Apples and Peers

A report from the Community Food and Health (Scotland) Learning Account with Evaluation Support Scotland 2010-2011

Contents

'Made rocket science understandable' (Learning Account participant)

Summary

In 2009-10, Community Food and Health (Scotland) or CFHS established a 'Learning Account' with Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS). This proved to be an effective way to support community groups to develop their self-evaluation skills and was continued into 2010-11.

The **Learning Account** enables community food initiatives to access a range of evaluation training offered by ESS. This year 10 people from nine different organisations took part in four workshops between January and March 2011. The workshops were offered as part of ESS's open course programme.

The **intended outcomes** for this work were for projects to have:

1. Increased self-evaluation skills;
2. Improved self-evaluation practice in their organisations; and
3. Increased ability to explain the impact of their work and to use that evidence in reports.

Since 2009, three **additional themes** have been supported by the Account:

1. *Embedding learning* (enabling participants to share their learning with colleagues and what difference this has made for organisations).

2. *Creative evaluations for community food initiatives* (to make evaluation more appropriate and accessible for services and their users).

3. *Peer learning among participants* (making the most of participants' own experiences and perspectives).

Evidence from the **case studies** included in this report indicates that these outcomes and themes have all been achieved successfully through the learning account. In addition, an **unintended outcome** has also been achieved – participating organisations feel more confident to apply for funding.

Requiring applicants to **commit to sharing and embedding learning** within their organisations has been effective for:

o Recruiting a motivated cohort committed to applying learning.
o Accelerating the embedding of workshop learning into everyday practice.

Following up with previous Learning Account participants will help us understand the extent to which these positive outcomes have been sustained.

Background and purpose of report

In 2009-10, Community Food and Health Scotland (CFHS) established a 'Learning Account' with Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS). This proved to be an effective way to support community groups to develop their self-evaluation skills and was continued into 2010-11.

The Learning Account enables up to 12 community food initiatives to access a range of evaluation training offered by ESS, to increase their capacity to self-evaluate.

> **We hope that this report, developed from participants' own case studies from 2010/2011, will help share learning with community food initiatives across Scotland.**

About the participating organisations

Of the nine organisations that took part, the following six projects contributed case studies on which this report is based.

Biggar Youth Project is a small voluntary organisation set up in 1995 by parents concerned at the lack of activities for young people 11 to 18 years in Biggar and the surrounding area. They offer a variety of activities including Biggar Bytes – a lunchtime drop in cafe offering a range of healthy eating and drinks choices.

Balornock East Residents Association provides access to facilities, information and activities for local residents in the east Balornock area of Glasgow to enhance their training, education and employment opportunities. Activities include a café providing low cost snacks and meals and healthy cooking sessions.

Bounce Higher is part of the Social Outreach programme at St. Andrew's Parish Church, Bo'ness. The main aim of the family work is to support parenting by improving communication within families and working with children to increase their capabilities.

East Lothian Roots and Fruits is a community-based project that aims to engage with local people of all ages and promote the benefits of healthy eating through access to affordable fresh produce and education. Activities include food co-ops, cooking sessions, community gardening and health promotion activities.

The Disability Community is a voluntary organisation in the north of Glasgow which provides support to young people and adults with learning disabilities. The aim of their youth and children's work is to support young disabled people to integrate into the wider community and to be as independent as they can be. The youth club runs a weekly cooking session.

Edinburgh Community Food is about helping people enjoy delicious, fresh healthy food and making sure everyone in the city has access to a healthy diet. The project tackles health inequalities in low-income communities in Edinburgh through food and health development and promotion work.

Intended outcomes

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1. *Embedding learning* (enabling participants to share their learning with colleagues and what difference this has made for organisations).

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What we did: the Learning Account explained

Ten people from nine different organisations took part in four workshops between January and March 2011. 36 training places were taken up, out of a possible 40. The workshops were offered as part of ESS's open course programme, i.e. Learning Account participants took place alongside participants from other voluntary organisations.

The four workshops build core self-evaluation skills, from setting outcomes to writing reports as follows:

o What are My Outcomes (WAMO)
o Collecting Information to Report on Outcomes (CITRO)
o Using Creative Approaches to Evaluate your Project
o Telling My Story (Analysis and Reporting)

Outcomes: what was achieved?

Learning outcomes
Each workshop has its own learning outcomes. A summary of participant self-scoring against these is shown in Appendix 1. This shows that participants feel much more confident in their ability to set, evaluate and report on outcomes.

Programme outcomes
In addition to individual learning outcomes, the Learning Account had its own intended outcomes as listed in section 3 above. Participants were asked to report on these in short case studies at the end of the Learning Account. Six case studies have been received at the time of writing.

Representative quotes from these are used to illustrate each of the outcomes below:

Outcome One: Increased self-evaluation skills

'By the end of the final session I was confident that I had the skills not only to evaluate in a relevant way, but was able to present a report in an appropriate manner as well.' Biggar Youth Project

> *'Before the training I did feel that I was quite adept at evaluation, however since I feel much more confident.'* Balornock East Residents Association

'I have gained an invaluable insight into evaluation and I have the knowledge to develop a logical model for evaluation for the service.' The Disability Community

> *'We constantly apply for grants to develop the work that we do and also evaluate on a regular basis. Going on this course has given us more knowledge and skills to be able to do this work and will also save us a lot of time.'* East Lothian Roots and Fruits

'The skills I have learned have helped me to self-evaluate my project and will assist me to discover new things.' Edinburgh Community Food

Outcome Two: Improved self-evaluation practice in their organisations

'Talking through the learning with staff has made them more confident to use the bits of information that previously would not have made it into the evaluation process, for example measures of confidence such as eye contact or speaking up in groups'. Balornock East Residents Association

> *'As part of the training workshop the workers and volunteers helped create an evaluation tool which would be used by the young people at the end of every cooking session. It was decided the most effective tool would be a visual tool which the young people could understand utilising basic literacy skills.'* The Disability Community

'(I) have more ideas of what I can use for evaluation measures and what can and cannot be measured.' East Lothian Roots and Fruits

Outcome Three: Increased ability to explain the impact of their work and to use that evidence in reports.

'I immediately had to put my learning into practice as a couple of days after the course I had to prepare a report for a funder. Although it was a relatively short report, it was so much easier having the Weaver's Triangle and notes to refer to as I did it'. Biggar Youth Project

> *'Our end of project report (to another funder)…did the job, our project ended without any need for further checks or reports…It was reflected that our reporting on achievement of outcomes fitted theirs'.* Balornock East Residents Association

'The learning account training…will have a positive impact on the organisation. The support workers now have an understanding of what the organisation is thriving to achieve and they know they can contribute to the success of service delivery'. The Disability Community

Additional outcomes

As described above, the Learning Accounts were also intended to support the **embedding of learning**, **creative evaluation** and **peer learning**. Again, representative quotes from the case studies have been used to illustrate each of these themes below.

Theme: Embedding learning

> *'After the first week I was ready to explain to all around me who were nterested…colleagues and other local groups. (My colleague) had been extremely interested in the Evaluation Course and I had been sharing my learning with her after each module.'* Biggar Youth Project

'Meetings with youth workers have identified new indicators for outcomes and has helped them process both the importance of gathering information and their methods.' Balornock East Residents Association

> *'I have discussed evaluation in team meetings and during individual staff reviews…I allocated a training session for evaluation training…I believe the most effective way of sharing my knowledge and skills was to actively engage the staff and volunteers in developing user friendly evaluation tools.'* The Disability Community
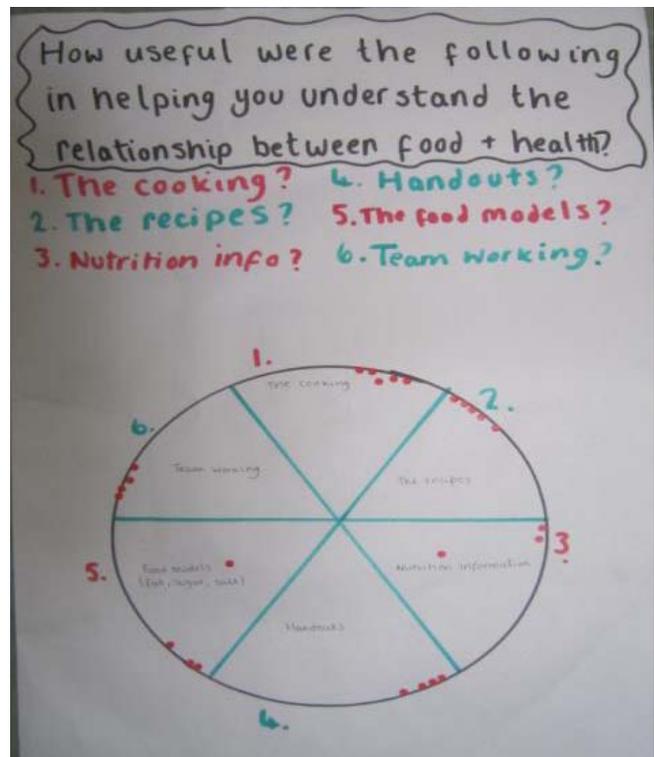
'We often work in partnership with individuals from other organisations when taking part in consultations; we will be able to share our experiences/skills with them'. East Lothian Roots and Fruits

> *'Since attending the Learning Account, we have been able to generate more informed and detailed discussion on this topic and we…have had the opportunity to share our newly gained knowledge with our colleagues'.* Edinburgh Community Food

Theme: Creative evaluations

> *'Some of the young people who were volunteering with us over the summer holidays created a colourful 'evaluation tree'. This in turn created a sense of ownership to the tree and the young people seemed to be the ones that were more conscientious of evaluation.'* Bounce Higher

An evaluation wheel created by Edinburgh Community Food

> *'I learned new (methods) that I think may make evaluation more interesting and may allow us to gain more information. We look forward to trying different techniques and seeing what suits our project the best'.* East Lothian Roots and Fruits

'The tool that was created was based on a self-generated map; the map was based on a seed to flower theme… As many of the disabled young people have limited literacy skills, traditional tools such as questionnaires were considered unsuitable…The young people are positive about evaluation and they have demonstrated an enthusiasm for starting the evaluation'. The Disability Community

> *'It has shown us new ways to chart and measure outcomes and individual indicators…and has taught more liberal methods of evaluation using non-verbal techniques. Talks with groups at our centre have highlighted how we can better use photographic evidence and a new camera has been purchased'.* Balornock East Residents Association

Theme: Peer learning among participants

'The opportunity to attend the courses not only allowed us to swap and share ideas with other organisations but to discuss and develop them with professional help from well skilled tutors.' Balornock East Residents Association

> *'A bonus was meeting so many other people from far and wide, from Edinburgh to Orkney and the networking that took place over break times. All in all it was a great experience.'* Biggar Youth Project

'(Practical workshops) allowed us to work out how to do the evaluation process and also work with other people in the group and share experiences, skills and knowledge'. East Lothian Roots and Fruits

Unintended outcomes

The case studies highlight one unintended outcome; participants feel more confident to apply for funding.

'During the course I took along a template that I was working on which had to be completed for our funding for NHS Lothian…I found this piece of work much easier having been on this course…The template has now been completed and passed by the NHS!' East Lothian Roots and Fruits

> *'It has already proved invaluable in my work not only with past funders, but in relation to funding applications.'* Biggar Youth Project

'I can testify to an easier grants process this time we achieved our Lloyds TSB funding. The application which I completed two years ago had to be revised…This time round our application was met with a short follow up telephone call and praise for choosing a set of outcomes that did not need to be reviewed'. Balornock East Residents Association

What can be learned?

1. The Learning Account approach has proved to be an effective way to support community groups to develop their self-evaluation skills and capacity.

2. Requiring applicants to commit to sharing and embedding learning within their organisations is relatively unusual but seems to be effective for:
   o Recruiting a motivated cohort committed to applying learning.
   o Maximising the impact of workshops.

3. On the above point, it is relatively unusual for organisations to make as much progress as the six case studies have from workshop participation alone. Sometimes further support (or time) is needed in order for workshop learning to be fully adapted to their individual contexts. In this case, participants are aware from the outset that they are required to share learning within their organisations. This appears to have accelerated the sharing and implementing of what has been learned.

4. While the evidence from the case studies shows learning is being applied and shared, it will be interesting to revisit participating organisations in future to find out to what extent these changes have been sustained.

5. Assuming learning has been sustained, it will be useful to explore what happens then; is evaluative learning improving organisation performance? Enhancing sustainability? Increasing engagement with policy and other stakeholders? We hope to continue to build up a bank of case studies that help to explore these questions.
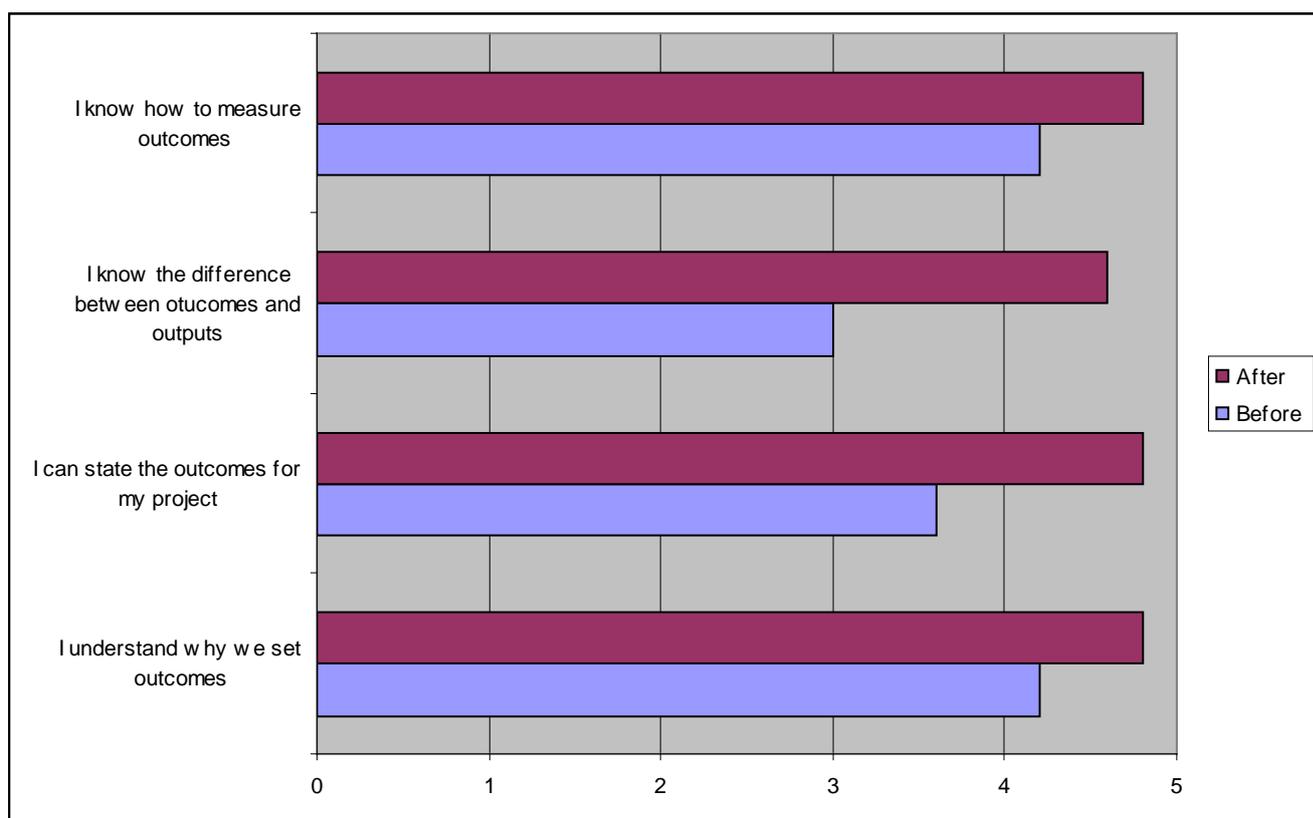
Appendix 1

Workshop learning outcomes

Each workshop has its own learning outcomes. Participants were asked to rate themselves against these before and after workshops. Results are given below for the workshops in which the participants took part.

What are My Outcomes?

Key: 1= 'I really need help with this', 5='I am pretty sure I know about this'.
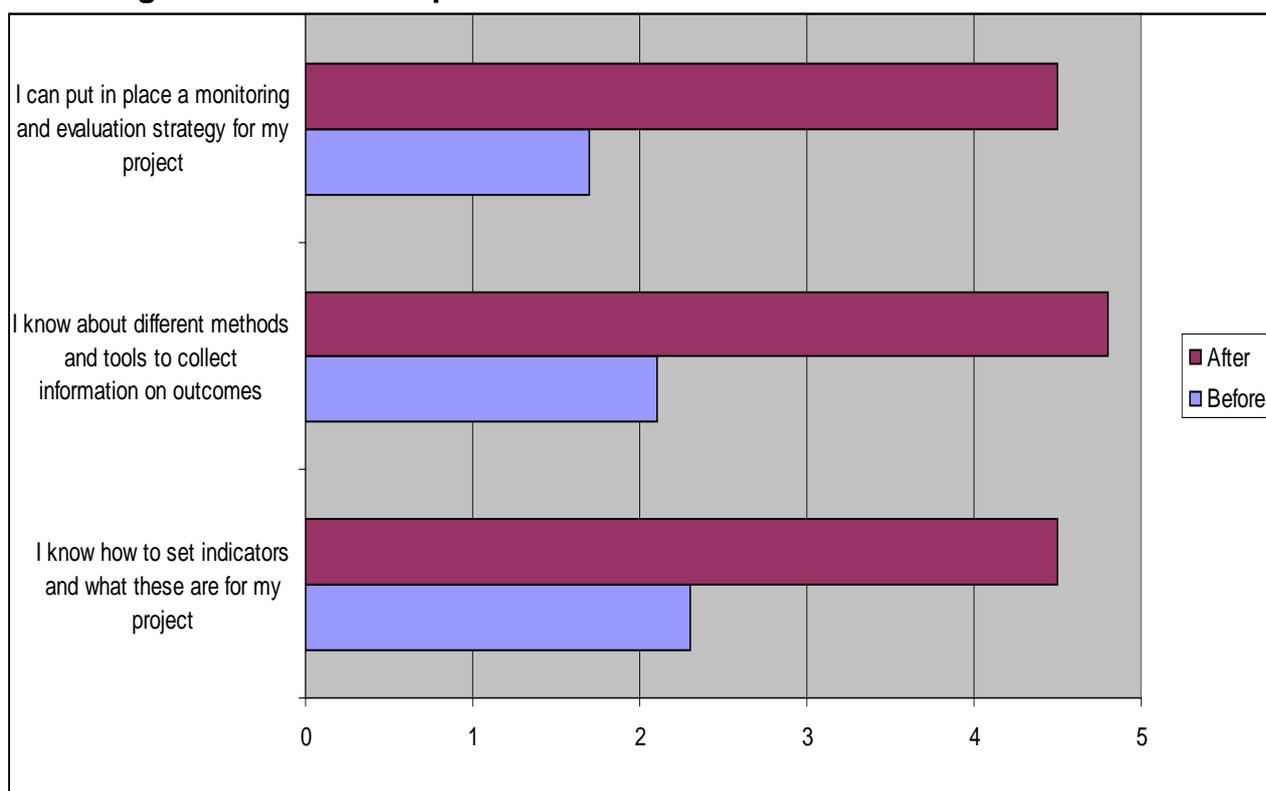
What participants said:

'There was a lot of discussion with peers which was beneficial. The learning was active which makes the course interesting and remarkable'

'Thank you for training very useful and valuable to take time out to re evaluate where I am to date.'

'Making evaluation more interesting; makes it easier to learn.'

'It was useful, relevant and I actually understand what I need to do in practice.'

## Collecting Information to Report on Outcomes

What participants said:

'(I will have) less duplication, more interesting methods, improved funding relationships.'

'(The best bit was) interactive exercises, size of group, using relevant examples (case study), info/skills gained on focus groups.'

'Made rocket science understandable'

Creative Approaches to Evaluate your Project
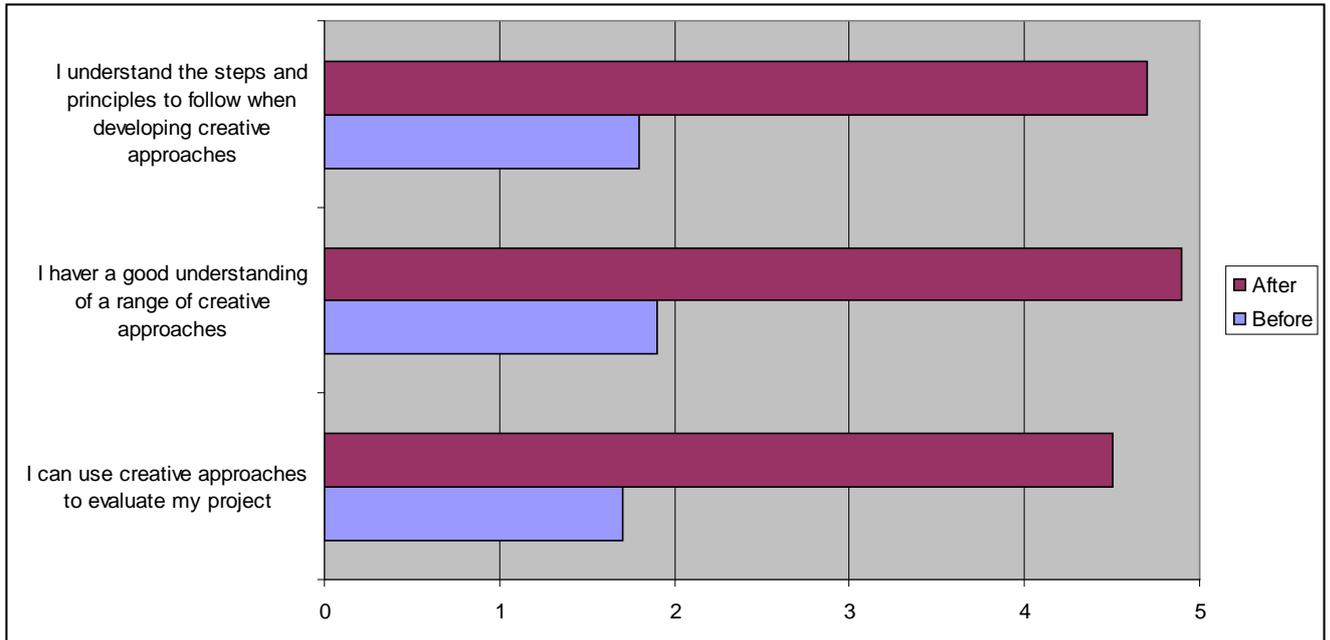
What participants said:

'(I will make) improvements to both funding applications and funding reports, policy implementation.'

'I've found this extremely useful and will use it to evaluate our current groups.'

'(The best bit was) the opportunity to share ideas with others and having time to spend on evaluation.'

'(I will) put it in to action straight away. I have been collecting information already so I would use this as well as the learning to determine future targets and hopefully use it to determine ways of reaching the people who really need it.'

'I plan to adapt some of the evaluation tools to meet the needs of the organisation, service and service users.'

'I need to come up with a new baseline evaluation (new project) and feel this will help a lot.'

Telling My Story (Analysis and Reporting)
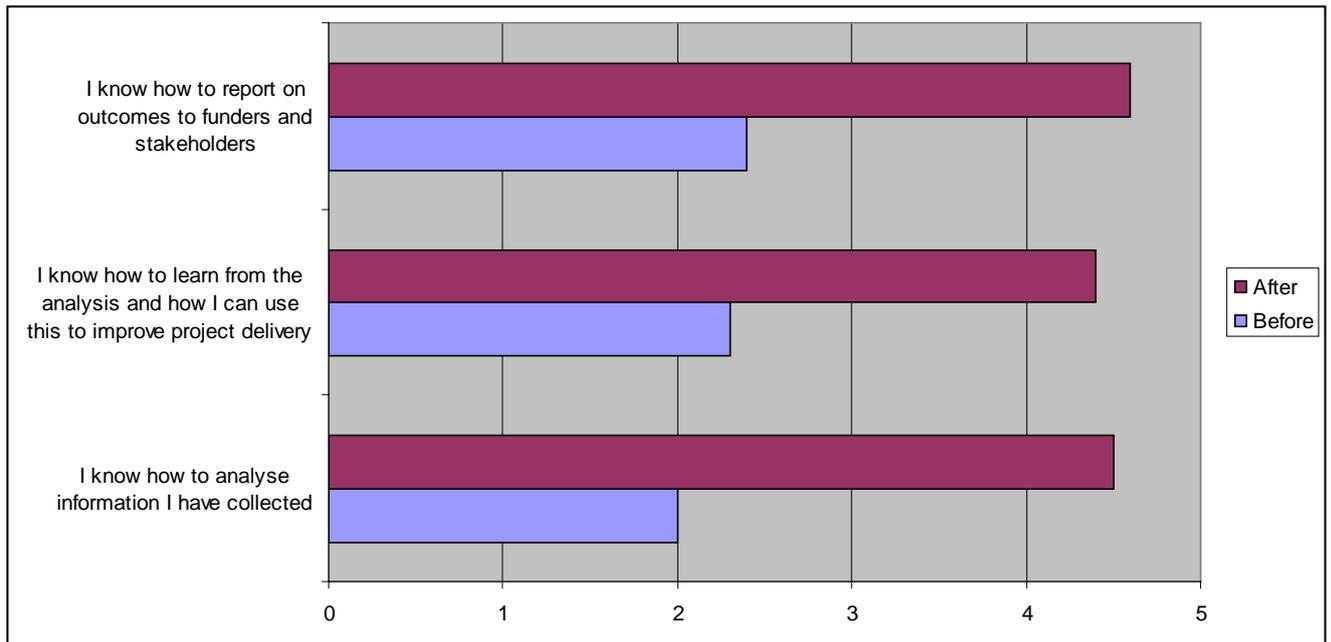
What participants said:

'(I will) use knowledge to approach report writing with less fear and dread.'

'Simply how useful and practical. I've something to work on and share with others at work.'

'The content was extremely useful and inspiring for 'telling my story'. The location, venue, is great. Training excellent.'

('The best bit was) looking at the reports to spot strengths and weaknesses to put into real life (visual) scenarios.'

'(The best bit was) clear, easy to understand way subject is taught. Exercises - examples of different reports.'