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## **Personal & Professional Development Unit 2**



QAI AWARD

# **Personal & Professional Development**

## **QQI Level 6**

### **6N1949**

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## Unit 2: Key Skills for Effective Work Participation

In any workplace situation, there are a certain set of skills which one should possess and excel at, in order to effectively participate in the work environment.

Such skills can be broadly categorised as follows:

Skill Category	What it Means	Examples
<b>Personal Skills</b>	‘Individual skills’, linked to personality traits.	Punctual; ability to work on own initiative; good communication; meet deadlines; work well under pressure.
<b>Interpersonal Skills</b>	‘People skills’, the ability to deal effectively and efficiently with people and work well as part of a team.	Good presentation/speaking skills; aware of body language; ability to give appropriate feedback; good communication; ability to deal with customers/parents/public.
<b>Practical Skills</b>	‘Doing Skills’, the ability to perform tasks.	Feeding and changing babies; arts and crafts; completing observations.
<b>Technical Skills</b>	‘Technology Skills’, the ability to adapt and use new (and existing) technology.	Typing; sending emails/texts to parents; creating and maintaining a website/social media presence.

*(Adapted from Douglas & O'Neill, 2010, pp18-27)*

This unit will consider some of the key skills required for effective participation in the workplace, in the context of personal and professional development; such skills include time management, problem solving, setting goals and objectives, planning, coping with stress, delegation and budgeting.

Each key skill area will be considered individually, and you will have the opportunity to complete a learning or reflection activity in relation to each specific area. This will not only support your learning, but will support you in a practical way to develop both personally and professionally.

While these skills are primarily discussed from a personal perspective, it should be noted that such skills can (and indeed do), have a significant impact on the organisation. Such an impact can be positive or negative, dependent on who displays the different skills and the manner in which they do so.

For example, a manager who has poor time keeping skills, will have a negative impact on the workforce, which will in turn, have a negative impact on the morale and functionality of the team. This in turn has a knock-on effect across the organisation. Where communication skills are lacking, again the impact will be across the organisation and certainly negative.

Therefore, when we think about any skill, we should consider it from an organisational context as well as an individual perspective.

Before we begin to look at each skill, it is a good idea to reflect on where you are currently at in relation to each of the aforementioned skills – as always with any area of development, you need to know the current situation and/or status before you can make plans to develop/enhance the skill/area.

It is also useful to know where you are at, at the start, as this will be invaluable in determining your progress and evaluating the methods you choose in your development journey.

The chart below comprises a basic skills audit in which you can assess and record your thoughts in relation to your current position and the different skills you demonstrate therein. In completing this activity, consider how you currently perform this skill, any particular areas which you excel at, and what challenges you in relation to the particular skill. It will also be useful at this point, to make a brief note of how you might go about addressing the issues which you noted with each particular area – a template for completing this is located after the basic skills audit.

<b>Skill</b>	<b>Current rating (1-5)</b>	<b>What do you excel at in relation to this skill?</b>	<b>What challenges you/requires development in relation to this skill?</b>
<b>Time Management</b>			
<b>Decision Making/Problem Solving</b>			

Setting Goals & Objectives			
Planning			
Coping with Stress			
Budgeting			

To complete a more specific skills audit, you should list the specific requirements of your current role and rate yourself for each one – the above example is the broad skill area, within each of these areas you can list several specific skills. From this list, you can then recognise the areas which require development.

You can do similar for a desired role. In both instances, you should also identify how you might go about addressing the areas for development. The following chart can then be used to draft a plan for addressing the areas identified as requiring development.

Development Goal	Actions/Steps	Timeframe	Potential Obstacles	Possible Solutions



This chart will be ever changing in that as you address a particular skill, it is removed from this chart and potentially another development area is added. In addition, as you progress through your career, you will usually find your skill set developing and your development needs changing, depending on your role and desired role.

## **1. Time Management:**

Time management is an essential skill for any individual. As the name implies, time management is how one manages their time; effective time management is how one manages their time in an effective and productive way. Therefore, time management can be considered from two perspectives; one perspective is the day-to-day use of time, including how you manage your daily/weekly/monthly schedule and how you combine work, study and family life.

The other perspective is how you manage your time in your personal and professional development, the timeframe you put on it and the use you make of the time you have to develop your skills.

You may feel that time management is not a strong point for you – however, effective time management is a skill which can be learned by following a few simple steps. In becoming better at managing your time, you will reduce stress levels and manage work pressure better, and become a more efficient organiser, planner and therefore, a better manager.

In your personal and professional development journey, effective time management is essential to ensure that goals are given a realistic timeframe, and you manage your time and the respective objectives effectively.

From an organisational perspective, effective time management is essential for the smooth running of the organisation, for good morale and team functioning and for good customer services/care. Where time management is ineffective, negative consequences will ensue which will ultimately have a negative impact across the organisation.

As stated previously, time management is a skill which you can develop or improve upon. The following list provides some pointers of ways that you can improve this skill:

### ***A. Make a Task List:***

Knowing what tasks you need to complete in the day/week/month is essential for effective time management. Make a list of such tasks and note which tasks are a priority and which tasks can wait if required.

Be realistic in relation to the time required to complete each task and allow time for the unexpected – it usually happens! In making a task list, ensure that you only list the tasks for which you are responsible or involved in – don't be tempted to take on board other tasks which are not relevant to your role.

### ***B. Keep a diary:***

The use of a diary can also be beneficial in effective time management. Diaries can be day to view or week to view – the week to view allows you to see at a glance what tasks you have to complete in any given week. There is also the option of using an electronic diary such as Google calendar, but if this your sole method of maintaining a diary, you will need access to an electronic device at all times to access your diary; the traditional paper diary is still a favourite of many!

Make notes in your diary of the tasks you must complete and refer to your diary regularly. Set aside a time each day to organise your tasks and time. Careful and realistic planning is essential to ensure you allow sufficient time for each task; as with the task list, ensure you are not taking too much on board or expecting to complete too many tasks in too short a timeframe.

### **C. Prioritise:**

Allocate tasks according to priority – this will obviously change regularly dependent on the task, time of year etc. If you are unsure, seek clarity from your manager as to which task they wish you to complete first. The chart below is useful in determining what a priority task is and what can wait for a future time/date:

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	<p>Crises</p> <p>Pressing problems</p> <p>Deadline driven projects</p> <p>Meeting preparations</p>	<p>Preparation</p> <p>Prevention</p> <p>Values clarification</p> <p>Planning</p> <p>Relationship building</p> <p>Empowerment</p>

Not Important		
	Interruptions	Trivia
	Phone calls	Junk mail
	Reports	Some phone calls
	Post	Time wasters
	Some meetings	Escape activities
	Nearest pressing matters	Facebook!
	Popular activities	

## ***D. Delegate:***

Where necessary (and possible), delegate tasks to other staff. If delegating, you should ensure the person to whom you delegate is capable of performing the task; if not, they will need to be supported and this may not be an option due to time constraints. In such instances, you will need to weigh up which is more beneficial – to do the task yourself, or to delegate and support the other member of staff to complete it on their own.

Again, prioritising will be instrumental in deciding on this – if the task is high priority, then you will need to select the option which will see the task completed quickest and to the highest standard.

However, you should not lose sight of the opportunity to support staff to up-skill, and if the task completion time is one which you can delay, then this could be a perfect opportunity to support a staff member to up-skill.

However, be mindful of your reasons for delegating. Avoid delegating tasks due to poor time management on your part, as in so doing, you are not developing your skills.

***E. Be assertive:***

Where necessary, say 'no' - though ensure to explain why! Be mindful of the difference of being assertive and being aggressive, and ensure that you do not appear to be the latter! It is perfectly acceptable to say 'no', provided of course the reasons for doing so are valid and genuine and clearly explained (if applicable).

***Activity:***

**What is your time management like at the moment?**

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**Do you currently do any of the items listed?**

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**What enhancements (if any) will you make to your current time management?**

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## **2. Decision Making/Problem Solving**

Another key skill required for effective workplace participation is the ability to make decisions and solve problems. Decision making and problem solving are inextricably linked – decisions need to be made when problem solving and problems can surface in the decision making process. The extent to which you will need to engage in this in a work context will depend on the role you occupy and the level of responsibility you have. Managers, supervisors and room leaders will undoubtedly have a considerable responsibility in this area. However, the childcare worker/assistant will need to be proficient in this skill also.

Regardless of the position you occupy within the organisation – from front line to senior management - you will undoubtedly be called upon to make decisions and engage in problem solving during the course of your work. Decisions can be considered as either routine or non-routine. Non-routine decisions are the frequent decisions a supervisor must make and as such require little thought, as these are the general day-to-day decisions of the centre.

Examples include break times, activities or general housekeeping. Non-routine decisions are generally governed by the policies of the centre and as such there is usually very little choice with such decisions.

On the other hand, non-routine decisions are generally less frequent decisions, not usually governed by everyday practice and as such require considerably more thought. Non-routine decisions are usually considered in terms of problem solving (Evans, 2004 p 155).

In any decision making process you need to be clear on three key considerations:

- 1. *What is the problem/decision to be made?***
- 2. *What are the possible solutions?***
- 3. *Which solution is the most suitable?***

In making a decision, you need to be confident with your chosen solution and present this solution to your staff team (where appropriate) in a timely manner.

You also need to be prepared to take responsibility if the decision made is deemed not the most suitable. In such an instance, you will usually need to re-visit the decision making process and re-consider the solutions available.

A useful tool to assist in the decision making and problem solving process is that of de Bono's six thinking hats. The six hats are used to categorise thinking and by switching 'hats', you can thus, switch your thinking.

When utilising the hats, you can do so by consciously thinking about which 'hat' you or another staff is 'wearing' i.e. you categorise the thinking of the respective individual. In using de Bono's hats, the individual can be removed from the process, making the discussion less personal and more work focused.

The following page gives a brief explanation of each hat and what it symbolises.

## De Bono's 6 Thinking Hats:



- ***The White Hat***

- The White Hat calls for information known or needed.



- ***The Red Hat***

- The Red Hat signifies feelings, hunches and intuition.



- ***The Black Hat***

- The Black Hat is judgment -- the devil's advocate or why something may not work.



- ***The Yellow Hat***

The Yellow Hat symbolises brightness and optimism.



- ***The Green Hat***

- The Green Hat focuses on creativity: the possibilities, alternatives and new ideas.



- ***The Blue Hat***

The Blue Hat is used to manage the thinking process.

*(De Bono Thinking Systems, 2011)*



Consider the example below which demonstrates how to use de Bono's hats in relation to a workplace problem. In using de Bono's hats, you are identifying the various responses which can occur and categorising them.

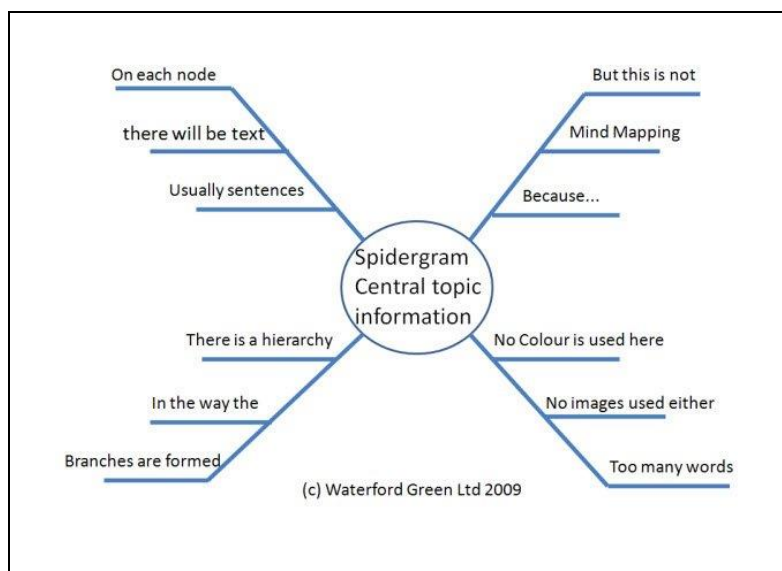
While this is not a tool which will ultimately solve the issue, it is one which will help to categorise thinking and help you to recognise if any individual is stuck in a 'thinking rut'. For example, some staff members may always be the one to wear the black hat and refuse new ventures because similar activities may not have worked in the past.

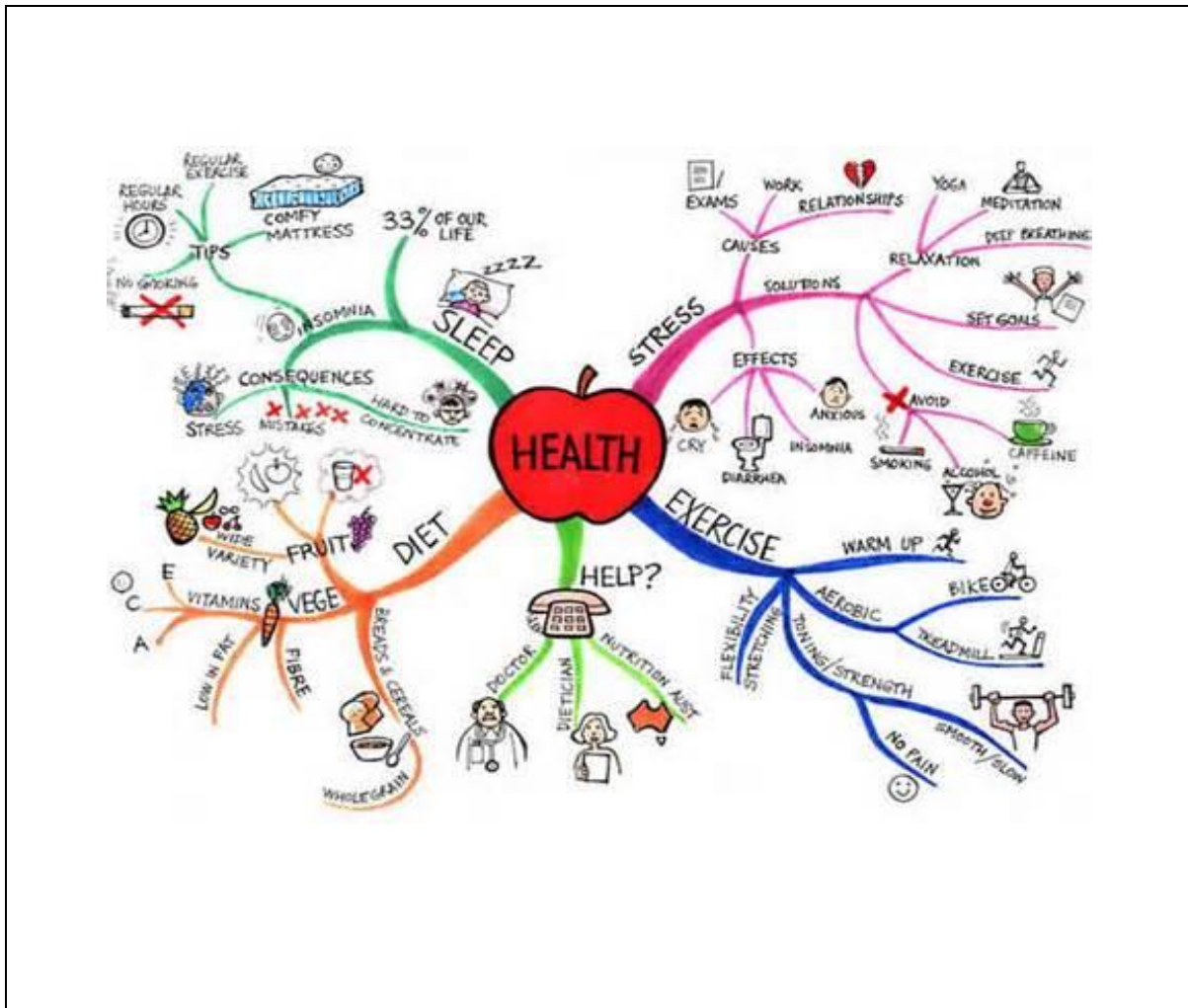
Such staff members need to be encouraged to become more of a yellow or green hat thinker i.e. be more positive or creative.

Issue: Two staff members who do not like to work together/do not get on	
De Bono Hat	Response
White (information known/needed – facts of the issue)	Staff members A.M and S.T. do not get on; will not work on same shift/same room
Red (feelings, hunches and intuition – your emotional response)	Frustrating, unfair on other staff; shift becomes difficult
Black (judgment - the devil's advocate or why something may not work – negative)	Tried talking to them before, it didn't work; tried insisting they get on, it didn't work
Yellow (brightness and optimism)	Look at the situation again to determine options; will think of other options/solutions
Green (creativity- the possibilities, alternatives and new ideas)	Possible solutions – external mediation; ensure the staff involved are always on opposite shifts; ask them to determine solutions
Blue (manages the thinking process, control)	Controls the thinking process through asking the right questions and ensuring goals and objectives are met/set

Other key factors which can support you in decision making and problem solving include:

- Clearly define the problem, identify possible solutions, analyse these solutions and decide which is the most suitable.
- Break it down – break the problem/decision issue down into smaller parts or its component parts. This will help you to see the problem/decision required in its entirety and thus ensure that key aspects are not omitted.
- Mindmap and spidergram - a mindmap is essentially a diagram which has organised notes in relation to the key points of the topic whereas a spidergram, while similar, will use key words, colour and images to highlight key points. Both tools are an invaluable way of documenting all your ideas in a visual display. Below are examples of a spidergram and a mindmap:





(Mindmap – Google Images)

- Brainstorm – Brainstorming involves eliciting everyone's perspective. Care should be taken to ensure that all relevant stakeholders get to have their say – in so doing, stronger personalities should not be permitted to dominate the proceedings, while quieter personalities should be encouraged to have their say. The above mindmapping or spidergrams can be useful ways of documenting the outcome of a brainstorming session.
- Compare to similar issues – perhaps a similar issue arose in the past and the solutions which worked then may be appropriate to this issue?

However, be mindful of the black hat thinking here, particularly where an issue was not resolved successfully before – perhaps the options selected in the previous unsuccessful incident were just not appropriate at that time. Perhaps the previous solution may need some tweaking to be more effective this time?

- Incubate the problem – sometimes it is best to ‘park’ the problem/decision making for a more appropriate time; perhaps staff need to ‘sleep on it’ for a little while to decide on the most agreeable solutions. Or perhaps the timing is just not right for any number of reasons. Whatever the reason, know that is perfectly acceptable to incubate a problem for a period of time – just ensure that it is not incubated indefinitely! Someone needs to take responsibility for bringing the decision/problem back to the table for consideration and therefore this must be clearly communicated to all involved.

## Activity:

Take some time to consider your current decision making/problem solving skills. Think of an example where you had to make a decision recently and complete the chart below:

What is the problem/decision to be made?	
What are the possible solutions?	
Which solution is the most suitable?	
Why?	

### 3. Setting Goals and Objectives

Goals (and objectives) are usually self-imposed targets but can also refer to the team/unit/organisational goals and objectives. Regardless of the ownership of the goals and objectives, it is crucial skill to be able set goals and objectives. In so doing, it is important to recognise that goals and objectives can be short, medium or long term.

There can typically be five types of goals as follows:

1. **ET Type.** Energy and Time allocation. ET implies the process of setting and tracking goals through the filters of how we allocate our time and energy.
2. **AS Type.** Achievements and Skills. “I want to speak Spanish fluently” or “I want to run a marathon”.
3. **IQ Type.** Internal Qualities. “I want to be more confident.” (TASK: specify what that means; create a scale.)
4. **MO Type.** Material Outcomes. “I want to have \$1 million dollars.” Or “I want to get a new car this year”.
5. **RQ Type.** Relationship Quality. “I want to have a better relationship with my father” or “I want to be regarded as a well-liked colleague at my company”. (TASK: paint a picture, of how that would look.)

*(Rousta, A. 2012)*

Goals and objectives are important as they not only measure and direct our performance, but they are also an important element of our personal and professional development. In identifying goals, we are motivating ourselves to move forwards, not just personally, but also professionally.

In achieving such goals and objectives we are boosting our self-esteem, we are enhancing our skill set and therefore we are continuously developing our personal and professional skill set. A useful checklist to help achieve such goals and objectives is to:

- Picture it – visualising the end result can be a powerful motivator.
- Tell someone – by telling someone you are committing yourself to the achievement of the goal/objective and are less likely to deviate from it if there is an expectancy that you will achieve it.
- Break it down – if the goal/objective is big, breaking it into smaller, more achievable chunks, can be beneficial.
- Date – putting a start and finish/completion date is essential as this helps to bound the goal/objective in a realistic, achievable timeframe and provides you with a concrete completion date.
- Be realistic – be realistic about the actual goal/objective and the logistics involved such as timeframe, requirements, resources required and available etc.
- Commit to it– you must commit yourself to achieving the goal/objective in order to successfully see it to completion; lack of commitment is not only a demotivator, but can often result in not meeting the full requirements of the goal/objective and lead to failure.

## Activity:

Do you set goals and more importantly, do you achieve your goals? Complete the chart below:

What was the goal/objective	Was it fully, partially or not achieved?	What helped the process?	What hindered the process?	What would you do differently next time?

## 4. Planning

Effective planning is an essential skill required for effective participation in the workplace. Effective planning is particularly important from an organisational – and therefore a management – perspective. Regardless of an individuals' position within the organisation, the following points are relevant in relation to planning.

Effective planning requires excellent time management skills and clear goals and objectives. Kolb's planning cycle of **Plan – Do – Review** is an effective tool for any planning process. Essentially, in this cycle you **plan** the task/activity with clear guidelines and objectives; **implement (do)** the plan and then **review** the plan to determine what worked and what requires development. Following review, any required changes are made and the cycle begins again.

Another useful tool for all individuals in relation to effective planning is the use of the **SMART** plan (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant and **T**imed).

- **Specific:** Objectives/Goals should be clear, specific and identify the Who? Why? What? and How? of the goal/objective.
- **Measurable:** Criteria for measuring the success of the goal must be clear. A common indicator is the completion of the goal though progress check points can be built in, such as levels achieved by a specific date.
- **Achievable:** It is imperative that the goal/objective is within your reach and/or the reach of the team. Setting objectives which are beyond reach can be demoralising and deter future attempts at achieving any goal.
- **Relevant:** The goal/objective must be relevant to the person/people responsible for carrying it through and be within the control of this person/these people.



Where the success of the goal/objective depends partly on the work of another, the goal/objective is not completely relevant and may ultimately fail.

- **Timed:** The goal/objective requires a clear time frame including both a clear start date and a clear end/completion date. A goal which does not have a specific start/finish date has the potential to be vague and left either un-started or unfinished.

## **Activity:**

Take some time to think of a recent occasion when you were required to plan an activity.

Use the SMART tool to outline the plan:

<b>Activity</b>	
<b>Specific</b>	
<b>Measurable</b>	
<b>Achievable</b>	
<b>Relevant</b>	
<b>Timed</b>	

## **5. Coping with Stress**

Stress and pressure has long since been a regular feature of working life. Modern times have seen an increase in this due to cutbacks and resultant staff shortages, as well as the general feeling of dis-contentment among many people due to the economic downturn.

Working in a busy childcare environment will undoubtedly bring its own stresses and being aware of the triggers for you is essential – remember stress can be quite subjective and what you find stressful may not be stressful for a colleague and vice-versa. In addition, what may be stressful one day, may not be stressful on another day.

Therefore, it is important that you know and understand what reduces your coping ability and what the potential stress triggers are for you. Common examples include lack of sleep, feeling unwell, too heavy a workload, poor time management, team working issues etc.

Becoming aware of what is stressful for you and what your triggers are is essential in the effective management of stress. Where stress goes unrecognised and therefore uncontrolled, your work will undoubtedly suffer, which will impact negatively on the children you work with and your colleagues. Feeling under pressure or stressed is a common, natural occurrence which everybody experiences. The following points will help you to manage your workplace stress and pressure:

### **A. Share the problem:**

Talk to a trusted colleague or your manager. Often just talking through an issue can be beneficial and may require no further action. However, if further action is required, talking it though will help you to devise solutions and formulate a plan to address the issue(s). Having such a mentor can be an invaluable source of support in your work.

**B. Know your limits:**

A key coping strategy for work pressure and stress is to know your limits. This applies to how much you can take on given your individual circumstances. For instance, some people can work full time, study part time and rear a family while for others, this could be impossible. It is essential to remember that everyone is different and people's ability to cope with stress and pressure is quite varied. Knowing how much you can take on is therefore essential.

Knowing your limits in relation to the tasks you undertake in work is also crucial. Can you adequately perform the task (along with your other duties) within your working hours i.e. additional administration duties? Are you sufficiently trained to undertake the task i.e. health and safety rep; first aid personnel? Many people feel they have to say yes to a new role or task. However, if you have any doubts, or indeed you discover after commencing the new task/role that you are in difficulty, then you need to speak to your manager.

Knowing your limits and seeking assistance when in difficulty show self-awareness and reflective practice at work and your manager will appreciate your honesty and practical approach.

**C. Effective Time Management:**

Perhaps one of the most important coping strategies for managing work pressure and stress is effective personal time management as previously discussed. If you need to, revisit this section again to refresh your mind on it.

## Activity:

Take some time to think about what causes stress in your life and complete the chart below:

Stress factor	Current coping strategy	What changes (if any) will you make to this coping strategy and why?

## **6. Budgeting**

A budget is an estimate of income and expenditure for a set period of time. It should therefore consider the expected income and expenditure over a given period. Disposable income i.e. the money available to spend, as well as any allocated income i.e. the money allocated to specific items, should be clearly documented.

The ability to plan and manage a budget is an essential skill, both from a personal and a professional perspective, for the individual as well as for the organisation. Your role will determine the level of input you have into budget decisions – again, the more responsibility involved in your role, the more input you potentially will have.

However, regardless of the level of input you have, an awareness of budget procedures is crucial, as well as an understanding of how best to manage resources to help maintain budget targets.

The following points explain some of the key factors in relation to effective budgeting:

- Determine income – you need to be clear on what your income will be and when this is due. For example, when do parents pay their fees – weekly or monthly?  
When is the ECCE subvention due?
- Calculate expenses – know what the running costs are; in this you need to include all outgoings including, though not limited to, staff wages, heating and lighting expenses, art and craft supplies, other miscellaneous items as required.
- Set your goal – what is your aim – to make a profit? To break even?
- Devise categories – set out the categories which your budget needs i.e. what are the different spending areas. Examples of categories include salaries, stationery, heat and light, travel, postage, office equipment, toys etc.

- List items per category – under each category, list the items that you would purchase/spend on.
- Keep totals – keep a record of income and expenditure, updating this regularly so you have a sound knowledge of the financial situation of the centre.
- Review regularly – regular reviews are essential as this will help you to identify any excess or unnecessary spending.

## Managing Your Budget

It is your responsibility to manage your budget effectively. Keep careful track of expenditures and regularly review your expenditure-to-date and projected future expenditure in each of your budget headings.

You may find as the year progresses that you need to transfer money between budget headings to reflect levels of expenditure that differ slightly from those you projected. An unexpected cost (e.g., having to cancel an event) can mean reassessing your budget or cutting back in other areas.

Effective budget management is achieved through maintaining accurate records, reviewing the budget on a regular basis, having systems in place to ensure expenses are authorised and necessary and integrating your budget management into the strategic and operational plans of the service.

Based on what you have read to date, take some time to reflect on the listed skills and complete the chart below. Consider your current skill set in relation to the listed skills and what you have learned about this – any new insights?

Did you discover a particular skill in which you excelled or need to develop? Are you happy with how you currently perform the different skills?

Consider what you might change in relation to the different skills – this does not mean that you are not performing well at a particular skill but that you may wish to do things differently in the future.

Skill	What have you learned about yourself in relation this skill?	What changes will you make in relation to this skill?
Time Management		
Problem solving		
Setting goals & objectives		
Planning		

<b>Coping with stress</b>		
<b>Budgeting</b>		

This unit provided an insight into the key skills required for effective participation in the workplace. You had the opportunity to explore your current situation in relation to these skills and by now you should have a good sense of the key skills you possess and areas in which you need to develop.

Remember, it is a good professional trait to be able to recognise an area or skill that requires development and to be able to formulate a plan of action to address that particular skill/area.

***End of Unit 2.***



## NOTES: