



# **Teacher Researcher Programme 2007/2008**

**The use of Learning Journals as a self  
reflection tool to support and develop  
Probationer teachers' skills in critical  
evaluation and reflection**

**Carol Smith, Camelon Education Centre**

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## **Abstract**

The transition from student teacher to fully qualified teacher whilst being an exciting and rewarding experience, can also for many be a stressful and bewildering experience.

This report investigates the introduction of Learning Journals as a way to help support newly qualified primary teachers undertaking their probationary period via the Teacher Induction Scheme within a small local authority. The Journals were designed to help provide a time and a space to engage in critical self-reflection and self-evaluation of their practice, which could then be shared with others, helping them identify areas of strength and areas for future development.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Entering into the teaching profession following a period of Initial Teacher Training can be for many a challenging, stressful and frantic period. The transition from student teacher to newly graduated teacher can bring with it a great many new challenges, both within the teacher's own classroom and within the wider community of the school. Everything from setting up their own classroom from scratch, establishing their own classroom rules, codes of behaviour and routines, classroom organisation and management, through to responsibility for forward planning, monitoring and assessment, are situations faced quite independently for the first time. Even Parents' Night, Christmas Concert and whole school assembly can cause anxiety as they are met for the first time. Ultimately this is a continued training year, and with so much to learn in such a short space of time it is understandable that many new teachers may feel overwhelmed. The danger is that they will learn how to cope rather than focus on how to continue to develop and improve their knowledge and skill of teaching and learning (Holly & McLoughlin, 1989)

Understanding what and how new teachers learn from classroom experiences, as well as the nature of these educational experiences is lacking. Little is known about the development of practical knowledge and professional dispositions, or the best means of improving them during this phase. (Holly & McLoughlin, 1989: 100)

Attempting to make this transition as smooth and as stress free as possible has been made much easier since the implementation in 2002 of The Teacher Induction Scheme (TIS). Following recommendations from the McCrone Report, the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) in partnership with the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED), Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), Association of Directors of Education Scotland (ADES), Scottish Teacher Education Committee (STEC), and other teacher organisations, set about revising current arrangements for new teachers as they entered the teaching profession. The resulting Agreement, *A Teaching Profession for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, made provision for the option of a guaranteed one-year training place for all Scottish trained graduate teachers, known as the Teacher Induction Scheme (TIS).

The main benefit of this scheme was that it enabled all Scottish trained newly qualified teachers, known as probationer teachers, to work towards gaining The Standard for Full Registration from the GTCS, known as their probationary period, in the same setting over a one year period. This marked an improvement on the old system where previously probationer teachers had had to work the equivalent of two full years, often in short term supply posts and possibly in more than one local authority, before being able to complete their probationer period. In reality, this often meant probationer teachers taking many years to complete their probationary period, with no continuity in their teaching experiences or stable opportunities to plan for their Continual Professional Development.

An important aim of the TIS is to provide probationer teachers with a supported, high quality experience that would set about giving them the best possible start to their teaching careers. Following detailed guidelines from the GTCS, each local authority has responsibility for placing and supporting those who choose to undertake the TIS option. Probationer teachers are contracted to work 0.7 of class contact time in schools, allowing the remaining 0.3 for their Continual Professional Development (CPD). Each probationer is allocated an in-school mentor in the form of an experienced teacher who can help guide and support them through their first year.

Exactly how the TIS is managed can vary slightly from local authority to local authority, as long as all GTCS guidelines are adhered to. Falkirk Council for example, where this study is based, has chosen to provide a team of Council Supporters in addition to the School Mentors and a year long planned programme of CPD sessions, referred to as Core days. (See Appendix 1). Council Supporters are experienced classroom teachers who are seconded for up to two years at a time and their main role is to provide pastoral and professional support to probationer teachers. This involves visiting probationers in their schools to hold meetings, undertaking classroom observations and working in conjunction with their schools, school mentors and school management teams, and supporting their planned CPD sessions. (See Appendix 2). Presently Falkirk Council has a team of five Primary Council Supporters and one Secondary Supporter.

The focus of this investigation has come about directly as a result of the TIS and the work being undertaken by Falkirk Council. Ensuring the probationer support service provided is of the highest

quality is very important to Falkirk Council and its team of Council Supporters. Each year it evaluates the support in place for both the probationers and the schools in which they are placed, then uses this feedback to adapt and improve where and if necessary. Council Supporters and School Mentors also meet on a regular basis at Coaching and Mentoring Network Meetings to discuss and review the provision of support.

At a Coaching and Mentoring Network Meeting in April 2007 one area that was identified as causing some concern was the quality of support currently being provided to enable Probationer Teachers to reflect on their own practice, identifying what was going well or any areas of concern, and to plan their next steps. In particular, concerns were raised about the difficulties many probationers had in discussing these issues with their Council Supporters and School Mentors during planned meetings.

It was felt that more could be done to help support Probationer Teachers in their ability to critically self evaluate and reflect on what was happening in their own practice. It was believed that in helping them to develop skills in regularly undertaking effective critical reflection would hopefully ensure that development of their professional and personal practice would be sustained beyond the probationary period, when support was no longer being provided in the form of Council Supporters and School Mentors.

Apart from regular meetings with their Council Supporter and School Mentor, there were only two occasions when probationer teachers were being asked to formally critically reflect. One was in the completion of evaluation sheets at the end of CPD sessions (known as Core Days) and the other at the end of planned observations when they were asked to complete a self- evaluation sheet. Feedback from previous years had shown that most had found this a useful activity, and importantly, many felt that having a record of their development and thinking had proved useful as the year went on.

Confident that self reflection, and in particular a record of written reflections, could have a valuable place in continual professional development, we discussed the idea of a Learning Journal to be kept by probationers over the course of the year. The concept of Learning Journals had been introduced to the Supporters and Mentors at a two day training course 'Developing Coaching Skills in Falkirk Council Schools' (2007) and again during 'An Introduction to Instructional Mentoring' (New Teacher Centre @ UCSG, 2007). We felt that Learning Journals could provide a useful vehicle for planned, effective self reflection, which hopefully would have a positive impact on probationer's ability to discuss their practice with others.

It was felt that if Learning Journals were to be used then their design should be as practical and useful as possible. We did not feel that a blank notebook would be particularly useful, but then neither would something that was too structured or prescriptive.

At the May 2007 Coaching and Mentoring Network Meeting we set about trying to decide on what these Learning Journals might look like. We used graffiti boards to focus on three main areas: 'What information would be useful inside the Learning Journal?'; 'What questions would encourage reflection?'; 'What would be the main uses of the Learning Journal?' The discussion around these graffiti boards and the collated data provided the ideas for the Learning Journal format. A master template of the Learning Journal was created and with Falkirk Council approval was sent to the printers.

## **1.2 Research Project**

Having decided we wanted to try and introduce Learning Journals was one thing, but just how effective or useful they would actually be was something we could only guess at. For this reason the following research project was born. The purpose of this research project was to address the following key questions:

1. Can Learning Journals offer support as a useful tool for critical reflection?

2. Can the use of a Learning Journals help Probationer Teachers reflect on aspects of their own practice, helping them evaluate what is working well and what is an area of concern, to help them plan their next steps and be able to discuss this with others?

3. What should the format of the Learning Journal be to ensure it was both useful and supportive?

Although Learning Journals were issued to all Probationer Teachers undertaking the TIS in Falkirk Council, this research study was designed to monitor their use by Primary Probationer Teachers in the first instance, as this was deemed to be manageable at this stage.

The use of Learning Journals by fifty-nine Primary Teachers was monitored over the course of session 2007-2008. Data would be collected via questionnaires, interviews, 'Ladder of Feedback' sheets and meetings in the first instance. The study was discussed with the Primary Probationers and their permission was sought via signed consent forms to allow the use of any data collected. Those who did not wish to give permission had their data discounted from the overall findings. All data remained strictly anonymous and no persons would or should be identified at anytime or in any form. Findings of the study were to be shared with all interested parties.

### **1.3 Aims and Objectives**

The main aim of this research project is;

To investigate the use of Learning Journals as a self-reflection tool to support and develop Probationer Teachers` skill in critical self-reflection and self-evaluation of their own practice, with a view to enhancing their professional development, and as an aid to the current coaching and mentoring process.

In order to achieve this, the specific objectives of the research are:

1. To review and critique current literature in the field of Journal Writing and their role in the reflective process

2. To evaluate the implementation process of Learning Journals as a possible supportive self-reflection and self-evaluation tool for Primary Probationer Teachers
3. To investigate the usefulness of Learning Journals as a way to support Primary Probationer Teachers in the Teacher Induction Scheme, and help them develop their skills of critical self-reflection and self-evaluation.
4. To evaluate the current design and format of the Learning Journals.
5. To investigate the possible role of Learning Journals in supporting the coaching and mentoring process.

#### **1.4 Benefits**

It is hoped that Learning Journals will help support Probationer Teachers by providing a useful vehicle for effective self-reflection and self-evaluation, enabling them to take ownership of and have a greater understanding of their own practice and their professional development. Through the act of written reflection it is hoped they will become better skilled at identifying the strengths and possible weaknesses in their current practice and in planning future steps in their Continual Professional Development. It is hoped that they will be increasingly articulate in sharing this with their Council Supporters and School Mentors.

It is anticipated that the act of regularly writing in their Learning Journal might help them to develop a critical mind, a questioning attitude and encourage them to explore problems and new ideas. Through the act of reflecting on their reflections, both independently and in discussion with others, it is hoped that they will deepen their thinking and their learning.

