednesday talking about how we can cut back on things generally. We are getting close to the end of the financial year, that's coming up. I said I don't like to cut back on the training, you know offering it all the time. I am surprised because budgets are sometimes tight, still encouraging us to do more things. They are offering more management training ... yes they are still paying out for us to do stuff. Yes they are very good.

Section 5.2.3

Sometimes their approach with individuals had not been so positive though. Joan had a very particular view of how she and other staff had been managed, balanced with a generally positive view of the organisation:

Section 6.4.2

I get on well with Homecare. I am very happy and I think they are very supportive.

However her experiences were mixed and some of the less positive views were also represented in her narrative, areas where she felt that the values of the organisation were not what she would expect. There was an acknowledgement that the organisation did not always get it right. She was happy and they were very supportive but had been in a situation with management that influenced some staff confidence and their wish to progress. She had not always felt trusted. She said that some situations were dealt with too severely and this affected staff morale and restricted staff aspiration. She felt that the management team had been reduced considerably, that

resource was stretched too thinly and that there was too much to do. She felt that communication could be better.

And then later she described a time when she felt that she was used as a part of the organisational learning and how that left her feeling aggrieved.

I had a bit of a rough deal with Homecare in the beginning and I told them so as well. They said they can only learn by being told and by experience. But I felt I was used for them to learn. But I didn't forget it for years you know. But I get on well with Homecare. I am very happy and I think they are very supportive.

Section 6.4.2

This rather ambivalent attitude to the organisation, remembering times when she felt less well treated is balanced with her more positive experiences but she presents it in a balance. As a part of this balanced picture she described her positive experiences with her manager, how it was important to her to have the trust and support so that she could do her job.

Xxxx has been very good. I say I am doing this, this and this am I on the right track and off I go. Everything went smooth. I would say a lot of help from above, especially xxxx. She has been very good, I mean I can talk to her, we go to supervision, we talk about business and then it might be guinea pigs. We talk about xxxx and xxxx. We talk about them, she knows them, all those sorts of things, it just flows and I feel very comfortable. It is [important], you know, not to feel intimidated, I don't do it to anybody else and I don't like it done to me.

Section 5.2.3

## Appendix 6. General consent form

# **Appendix 6. General consent form.**

## **Consent Form**

### **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

**University of XXX**

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in Care as an example of workplace learning: staff perspectives and experience.

**RESEARCHER'S NAME(S) AND TELEPHONE NUMBER(S):**

I have been asked to participate in a research study conducted by Audrey Kempson  
XXXX (work)

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

Below is a description of the research procedures and an explanation of my rights as a research participant. In accordance with the policies of University of XXX I have been asked to read this information carefully. If I agree to participate, I will sign in the space provided to indicate that I have read and understand the information furnished on this consent form. I am entitled to and will receive a signed copy of the form.

#### **PURPOSE:**

The purpose of my research is to establish staff perspectives in one Care organisation on:

1. Factors that might inhibit or promote learning
2. Individuals' experiences and attitudes that might hinder or support learning in the workplace
3. The relationship between Care Centre delivery, the NVQ model, the organisation and the nature of individuals' learning in the

#### **DURATION AND LOCATION OF STUDY:**

My participation in this study will last for approximately one and a half hours and will take place at XXX, XXX/In my workplace

#### **PROCEDURES:**

During this study, the following will happen.... You will be interviewed or observed by Audrey Kempson. The interview will be recorded for the purpose of data review and analysis.

I understand there are no known or anticipated risks associated with participation in this study.

I will receive no direct benefit from my participation in this study; however, the possible benefits to others include an improved programme of delivery of NVQs.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Information will be gathered in a recording of each interview. This will be stored on CD for the researcher's use and on a computer and backed up on a remote server. The system has a secure password that is changed regularly. CDs and transcripts will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Names will be changed to protect confidentiality. Any identifying factors will be removed from descriptions in the final text.

Personal data will not be disclosed to anyone other than the researcher.

Confidentiality means that the researcher will have a record of who participated but the data will be kept private.

I understand the data collected in this study will be kept confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Specifically, the researcher will keep the information regarding names and links to the data separate from the data. The data will be copied onto a password protected computer and backed up on a remote server that is also password protected. The researcher and her supervisors will have access to the data

### **RIGHT TO REFUSE OR WITHDRAW:**

Participation is voluntary and I may refuse to participate. I may discontinue my participation at any time

### **I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT AND I WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM.**

---

*PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE*

*DATE*

### **PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT:**

I have explained to the above named individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits and possible risks associated with participation in this research. I have answered any questions that have been raised and I will provide the participant with a copy of this consent form.

---

*RESEARCHER'S SIGNATURE*

*DATE*

## Appendix 7. Extracts from chapters 5 and 6 showing evidence construction.

## Appendix 7. Chapter 5: extract showing evidence construction

Appendix 7. Extract from Chapter 5 pages 134-137 showing evidence construction

John and Tracey both commented on the supportive and well planned nature of their induction to the workplace and the helpfulness of staff attitudes to their learning. Their experiences as occasional worker and new member of staff meant their experiences did not encompass much more workplace learning or the NVQ so there was not much in their narratives regarding the social nature of learning.

Stacey's narrative told of her personal experience of being both types of candidate, motivated and reluctant, and of having experienced both types of assessors, one who she found difficult to work with and one with whom she progressed well. Her narrative represented many different aspects of experience of engaging in workplace learning and is used as an example here. She described a change within herself that moved her from having little interest in learning while undertaking her level 2 NVQ to a person intent on learning, making the most of all opportunities and proud of the work she was achieving at level 3 (**4**). She subsequently took this learning forward and became an assessor. She reflected on several managers and assessors, recognising their different attributes in terms of teaching and encouraging and one person in particular:

She was such a lovely person and she really got me enthusiastic about things. She taught you about things you liked and everything else about the job. She booked you on training courses for the things you enjoyed and so you really tried and she did that with all of us, and the one thing you were not that keen on she tended not to push us in that direction. OK when they are ready we will be pushed in that area but not at the moment. She was fabulous, she taught me a hell of a lot about care and about myself, how I learn and what I want from life. She made me think.

Evidence drawn from narratives in relation to theme of social learning

Individual narrative used as an example of evidence of theme of social learning

This very individualised understanding made an impact upon her development and later when she talked of her role as an assessor she had a clear idea about what made a good teacher (**2,3,4,5,8**);

Evidence from individual narrative sub theme social learning and teaching in the workplace

Openness, approachability, recognising individual learning modes. Teachers who are willing to learn and take on others ideas.

She showed that persistence was beneficial and rooted in understanding and close working alongside individuals:

I will keep going over things and in different approaches each time to make sure they know what they are doing. There is nobody that I haven't been able to teach yet. (**4**)

The determination to adapt and persist with people was evident in the narratives of all the assessors; they discussed trying different approaches towards candidates in terms of being positive, encouraging effort, success and praise (**2,3,4**). They also reported times where there was a need for firmness with staff and recognition that some behaviours were not acceptable. Alfie and Joan described how starting the NVQ had identified performance issues, how they addressed these issues by planning further training so that expectations of performance could be achieved. Both of the candidates had gone on to successfully complete their NVQ with the support and guidance of their assessors who were also their workplace managers. From a researcher perspective the association between perceived poor practice and assessment of competence was an important consideration in relation to the delivery of NVQ assessment by workplace assessors (**2,4,5,8**).

Evidence drawn from narratives in relation to sub theme of social learning

Participants' narratives identified managers and assessors who gave great support and encouragement to staff (**8**). It was possible to see this role modelling of a positive experience influencing their ongoing approach. In one representative example Alfie told of a manager

Researcher perspective

Evidence drawn from narratives in relation to sub theme of social learning

who had inspired him to learn, whom he admired and who had given him time and support to develop.

Alfie described himself as a keen and committed candidate, wanting to improve his presentation skills as well as his knowledge. He recognised a need to present himself in a 'professional' way and used his friends as a part of his social learning as well as colleagues to try to address these issues:

I thought I have really changed as a person. There I was staring at a blank screen and two hours later it all came to me and I was typing away, very slowly, but I thought I used to write everything now I type. And the way I write is so different, much more professional...because handing work in I thought I am not professional... So I asked my friends, 'I want this but I want to say it in a professional way, what can I change?'

From a researcher perspective this creativity as a candidate to find what was needed from whatever source was a thread within the interviews. Candidates and assessors were together and separately identifying gaps in knowledge and performance and finding ways to address them. They were showing how useful working alongside each other could be to learning in the workplace. Managers and assessors were trying to understand individual needs and trying to support and encourage and often struggling with this but some were succeeding even with candidates who identified themselves as reluctant candidates. It was clear that the internal motivation of a candidate to learn was key to successful progression but that this could be ameliorated by appropriate support **(2,3,4,5,8)**.

Evidence from individual narrative sub theme social learning.

Researcher perspective

## **Appendix 7. Chapter 6: extract showing evidence construction**

Chapter 6 pages 184-186

Joan's narrative described what it was like to assume the assessment role, how difficult she found the process and how time consuming it can be:

Evidence from individual narrative

I don't want to let them down and that has always been my main thing.

At first my thoughts about the NVQ were, 'Well it's not going to last, it will be another thing, it will come and go.' But then I began to see that there is something going on that makes people do something.

*Italics represent evidence from narratives*

Joan stated that there was a danger in concentrating too much on assessor observation of practice, in that sometimes candidates want to be more involved and to undertake some of the work themselves:

We have got one candidate who wants to be doing more written work. It is level 3 but...they don't want it done all on observations, they want to do some work.

From a practitioner perspective tailoring the assessment process to meet the needs of the individual is part of the process of competent NVQ assessment but this comment was recognition of a push in Centre strategy to gather more evidence from observations of practice, which carry greater weight in terms of assessment value. From a researcher perspective

Practitioner perspective

Researcher perspective/reflection

Joan's view was considered carefully and included as a fair criticism (3,5)

Three of the assessors reflected in their narratives on the difficulties of being a workplace assessor. The feelings were similar in that they all raised the issues of the time that it took to meet with candidates, plan the work, observe and then write up observations and complete documentation. Even well motivated assessors struggled at times with the pressures of the job. One found the process difficult to pick up again after some time of not assessing although the other reported that it was a skill that they were able to pick up again easily. The problem of integrating assessment into already busy workplaces was one that arose in all of the assessor narratives and there seemed to be no easy answer. As a practitioner I often point to the advantages of being able to monitor staff performance in a very structured way that can be of benefit the workplace. (5).

As a way of exploring this further I asked whether the participants thought that having an outside agency assess might be advantageous. This was in order to gather more detail on the participants' perspectives of the challenge of NVQ assessment as it is delivered within Homecare. In their narratives Alfie and Holly thought that in some ways this might help and it would certainly be one less job when the managerial role was

Evidence from several of the participants' narratives

Evidence from individual narrative

Practitioner perspective

Researcher perspective

Evidence from participants' narratives: sub theme challenges

stretched at times. They thought that it would also solve the problem that there are candidates waiting to undertake their qualification and they are held up if existing candidates are slower than expected and this can be frustrating for everyone involved. However both felt that the relationship between the candidates and workplace assessors was an advantage to assessing and to managing staff performance that in turn benefited the workplace. All of the assessors felt that what was needed was more designated time to assess. Stacey summed this up:

You just don't get the time I can't do any of it at work. It's usually what I can get done here or at home. Especially when I was doing my assessors. I was doing hours at home. So much so I was eating drinking and sleeping NVQ at one point, just to make sure I knew what I was doing to assess. And that was very difficult and that's why people don't like doing it. I've got people at work who have got families, they cannot sit at home and do their NVQ. The only chance and opportunity they get is here.

Example from evidence of one participant narrative.

From a researcher perspective this highlighted one of the problems of NVQ assessment and workplace learning, it happens in busy workplaces and as a result sometimes gets put to one side for more urgent issues. This is a potential reason for assessment being contracted outside of the workplace and is recognition

Researcher perspective

of one of the main challenges of an organisation that retains NVQ assessment as part of staff development.