

## The Benefits of Tertiary Study for DHHS Staff

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### Background

Recent transformations to the organisational structure at the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) may lead to risk factors such as resistance to change and operational disruptions (Rose, 2009).

Research has demonstrated that one approach that can effectively manage the risk factors associated with organisational restructure is increasing staff engagement with further study (Blundell et al. 1999). This is because further study can develop deeper competence (Ng & Feldman, 2009). Further study has been shown to provide individuals with both declarative and procedural knowledge, which can increase their adaptability, flexibility and analytical skills (Ng & Feldman, 2009).

Therefore, increasing DHHS staff engagement with further study may mitigate the negative effects of organisational restructure.

### Aims

This research project aimed to establish what benefits DHHS employees receive from further study. DHHS employees were asked what benefits or advantages they had experienced as a result of returning to further study.

### Methodology

Primary data was gathered through triangulation of quantitative data collection methods, for ease of analysis and versatility, and qualitative data collection methods, for investigation behind the meaning (Walter, 2010).



### Literature Review

The research project is based on the conceptual framework developed Schuller, Preston, Hammond, Brasset-Grundy and Bynner (2004).

They suggest learning is a process whereby people build up their assets and then benefit from the returns of their investment (Schuller et al., 2004). The benefit may take the form of three distinctive forms of capital:

- **Identity** capital – characteristics that define an individual's outlook and self-image. This includes attitudes, values and self-esteem.
- **Social** capital – networks and norms which enable people to contribute effectively to common goals. This includes family, friends and civic engagement.
- **Human** capital – qualifications, knowledge and skills which enable individuals to function effectively in economic and social life.

### Data Collection

Quantitative data was collected through an on-line survey. The first section collected demographic information and the second section analysed the participants' experience of tertiary education.

Qualitative data was collected through responses to an invitation to discuss the topic further. Sixty-two participants responded by email with further insights.

One of the successes of the research project was the response to the survey. Self-administered surveys typically have a low response rate (Walter, 2010). However the survey received an overwhelming response, with 270 participants completing the survey.

### Analysis

Quantitative data analysed through Survey Monkey software showed the three benefits scored the highest average ratings overall:

- Improved job performance
- Increased motivation to learn
- Improved self esteem

During the conceptual analysis of the qualitative data, several key themes emerged:

- ‘knowledge’
- ‘performance’
- ‘confidence’
- ‘staff relations’

These benefits appeared frequently throughout the data

### Results

Mapping the data against the conceptual framework, three sets of results emerged.

#### Human Capital

<p><b>85%</b> of participants surveyed said returning to study had increased their <b>motivation to learn.</b></p>	<p>“I enjoyed learning new things, which broadened my perspective and enhanced my work performance”.</p>
<p><b>86%</b> of participants surveyed said they had experienced <b>improved job performance.</b></p>	<p>“[Further study] improved my job prospects and allowed me to gain employment in an area I had a great interest”.</p>

One explanation as to why returning to study improves job performance is that education develops deeper competence.

By providing individuals with declarative and procedural knowledge the likeliness of them completing work tasks more successfully increases (Ng & Feldman, 2009).

Essentially encouraging staff engagement with further study benefits both the individual and the organisation, as in-depth and analytical knowledge.

#### Identity Capital

<p><b>79.4%</b> said their <b>self-esteem had improved.</b></p>	<p>“The course is giving me confidence to step into a management role”</p>
<p><b>70%</b> were <b>more able to manage change.</b></p>	<p>“Return to study allowed me to shift my thinking in many ways... Studying forces one to re-evaluate and often adjust”.</p>

By focusing on positive feedback and learning from constructive criticism individuals develop their self-perception, which in turn may improve their self-esteem.

Returning to study helps to develop talents and abilities. This can increase competence and confidence and ultimately improve self-esteem.

#### Social Capital

<p><b>61%</b> had formed <b>wider social networks.</b></p>	<p>“I think this [further study] facilitates critical reflection. This in turn enhances leadership... and responsibility and enhances relationships in the workplace.”</p>
<p><b>More than half</b> said their <b>workplace relationships had enhanced.</b></p>	<p>“My ability to support, assist, communicate, articulate with other staff has grown.”</p>

While social capital showed the least growth, there were clear benefits associated with enhanced communication skills.

### Sources

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