#### **1.5 Proposed Research Enquiry Timescale**

Planned Research Period: August 2007 – March 2008

Timetable:

##### **August 15<sup>th</sup> 2007 (Probationer Induction Day):**

- Learning Journals issued to all Probationer Teachers.
- Short presentation on purpose and use

**August 2007:**

- Questionnaire issued to all Primary Probationer Teachers
- Issue permission letters

**August – September 2007:**

- Undertake Literature Review.
- Monitor use of Learning Journals in own Learning Journal and through discussion with other Council Supporters

**December 2007:**

- Questionnaire to Primary Probationer Teachers
- Ladder of Feedback/Interviews

**January – March 2008:**

- Monitor use of Learning Journal recording findings in own Learning Journal and through discussion with other Council Supporters

**March 2008:**

- Final questionnaire issued to Primary Probationer Teachers
- Ladder of Feedback – with same sample group
- Excerpts from Learning Journals

**April 2008:** Analyse data

**April/May 2008:** Compile report

**June 2008:** Disseminate findings

**2. Literature Review**

In this section a selection of previously published literature relating to reflection and Learning Journals is reviewed and some of the main points pertinent to this study are discussed. There is a large amount of literature available on both these subject areas so it has been necessary to limit this section to a few main ones.

**2.1 Reflection**

What does it mean to be reflective and why is it important?

According to Ghaye & Ghaye “there are many different views of what it is to be reflective” and the “many different ways to be reflective blend into each other, forming continuous cycles of reflection and action” (1998: 2). Moon (1999) suggests that reflection is an everyday word and an every day action but ‘what complicates the picture of reflection is the range of different purposes or outcomes that the activity of reflecting seems to fulfil’ (1999: 23).

There does appear to be some consensus that ‘reflection is an important human activity in which people re-capture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it’ (Boud et al, 2004: 19).

It is a way of bringing together old and new learning and experiences, and from this we can create new levels of understanding and meaning. The danger is, however, according to Schon (1983) that although both ordinary people and professional practitioners often think about what they are doing, often when they are doing it, the routine and repetition of some practice prevents us from thinking about why we are doing things.

There appears also to be a consensus that reflecting is a good thing to do with an abundance of literature available on reflection, reflective practice and being a reflective practitioner. (Bolton, 2001; Bough *et al*, 2004; Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998; Holly, 1984; Ghaye & Lillyman, 1997; Moon, 1999; Pollard, 2002; Schon, 1983, Holly & McLoughlin, 1989) According to Day, in today's climate of accountability and the requirement of teachers to take responsibility for their professional development, reflective teachers will be able to survive and flourish (1993: 87)

Much of the literature on reflection recognises that teachers consistently monitored and evaluated what they do, and have always done so (Moon, 1999; Holly, 1984; Holly & McLoughlin, 1989; Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998; Ghaye & Lillyman, 1997) but that the quality of this reflection can be diverse and it cannot be assumed that all reflection is purposeful or useful in developing learning. Teachers "need time and conditions conducive to reflection in order to consider practice and the meaning of teaching" (Holly & McLoughlin, 1989).

Two main systems are advocated to ensure reflection is meaningful and helps move thinking to new levels; one is writing as a form of reflection, and the other is undertaking professional dialogue with other trusted professionals and practitioners. (Moon, 1999; Holly & McLoughlin, 1989; Proff, 1975; Pollard, 2002; Bolton, 2001; Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998; Ghaye & Lillyman, 1997) Although each serves its purpose on an individual basis, the greatest benefits are found when both systems are employed simultaneously. According to Holly & McLoughlin:

Reflecting on practice through writing can provide a rich, comprehensive and evolving data base for the study and conduct of teaching. Not only does it enable us to gain insights into our work, it also provides us with ways of looking at teaching and describing it in words that we can use to communicate and learn

from others, to gain and understand and to improve the quality of communication and collaborative action necessary to bring schooling closer to democratic principles. (1989: 281)

## 2.2 Learning Journals

According to Moon:

Journals favour learning through the encouragement of conditions for learning. Journal writing also produces good conditions for reflection and since reflection enhances learning, we shall not try to tease out the interrelationships but will regard them as mutually reinforcing the system. (1999a: 19)

For the purpose of this report we are referring to the place where written reflections on practice are recorded and kept over a period of time as a Learning Journal. Some literature may also refer to this document as a Learning Log, or a diary, a journal, a reflective journal, a Personal-Professional journal (Holly, 1984) or in the case of Walker (in Boud *et al*, 2004) a portfolio.

Not only is there diversity in the names of these documents, but there can also be diversity in their structure and their overall purpose. However there are also some commonalities. Each is a place where people will be encouraged, on an individual and solitary basis to write about their own thoughts, feelings, ideas, problems, successes etc with a view to gaining insights into their own experiences and their own professional development. Each can claim to promote reflection and so deepen learning. However 'each one can claim to place a different emphasis on the role of self and others in the learning process, on how private or public the document is, on the formality or informality of it, the structure of each entry, how learning emerges and who might benefit'. (Ghaye & Lillyman, 1997: 43)

It is the act of writing that is viewed as being important in the process of using a Learning Journal. Holly says "speaking is faster than writing" and as a result we often "speak impetuously, without thinking, remembering selectively, the written word in contrast is usually more deliberate" (1984: 9). Taking time to think and to stop and re-read what we have written is also seen as a major value of a Learning Journal and it is what helps deepen the reflection and learning process, especially if we can come back and re-visit these experiences at a later date and so add a new, slightly detached

perspective (Bolton, 2001; Moon, 1999, 1999a; Ghaye & Ghaye 1998; Holly & McLoughlin, 1989, Holly, 1984). Both Moon (1999a) and Bolton (2001) advocate journal writing as a great stress buster, especially if there is freedom to write what you want with the confidence of knowing your journal contents will be confidential and remain private.

Journal writing is not and should not be seen as an easy option however. Some people find it hard to even begin to think of writing (Bolton, 2001: 139) and Holly (1989) believes there are many good reasons why people are reluctant to plunge into reflective writing. Journal writing can be time consuming and perceived lack of time is a major barrier. Atkinson & Claxton claim that “teachers interviewed claimed they had no time for reflection on their work” (2000: 146). Furthermore, teachers invest a lot of themselves in their work and through this reflective process teachers need to be prepared to have challenges made to their beliefs or at least be prepared to be open minded and be willing to change. Ghaye & Ghaye warn “asking teachers to think about how things might be improved implies negativity in current practice” (1998: 79).

There are, warns Progoff, limitations in the use of Learning Journals in that it is only “helpful up to a point”, stressing that “The tendency of journals to turn in upon their own subjectivity however and move in circular patterns is a common pitfall that must be borne in mind” (1975: 25). Reflection does not necessarily just happen (Moon, 1999) and for it to help move thinking and learning long, ideally it should be a cyclical pattern. This assumes that those who are writing in their journals are able to reflect on their own practice. However, what if they see only what they want to see, or what if they do not have the knowledge or experience to add to what they see? This also opens up the issue of ‘When I look in the mirror do I see what you see when you look at me?’

Discussion and dialogue on journal writing is seen as essential to move thinking on, solve issues and gain perspectives (Bolton, 2001; 169) There are, suggests Boud *et al* (2004) limitations to what can be achieved unaided and the learning process can be accelerated through appropriate support, encouragement and intervention by others.

Developing effective skills in reflective practice is a process that can be learned and developed over time. Writing Journals can create the conditions that favour this learning (Moon, 1999). According to Holly & McLoughlin, "self evaluation is an integral and essential part of professional development". (1989: 281) Ignorance might be bliss but it contributes little to professional development or the development of the profession. (ibid: 288)

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In this section the methods used to gather the data to address the research objectives as stated in section 1.3 are outlined. Due to unforeseen circumstances changes had to be made to both the timescale and the nature of the data gathered. These will be fully explained in this and the following sections.

#### **3.2 The Research Enquiry**

The research enquiry did not get off to a very good start. The original plan had been that the Learning Journals would be given out to the Probationer Teachers at the Probationer Induction Day held at the Park Hotel on August 15<sup>th</sup> 2007. At this time an explanation would be given as to why the Learning Journals had been issued and some guidance as to their intended use.

However, due to unforeseen circumstances the Learning Journals which arrived from the printers were not what we had planned or hoped for. Instead of being an A5 notebook containing useful information and two main areas for reflective writing, complete with prompts and guidance, what actually arrived was a 'phonebook sized' A4 book, with one staple holding it together, and a

mismatch of pages. The layout of the pages meant it was very difficult to make sense of what was there and for what purpose.

This was a major blow and I was unsure how we were going to proceed with the implementation of Learning Journals with them in this format. As far as I could see I had three main options: proceed with the research enquiry using these Learning Journals; issue blank notebooks instead; or postpone the research enquiry until a later date. None of these were particularly satisfactory.

The situation was resolved when the decision was taken to have the Learning Journals printed again, this time in the originally planned format A5, notebook style. I was very grateful for this decision and felt it demonstrated a commitment by Falkirk Council. Unfortunately the new Learning Journals would not be ready for a few weeks, so although the research enquiry could proceed, changes would need to be made to the planned timescale.

The new timescale was to be as follows:

### **Revised Proposed Research Enquiry Timetable**

#### **August 2007:**

- Discuss with Probationer Teachers the concept of Learning Journals, the A4 format they had received and intended research enquiry
- Questionnaire issued to all Primary Probationer Teachers

#### **August – December 2007:**

- Undertake Literature Review.

#### **November 2007:**

- Issue new Learning Journals
- Presentation on Learning Journals purpose and use
- Issue permission letters

#### **November – December 2007:**

- Monitor use of Learning Journals in own Learning Journal and through discussion with other Council Supporters

#### **December 2007:**

- Questionnaire to Primary Probationer Teachers
- Ladder of Feedback/Interviews

#### **January – March 2008:**

- Monitor use of Learning Journal recording findings in own Learning Journal and through discussion with other Council Supporters

**March 2008:**

- Final questionnaire issued to Primary Probationer Teachers
- Ladder of Feedback – with same sample group
- Excerpts from Learning Journals

**April 2008:** Analyse data

**April/May 2008:** Compile report

**June 2008:** Disseminate findings

Unfortunately this timescale did not always go according to plan either, and adaptations had to be made along the way in response to further unforeseen incidents and results from questionnaires, interviews and analysis of feedback.

The August Questionnaire (Appendix 3) was issued as planned, designed to find out how many probationers had used a Learning Journal before and to gain an insight into what they thought about using them. It was my intention to wait until the new Learning Journals were ready and then discuss them with the probationer teachers just prior to the beginning of the planned intervention period in November. In doing this the format of the Learning Journal would be clear and hopefully easy to follow, making the Journals simpler to use. Quite quickly it became apparent that my decision to wait until the new Learning Journals were ready before properly discussing them had not been a good choice.

The problem arose from the fact that we had already started talking with the probationers about them using a Learning Journal, the fact that I had issued a questionnaire asking them about the value of self reflection, and that some probationers had chosen to start using the 'phonebook size' version. The lack of detailed information given to the probationers about the purpose and use of the Learning Journals resulted in the Council Supporters being quizzed about them during their meetings, and there was obviously a lot of confusion. To try and rectify this I organised the first possible opportunity to speak with all the probationers. On September 4th 2007 I did a short PowerPoint presentation and answered questions on the Learning Journals.

I was not aware just how many problems this jumbled, unstructured, messy start caused until the questionnaires were issued in December 2007.

The new Learning Journals went out as planned at the very end of October 2007. Unfortunately I was not there when they were given out and as a result they went out without any further explanations. However I felt confident that after the PowerPoint presentation and in this new format, they would be straight forward and easy to use.

At the beginning of December 2007 I issued a questionnaire designed to gather information on how the probationers were using their new Learning Journals. (Appendix 4) As it was now very close to Christmas Concert and party season, and we were busy with Interim Profiles, I made the decision to wait to conduct the interviews in the New Year. This turned out to be a very fortuitous decision.

I examined the feedback from the December questionnaires in the week leading up to Christmas and the results were quite shocking. The full results will be examined in the next section, but the shocking truth was that nearly three quarters of the probationers were not using their Learning Journals on a regular basis, and a huge 40% were not using them at all. As a result less than a quarter of the probationers said they were finding them useful.

At the beginning of the New Year the Council Supporters got together to discuss the results of the December questionnaire. Each supporter agreed to discuss the Learning Journals with their own group of Probationers to try to get to the root of what made them so unpopular. I went ahead with my planned interviews, randomly selecting two probationers from each of the five Supporters groups, and arranged a visit to see them in their schools. I used the Ladder of Feedback format to structure our interview. (Appendix 5) I was keen to try and find out why so many people had chosen not to use the Journals. Again the results from this will be discussed in greater detail in the next section, but it did give me a much better insight into some of the issues and barriers surrounding the use of Learning Journals.

As a result of this feedback, the Council Supporters decided to create a set of specific Guidelines (see Appendix 6) for the use of the Learning Journals. Each Council Supporter then issued and discussed these Guidelines on an individual basis with each of their probationers at their next meeting in January 2008. We focused on ensuring that all probationers were clear as to the intended purpose of the Learning Journals, how they should be used, and discussed any problems the probationers were having. At meetings Council Supporters made a point of actively encouraging the probationers to refer to and use their Learning Journals where appropriate. A second intervention period was planned between January and March 2008, where probationers were asked to try to use their Learning Journals using the newly issued guidelines.

In March 2008 we asked the Primary Probationer Teachers to give us feedback based on their use of the Learning Journals since the issue of the new guidelines in January 2008. Two questionnaires were issued, two weeks apart. The first questionnaire asked for feedback on the format and layout of the Learning Journal. (Appendix 7) The second questionnaire asked for feedback as to the use and usefulness of the Learning Journals. (Appendix 8) To try to ensure a good return of questionnaires the first was accompanied by an addressed envelope and was returned through our internal mail system. The second was taken out to the probationers' meeting by their Council Supporter and collected at the following meeting.

As I decided I wanted feedback from as many of the probationers as possible, as this had proven invaluable in gaining a good perspective in January. I issued a Ladder of Feedback sheet to everyone and built questions into the questionnaires that would allow people a forum to share their thoughts, feelings, opinions and general comments.

The results from the data collected and reflections on the research enquiry itself are discussed in more depth in the next section.

## **4. Results**

This section details the findings of the data gathered over the period of the whole research project. The findings from the data collected have been collated, analysed and discussed in terms of its impact on the research methodology. A full discussion based on the implications of these findings and conclusions drawn as a result can be found in the next section

### **4.1 August 2007 Questionnaire**

This questionnaire was designed to find out how many probationers had used a Learning Journal previously and to gain an insight into how they felt about using them during their probationer year. The questionnaire was issued and filled in by the probationers during a CPD session (known as a Core Day) at the end of August 2007, so this meant I had a 100% return rate. At this point in time the probationers were yet to receive their proper A5 size Learning Journals but still had their 'phonebook size' ones from their Probationer Induction Day on the 15<sup>th</sup> August.

The questionnaire revealed that twenty-four (42%) of the probationers had used a Learning Journal (or something similar) before and thirty-three (58%) had not. Of the twenty-four probationers who had used a Learning Journal before, twenty-two of these had used it at University during Teacher Training, one in Nursing Training and one in Management Training.

In question 2 the probationers used a sliding scale from 1-10 to say how useful they felt a Learning Journal would be in their probationer year. For ease and clarity, the data from question 2 is organised in Table 1.

Table 1

No help	Not very useful			Useful			Very useful		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	1	1	5	9	6	14	12	6	2
2%	12%			51%			35%		
14%				86%					

*Collated Data from August 2007 Questionnaire - Q2*

If we take 5 to be the half way point on the scale and say that 5 and everything above is a positive response to the use of Learning Journals, then 86% of the probationers felt that Learning Journals would be a useful thing to have.

Points 1 to 4 on the scale would therefore represent a negative response to the usefulness of having a Learning Journals, and the data collected indicates that 14% of the probationers felt that having Learning Journals would not be a useful thing.

If we break down the positive and negative responses further, taking point 1 on the scale to represent the category 'no help at all', then 2% of the probationers fell into this category. If points 2 to 4 then represented the category 'not very useful', then this was the feeling of 12% of probationers. By taking the points on the scale between 5 and 7 to fall into the category 'useful', then 51% of responses fell into this category. Then if we take the remaining points 8 to ten on the scale to represent the 'very useful' category, then 35% of responses fell into this category.

From this we can conclude that the vast majority of probationers, 86% in fact, surveyed in August 2007 felt that having a Learning Journal would be a useful thing to have during their probationer year.

Question 3 asked the probationers the frequency with which they felt they would be able to use their Learning Journals. The results are collated in Table 2.

Table 2

Frequency	Only Occasionally	On a weekly basis	On a daily basis	Other – please state
Number of probationers	11	43	1	2 1- fortnightly 1- unsure

*Collated data from August 2007 questionnaire – Q3*

Of the probationers surveyed 75% indicated they felt they were likely to use their Learning Journals on a Weekly basis. Of the options given, 19% felt they would use them occasionally and 2% chose the categories daily, fortnightly or not sure.

Question 4 asked for comments about how the probationers felt about keeping a Learning Journal. These were collated into positive responses, negative responses and neutral responses. Neutral responses were ones that were neither positive or negative in their make up *“I haven’t kept one before”* or ones where both positive and negative comments were made equally *“I think I will like having a Learning Journal but I am worried I will not have the time to keep it”* The results, including the themes of the main issues raised, are collated in Table 3.

Table 3

Positive comments made	Neutral comments made	Negative comments made
28	13	16

<p><i>Examples of themes:</i></p> <p><i>It will allow me to keep track of learning experiences</i>  <i>It will enable me to reflect</i>  <i>I think it is a good idea</i>  <i>I think I will find it useful</i>  <i>Good reflective tool</i>  <i>Good for reflecting back</i>  <i>It will be a useful resource</i></p>	<p><i>Examples of themes:</i></p> <p><i>Uncertain</i>  <i>I haven` t kept a Journal before</i>  <i>Great in theory but unsure</i>  <i>Never used one previously</i>  <i>Like the idea but not sure if I will have the time</i></p>	<p><i>Examples of themes:</i></p> <p><i>I am very busy at the moment</i>  <i>Time consuming and time is precious</i>  <i>Hard to see how I will have the time</i>  <i>Feel I would rather spend my time planning</i>  <i>Seems like an additional piece of paperwork</i></p>
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*Collated data from August 2007 questionnaire – Q4*

The majority of the comments made appeared to be positive in their nature, with almost twice as many positive comments than negative ones. However because of the subjective nature of the data it is impossible to accurately compare positive against negative. What these data do give us is a clearer picture of the thinking of the probationers at this time and the main themes in their thinking.

The main theme in the negative comments was the issue of time, or rather lack of having any spare time in which to keep a Learning Journal “*hard to see how I will have the time*” and the need to focus their attention elsewhere such as on planning and classroom work “*Feel I would rather spend my time planning*”.

The majority of the positive comments focused on how keeping a Learning Journal would hopefully help them reflect on what they were doing “*it will allow me to keep track*”, “*it will enable me to reflect*” or just stated that they felt it would be a good idea “*I like the idea of using a Journal*”, “*should be helpful*”

Neutral comments tended to reflect the worries of those who had never used Journals before, such as “*I am not sure how I should use it*”, “*great in theory but unsure*”

#### **4.2 December 2007 Questionnaire**

This questionnaire sought to gather data on three main areas: how often the Learning Journals were actually being used; the reasons for which they were being used; how useful the probationers

found them to be in supporting their ability to be critically reflective. Probationers had had their new, properly designed Learning Journals since the end of October 2007.

The questionnaires were issued at a Core Day at the beginning of December 2007. Due to probationers absences only fifty-three questionnaires were returned (93%)

The probationers were asked to say how often they were currently using their Falkirk Council Learning Journals and were given the options of every day, every few days, once a week, fortnightly, monthly or never. The collated results can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4

Frequency	Number of probationers
Everyday	0
Every few days	1
Once a week	8
Fortnightly	5

Monthly	15
Never used it	21
Other: a couple of times	3

Collated data from December 2007 questionnaire

- *Deemed to be a regular basis for the purpose to this study*
- *Deemed not to be a regular basis for the purpose of this study*

From the data we can see that only 8 probationers (15%) were using their Learning Journals on a weekly basis and only 14 (26%) of them were using them on what could be considered a regular basis. 21 probationers (40%) had never used them at all and in total 39 probationers (74%) were not using their Learning Journals on what could be counted as regular basis.

The probationers were asked to indicate from a given list, some of the times they had used or had referred to writing in their Learning Journal. This was designed to give information on the sort of things they were being used for and the list included some of the things we had intended the Journals to be used for. Table 5 below shows the collated data.

Table 5

Reason for using Journal	Use by probationer
During personal reflection	24
Meeting/discussion with Council Supporter	9
Meeting/discussion with School Mentor	2
Discussion with colleagues	1

Discussion with fellow probationers	3
When faced with a problem	10
When planning next steps in CPD	13
None of the above	19

*Collated data from December 2007 questionnaire*

Of the 32 probationers who said they had used their Learning Journals, albeit only 14 of them on a regular basis, 24 indicated they were using them for the intended purpose of self reflection. Only 9 people said they were using their Journals at meetings with their Council Supporters and this dropped to 2 who were using them at meetings with their School Mentors. To help with problem solving 10 people used their Journals and 13 were using them to plan the next steps in their Continual Professional Development (CPD).

Some of the questionnaires returned had this section completely blank. This was understandable as by not using the Learning Journals at all then many obviously felt they could not fill in what they were using them for.

The final section of this questionnaire asked the probationers to say how useful they had found their Learning Journal up to this point. The results are collated in Table 6.

Table 6

Responses	No help at all	Not very useful	Useful	Very useful	No response
Number of probationers	16 (1)	21 (7)	13 (29)	0 (20)	3 (0)
%	30% (2%)	40% (12%)	25% (51%)	0% (35%)	5% (0%)

%	70% (14%)	25% (86%)	5% (0%)
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*Collated data from December 2007 questionnaire. Related figures from August 2007 are in brackets in red)*

A comparison of these findings related to the data collected in August 2007 (August figures are in brackets in red) shows that the original number of probationers who thought that having a Learning Journal was useful had dropped from 86% to 25%. Those who had not felt them to be very useful had risen from 14% to a huge 70%. It is felt that most of this 70% could be attributed to the fact that 21 probationers had never used their Learning Journals and that a further 18 probationers were not using their Journals with any regularity. Nevertheless, the data clearly shows that in December 2007, 70% of probationers did not think that having a Learning Journal was useful and only 25% felt that it was.

#### **4.3 Ladder of Feedback/Interviews – January 2008**

A small group of ten probationers were randomly selected to take part in an interview with myself regarding Learning Journals. These probationers were selected from those who had indicated they were happy to take part in a short interview and who had given written permission. To try and get some balance, I randomly selected two probationers from each of the five Council Supporter's groups, making ten in total. The interviews took place at a pre-arranged time in the probationer's own school and lasted approximately half an hour.

Rather than having a list of questions to ask I chose to use the Ladder of Feedback format for the interview. This format was sent to the probationer in the week prior to our interview to allow them to think about the sorts of things they might want to discuss or points they might want to make. The interview would cover both the present format of the Learning Journal and its current use.

Of the probationer interviewed 7 indicated they were currently using their Learning Journals, although only 4 on what could be deemed a regular basis (3 on a weekly basis and 1 fortnightly). When asked how they were using their journals, all 7 indicated they were writing some kind of evaluations of their classroom practice and reflecting on what they were doing in class. All 7

indicated they liked the idea of the Journal but in practice found it difficult to use as it was time consuming and involved repeating evaluations that needed to be written in school planners. The 3 probationers currently not using their Journals indicated lack of time and lack of understanding of the purpose of the Journal as the reasons, and one had lost it.

The Ladder of Feedback format allowed me to gather further information about the Learning Journals use and format with regards to concerns the probationers might have, things they valued, things they wished clarified and any suggestions they wished to make.

I have listed the main topics and themes to come out of these interviews in table 7 below.

Table 7

CONCERN	VALUE	CLARIFY	SUGGEST
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of time</li> <li>- workload issue</li> <li>- Repetition of information</li> <li>- didn't like writing things down</li> <li>- discussed things with Supporter instead of writing in journal</li> <li>- forget to use it</li> <li>- prefer photographs</li> <li>- never used one before</li> <li>- lack of clarity in instructions</li> <li>- pages too small</li> <li>- having to evaluate twice</li> <li>- its stressful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a good reflective tool</li> <li>- user friendly</li> <li>- good size and layout</li> <li>- good amount of space</li> <li>- small and compact</li> <li>- handy to use before courses</li> <li>- like only having to complete it if I want</li> <li>- intro pages good</li> <li>- prompt questions good</li> <li>- like having no lines</li> <li>- Core Day section</li> <li>- A5 is good</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- do they get handed in</li> <li>- what is expected</li> <li>- ways it can be used</li> <li>- how it links to Standard</li> <li>- why we use it</li> <li>- can anyone ask to see it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- make it A4</li> <li>- take away lines in Core Day section</li> <li>- dividers</li> <li>- include a 0.3 record sheet</li> <li>- stop having to fill in evaluation of Core Day twice</li> <li>- a space to include or attach Core Day evaluations to save re-writing</li> <li>- make it compulsory at Core day</li> <li>- better explanation of use</li> <li>- double page format for Core Day section</li> </ul>

Collated data from Interviews January 2008

It was very clear from these one to one interviews that a lack of understanding or knowledge about what had been the intended purpose of the Learning Journals was the main barrier to them being

used. It became very apparent that I had not explained their purpose well at all. Most people had thought that they should write evaluations of their days and weeks in school. This explained the “*repetition of information*” comments and why people were saying that they were already writing this information in their weekly school planners. It also explained many of the “*workload issue*” comments. Others felt they really didn’t understand what to do with them, so chose to do nothing at all.

Those who had used or were using the Learning Journal seemed to like the format. Most were much happier with the new A5 size and the layout inside. It was apparent however that the format would not suit everyone, although the A5 size was popular, some wanted A4, although the lines suited some, others would have preferred no lines. We would not be able to make everyone happy, but by doing a survey of the format later, we could look at what the majority wanted.

The feedback from these interviews helped to identify the areas that needed to be addressed. We needed to look at ways we could explain clearly how we intended the Learning Journals to be used and most importantly share the reasons why. We also need to look at the workload and time issue and see if we could address these, finding a space in which the probationers might be able to use their Journals in a manageable and useful way.

The findings from both the December 2007 questionnaire and these interviews resulted in the ‘Guidelines on Learning Journals’ being drawn up and issued to all Primary Probationer Teachers. These Guidelines were discussed individually with each of the probationers and time was spent ensuring each probationer had a better understanding of the intended use of the Learning Journal, i.e. a way of reflecting on the aspects of their practice that was currently going well, any issues and any future development steps, and that these reflections could be discussed at their meetings with both their Council Supporter and School Mentor. A new Intervention period running from January to March 2008 was planned. Probationers were asked to try to follow the Learning Journals Guideline instructions during this period. The outcomes of this would be assessed in March 2007 by use two

questionnaires, one on the format of the Learning Journal and a second on the use of the Learning Journal.

#### 4.4 `Survey of Format of Learning Journals` March 2008

This questionnaire was issued to all Primary Probationer Teachers at the March 2008 Core Day. As the questionnaire was quite lengthy and time was short, each probationer was provided with an addressed envelope in which to return their completed questionnaire via Falkirk Council Internal Mail. This questionnaire had the lowest return of them all, with only 28 being returned (49%).

The data collected is detailed in the following grid.

QUESTION	Yes	No	Not answered
Q1. The present Learning Journal is A5. Should it remain this size?	25	3	0
Q2. Should copies of timetables, CPD sessions, Standard for Full Registration remain part of the format?	27	0	1
<b>`Reflections on Core Day` section</b>			
Q3a This section was laid out using 3 main headings. Was this useful?	22	4	2
Q3b. Did you like having the lines?	19	7	1
Q3c. Is having one page enough?	22	6	0
<b>`Reflections on Practice` section</b>			
Q4a. This was designed with a double page for each week. Did you like this?	22	6	0
Q4b. Did you like the blank page format?	21	6	1
Q4c. Did you find the questions posed at the top of the left hand page useful?	26	2	0
Q5. A suggestion was made to add blank pages for a `To do` lists and general notes. Would you have found this helpful?	22	4	2

*Collated data from Learning Journal Format questionnaire March 2008*

The last part of the questionnaire asked for any other suggestions:

- *A calendar would be useful*
- *More pages for informal notes*
- *Lists of professional reading and websites*
- *A diary format with the dates written in*
- *A `To Do List` section*

- *Remove the lines*
- *Deadlines of submission dates for Interim and Final Profiles*
- *Examples of Profiles*
- *Thicker with a hard back cover*
- *Mind maps*
- *Diary section*
- *Just a blank notebook*
- *Headings and prompts only on first pages, the rest blank*
- *A place for Core Day Evaluation sheets to be kept*

The findings of this questionnaire seem to suggest that on the whole people were happy with the current format and that there would be no real need for radical changes to be made to what was already there. Although some of the suggestions made could not be considered due to cost implications, others such as including the Core Day evaluation sheets to cut down on repetition and keeping everything in one place, and adding in extra pages for notes, seemed to be easy to remedy and too important to not include.

#### **4.5 `Survey of Use of Learning Journals` March 2008**

The following questionnaire was issued at the end of March 2008. Following the poor return from the format questionnaire, these questionnaires were taken by the Council Supporters to their meeting with the probationers and collected when complete. In this instance 55 of the questionnaires were returned (96.5%)

The purpose of this questionnaire was to gather information on the ways in which the probationers might be using the Learning Journals and the ways in which they might be finding them a useful support. Rather than just asking if they felt they were useful or not in the general sense as in previous questionnaires, the intention was to find out more details about how exactly they were being used and what if anything was useful about them.

It was only much later that I realised this was not going to give me a continuity across the data I had previously gathered, i.e. to make direct comparisons to the August and December questionnaires in terms of perceived usefulness. I do believe however that the data I gathered in this questionnaire helped us make informed decisions about the usefulness and purpose of Learning Journals as a

supportive tool in aiding self reflection during probationer teacher's probationary year. It also helped us plan our next steps.

The data from this questionnaire revealed the following facts.

When asked if they had used their Learning Journals at Core Days to reflect on outcomes of the day, 51 probationers said they had (93%) and only four said they did not (7%). This was not a huge surprise as time was now being allocated at Core Day sessions in which probationers could write in their Journals. It would appear however that many of the probationers were choosing to use this time to record their reflections in their Journals and were finding it beneficial.

When asked about the frequency of their Journal Writing, 47 probationers (85%) said they were generally using them on a weekly basis. Again this was no great surprise as the guidelines issued had specified trying to find time during their 0.3 CPD time to reflect weekly. However, the fact that this appeared to be sustained over the three month period would seem to be quite positive. Many of the comments made explained that many probationers found it a good way to prepare for their meetings with their Council Supporters, *"it helped me think about the things I wanted to say to my Supporter"*, *"it helped sort things out, especially when they were not going so well"*.

Only 8 probationers (15%) had said they found writing in their Learning Journal difficult to sustain on a regular basis. Their comments suggested that they did not enjoy or see any value in Journal writing *"it does not suit my learning style"*, *"I was not able to find the time"*, *"my reflection takes place through discussion"* and therefore did not use them.

The importance of using their Journals to prepare for Council Supporter meetings was supported by the fact that 52 probationers (94.5%) said they brought them with them to meetings, and that 43 of them (78%) said they found them a useful way to prepare. However only 31 probationers (56%) said they took them to School Mentor meetings and only 22 of them (40%) found this a useful way to prepare. This appeared to be because the structure of the Council Supporter meeting and the

School Mentor meeting varied. Council Supporters used a Meeting Log (see appendix?) which is specifically designed to ask the probationer about what they feel is going well in their practice, any challenges and next planned steps. This links with the thinking and reflections made in their Learning Journals. School Mentor meetings tend to be more focused on individual issues such as planning, Parents' Night or undertaking assessment and the Meeting Log format is rarely used.

When asked if they found their Learning Journals useful as a way of identifying or solving problems, 29 probationers (53%) said they did and the remaining 26 (47%) said no.

When asked if they found their Learning Journals useful for having quality thinking and reflection time 42 probationers (76%) said yes with 13 (24%) saying no it did not really suit them.

In response to whether or not writing down their thinking and having it recorded was a useful thing to do, 46 probationers (84%) said it was and only 9 probationers (16%) said it was not.

When asked if they felt Learning Journals had a place as a way of supporting reflective thinking during the probationer year, 48 probationers (87%) said it had even though not all of them had felt it suited them personally, and 5 (9%) probationers said they believed it did not have a place and two (4%) indicated they were not sure.

. The last section of the questionnaire asked for any other comments. Many of the comments made at the end of this questionnaire were particularly useful in identifying what people were thinking about Learning Journals, problems that had occurred and the reasons for these.

- *I found it very useful and it would be a great idea if NQT's had Journals too*
- *I think Learning Journals would have been much more useful if they had been explained properly*
- *I enjoyed noting my thoughts and feelings in my Journal*
- *A good way to record and reflect*
- *Useful but time can be an issue*
- *I found it a good idea to make sure I reflected every week*
- *It would have been better if they had been established from the outset*
- *It is not a style that suits everyone*
- *I feel it is beneficial*
- *I admit I didn't like it or use it at first but when I used it I found I liked it*
- *I forgot to use it at the start*

- *I found it useful when meeting with my Supporter*
- *I think if it had been ready on time people would have liked it*
- *It has been a useful thing to have*
- *It gave me support and helped me record my development*
- *A fantastic resource if used properly*
- *A good way to keep track*

By categorising the comments made into positive comments, negative comments and neutral comments using the same criteria as table 3 in the August 2007 questionnaire, it was again found that the vast majority of comments were positive, and seemed to suggest that many of the probationers had found Learning Journals a generally useful and supportive tool for reflection on their practice. The results are collated into Table 8.

Table 8

Positive comments made	Neutral comments made	Negative comments made
<b>19</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>
<p><i>Examples of themes:</i></p> <p><i>I think this is an excellent tool for a probationer.</i>  <i>It was useful to have at Core Days</i>  <i>The Learning Journal has become a useful tool for reflection and is a record of my development.</i>  <i>I feel it has been beneficial.</i>  <i>I admit I didn't use it at first but when I used it I found I liked it.</i>  <i>A good way to reflect on my practice.</i>  <i>I am glad I used it.</i></p>	<p><i>Examples of themes:</i></p> <p><i>Electronic versions would be easier.</i>  <i>It would be better if they were established from the outset.</i>  <i>I would prefer a format that kept everything in the one place.</i>  <i>If journal had been pre-dated.</i>  <i>I think if it had been ready on time more people would have used it.</i>  <i>A separate space for School Mentor meetings</i></p>	<p><i>Examples of themes:</i></p> <p><i>I record details in my own diary anyway.</i>  <i>It is too specific a format.</i>  <i>I kept a Journal at University and learned it does not suit my style.</i></p>

*Collated data from Use of Learning Journals questionnaire March 2008*

The next section aims to look at these findings within the context of the whole research enquiry and to draw some conclusions from the findings.

## **5. Discussion and Conclusions**

The aim of this research enquiry was to investigate the use of Learning Journals as a self-reflection tool to support and develop Probationer Teacher`s skill in critical self-reflection and self-evaluation of their own practice, with a view to enhancing their professional development, and as an aid to the current coaching and mentoring process.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

- Evaluate the implementation process of Learning Journals as a possible supportive self-reflection and self-evaluation tool for Primary Probationer Teachers.
- To investigate the usefulness of Learning Journals as a way to support Primary Probationer Teachers in the Teacher Induction Scheme (TIS), and help them to develop their skills of critical self reflection and self evaluation.
- To evaluate the current design and format of the Learning Journals.
- To investigate the possible role of Learning Journals in supporting the coaching and mentoring process.

Each of these will be discussed with respect to the findings of the study and the methodology employed.

### **5.1 Evaluation of the implementation process of Learning Journals as a possible supportive self-reflection and self-evaluation tool for Primary Probationer Teachers.**

The implementation of Learning Journals in session 2007-2008 to a group of Primary Probationers was by no means a smooth or coherent process. Along the way many lessons were learned about the need and importance of a structured, informed and supported introduction to Learning Journals.

The findings of this study would appear to strongly substantiate Bolton (2001,p169) when she states that `Journals need to be carefully introduced and facilitated` .

Although there is a fair amount written about Learning Journals, their purposes and their uses as a tool for reflection (Moon, 1999, 1999a; Bolton, 2001; Boud *et al*, 2004; Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998; Holly, 1984; Holly & McLoughlin, 1989; Ghaye & Lillyman, 1997; Progoff, 1975; Schon, 1983) this tends to be general information as to the structure, design and use of Learning Journals. Even when Learning Journals are all being used for the purposes of supporting learning and personal development, they are used in a variety of ways.

Although they all claim to enhance learning, each one can claim to place a different emphasis on the role of self and others in the learning process, on how private or public the document is, on the formality or informality of it, the structure of each entry, how learning emerges and who might benefit. (Ghaye & Lillyman,1997: 43)

Some of the probationer teachers taking part in this study had used Learning Journals previously during their studies. An assumption was made in this study that those who had used them before would be familiar with the purpose of this particular Learning Journal. This was not the case, and investigations revealed that the Learning Journals used during their training had had their own, quite specific learning agendas and purposes. The rest of the probationers, who had not used a Learning Journal before, were given too little information too late, to allow them to work out what the purpose of this Learning Journal was or how it should be used. In this respect it was evident that the support given during the introduction of Learning Journals in this study was poor and had a direct impact on their subsequent use and the value placed on them.

It is now clear that it is essential to share with the probationers the specific purpose of the Learning Journals, how they are intended to be used, and the ways in which the probationers will hopefully benefit from using them, from the very moment the Learning Journals are issued. Ideally, in the case of our study, we discovered this needs to be done by the Council Supporters, creating a bond and a shared understanding of the purpose and use of the Journals. Also this way support can be

given in small groups and on an individual basis, and it can be maintained and reviewed over the course of the year.

Tailoring the Learning Journals to specific needs of the probationer teachers and the circumstances within which they are using them will be essential if they are going to be useful. It will be necessary to create 'the time and conditions conducive to reflection in order to consider practice and the meaning of teaching' (Holly & McLoughlin, 1989: 261)

Walker ( in Boud *et al.*, 2004) talks about the need to discuss methods and techniques used to keep a record of written reflections, advocating the use of exercises which would expose the participants to some of the techniques they may use. Certainly the findings from the study would suggest that some would have found it useful to have examples of entries and more guidance in the sort of things they could be recording. This could perhaps be something that should be considered in the early stages to help the probationers become familiar with and develop their skill in critically reflective writing.

Ghaye & Ghaye state 'there are no writing rules or writing styles' advocated in Journal writing (1998: 86). In terms of how people actually record in their Journals this would appear to be true. However, while I would agree to a point in that people need to have the freedom to record their thinking in a form that best suits them, be this notes; drawing; charts; mind maps etc, I would suggest that based on our findings, a certain amount of structure/guidance in their use especially at the beginning stages is necessary to support the purpose of true and detailed reflection.

The results from this study seem to suggest that without proper guidance, instruction or structure, Learning Journals will not be adopted or used by the probationer teachers. However, when there is a clear understanding of the purpose of the Learning Journal, who it is for and who benefits, and when there are set guidelines as to their use, then not only are more probationer teachers willing to use them but it appears that many will actually find them a useful thing to have.

## **5.2 Investigation of the usefulness of Learning Journals as a way to support Primary Probationer Teachers in the Teacher Induction Scheme (TIS), and help them to develop their skills of critical self-reflection and self-evaluation.**

The intention of this study was to see if Learning Journals could provide a way of supporting and helping probationer teachers reflect on and evaluate their teaching during the often challenging and stressful experience of their probationary year, with a view to moving their learning forward.

Central to this investigation was the wellbeing of the probationer teacher. The most important person in the induction process has to be the new teacher, “Indeed, there is a clearly defined expectation that induction activity should occur *with* NQTs, rather than being something that is done *to* them” (Pollard,2002: 376). This Pollard says works best when they are willing to take responsibility for their own professional development.

Throughout the whole study process the probationer teachers demonstrated they were not only willing to take responsibility for their own continued professional development but that they had a desire to do so, providing evidence that “a commitment to lifelong learning and professional development is at the heart of what it means to be part of the teaching profession”. (Pearson & Robson, 2005). Comments made throughout the whole study through questionnaires, interviews and informal chats at meetings, demonstrated how important they felt it was to spend time reviewing their practice, reflecting on what was happening and to use this information to continually move their learning forward.

Reflection touches a need within the professional to make sense of their situation. (Ghaye & Lillyman, 1997) Making sense of their probationer year was important for probationer teachers, not just in terms of their professional and personal development, but in terms of their confidence and self-esteem. “There is something powerful in being able to justify what we do, and in knowing what we do”. (Holly & McLoughlin, 1989: 280) As one probationer commented “*it is helpful to know when things are going right as much as it is to know when they are going wrong. In fact probably more so, because I generally know when they are going wrong!*”

However the findings of this study appear to suggest that reflection is not just something that will be guaranteed to happen automatically. The willingness of probationers to reflect on their practice and the belief that this is a good and valuable thing to do is not enough. Even having a Learning Journal in which to record their reflections is not enough. This study appears to demonstrate that there needs to be a structure, some guidelines and a clear understanding of the purpose and possible benefits of the Learning Journal and of self-reflection for it to stand a chance of working.

This study showed that probationers are likely to become quite overwhelmed with all the new knowledge, skills and understanding they need to acquire in their probationary year. Time, lack of it and/or management of it, can become a huge issue and planning and preparation can start to take over their lives. Finding a space or the time in which to reflect can for many be very difficult thing to manage, no matter how much they believe that it will be beneficial.

The findings of this investigation, and in particular the findings after the guidelines were introduced in January 2008, seem to suggest that having a set reflective task which can be undertaken in a manageable period of time, will ensure that the reflection is sustained over time and so is beneficial. By asking that the probationers spent at least 10-15 minutes each week being reflective journal writers seemed to have multiple benefits. The probationers developed regular self-reflection habits, the build up of reflections over time allowed them to evaluate their own long term thinking and development, they were able to see progress over time, they felt more confident about using their journals and they began to see the benefits for themselves.

Many probationers indicated that using their journals was a useful way to prepare for meetings with their Council Supporters. The Council Supporters themselves indicated that they felt probationer came to meetings much more able to talk about what they felt was going well in their practice and what not so well in the general sense, rather than just a reaction to the sort of day they had had just prior to the meeting.

Importantly, it was highlighted from the study that journal writing will not and does not suit everyone. In the case of this study it was a small minority who felt it did not suit or did not benefit them. No matter how small the group, it is important to respect the needs of all individuals and accept if some try it and don't like it, then it should not be continually forced upon them. It is difficult to judge how useful they will be until they have been used for the purpose they have been designed for, as one probationer said "*I didn't like it until I actually started using it*" and "*I liked it once I understood what it was for and how I was supposed to use it*". However, if probationers try using them and find no value in doing so then to continue to insist they are used would seem to be a waste of time and energy.

This was a very small scale investigation and many problems were encountered along the way which had an impact on how the Learning Journals were used. Many valuable lessons especially to do with implementation of Journals were learned. What can be deduced from the study is that Learning Journals can have no value at all if they are not being used, and they will only be used if probationers see the value and benefits of using them. After sorting out many of the problems relating to the issuing of the Journals such as the lack of understanding of their purpose or how they should be used, and in creating a workable structure within which they could be regularly used, it appears that once the probationers were actually using them the vast majority of them found them useful. The probationers appear to have found their Journals most useful as a place to reflecting on their teaching, looking at what parts of their practice were going well, which parts not so well and planning their next steps. They also appear to find value in having a record of their development over time. Most said they found them a useful way to prepare for their meetings with their Council Supporter.

It would appear therefore that as a tool or a vehicle to allow probationers the time and space to reflect on and develop their practice, and helping them to identify next steps, then if properly introduced and facilitated they can indeed be useful. This is true also as to the question of whether or not they can help support probationer teachers in their probationary year. However, in answer to

the question of whether or not Learning Journals can help develop good reflective skills is not something this investigation was able to answer at this stage.

### **5.3 Evaluation of the current design and format of the Learning Journals.**

There was a strong belief from the very beginning that getting the right layout and format of the Learning Journals would be important in ensuring its value as a supportive and useful tool. A lot of time was spent prior to the study looking at the proposed use of the Journal and deciding on a design that would ensure it was easy to use and practical.

The findings in this study suggest that this time was well spent and that the layout and format chosen was beneficial to its use, and that the majority of probationers were happy with it in its current format. Although the first edition A4 'phonebook size' was not what we had planned to give to the probationers, it allowed probationers to make an unintended comparison between the two sizes. Perhaps this is one reason why there was such an overwhelming support of the planned, smaller size. The intention was to allow the probationers to carry their Journals around with them so they might be used at any time or in any place. The responses from both the Format Questionnaire issued in March 2008 and the Ladder of Feedback sheets issued in December suggested that probationers were happy with the size of the Journals with comments such as "*a good amount of space*", "*small and compact*", "*user friendly.*"

The addition of extra information such as The Standard for Full Registration, planned CPD sessions (Core Days) and useful contacts received a favourable response in the feedback from probationers, with the vast majority saying they liked having these and found them useful. Extra additions were suggested by some probationers for the future, such as a diary section and a hard cover, but the costs of these are likely to be prohibitive.

One suggestion or comment that was mentioned frequently throughout the study was the fact that the probationers were asked to complete evaluation sheets on the Core Days at the end of their session, and the Core Day section within the Journal is asking for responses to virtually the same

issues. This is something that needs to be addressed for the future. It is understandably unacceptable to have repeat work, especially on the same day, and write basically the same thing in two separate places.

Another suggestion or comment that was made frequently was the fact that the probationers always seemed to be working from a `To Do List` which many presently kept in a separate notebook or diary. The suggestion was made that having a section or space for this within the Learning Journal would be very useful. This again is something which needs to be considered for the future and one major benefit would be that the `To Do List` could be directly linked to the reflections and planning of next steps.

Unsurprisingly, it would be difficult to create a Learning Journal that exactly suited everyone in its style and design. People are individuals and have individual likes and dislikes. Whether or not to have lines was one issue that demonstrated personal likes, usually related to the size of an individual's handwriting, with some liking the lines and others finding them restrictive. What does appear to be demonstrated through this study however is that the overall basic design of these Learning Journals is useful, practical and beneficial, and that no major changes needed to be made.

#### **5.4 Investigation of the possible role of Learning Journals in supporting the coaching and mentoring process.**

It would appear from this study that the role of Learning Journals to support probationers' ability to reflect on their practice is only part one of a two part process. Part one is the personal reflection through writing in and reading over their Journals, and part two is the dialogue with others which comes about as a result of these reflections. Both have equal importance.

Supporters should not be trying to create mini-mes (Rippon & Martin, 2003). The most important person in the induction process is the probationer, and the role of the Supporter should be to support this person on their personal journey of discovery into what it entails to be an effective practitioner. According to Holly,

Keeping a journal and discussing what is salient to the teacher's work, with a view to improving teaching, shifting the responsibility and control of these efforts to the person who can make the most difference – the teacher (1984, : 19).

It appeared from the investigation that using their Learning Journal to prepare for their meetings with their Council Supporters did give the probationers more confidence. A marked difference was noticed by the Supporters in the quality and depth of their responses to the Meeting Log questions of 'What is going well?', 'What concerns do you have?' and 'What next steps?' Probationers were more willing and more able to give their own points of view.

However this could also be explained by the fact that the probationers had entered the second half of their year as a probationer. Most were feeling more settled and happier anyway, and most were generally more confident. With fewer new challenges to be faced and having developed their planning, organising and classroom management skills, as well as a better understanding of their class and the relevant curriculum, confidence is generally higher. Also by this stage probationers tend to have built a solid trusting relationship with their Supporter, so conversations tend to be more open.

However, this study has highlighted the fact that the Supporters and Mentors have a vital and responsible role to play. Although only touched on briefly during this study, it was still apparent that the quality of the support given and the quality of the dialogue between the probationer teacher and the Supporter or Mentor is hugely important. Reflections in Learning Journal could be moved on to a whole new higher level with the correct support and by asking the 'right questions'. This is an area that would merit further investigation.

It was also interesting to note in this study that although a high number of probationers used their Learning Journal to prepare for their meetings with their Council Supporter, a much smaller number used them for meetings with their School Mentor. It is believed that the reason for this firstly lies in the fact that meetings with the School Mentors tend to follow a different format. The Meeting Logs are not generally used and specific issues such as planning, assessment or behaviour management

tend to be discuss, rather than a more general 'talk about what is going well' etc. The second reason may well be due to the fact that many School Mentors will not be aware that the probationers are using Learning Journals. Neither will they have had the purpose of Learning Journals, nor the reasons why probationers are being asked to use them, properly explained. These are areas which need to be addressed and would benefit from further study.

## **6. Recommendations**

This study was a small scale investigation into the use of Learning Journals with Primary Probationer teachers. The study appeared at times to raise as many questions as it was intended to answer, and some of the questions we set out to answer remain unresolved as yet. It is hoped that these questions will be answered in a second year study of the Learning Journals.

The findings of this study were shared with the Probationer Support Team, the CPD Co-ordinator and the Curriculum Support Manager, and the decision has been taken by Falkirk Council to issue Learning Journals again next session to its probationer teachers on the TIS. As we still feel we have a lot to learn about the use of Learning Journals, it is hoped that the study will continue and will be extended to look at Secondary Probationers, School Mentors and to further investigate the role of Learning Journals in supporting the coaching and mentoring process.

As a result of this study it is felt that we have a better understanding of the way Learning Journals need to be introduced and the importance of doing this properly. It is vital to the success of the use of the Learning Journals that **all** who are involved with them have a very clear understanding of their purpose, how they are to be used and the possible benefits in using them. Setting out guidelines for their use, especially in the early stages can be beneficial. These matters will be addressed when the Learning Journals are issued to the new probationer teachers.

The format and design of the present Learning Journals was found to be both practical and useful, with a only a few additions being recommended. Talks are being held with the publishers to discuss the format of next sessions Journals and although little will change, it is hoped that we can address

the issue of the Core Day evaluations which are currently being completed twice. It is hoped that there will be a way to include the evaluations into the Learning Journals, rather than have the separate sheets used at present. It is also hoped that addition pages for notes will be added.

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APPENDIX 1

PRIMARY PROBATIONER SUPPORT PROGRAMME  
SESSION 2007-2008  
CORE PROGRAMME OF EVENTS



Probationers are expected to attend all sessions in the programme.

DATE	COURSE CONTENT	PROVIDER
15 Aug. 07 Park Hotel Falkirk	9am-3.30pm Induction Day	Julia Swan, Director of Education, Falkirk Council Rob Long
28 Aug. 07 Camelon Ed. 30 Aug. 07	9am-3.30pm Surviving Your Probationary Period!	Glenda White
4 Sept. 07 Victoria Buildings 6 Sept. 07	9am-11.30am Library Support for Schools GTCs Documentation	Yvonne Manning Probationer Supporters
18 Sept. 07 Camelon Ed. 20 Sept. 07	9am-3.30pm Meeting Pupils' Needs	Marian Boyle Mary Connolly
9 Oct. 07 Camelon Ed. 11 Oct. 07	9am-3.30pm Equal Opportunities (am) Meeting With Parents (pm)	Elaine Watts Janice Collins Kath Hamill
30 Oct. 07 Camelon Ed. 1 Nov. 07	9am-3.30pm Support for Learning	ASL Team
Closure Day Camelon Ed. 19 Nov. 07	9am-3.30pm Topsport Enterprising Art Activities	Christine Snedden Pat Shanks
4 Dec. 07 Camelon Ed. 6 Dec. 07	9am-3.30pm Language Skills Across the Curriculum Enterprise in Education	Lynne Ferguson Davina Gallacher
15 Jan. 08 Camelon Ed. 17 Jan. 08	9am-3.30pm Creating a Positive Ethos	Tom Begen Ed. Psych. Services Team
19 Feb. 08 Camelon Ed. 21 Feb. 08	9am-3.30pm Early Years Support Transition	Liz Rose
11 March 08 Camelon Ed. 13 March 08	9am-3.30pm Working Within a Team Post-Induction Plan	David Richardson Probationer Support Team
13 May 08 Camelon Ed. 15 May 08	9am-3.30pm Citizenship Eco-schools	Marilyn Milligan Helen Winton

Authority Closure Day

Tuesday Group

Thursday Group

Lunch provided

Lunch provided

Lunch provided

**PRIMARY PROBATIONER SUPPORT PROGRAMME**  
**SESSION 2007-2008**  
**Spotlight Sessions**



As the topics below would be beneficial to all Probationers, it is expected that they will be able to attend all courses.

<b>DATE</b>	<b>COURSE CONTENT</b>	<b>PROVIDER</b>
6,12 or 19 Sept. Camelon Ed. Centre	4pm-6pm ICT	Malcolm Wilson And Jane Crerar
26 Sept. Camelon Ed. Centre	4pm-6pm Professionalism Into Practice	John Anderson
2 or 4 Oct. Camelon Ed. Centre	4pm-6pm Ideas for Display	Fiona Stirling
8 Nov. 07 Camelon Ed. Centre	4pm-6pm Falkirk Framework for Behaviour Management	Tom Begen
29 or 31 Jan. 08 Camelon Ed. Centre	4pm-6pm Preparing for Interview	Sheena Wright And Eileen Fairweather
3 or 10 Mar. 08 Ladeside Primary School	4pm-6pm Working With Pupils on the Autistic Spectrum	Jan Evans
12 June 08 Park Hotel Falkirk	3.45pm-4.45pm Informal End of Session Meeting	Julia Swan, Director of Education, Falkirk

Light refreshments will be served in the coffee lounge from 3.45pm

APPENDIX 2

## Induction Programme Year Planner

Month	Supporter	School	LEA CPD
Aug	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School meeting</li> <li>6 meetings to review progress</li> <li>4 observations:</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet Supporter</li> <li>6 meetings with school mentor to review progress: main focus on planning, school policies, resources, assessment and classroom management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Induction Day</li> <li>Surviving your Probationary Period</li> </ul>
Sept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Behaviour Management, Classroom Organisation and Management, Components of a Lesson, Classroom Communication (including one cross observation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Observations (non compulsory)</li> <li>School based CPD</li> <li>Progress meeting with supporter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Library Support/GTCs Documentation</li> <li>Meeting Pupils' Needs</li> <li>ICT</li> <li>Professionalism into Practice</li> </ul>
Oct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Progress meeting with school mentor (Oct)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Equal Opportunities/Meeting with parents</li> <li>Support for Learning</li> <li>Ideas for Display</li> </ul>
Nov	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School meeting to discuss probationer's progress and write report (end Nov)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting with Supporter to discuss progress and write report</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Topsport/Enterprising Art Activities</li> <li>Falkirk Framework for Behaviour Management</li> </ul>
Dec	Interim Profile to be sent to GTCS		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Language Skills Across the Curriculum/Enterprise in Education</li> </ul>
Jan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6 meetings</li> <li>5 observations: language, maths, RME,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6 meetings with school mentor</li> <li>Observations (non compulsory)</li> <li>School based CPD</li> <li>Progress meeting with Supporter (April)</li> <li>Meeting with supporter to discuss probationer's report (May)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creating a Positive Ethos</li> <li>Preparing for Interview</li> </ul>
Feb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expressive arts, Environmental studies (including one cross observation)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early Years Support/Transition</li> </ul>
Mar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Progress meeting with school mentor (April)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working within a Team/Post Induction Plan</li> <li>Working with Children on the Autistic Spectrum</li> </ul>
Apr	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting with school to discuss probationer's report</li> </ul>		
May			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Citizenship/Eco-schools</li> </ul>
June	Final Profile collated and sent to GTCS		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Informal End of Session Meeting</li> </ul>

# Learning Journals

Please help us by answering the following questions as honestly as possible. We are looking to make the best use of Learning Journals. Your experiences and comments will help us in that process.

1. Have you ever used a Learning Journal (or something similar) before?  
Yes                      No

If yes, can you please give more details.

2. Can you rate on the scale below (1-lowest 10- highest) how useful you feel a Learning Journal will be in your role as supporter. (Please circle)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Not useful

very useful

3. What problems do think you might encounter in using your Learning Journal?

4. Is there any way in which using a Learning Journal might be made easier for you?

5. How do you feel about setting aside a designated time to write in your Learning Journal in the early stages?

6. At this early stage, how frequently do you think you might be able to use your Learning Journal to inform your work as a Supporter? Circle to indicate.

Only occasionally                      on a weekly basis                      on a daily basis

Other \_\_\_\_\_

7. When are you planning to write in your Learning Journal for the first time after this meeting?

8. If you have any other comments to make please use the space below.

**APPENDIX 4**

**Probationer Support Team**

Camelon Education Centre  
Abercrombie Street, Camelon, FK1 5RS  
Phone: 01324 501655 Email: c.smith@falkirk.gov.uk

**PLEASE RETURN TO CAROL SMITH, PROBATIONER SUPPORTER  
BY 10/12/07 AT LATEST**

**Date : 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2007**



**Falkirk Council Learning Journal Questionnaire**

Please answer the following questions as honestly as you can.

Q1. In the past, have you ever used a Learning Journal?

YES  NO

Q2. How often do you use your Falkirk Council Learning Journal? *Please tick the one closest to describing how often.*

Every day  every few days  once a week  fortnightly

Monthly  never use it

Q3. From the following list, indicate times where you have used or referred to writing in your Learning Journal. *You can tick as many as you like.*

- During personal reflection
- Meeting/discussion with Council Supporter
- Meeting/discussion with School Mentor
- Discussion with colleagues
- Discussion with fellow Probationer teachers
- When faced with a problem
- When planning next steps in CPD
- None of the above

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Q4. How useful have you found your Falkirk Council Learning Journal up to this point.

Very useful  useful  not very useful  no help at all

Many thanks for your support.

*Director : Julia Swan*  
McLaren House, Marchmont Ave,  
Polmont, Falkirk, FK2 0NZ.  
Telephone : 01324 506600  
Fax : 01324 506601

# Ladder of feedback

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of our research into the use of Falkirk Council Learning Journals this session. I am using the Ladder of Feedback as a way to gather information. I would like you to consider, and be prepared to discuss your thoughts on, these **4 main areas**:

**Suggest:** eg. any suggestions you have to make Learning Journals more user friendly

**Concerns:** eg. any concerns you have about the use or format of Learning Journals

**Value:** eg. anything you value/like about Learning Journals

**Clarify:** eg. anything you would like a clearer explanation or are confused by or unsure of.

Our chat should take no longer than 15-20 minutes. I thought you might find it useful to jot down an idea or two prior to our meeting, so I have provided space below.

I am looking forward to our chat.

Regards

Carol Smith

Suggest:
Concerns:
Value;
Clarify:

## APPENDIX 6

### Falkirk Council Learning Journals Support for Probationer Teachers

*“The SFR, in line with the professional review and development model used in Scottish schools, identifies professional reflection and self evaluation as integral to good professional practice and to school improvement. Newly-qualified teachers will have become accustomed to engaging in self-evaluation within ITE. They will expect the emphasis on this wider skill to extend into their role as a teacher and to have an entitlement to appropriate CPD. Such professional reflection and self-evaluation is at the heart of the use of the SFR for all fully registered teachers.*

*The Standard for Full Registration May 2007 (2.5)*

The SFR specifies what is expected of a teacher seeking full registration with the GTCS. During your probationer year you are required to provide the GTCS with evidence that you are fulfilling all aspects of the Standard in order that you may be awarded full registration. Some aspects are easier to evidence than others.

To enable you to provide evidence of **Standard for Full Registration 2.4 Professional Reflection and Communication**, Falkirk Council Education Services are piloting the use of a Learning Journal.

Setting aside time to reflect deeply on your current practice and making a written record of this in your Learning Journal will enable you to evidence 2.4.1 and 2.4.3 of the Standard. Sharing these reflections with your Council Supporter and School Mentor will enable you to evidence 2.4.2 of the Standard.

**Between now and the Easter Holiday there is an expectation that you will use your Learning Journal on a regular basis in the following ways:**

- Bring your Learning Journal to **all** Core and Spotlight sessions. Spend 5 minutes at beginning and end of session reflecting on what you hope to/what you did learn and any future action. Time will be provided for this during sessions (Lunch time could also be used for Journal writing as an optional extra)
- Spend at least 10-15 minutes **each week** during part of 0.3 time writing in main part of Journal reflecting on what is working/going well within your classroom practice and any issues, concerns or problems for that week.
- Bring Learning Journal to all Council Supporter meetings and use/refer to weekly entries during discussion with Council Supporter
- Take Learning Journal to School Mentor meeting and use/refer to weekly entries during discussion with School Mentor.

Your Council Supporter will be actively supporting you in your use of the Learning Journal and in your ability to evidence your competence in *2.4: Professional Reflection and Communication* from the Standard for Full Registration. They will be able to offer advice and/or guidance on this matter.

## APPENDIX 7

### Probationer Support Team

Camelon Education Centre  
Abercrombie Street, Camelon, FK1 5RS  
Phone: 01324 501655 Email: c.smith@falkirk.gov.uk



**Falkirk Council**  
Education Services

Date: March 2008

## Survey of Learning Journal Format

Primary Probationers

Dear Colleagues,

A Learning Journal is a place where you can easily and effectively record your in-depth thinking on your current practice, your successes and your own areas for future development. We believe the **format** of this Learning Journal is key to its success.

Having had the opportunity to work with the new Falkirk Council Learning Journals, we would value your opinions on its present layout. The following survey asks you for your thinking on the different sections of the Journals, as well as giving you an opportunity to make some of your own suggestions. There is also an opportunity for you to offer some words of support, guidance or advice to future Probationer Teachers and have these included in our next Learning Journal.

Lastly, for the purpose of my Research Project, I would be extremely grateful if you could send me a photocopy of one of the pages of your Learning Journal that demonstrates your ability to be critically reflective of your own practice. Delete any names or confidential parts and send it to me anonymously. I do not need to know where the pages have come from.....it is not part of any personal assessment!! Remember - do not send anything that you are not happy to share. This will just let me see examples of the type of ongoing reflection that has happened in the Journals.

You will be given an addressed envelope in which you can return all of these things to me. Just put it in the Internal Mail bag in your school by **WEDNESDAY 19<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2008** so that it reaches me in time.

I am very grateful for your continued support in helping me evaluate Falkirk Council Learning Journals.

Many thanks,

Carol Smith  
Probationer Supporter

*Director : Julia Swan*

McLaren House, Marchmont Ave,  
Polmont, Falkirk, FK2 0NZ.  
Telephone : 01324 506600  
Fax : 01324 506601

Part A

**Survey of Falkirk Council Learning Journal format**

**Please circle your response**

Q1. The present Falkirk Council Learning Journal is A5. Do you think it should remain this size?

YES

NO

*If No, then state why not and what size do you think would be better.*

---

Q2. Copies of timetables, Core/Spotlight Days and the Standard for Full Registration were included in your Journals. Should they remain part of the format of the next Journal?

YES

NO

*If No, which ones should be removed?*

---

Q3. **`Reflection on Core Days` section**

a) This section was laid out using three main headings. Was this useful?

YES

NO

*If No, what would you like changed.*

b) Did you like having the lines?

YES

NO

c) Is having one page to write on per session enough?

YES

NO

*If No, how many would you like?*

**Q4. `Reflection on own practice` section**

- a) This was designed so you had a double page to write on each week. Were you happy with the format of the double page?

YES

NO

*If No, what would have been more useful?*

- b) These pages had no lines. Did you like the blank format?

YES

NO

*If No, what would you have preferred?*

- c) Were the questions posed at the top of the left hand page useful when you first started to use your Journal? ( *"What is going well?", "What have I learned" etc*)

YES

NO

---

Q5. A suggestion was made to include extra blank pages in the Journals which could be used to write extra notes, make `To Do` lists and for other general purpose things. Would you have found this useful?

YES

NO

## Part B

Do you have any suggestions as to how the format of the Journal could be improved?

---

## Part C

Having almost completed your own Probationer year, we would be grateful for any words of advice, support or guidance you would like to offer future Probationer Teachers. These will be included in our next edition of the Falkirk Council Learning Journal, to help those starting their Probationer year in August 2008.

---

## Part D

### **Final Task**

Have a look through the pages of your Learning Journal. Find an example of something you wrote that you feel demonstrates you being critically reflective about your own practice. (It need not be very long) Once you have made sure that all personal details have been deleted, make a photocopy and send it to me along with this survey.

**This needs to be something you are happy to share and you should NOT identify yourself in any way.**

**Thank you for your continued support. Please return your questionnaire and Journal excerpt to me by Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> March in the envelope provided.**

Many thanks  
Carol Smith

## APPENDIX 8

### Probationer Support Team

Camelon Education Centre  
Abercrombie Street, Camelon, FK1 5RS  
Phone: 01324 501655 Email: c.smith@falkirk.gov.uk



**Falkirk Council**  
Education Services

### Falkirk Council Learning Journal Questionnaire March 2008

#### Name:

*The following questions are based on your use of the Learning Journal since January 2008. (If you had lost your Journal but were using a notebook (or similar) instead, then answer as if this was still your Learning Journal. It is the type and frequency of critical reflection I am interested in. For the purpose of my research I am interested in the use of written reflection as a way of enhancing overall critical reflection in your induction year)*

#### Please circle your answers

Q1. Did you bring along and use your Learning Journal on Core Days?

YES

NO

*If No, can you say why and any other ways that you recorded your reflections of the day*

---

Q2. Did you manage, (give or take the odd occasion), to write in your Learning Journal on a weekly basis?

YES

NO

*If No, can you say why, and any ways in which you did record your reflections of what was going well or not so well.*

---

Q3. Did you bring your Learning Journal along to your meetings with your Council Supporter?

YES

NO

*If No, can you say why*

**Director : Julia Swan**

McLaren House, Marchmont Ave,  
Polmont, Falkirk, FK2 0NZ.  
Telephone : 01324 506600  
Fax : 01324 506601

Q4. Did you bring your Learning Journals along to meetings with your School Mentor?

YES

NO

*If No, can you say why*

Q5 In which of the following ways did you find a Learning Journal useful.

❖ As a way of preparing for meetings with Council Supporter

YES NO

❖ As a way of preparing for meetings with School Mentor

YES NO

❖ As a way of identifying or solving problems, big or small

YES NO

❖ A set time for quality thinking time and reflection

YES NO

❖ Do you think the act of writing your thinking down and recording it, is a useful thing to do?

YES NO

❖ Do you think Journals have a place as one of the ways in which probationer teachers can effectively and usefully reflect on their development throughout their induction year?

YES NO

*Thank you for your support in piloting the use of Learning Journals this year. Please feel free to add any additional comments you would like to make in the space below. Your support and goodwill throughout this whole intervention was greatly appreciated.  
Carol Smith*

Any other comments: