

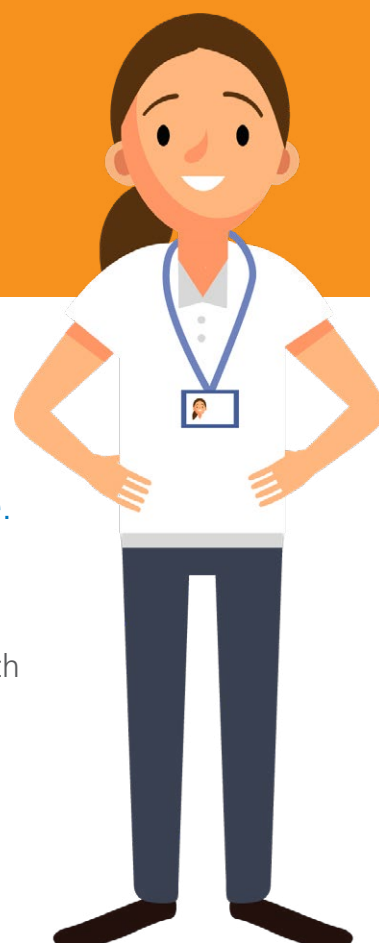
# Making learning work for AHP support workers



# Introduction

This Guide aims to provide employers and support workers with information, advice and guidance on how to create supportive learning cultures and processes in the workplace.

This has been published to support [HEE's AHP Support Worker Competency, Education and Career Development Framework](#). The Framework is one element of HEE's AHP workforce strategy, which nationally, regionally and locally aims to build capacity and capability across the professions and secure the future support workforce.



# The importance of learning



There are a number of ways to think about learning in the workplace. One is the distinction between formal and informal learning.

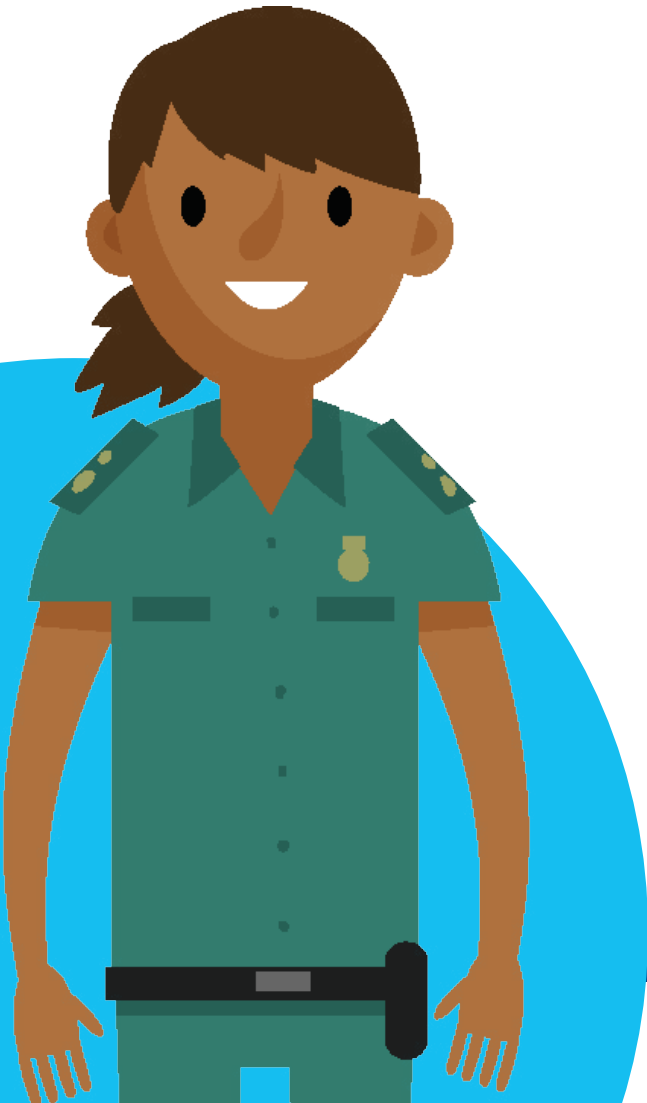
Formal learning is learning that is deliberate and planned, with obvious examples including recognised qualifications that are accredited such as A Levels, diplomas or foundation degrees. Mandatory training or the Care Certificate, however, are also examples of formal learning. Formal learning emerges from organisational processes and procedures, such as job design, decisions about allocation of the apprenticeship levy, team working, and appraisals, as well as external drivers, such as government policy.

Access to formal learning, however, is not a guarantee that learning will be effective and transferred into improved performance and understanding. Learning must be relevant, well designed and appropriately delivered. It also has to be supported in the workplace. Managers are particularly important in this process, not only as they allow staff time off to learn, but also as they assist them in applying what they have learnt into their job. Training evaluation is a means of assessing the effectiveness of a programme's content and teaching and, more importantly, its impact in terms of changed and improved performance.

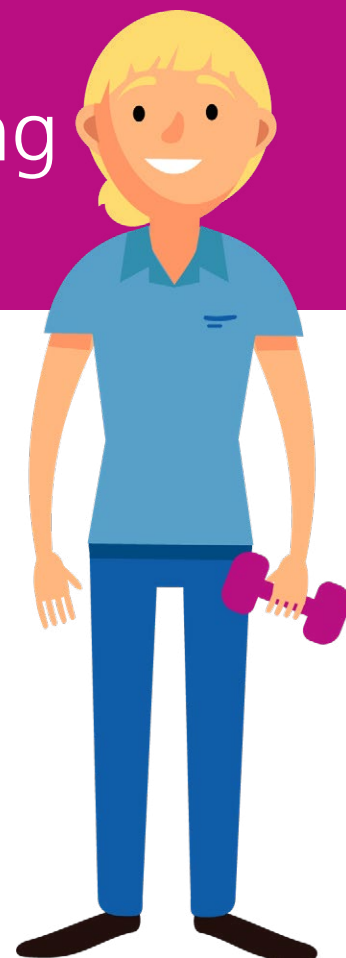
Formal learning, though, is not the whole story and research suggests it may not in fact be the primary source of learning in a workplace. There are many informal ways that people learn. Informal – sometimes called tacit – learning can be a significant factor in contributing to knowledge in the workplace. Informal learning is unplanned, non-deliberate, often accidental, experiential and unexpected. Examples of informal learning include:

- meetings
- experience
- feedback
- self-direction
- practice
- observation
- listening
- reading
- incidents
- conversations
- learning by doing.

What links formal and informal learning is the extent to which organisations support, enable and champion learning for all their staff. A supportive learning culture, research shows, delivers a range of benefits such as improved job satisfaction, lower turnover, increased employee commitment, innovation and productivity gains. Put simply, organisations that encourage learning for all their employees perform better than those that do not.



# Understanding organisational learning cultures



Effective organisations encourage learning. They recognise that learning occurs all the time and that it is a partnership between the learner, the source of learning (such as an education provider), and the workplace. The idea of 'learning organisations' was first developed systematically by Peter Senge in his 1990 book *The Fifth Discipline*. Learning researchers Alison Fuller and Lorna Unwin have developed a useful model to assess whether organisations have what they describe as an "expansive" or "restrictive" learning culture<sup>1</sup>. They identify a range of factors that can determine the nature of organisational learning cultures. These include:

- the extent to which employees can draw on each other's experiences
- whether employees take a long-term view of their work and careers
- whether the learning and development of all staff is encouraged and is a key organisational objective
- the degree to which learning and development is spread across the whole organisation
- whether employees are encouraged to critically reflect
- whether managers are supported to assist their staff's learning and development.

<sup>1</sup> Fuller A and Unwin L (2011) Workplace learning and organisations, in *The Sage Handbook of Workplace Learning*, ed., Malloch M et al, pp 45-59. Sage, London.

The table below sets out a series of questions that can be used by AHP services to assess the extent to which they characterise an 'expansive' learning culture. These questions should be considered from the perspective of support workers. You could ask support workers to complete the questions so that you have a clear view of their perspective of the extent to which their learning needs are met, but also the degree to which learning opportunities are maximised.

Question	Response
1. Are AHP support staff encouraged to take part in discussions to solve problems or improve services?	
2. Are there opportunities for staff to meet together and discuss experiences?	
3. Are staff given regular supportive and constructive feedback?	
4. When AHP support staff are on training programmes, are they encouraged to set training-related goals in their work?	
5. Are AHP support staff personal development discussions valued and acted upon?	
6. Is the learning of staff, including support workers, celebrated?	
7. Is there adequate investment in learning for support workers?	
8. Are AHP support staff given some time to reflect on their work and learning?	
9. Are managers encouraged to support their AHP support staff learning?	
10. Are managers given support to assist their AHP support staff learning?	
11. Are equality and diversity issues addressed in organising learning?	
12. Do AHP support staff have access to career discussions?	
13. Are support workers encouraged to reflect on their learning?	
14. Are support workers facilitated to record their learning, including experiential learning?	
15. Are AHP support staff aware of the progression opportunities available to them?	
16. Is the effectiveness of learning evaluated?	

# The learning and development cycle



For formal learning, the learning and development cycle is a useful tool for considering the planning and organisation of learning. It breaks learning down into four linked steps that will assist managers as they consider and organise learning interventions:

**Step 1:** Identify training needs – this will be driven by service need. [HEE's AHP Support Worker Competency, Education and Career Development Framework](#) can help to clarify support worker learning objectives.

**Step 2:** Plan learning – this means considering how the learning need might be met and planning the appropriate intervention. This should be part of regular appraisal and personal development planning.

**Step 3:** Implement learning – from a manager's perspective this means supporting the learner throughout their training, asking for their feedback, and ensuring that they can apply what they have learnt in their role. Research suggests that managers can be key to the success or failure of a learning programme.

**Step 4:** Evaluate – assessing the effectiveness of a learning intervention (whether it has met its objectives and the effect it has on outcomes) is a key step in the cycle but frequently one that is not regularly undertaken. Evaluation is discussed in more detail below.

# Reflective learning



Reflective learning can assist the planning and organisation (and effectiveness) of formal learning. There are also tools available to assist the effectiveness of informal learning. David Kolb, for example, developed his experiential learning cycle in the 1970s. Familiar to many registered staff, it can also be a useful tool for support workers to adopt or for their managers to utilise when supporting staff on formal learning programmes. A key element is the encouragement of reflective practices; where employees step back from an experience, analyse and critically assess what has happened and its significance, informal learning can be recorded.

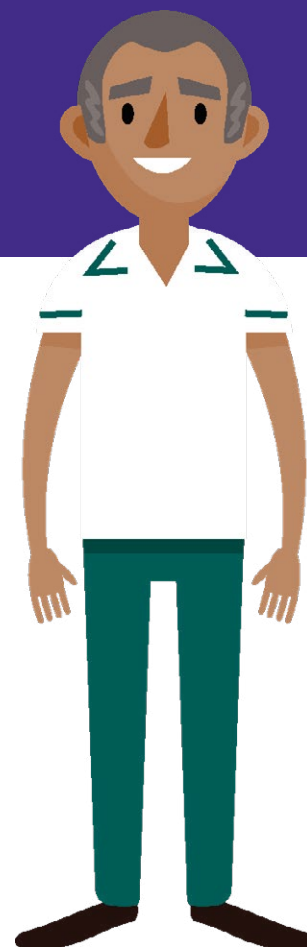
Reflections on an experiential event might involve addressing the following questions:

1. What happened?
2. What was the significance of the event?
3. What did I learn?
4. What should happen next?
5. What would I do differently next time?

Recording learning in a structured way, such as in a portfolio of evidence or a Skills Passport, will also help build study skills, support development reviews and build confidence among AHP support workers.



# Self-efficacy



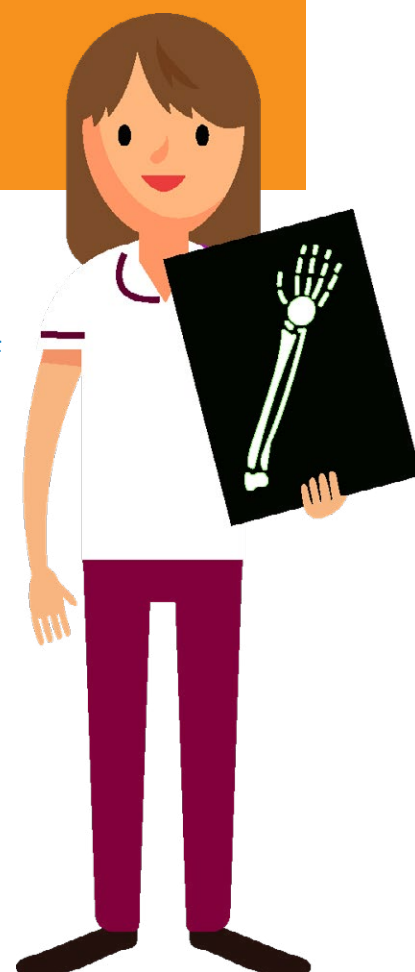
An individual's self-efficacy is their belief that they are able (or not) to successfully master or acquire knowledge or perform a new skill or change a behaviour. A person's self-efficacy is not fixed and can be critical in determining the success or failure of learning programmes. The greater someone's self-efficacy, the more they are likely to engage with learning and acquire new knowledge and skills. Conversely, low self-efficacy can act as a barrier to learning – regardless of how well that learning is designed or delivered. Signs of low self-efficacy might be people who try to avoid learning opportunities or display general signs of negativity about their learning. Previously poor experience of learning or a long absence in accessing learning may mean individual's self-efficacy is low.

Self-efficacy is a multi-faceted concept that is shaped by a range of life experiences.

Good learning providers will assess the extent to which learners are 'learning ready' (this is formalised when individuals' functional skills are assessed) and assess engagement during learning, providing support when needed.

Organisational learning cultures that celebrate and support everyone's learning and contribution also help build self-efficacy.

# Evaluating learning



A feature of expansive learning cultures and a key learning cycle stage is the evaluation of learning. There are two forms of evaluation relevant to learning: formative and summative.

Formative evaluation investigates the effectiveness of the learning itself (its design, delivery and organisation). It considers, for example, whether:

- learners found the content relevant to their work
- the content was clear
- the delivery style was engaging
- learners' expectations were met
- learners set themselves learning goals
- managers and peers were supportive of the learning.

One benefit of undertaking formative evaluation, in addition to understanding the effectiveness of the learning, is that it will allow barriers to be identified and addressed.

Summative evaluation looks at the impact of the learning and addresses the question: what difference has it made? Ways of exploring this question will depend on the nature of the learning and could involve surveys, interviews and gathering pre- and post-learning data. When considering the impact of training, there is value in not evaluating as soon as the learning has been completed (which is what frequently happens) but instead doing so a little while after, so that the extent to which learning has been retained and transferred to improved performance can be assessed.

It is quite possible for there to be positive formative evaluation results (because learners found the experience enjoyable) but negative summative ones (learning was not applied or was not relevant) and vice versa (effective learning can be challenging for learners). You should not, then, rely on formative evaluation to judge the impact of training.

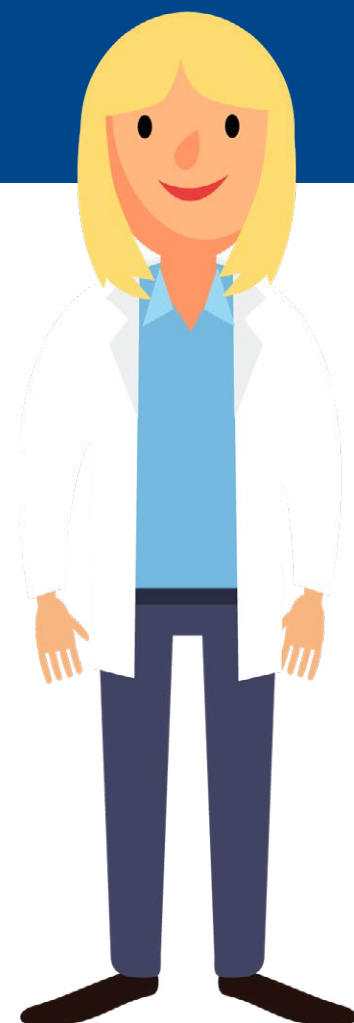
Evaluation is often the 'weak link' in the learning cycle and is rarely undertaken, despite the significant investment in, for example, apprenticeships.

# Conclusion

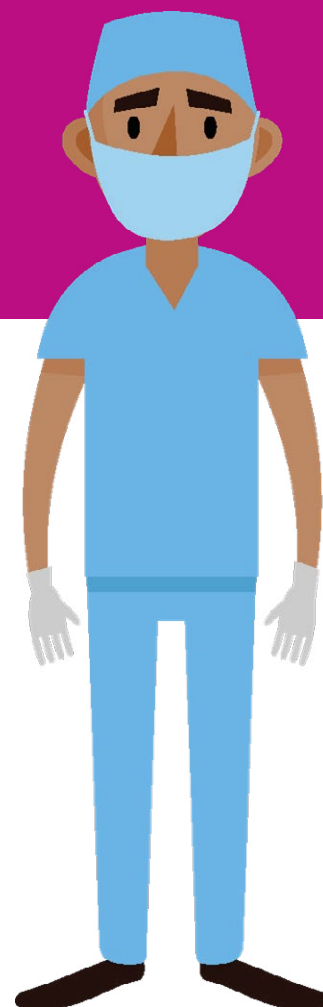
Discussions and reviews of health and social care support worker learning have tended to focus on access to formal education programmes. This is clearly important, but it is also important to consider informal learning, learning cultures and the factors that make learning, in whatever form, effective. This is a complex subject, but research suggests that there are a number of key interventions that can make a significant difference (and not just for support workers):

1. Encourage feedback.
2. When staff are undertaking training, managers should discuss the learner's experience and support them to apply learning in the workplace and set work-related learning goals.
3. Consider and address learners' self-efficacy.
4. Widen access to learning.

Implementation of [HEE's AHP Support Worker Competency, Education and Career Development Framework](#) provides an opportunity for AHP managers and others to review more widely how supportive their services are of support worker learning.



# Acknowledgements



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