The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL)

July 2005

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Introduction

I) Purpose of guidelines

The purpose of these guidelines is to:

- provide guidance to learning providers across all post-16 education and training sectors in Scotland on managing the process of recognising the prior informal learning of learners within the context of the SCQF
- provide a set of core principles and key features that will enable users of the SCQF to have confidence that there is consistency in approaches to recognising prior informal learning
- Support the practice of recognising prior learning as part of the lifelong learning agenda in Scotland.

The term **prior informal learning** can also be described as **prior experiential learning**. It covers all prior learning which has not previously been assessed or credit-rated. This includes prior learning achieved through life and work experiences (paid and voluntary), as well as prior learning gained in non-formal contexts through community-based learning; workplace learning and training; continuing professional development and independent learning.

The guidelines focus on managing the process of recognising the prior informal learning of the learner. These guidelines do not cover the recognition or credit-rating of programmes of non-formal learning and training. However, the recognition of the learning gained by an individual as a result of undertaking non-formal, non-credit rated learning or training provision can be managed through the RPL process.

The guidelines are not prescriptive, but are intended to encourage a range of approaches to RPL across the sectors to take into account the needs and goals of different learner groups.

The guidelines are consistent with the SCQF Credit-rating Guidelines; the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Guidelines for the Accreditation of Prior Learning for Higher Education and European developments in RPL.

Developing effective mechanisms for recognising prior informal learning is an essential element of the successful implementation of the SCQF.

II) Development of the guidelines

In order to ensure the relevance and applicability of the guidelines across the different SCQF 'user groups', these draft guidelines are the outcome of a national debate on the recognition of prior informal learning. This debate was largely facilitated through sector-based workshops across Higher Education Institutions (HEIs); Scotland's Colleges (of further and higher education)and Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA); Community Learning and

Development (CLD); voluntary sector learning providers; workplace learning and training providers; and professional and statutory bodies[1].
An interactive discussion forum has also been established on the project website to continue the debate: www.scqf.org.uk/rpl

The key issues addressed during the debate emerged from a review of current RPL activity across the different sectors and an exploration of the potential for further development of RPL within the context of the SCQF. [2]

The guidelines were the subject of a consultation exercise across the different sectors. The guidelines will form part of the SCQF Handbook.

III) Scope of the Guidelines

The SCQF RPL guidelines centre on the core principles and key features of the RPL process within the context of the SCQF. The guidelines are learner-centred and recognise the continuum of learner needs. This continuum ranges from those learners not involved in a formal learning process who need support in developing their confidence before entering formal programmes or seeking SCQF credit, to those individuals who are confident as learners and who are actively seeking a means of recognition of their learning.

The core principles are intended to help learning providers develop further good practice in RPL. The key features are neither exhaustive nor prescriptive but are intended as guidance to learning providers in the development and operation of RPL processes.

In the guidelines there is a distinction between RPL for personal/career development and RPL for credit. This can also be defined as formative recognition and summative recognition respectively[3]. The formative recognition process, linked to personal/career development, may lead to summative recognition in the form of credit, or may be an end (or a beginning) in itself.

The section on RPL for personal/career development focuses on the process of enabling learners to make clearer connections between the learning they have already achieved and future learning opportunities. The SCQF can be used to support this process through the mapping, or a notional levelling, of

[1] For details of the key issues and main outcomes of the national debate on RPL see Whittaker,R *SCQF Recognition of Prior informal Learning (RPL) Project. Summary Report on SCQF RPL Workshops. April-June 2004* (SCQF, 2004). This report is available on the SCQF RPL website : www.scqf.org.uk/rpl

[2] For details of this review see Whittaker, R *SCQF. Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) Project. Interim Report* (SCQF 2004) This report is available on the SCQF RPL website : www.scqf.org.uk/rpl

[3] The distinction between formative and summative recognition, is made in the Commission of European Communities *'Draft Common Principles for the Validation of Non formal and Informal learning'* (EU, 2004). The final version of the common principles does not refer to this distinction, but it is implicit in the use of the terms 'identification' and 'validation' of non-formal and informal learning.

this learning in order to identify future potential learning pathways. Formative recognition, therefore, has both retrospective and prospective dimensions. Links should be established, where possible, between RPL and personal, or professional, development planning (PDP) across all sectors.

Processes such as reflection on experience, confidence-building, planning further self-development and identifying learning opportunities already take place within learning provision in the community (CLD); in colleges; in the voluntary sector; in the workplace and through careers guidance services. Linking these processes to the SCQF provides the opportunity to recognise the knowledge, skills and understanding gained through prior informal learning as well as facilitating the planning of further learning.

The section on RPL for credit reflects existing good practice in colleges and HEIs in terms of the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). The resource intensive nature of RPL is recognised and as such the guidelines encourage the use of existing tools for support and assessment, as well as the development of more innovative, less-resource-intensive approaches. On-line tools and group approaches should be considered as a means of complementing individual support.

All RPL activity requires resources and can be resource-intensive. Centrally - provided funding is necessary across all sectors in order to support RPL provision as part of the lifelong learning agenda in Scotland.

IV) Structure of the guidelines

Section One of the guidelines:

- defines the terms used in the guidelines
- considers the use of RPL within the context of the SCQF in terms of the different forms of recognition
- looks at the link between the different forms of recognition
- recognises the comparability between the outcomes of informal and formal learning
- highlights the range of learners who can undertake RPL
- Considers the benefits of RPL from the perspectives of learners, learning and training providers and employers.

Section Two defines the core principles underpinning effective and quality-assured RPL provision within the context of the SCQF. These core principles are the outcome of the national debate on RPL.

Section Three provides a diagram illustrating the learner's journey through RPL.

Sections Four and Five provide guidance on the processes of RPL for Personal and Career Development (formative recognition) and RPL for Credit (summative recognition) respectively. The guidance relates to purpose, possible outcomes, context of activity and key features. These sections are

written as stand alone sections and, therefore, there is repetition in terms of some of the key features which are common to both forms of recognition.

Section Four is aimed at learning providers developing and operating processes of formative recognition as part of a set of activities related to educational/career guidance; personal development planning; or in preparation for a process of summative recognition.

Section Five is aimed at learning providers which deliver SCQF credit-rated provision and are developing or operating processes of summative recognition, , leading to entry to, or credit within formal programmes within their organisation.

Section Six provides a glossary of key terms used in the guidelines.

1 SECTION ONE

Definitions, Use of RPL within the context of the SCQF, Benefits of RPL

1.1 Definitions

1.1.1 Definition of formal, non-formal and informal learning

The EU definition of the different types of learning, referred to in its Memorandum on Lifelong Learning[4], can be summarised as follows:

- **Formal learning** takes place within the context of programmes delivered by learning and training providers; is assessed and credit-rated; and leads to recognised qualifications;
- **Non-formal learning** takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training. It may be assessed but does not typically lead to formal certification, for example, learning and training activities undertaken in the workplace, voluntary sector or trade union and through community-based learning;
- **Informal learning** can be defined as experiential learning and takes place through life and work experiences. It is often unintentional learning. The learner may not recognise at the time of the experience that it contributed to the development of their skills and knowledge. This recognition may only happen retrospectively through the RPL process, unless the experiences take place as part of a planned experiential or work-based learning, programme.

While it is useful to differentiate between these different types of learning for the purposes of the guidelines, it is likely that an individual's learning experience will have a combination of formal, non-formal and informal aspects.[5]

The SCQF provides the opportunity for the recognition of all forms of learning.

1.1.2 Definition of prior informal learning

The term **prior informal learning** can also be described as **prior experiential learning**. It covers all prior learning which has not previously been assessed or credit-rated. This includes prior learning achieved through life and work experiences (paid and voluntary) , as well as prior learning gained in non-formal contexts through community-based learning; workplace learning and training; continuing professional development and independent learning.

The types of experiences through which prior informal learning can be gained include:

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[4] Commission of European Communities , 2000, *Memorandum of Lifelong Learning*, Commission Staff Working Paper, Brussels

[5] H. Colley, P. Hodkinson, J. Malcolm, 2003, *Informality and formality in learning*, Learning and skills Research Centre

- A particular piece of work, task or project undertaken at work, or through community or voluntary work, or through independent learning
- The experience of doing a particular job (paid or voluntary), or performing a particular role, over a period a time
- 'On-the -job' training, or being mentored
- A non-credit-rated educational or training course, undertaken in a community or workplace setting
- The experience of training, teaching or mentoring others, either formally or informally.

1.1.3 Definition of Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL)

The **Recognition of Prior Informal Learning** (RPL), is a process undertaken by learners, including adults considering returning to learning, that involves describing experiences, reflecting on those experiences, identifying the learning associated with the experiences, defining this learning in terms of statements of skills, knowledge and understanding and providing evidence of this learning. The role of the learning provider is to provide effective support to the learner in this process and to manage the process of recognition in a clear and consistent manner.

RPL can form part of various activities associated with personal /career development; educational/career guidance; and confidence-building, as well as assessment and credit-rating. RPL is valuable in terms of its potential prospective/diagnostic function, as well as its retrospective focus.

The term 'recognition' therefore has a broader scope than the term 'accreditation'. The **Accreditation of Prior Experiential learning (APEL)** is one form of recognition. Learning providers and receiving institutions may decide to use terms such as RUL/RUPL (Recognition of Prior Uncertificated Learning); RIPL (Recognition of Informal Prior Learning); RPEL (Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning) to indicate more clearly the type of prior learning with which this process is concerned**.**

1.2 Use of RPL within the context of the SCQF

1.2.1 Different forms of recognition

Recognition of prior informal learning can be undertaken by a learner for **personal and career development**, or to support the transition between informal and formal learning; or for **gaining credit** (for entry to and/or credit within formal programmes of study).

RPL for personal/career development focuses on ***formative*** recognition (supporting a continuing learning process through identifying a learning pathway)[6] . Formative recognition may result in a notional levelling of an individual's learning

[66] The distinction between formative and summative recognition, is made in the Commission of European Communities *'Draft Common Principles for the Validation of Non formal and Informal learning'* (EU, 2004).

within the context of the SCQF as part of an educational guidance or personal development planning process.

RPL for credit, , focuses on ***summative*** recognition (to gain entry to, or credit within, a formal programme of study). Summative recognition will involve a formal assessment of prior informal, or experiential, learning as part of the credit-rating process.

The provision of both forms of RPL should take place within the context of clearly defined quality assurance mechanisms.

It is important to ensure that a learner clearly understands the process and possible outcomes of both RPL routes before he or she makes the decision to proceed.

1.2.2 Link between the two forms of recognition

For some learners, the process of formative recognition may be a preparatory stage to summative recognition. The process of identifying learning through reflection and considering how evidence of this learning can be provided is common to both forms of recognition.

Some learners may not feel sufficiently confident or prepared to undertake a process of summative recognition directly. For others, the decision to undertake RPL for credit may only emerge after they have engaged in the process of formative recognition and identified a learning pathway.

Learning providers which deliver SCQF credit-rated provision may therefore adopt a two stage approach to RPL for learners, based on this distinction between formative and summative recognition.

Learning providers which deliver non-formal learning, within, for example, the voluntary sector, Community Learning and Development and workplace learning and training, may support learners in a process of formative recognition in order to prepare them to undertake a process of summative recognition at a receiving institution, i.e. a college or HEI, to gain entry to or credit within a formal programme at that institution. This type of RPL provision is likely to become increasingly prevalent across Scotland within the context of local learning strategies.

1.2.3 Recognising comparability between the outcomes of informal and formal learning

All RPL processes contain an element of reflection and identification of the learning gained through experiential or informal learning which can be related to:

- a set of core or subject-specific skills or national occupational standards within a community-based learning or workplace training context (for personal/career development) or;
- the core learning skills required to successfully undertake a programme of formal learning (for bridging to support the transition between informal and formal learning) or ;

- the entry requirements to a formal programme of study (for recognition for entry) or;
- the outcomes of a formal learning programme (for recognition for credit within a programme).

The key premise underlying RPL is that:

- recognition is given for learning, not for experience alone;
- the learning that is recognised should be transferable and not just context-specific;
- credit awarded as a result of RPL is of the same value as credit gained through formal learning.

This should be clearly understood by learners; learning providers; employers; and receiving institutions.

1.3 Who can undertake RPL?

RPL can be undertaken by a wide range of learners to help them either re-enter learning or as a contribution towards a programme of study, including:

- adults returning to education;
- unemployed people seeking recognition for skills gained through informal learning;
- people wanting to improve upon existing qualifications;
- those wanting to re-train or change careers;
- students at colleges and HEIs;
- people who have undertaken non-formal learning or training in the workplace or through community-based learning;
- people who have gained a range of skills and knowledge through volunteering or through activities or projects within their community;
- people who have been out of the education system for a long time and who may lack formal qualifications, as well as self- confidence as learners;
- people who have disabilities of some kind;
- minority ethnic groups; gypsy travellers; refugees and asylum seekers**;**
- school-aged students who have undertaken significant extra-curricular activities.

1.4 Benefits of RPL

1.4.1 Benefits for learners

- **Increased self-confidence**
  The process of reflection that the recognition of prior informal learning involves, as well as the promotion of the valuing of learning by self and others, often leads to increased self-confidence as a learner. This can enhance the motivation to continue learning

- **Preparation/planning for further learning and personal/ career development**

The process of RPL for personal/career development, or formative recognition, helps learners to:

- think about what they have achieved so far through their experiences in terms of strengths and skills
- map their learning onto the SCQF to identify a notional level
- think about their goals and what they need to do to achieve them,(for example join a vocational or academic programme at a college or HEI; do a training course; apply for or change jobs)
- consider their options and make decisions about the direction they wish to take in terms of further learning opportunities or career development
- ease the transition from informal to formal learning by enabling both them and others to value their achievements and to recognise the importance of their learning through experience
- develop their analytical and learning skills through the process of undertaking RPL itself
- Prepare them to make an RPL claim for credit to gain entry to, or credit within a programme of study at a college or university.

- **Gaining credit for prior informal learning**
  The process of RPL for credit, or summative recognitioncan help learners to:
  - gain general credit which is not related to a particular formal learning programme;
  - gain entry to a programme of study at a college or university (if they do not have the normal entry qualifications)
  - gain credit towards a programme of study and so allow them to join at a later level, shortening the period of study
  - gain credit within a programme of study they have already commenced.

1.4.2 Benefits for learning and training providers

Colleges and HEIs:

- **Increase access and widen participation for non-traditional learners**:
  - RPL can address the needs of mature learners and part-time students, by recognising alternative forms of entry requirements and shortening the period of study
  - Learners who have been guided in the identification of their skills and knowledge through an RPL process within the context of voluntary sector learning provision; work based learning, trade union learning and community learning and development which involved a notional levelling of their learning within the SCQF would be able to provide a record of that process to admissions staff in colleges and HEIs to support their application. This would assist admissions staff in reaching decisions about an applicants potential ability to successfully undertake the programme
  - By utilising a consistent, and recorded, approach to RPL for entry to or credit within a programme, decisions regarding entry and credit are more transparent

- RPL can support strategies of retention, guidance and learner support by identifying the needs of learners before entry.

- **Support development of learning partnerships**
  RPL processes linked to formative and summative recognition may require collaboration between learning providers across the different sectors in order to ensure the needs of the learner are most effectively met. The provision of RPL to learners across the different sectors may require the development of learning partnerships between colleges; HEIs; employers; professional and statutory bodies; and community learning and voluntary sector learning providers, as well as organisations such as Careers Scotland and Learn Direct Scotland. The community planning agenda will further increase this form of partnership, for example local learning strategy partnerships.

- **Links to personal development planning**
  RPL can be embedded within personal development planning processes and can help to make explicit the links between life, work and learning

- **Support developments in the area of learning and teaching**
  - The development of RPL processes can contribute to curriculum development in relation to the nature of learning, knowledge and assessment
  - RPL is integral to the development and operation of work-based learning programmes
  - RPL claims for credit are usually based on recent or current workplace practice which can provide a useful source of discussion material for learners within the context of a formal learning programme and can enhance their understanding of the connection between theory and practice.

Community Learning and Development; Voluntary sector learning providers; workplace learning and training providers; professional and statutory bodies; educational/career guidance providers

Activities related to RPL for personal/career development, or formative recognition, already take place within learning and training provision across the different sectors. Linking these processes to the SCQF can assist these learning providers to:

- **Support educational/career guidance to learners and identification of further learning opportunities**
  A notional 'levelling' of an individual's learning within the context of the SCQF through the process of formative recognition would assist the learning or training provider in providing guidance on ways in which the learner can use and build on their skills and knowledge in terms of further learning opportunities

- **Support learners in personal development planning and continuing professional development**

RPL processes can be integrated with existing systems for personal development planning within the context of the workplace; community learning and development and continuing professional development within the context of professional and statutory bodies

- **Support learners making the transition from informal and non-formal to formal learning**
  Notional levelling can form part of a pre-entry RPL service to learners who are making the transition from informal to formal learning, for example within a community learning partnership. Through RPL, links can be made between an individual's informal learning and other more formal types of learning. This can be achieved, for example through the identification of learning skills which can be transferred between different learning contexts. RPL can encourage a stronger sense of learner identity on the part of the individual and a greater understanding of the way in which he/she learns. This metacognitive development can produce more effective learning strategies which can be applied in further learning experiences whether non-formal or formal.

1.4.3 Benefits for employers

RPL can support training and staff development strategies of employers and voluntary organisations by:

- increasing motivation and interest in workplace practice on the part of the employee/learner
- reducing the amount of time needed to complete a qualification and therefore requiring less time away from the workplace
- generating new ideas and developments in the workplace as a result of process of reflection on practice by employee/learner
- Improve employee retention and reduce recruitment and training costs.

2 SECTION TWO

2.1 Core principles of RPL

A variety of different approaches to RPL can be developed and utilised by learning providers to meet the needs and goals of learner groups across the different sectors. All RPL provision, however, whether for personal/career development or for credit, should be underpinned by the following core principles. The aim of the core principles is to ensure effective, quality-assured practice that will enable all users of the SCQF to have confidence in the outcomes of RPL. By identifying core principles as the parameters within which all RPL provision within the context of the SCQF should operate consistency will be more feasibly achieved.
The core principles are the outcome of the national debate on RPL which was facilitated through the sector-based SCQF RPL workshops.

2.1.1 Learner-focussed

RPL should be a gateway, and not a barrier, to learning. RPL should promote the positive aspects of an individual's learning experience (as opposed to its deficiency). RPL should be a voluntary activity on the part of the learner. The learner's needs and reasons for recognition should be paramount.

2.1.2 Accessibility

RPL should be an accessible and inclusive process, applicable to all learners at all levels. Accessibility can be facilitated through:

- Initial information and advice (awareness raising);
- Manageable systems in terms of time and money from the perspective of both learner and learning provider;
- Easy to understand and easy to implement processes;
- Embedding of RPL in the programme design stage in order to become an integral part of college and HEI provision, rather than an 'add-on', marginal activity.

2.1.3 Flexibility

A range of different approaches to RPL in terms of both support and assessment should be encouraged to address the diversity of learner needs, goals and experiences across the different sectors.

2.1.4 Reliability, transparency & consistency

In managing RPL processes are necessary to ensure confidence in the outcomes.

2.1.5 Clarity of role definition

The roles and responsibilities of learner; learning provider; and receiving institution should be clearly defined. Staff involved in managing and supporting the RPL process should be provided with appropriate training and support.

2.1.6 Quality

RPL should be underpinned by Quality Assurance mechanisms. Moderation of RPL for personal and career development should focus on ensuring that the standards of notional levelling are consistently applied. Moderation of RPL for

credit should be integrated within existing quality assurance processes and should be available for scrutiny for appropriate external quality assurance, for example by an external auditing body.

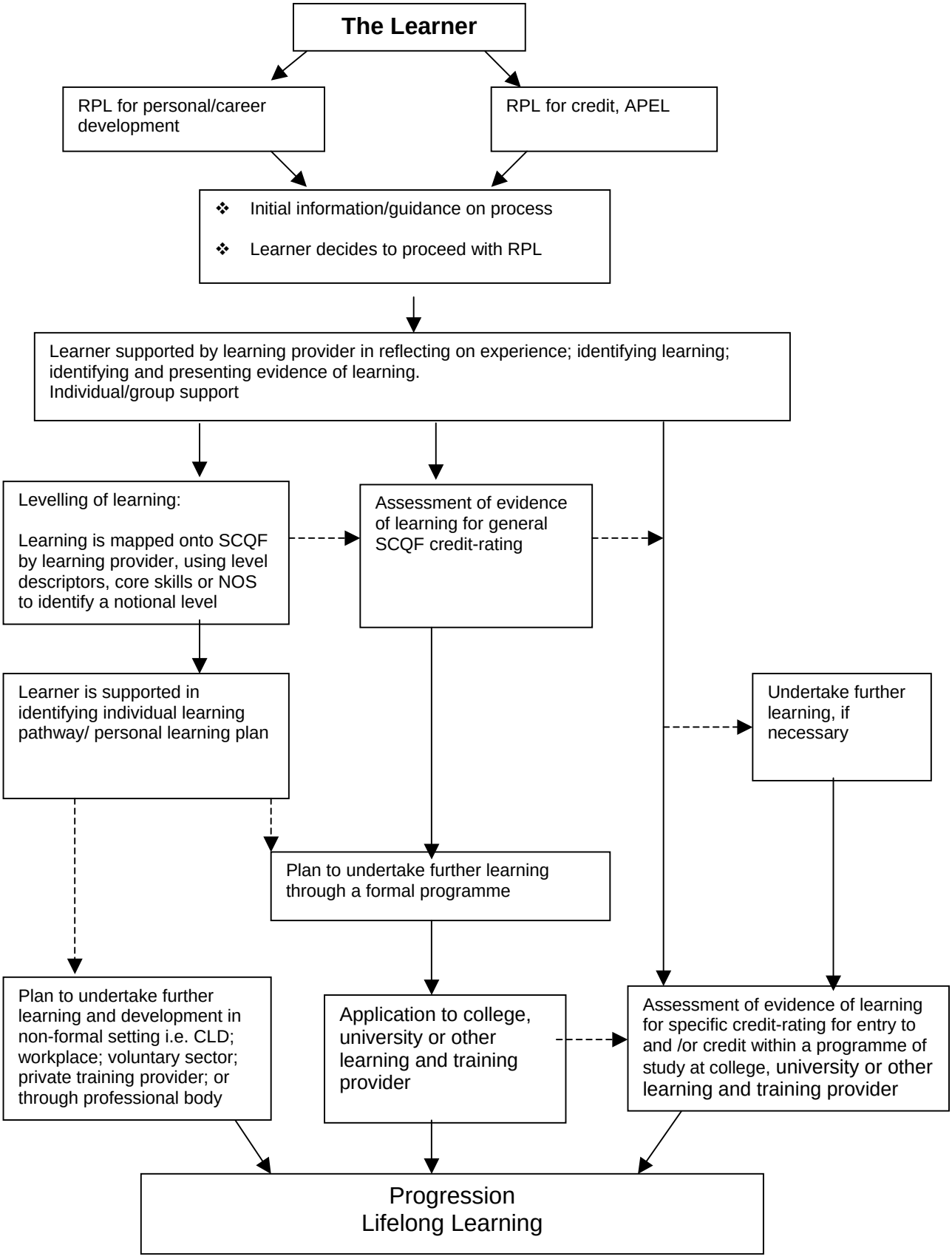
2.17 Collaboration

Collaboration between sectors should be encouraged in order to meet the needs of the learner more effectively. Links should be encouraged between learning providers and receiving institutions, and between these and organisations such as Careers Scotland, in supporting learners and potential learners to gain recognition for their prior informal learning within the context of the SCQF. Collaboration should extend to the sharing of case studies; examples of good practice; and approaches to support and assessment.

3 SECTION THREE

RPL: The Learners Journey.

Diagram indicating possible RPL routes for learners



4 SECTION FOUR

RPL for personal/career development (formative recognition)

4.1 Purpose, possible outcomes, context of activity, key features of the process

This section is aimed at learning providers developing and operating processes of formative recognition as part of activities related to educational/career guidance; personal development planning; or as preparation for a process of summative recognition, or RPL for Credit/

4.2 What is the purpose of RPL for personal/career development?

RPL activities, within both formal and non-formal settings, can be linked to the personal and career development of learners.

The RPL process enables learners to make clearer connections between the learning they have already achieved and future learning opportunities. The personal value of engaging in the RPL process in terms of confidence-building and promoting self-direction is a key outcome. The RPL process provides a basis for enhancing self-knowledge in a way which encourages personal development and prepares learners not only for further learning, but also for the labour market.

Whether this process leads to self-recognition of learning, or formative recognition as part of a programme for personal or career development, or for entry to a formal programme of study at a college or university, it can lead to greater self-confidence and higher self-esteem on the part of the learner.

By becoming more conscious of themselves as learners, the transition into more formal learning, if that is the direction the learner chooses to take, can become less intimidating. By developing a clearer understanding of the nature of his or her knowledge and skills the learner can make more informed decisions about the direction he or she wishes to take in terms of further learning, employment or community activity. By defining what he or she already knows or can do, an individual is better equipped to identify his or her goals and the steps he or she needs to take in order to achieve them.

The process may lead to a notional levelling of an individual's learning within the context of the SCQF in order to assist him/her in the planning of a learning pathway. As well as existing diagnostic tools, the SCQF generic level descriptors (possibly contextualised) can be used in the notional levelling of prior informal learning. Profiling against core skills or national occupational standards can be used as the focus for a formative process of recognition across all sectors/contexts. Unlike the award of credit, the outcome of notional levelling is not necessarily transferable between learning providers but is intended to be a useful form of guidance for the learner and can be a useful source of information to other learning providers, or to employers, about a learner's knowledge, skills and abilities.

4.3 Summary of possible outcomes

- Recognition by self, and by others (peers; colleagues; employer; community) of the value of strengths and skills gained through prior informal learning to increase learner self-confidence and motivation;

- A more supported transition from an informal to a formal learning context in a college, SQA-approved centre or university as part of a bridging process

- A mapping or notional levelling of an individual's learning within the context of the SCQF in order to help identify possible progression routes;

- Planning of individual learning pathway; personal/career development plan; or personal learning plan which will build on this learning in order to achieve goals;

- Preparation of RPL claims for either general credit or for specific credit to gain entry to, or credit within, a formal programme of study or qualification.

4.4 Where does, or could, such activity take place?

RPL processes aimed at personal/career development can take place within the context of:

- access programmes leading to entry to a programme of study within colleges or HEIs;
- programmes offered to individuals by colleges and other providers which are not designed for further progression but are an outcome in themselves;
- community-based learning provision offered by colleges and local authorities; community learning and development providers; and voluntary sector learning providers;
- adult literacy and numeracy learning provision;
- workplace learning programmes offered by such organisations as the Workers Educational Association (WEA);
- workplace learning and training provided by trade unions;
- continuing professional development supported by professional and statutory bodies;
- workplace learning and training for staff within statutory and private employing organisations;
- workplace learning and training for volunteers and paid staff within voluntary sector organisations;
- Educational and career guidance services provided by Careers Scotland.

This list is not exhaustive.

4.5 What does the process involve?

All stages of the process should be underpinned by the core principles, to ensure effective and quality-assured provision.

4.5.1 Key Features of RPL for personal/career development

Learning providers may need to consider the following key features when developing and operating processes of formative recognition**,** or RPL for personal/career development**:**

a. initial guidance on the RPL process;
b. supporting learners in the reflective process; identifying learning through experience (skills, knowledge and understanding); selecting and presenting evidence of that learning; identifying areas for further learning;
c. mapping learning within the context of the SCQF (notional levelling of learning)
d. identifying learning pathways;
e. RPL to support the transition between non-formal learning contexts and formal learning
f. monitoring process for RPL procedures
g. support for staff engaged in the support and assessment of RPL
H. integration of provision within quality assurance systems

4.6 Additional Guidance Notes on Key Features

The following additional guidance notes may be helpful to learning providers in considering the key features of the RPL process:

4.6.1 Initial guidance on the RPL process

Learners, or adults considering returning to learn, should be given preliminary information and guidance on RPL in terms of the principles, policy, procedures and any cost involved. The learning provider should ensure a learner clearly understands each stage of the process and has realistic expectations regarding the possible outcomes of RPL before he or she makes the decision to undertake RPL. Such information should be provided in written or electronic form, as well as through discussion. This information should be clear, accurate and accessible.

If the learner decides to proceed with RPL, the learning provider should organise appropriate support for the RPL process.

4.6.2 Supporting learners in identifying or providing evidence of learning

Each stage of the RPL process should be clearly defined and appropriate support provided at each stage.

Support for the RPL process includes:

- Helping to identify learning experiences;
- Helping to develop the skills necessary for reflection on those experiences;
- Helping to identify and express the learning achieved as outcomes or competences, which can be learner-defined in relation to the notion of ‘distance travelled’ or externally-defined through, for example core skills or national occupational standards ;
- Helping to identify the transferability of the skills, knowledge and understanding gained through prior informal learning;

- Helping to identify and select evidence of learning;
- Helping to identify areas for further learning and development;
- Advising on way in which to present evidence of learning.

Support can be provided through a combination of **:**

- **Written or e- learning materials,** such as guides; workbooks; self-study materials; existing or specially devised self-evaluation or diagnostic tools; personal or professional development planning tools; individual and group reflective exercises; or exemplar RPL claims;

- **Individual tutorials/meetings** which provide focussed guidance in relation to a learner's individual RPL claim**;**

- **Group sessions** which can range from those which are informal meetings of learners as part of a process to encourage peer group support to those which are highly structured, task-based and tutor-led, possibly as part of a wider programme of learning. Group approaches to RPL support make better use of limited resources and often provide a more positive, less isolating experience of RPL for learners.

- **Electronic communication**, such as email; on-line discussion fora; audio and video conferencing, between the learner and the RPL tutor or advisor and between the learner and other learners , can form an integral part of both group and individual support. Electronic communication can be a more flexible means of both seeking and providing support at a time, pace and place that suits both learner and tutor.

  If appropriate, collaborative arrangements for support can be agreed between learning providers; employers and voluntary organisations; and other organisations such as Careers Scotland.

  Support must be provided by staff that are appropriately trained, supported and resourced to carry out this role.

4.6.3 Gathering and Presenting Evidence of Learning

Evidence of learning can be gathered through a variety of different mechanisms. Where possible, more streamlined, less resource-intensive approaches should be used to make the process more manageable for learner and provider. These mechanisms can include:

- **Reflective Account;**
- **Project work;**
- **Structured Interview/oral evidence;**
- **Observation of practice/simulation.**
- **Europass Curriculum Vitae (CV)**
- **Existing work-based learning practices in evaluation and assessment**
- **Profiling**
- **Record of Volunteer Learning and Experience**

- **Portfolio**

Learners should be provided with guidance on the approach used to evidence their learning and supported in the gathering or production of this evidence. If a learner is undertaking formative recognition in order to identify an individual learning pathway (rather than seeking the award of credit), the process does not require a formal assessment of learning to take place. However, if the learner is undertaking formative recognition as a preparatory stage to summative recognition , the evidence gathered may be submitted for formal assessment at some future point. The appropriate mechanism for the gathering of evidence should therefore be determined in terms of the needs and goals of the learner and the context in which RPL for personal and career development is taking place.

Reflective Account: this can be produced by a learner, with appropriate support, to demonstrate the process and outcomes of reflection on his or her experience. This approach enables the learner to make clear connections between his or her experiences and the learning which has resulted.

Project work: this can demonstrate a learner's prior informal learning if he or she has undertaken a particular work-related or community-based activity, or a project through independent study.

Structured Interview/oral evidence: a learner can provide oral evidence of their prior informal learning through a structured interview. This can provide a good opportunity for the learner to provide further clarification on the nature and outcomes of their prior informal learning and to discuss their goals in terms of further learning and development. The interviewer should record the key points discussed in the interview, so that the process is transparent. An interview schedule or proforma should be developed and used by learning providers to ensure consistency. This proforma can be made available to the learner in advance to enable them to prepare for the interview.

Observation of practice/simulation: direct observation of a learner's skills, knowledge and understanding can take place in a particular context such as the workplace. If the learner does not have the opportunity through his/her workplace practice to demonstrate particular skills and knowledge, a simulation or role play may be used.

Europass curriculum vitae (CV)[7]: the Europass CV is the backbone of the Europass framework and in its electronic form can be linked to other Europass documents such as the Europass Language Passport and to the Diploma or Certificate supplement, for higher education and vocational education respectively. The Europass CV includes categories for the presentation of

[7] The development of Europass (a single framework for transparency of qualifications) will 'link separate documents aimed at the transparency of qualifications and competences into a single framework in the form of a structured portfolio of documents known as 'Europass'' ,Commission of European Communities (December 2003) *Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a single framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass.)* Details of the Europass CV and Europass Language Passport can be found on the Europass website: http://europass.cedefop.eu.int

information on language proficiency, work experience and education and training achievements as well as additional competences held by the learner in relation to technical, organisational, artistic and social skills. The Europass CV, and other extended CV formats, can be used as evidence of prior informal learning as part of a portfolio or to underpin a structured interview/oral assessment.

Existing work-based learning practices in evaluation and assessment such as workplace appraisal or professional development processes can be drawn upon as sources of evidence for RPL claims. This also includes those assessment methods used for SVQs.

Profiling is a paper-based or on-line tool used within workplace learning and training to enable workers to identify their existing skills and knowledge against national occupational standards (NOS); existing qualifications or units, such as SVQs. This process generates an action plan to meet any gaps in skills and knowledge. Profiling can be an effective RPL mechanism within the workplace.

Record of Volunteer Learning and Experience is used within workplace learning and training in the voluntary sector and encourages individuals to collect and maintain a record of informal learning to identify how and where they learn through volunteering. It can be used by learning providers to identify where learning occurs and could be utilised as transferable evidence for an RPL claim.

Portfolio: this term refers to a collection of materials which has been compiled by a learner to demonstrate what he or she has learnt.

The portfolio route for an RPL claim enables the learner to decide which learning experiences to draw upon and the particular pieces of evidence he or she will compile to demonstrate the learning outcomes or competences. Evidence can include direct evidence, which is material the learner produced at the time of the experience; reflective evidence, such as reflective accounts; and 'third party' evidence, such as references or testimonials from employers; tutors; colleagues and/or peers.

The process of compiling a portfolio can be highly rewarding, but is often resource-intensive. The learner requires detailed guidance on how to put together a portfolio, and in particular on the nature, range and volume of evidence required to demonstrate the learning.

Learners should be encouraged to reduce the volume of evidence by being selective in their choice of evidence and to cross reference evidence to more than one learning outcome or competence so that the process of compiling a portfolio becomes a more manageable exercise.

4.6.4 Shared responsibility for evidence-gathering

The responsibility of providing evidence of prior informal learning can be shared between learner and learning provider. By recording the learning achieved in a non-formal programme in a format that could be presented by the learner at some future point as a source of evidence to a receiving institution, learning providers can facilitate the process of RPL for credit.

4.6.5 Mapping learning within the context of SCQF: Notional Levelling of learning

A learner can be guided to define his or her own outcomes of their prior informal, or experiential, learning either in relation to the notion of 'distance travelled' or in terms of externally defined learning outcomes or competences, utilising, for example, those contained within core skills units/ modules or national occupational standards.

Allocation of a notional level to these learning outcomes is a matter of professional judgement, utilising relevant reference points such as the SCQF generic level descriptors. These 'set out the characteristic generic outcomes of each level. They are intended to provide a general shared understanding of each level and to allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning at different levels'[8]

If the outcomes or competences are learner-defined, the SCQF level descriptors should be used to guide the learning provider in mapping the learner's learning onto the SCQF in order to determine a notional level. Guidance on ascribing an SCQF level to defined learning outcomes is provided in the SCQF Credit-Rating Guidelines[9].

Each of the twelve levels within the SCQF has a descriptor defined in terms of a range of general outcomes that are characteristic of that particular level. The outcomes are listed under five broad headings:

- Knowledge and understanding
- Practice (applied knowledge and understanding)
- Generic cognitive skills such as evaluation and critical analysis
- Communication, numeracy and IT skills
- Autonomy, accountability and working with others.

Increases in level of demand relate to factors such as

- Complexity and depth of knowledge and understanding
- Links to academic, vocational or professional practice
- The degree of integration, independence and creativity required
- The range and sophistication of application or practice
- The roles taken in relation to other learners/workers in carrying out tasks.

If the outcomes are externally defined and contained within core skills units/modules, for example, an SCQF level may already have been determined for this learning and this will be used in the notional levelling of an individual's learning.

The tailoring of SCQF level descriptors within the context of different sectors may assist learning providers to carry out this levelling process, and would facilitate the levelling of specific knowledge and skills, as well as generic skills.

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[8] SCQF *An introduction to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (SCQF, 2001)

[9] The SCQF Guidelines on Credit–Rating are available in the downloads section of the SCQF website : www.scqf.org.uk

The outcome of the notional levelling process should be recorded and documented by the learning provider in the form of a profile which belongs to the learner. This is to ensure that the notional levelling process and outcome is transparent and can be clearly understood by other learning providers; receiving organisations, or employers. A standardised format for this profile which is transferable and recognisable across different sectors would be a useful development.

4.6.6 Identifying learning pathways

Locating an individual's learning on the SCQF in terms of a notional level enables the learner to identify possible progression routes, in order to build on that learning. Progression routes might include a formal learning programme at the appropriate level at a college, other SQA-approved centre, or HEI, or a non-formal learning programme within a workplace or community-based setting.

The outcomes of the notional levelling of learning can be used by a learner to support an application to undertake a programme at a college or HEI, workplace learning or training programme or a programme of continuing professional development.

The formative recognition that is the outcome of RPL for personal/career development can also prepare a learner to undertake a process of summative recognition, or RPL for credit. The process of reflection, identifying learning and gathering evidence of learning is common to both forms of recognition.

4.6.7 RPL to support transition between non-formal learning contexts and formal learning

RPL can be linked to further learning opportunities in terms of bridging activities to ease the transition between informal and formal learning. The focus of RPL in this context is in the identification, and further development, of core learning skills gained through prior informal learning which can be transferred to more formal learning contexts.

This activity can be integrated within developments and programmes concerned with bridging and learner support and guidance.

The transition stage can be at various points of a learning pathway: the transition between informal and non-formal learning and training; or between informal /non-formal and formal learning at a college or HEI.

4.6.8 Monitoring process for RPL procedures

The process of monitoring and reviewing the operation of RPL procedures should be clearly defined and integrated within existing quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms of the learning provider.

Mechanisms for monitoring and reviewing RPL procedures may take into account :

- the number of learners undertaking RPL
- an evaluation of the learner experience, including the time taken by learners to undertake RPL process
- an evaluation of the staff experience, including the time spent by staff in supporting the RPL process and managing the process of recognition
- a tracking of progression routes of learners who have undertaken RPL

- an evaluation of the effectiveness of any collaborative arrangements with other learning providers /learning partnerships/receiving institutions.

4.6.9 Support for staff engaged in support and assessment of RPL

Staff involved in the planning, development and operation of RPL procedures need to be provided with training, and continuing support for this role. This requires adequate resources.

The roles and responsibilities of both staff and learners in the RPL process need to be clearly defined.

4.6.10 Integration of provision within quality assurance systems

RPL processes relating to learner support, recognition, notional levelling, guidance on further learning and development and monitoring need to be fully integrated within organisational quality assurance systems to ensure transparency, consistency and reliability.

5 SECTION FIVE

RPL for credit (summative recognition)

5.1 Purpose, possible outcomes, context of activity, key features of the process

This section is aimed at learning providers which deliver SCQF credit-rated provision and which are developing or operating processes of summative recognition, or RPL for Credit/, leading to entry to, or credit within formal programmes within their organisation

5.1.1 What is the purpose of RPL for credit?

RPL for credit, , is the assessment and formal recognition of any non-assessed, non-credit-rated learning achieved by a learner prior to the point of undertaking a particular programme of formal learning.

A learner can undertake RPL to seek entry to a programme of study at a college or HEI if they do not have the normal entry requirements, but can demonstrate that they have achieved the prerequisite skills and knowledge through their experience, or informal learning.

A learner can also use RPL to gain credit within a programme of study at a college or HEI, or towards a Scottish Vocational Qualification**.** Credit can be gained for a unit (s) or module (s) within a programme of study/qualification or for an entire level(s) of a qualification to enable a learner to enter a programme with 'advanced standing', i.e. entering a programme later than the normal start point. Credit may also be gained within a programme after the commencement of that programme.

5.1.2 General and specific credit

The distinction between general and specific credit becomes important when a learner wishes to use SCQF credit gained through RPL in relation to a particular programme of study.

General credit is awarded for prior informal learning without any reference to a specific programme of study. General credit is assigned within particular levels of the SCQF.

Specific credit is given for prior learning in relation to a specific programme of formal learning. If a learner can demonstrate that she has achieved learning which is equivalent to the outcomes of a unit, module or entire level of programme, specific credit can be awarded for this learning. This could result in the learner gaining credit within his/her programme of study.

5.2 Summary of possible outcomes

- **Entry to the first level of a programme at a college or HEI** (as an alternative to normal entry requirements if the learner can demonstrate appropriate knowledge and skills equivalent to the admissions requirements)

  General SCQF credit (this could be a intermediate stage between RPL for personal and career development (formative recognition) and RPL for specific credit (summative recognition) , or could be an outcome in its own right**.**

- **Specific credit within a programme of study at a college, other SQA-approved centre or HEI** (credit can either be for particular units/modules; or for entire levels of a programme.

5.1.3 Where does, or could, such activity take place?

RPL for credit is provided by learning providers which deliver SCQF credit-rated provision.

The SQA and HEIs can award a general SCQF credit-rating and, from 2005-2006, colleges can credit-rate their own provision within the SCQF.

The amount of specific credit a learner can be awarded within a particular programme is determined by the receiving institution or organisation which provides SCQF-credit-rated provision.

5.1.4 What does the process involve?

All stages of the process should be underpinned by the core principles, to ensure effective and quality-assured provision.

In cases where learners are undertaking a process of RPL for credit the principles of reflection and identification of learning are similiar to those underpinning RPL for personal and career development However, this process requires a formal assessment of the learning to take place for the purposes of credit-rating.

Existing RPL processes within colleges, other SQA-approved centres and HEIs can be potentially less resource intensive by utilising models which provide more structured guidance to the learner on the type of evidence that is required for their RPL claim, and which utilise group approaches to learner support rather than solely individualised tuition. Self-evaluation and the use of e-learning tools should also be considered as methods to complement the support and assessment provided by staff. The integration of RPL processes within Personal Development Planning (PDP) approaches, and other tools to assist reflective learning, should also be considered.

5.2 Key Features of RPL for credit

Learning providers may need to consider the following key features when developing and operating processes of summative recognition**,** or RPL for credit

a. initial guidance on the RPL process
b. supporting learners in reflective process, identifying learning through experience (skills, knowledge and understanding), selecting and presenting evidence of that learning, identifying areas for further learning**)**
c. gathering and presenting evidence of learning
d. assessment process for RPL claims
e. credit limits for RPL within formal programmes of study
f. fee process for RPL claims
g. monitoring process for RPL procedures
h. support for staff engaged in support and assessment of RPL
i. integration of provision within quality assurance systems

5.2.1 Additional Guidance Notes on Key Features

The following additional guidance notes may be helpful to learning providers in considering the key features of the RPL process:

5.2.1.1 Initial guidance on the RPL process

Learners, or adults considering returning to learn, should be given preliminary information and guidance on RPL in terms of the principles, policy, procedures and any cost involved. The learning provider should ensure a learner clearly understands each stage of the process and has realistic expectations regarding the possible outcomes of RPL before he or she makes the decision to undertake RPL. Such information should be provided in written or electronic form, as well as through discussion. This information should be clear, accurate and accessible.

If the learner decides to proceed with RPL, the learning provider should organise appropriate support for the RPL process.

5.2.1.2 Supporting learners in identifying or providing evidence of learning

Each stage of the RPL process should be clearly defined and appropriate support provided for each stage.

Learners making a claim for RPL for credit will require support for the RPL process itself, as well as support in the subject, vocational or professional area in which they are making the RPL claim.

Support for the RPL process includes:

- Helping to identify learning experiences
- Helping to develop the skills necessary for reflection on those experiences
- Helping to identify and express the learning achieved as outcomes or competences, which can be related to those within units/modules or programmes
- Helping to identify the transferability of the skills, knowledge and understanding gained through prior informal learning
- Helping to identify and select evidence of learning
- Helping to identify areas for further learning and development
- Advising on way in which to present evidence of learning

- Providing feedback on the presentation of the RPL claim.

Support in the subject, vocational or professional area includes:

- Advising if the prior informal learning is likely to be at the appropriate level for the purposes of the claim
- Clarifying outcomes of competences within units/modules or programmes and/or agreeing the learner's own outcomes or competences
- Advising on the structure of the submission and criteria for assessment
- Advising on which types of evidence are appropriate to the learning outcomes or competences
- Advising on the level of analysis, or integration of relevant theory, required in the submission
- Advising on the way in which any further learning or development required to supplement the claim can be undertaken
- Providing feedback on draft submissions where appropriate.

Support can be provided through**:**

- **Written or e-learning materials**, such as guides; workbooks; self-study materials; existing or specially devised self-evaluation or diagnostic tools; personal or professional development planning tools individual and group reflective exercises; RPL literature ; exemplar RPL claims;

- **Individual tutorials/meetings** which provide focussed guidance in relation to a learner's individual RPL claim;

- **Group sessions** which can range from those which are informal meetings of learners as part of a process to encourage peer group support to those which are highly structured, task-based and tutor-led, possibly as part of a wider programme of learning, or an RPL unit/module. Group approaches to RPL support make better use of limited resources and often provide a more positive, less isolating experience of RPL for learners.

- **Electronic communication**, such as email; on-line discussion fora; audio and video conferencing, between the learner and staff supporting him or her and between the learner and other learners can form an integral part of both group and individual support. Electronic communication can be a more flexible means of both seeking and providing support at a time, pace and place that suits both learner and staff.

  If appropriate, collaborative arrangements for support can be agreed between learning providers; employers and voluntary organisations; and other organisations such as Careers Scotland.

  Support must be provided by staff that are appropriately trained, supported and resourced to carry out this role. Organisations should determine whether the support and recognition process is a centralised or devolved function, or whether a combined approach of central coordination with devolved support and

recognition is most appropriate. Decisions on operational management will be determined by the most efficient deployment of resources and the provision of an effective, quality assured process to learners.

5.2.1.3 Gathering and Presenting Evidence of Learning

Clear mechanisms for making RPL claims must be in place. Evidence of learning can be gathered through a variety of different mechanisms. Where possible, more streamlined, less resource intensive approaches should be used to make the process more manageable for both learner and provider The following mechanisms provide an indication of the range of approaches being used, but do not represent an exhaustive list. .

- **Reflective Account;**
- **Project work;**
- **Interview/oral assessment;**
- **'Assessment on demand', such as exam or assignment;**
- **Simulation/observation of practice**
- **Mapping of learning outcomes**
- **Existing work-based learning practices in evaluation and assessment**
- **Profiling**
- **Record of Volunteer Learning and Experience**
- **Europass Curriculum Vitae (CV)**
- **Portfolio**

Learners should be provided with guidance on the mechanism(s) to be used to evidence their learning and should be supported in the gathering or production of this evidence.

Reflective Account: this can be produced by a learner, with appropriate support, to demonstrate the process and outcomes of reflection on his or her experience. This approach enables a learner to make clear connections between his or her experiences and the learning which has resulted.

Project work: this can demonstrate a learner's prior informal learning if he or she has undertaken a particular work-related or community-based activity, or a project through independent study

Structured Interview/oral assessment: a learner can be interviewed as part of the process of making an RPL claim. This can provide a good opportunity for the learner to provide further clarification on the nature and outcomes of their prior informal learning and to discuss their goals in terms of further learning and development. If the learner is making an RPL claim for entry to a programme at a college or HEI, an interview might be the primary source of evidence. An interview schedule or proforma should be used to ensure consistency .The interviewer should record the key outcomes of the interview, so that the process is transparent. This proforma can be made available to the learner in advance to enable them to prepare for the interview

Assessment on demand: learners can undertake traditional forms of assessment where appropriate. A learner can undertake the existing assessment

for a particular unit/module, or he/she can undertake one that has been specially devised.

Observation of practice/simulation: direct observation of a learner's skills, knowledge and understanding can take place in a particular context such as the workplace. If the learner does not have the opportunity through his or her workplace practice to demonstrate particular skills and knowledge, a simulation or role play may be used..

Mapping of learning outcomes: written statements of learning achieved within an informal or non-formal context are defined by the learner and mapped onto the outcomes of a programme, or those of a programme level, as a means of demonstrating their achievement. The reflective process is implicit, rather than explicit, in this form of evidence. This more streamlined approach is useful when a learner is claiming a substantial amount of credit within a programme, against particular levels, rather than against particular modules or units.

Existing work-based learning practices in evaluation and assessment such as workplace appraisal or professional development processes can be drawn upon as sources of evidence for RPL claims. This also includes those assessment methods used for SVQs.

Profiling is a paper-based or on-line tool used within workplace learning and training to enable workers to identify their existing skills and knowledge against national occupational standards (NOS); existing qualifications or units, such as SVQs. This process generates an action plan to meet any gaps in skills and knowledge. Profiling can be an effective RPL mechanism within the workplace. Moreover, the parameters of knowledge and skills identified in National Occupational Standards might provide common credit currency between academic, vocational and professional qualifications against which learners could be profiled.

Record of Volunteer Learning and Experience is used within workplace learning and training in the voluntary sector and encourages individuals to collect and maintain a record of informal learning to identify how and where they learn through volunteering. It can be used by learning providers to identify where learning occurs and could be utilised as transferable evidence for an RPL claim.

Europass curriculum vitae (CV)[10]: the Europass CV is the backbone of the Europass framework and in its electronic form can be linked to other Europass documents such as the Europass Language passport and to the Diploma or Certificate supplement, for higher education and vocational education respectively. The Europass CV includes categories for the presentation of information on language proficiency, work experience and education and training

[10] The development of Europass (a single framework for transparency of qualifications) will 'link separate documents aimed at the transparency of qualifications and competences into a single framework in the form of a structured portfolio of documents known as 'Europass'' ,Commission of European Communities (December 2003) *Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a single framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass) .)* Details of the Europass CV and Europass Language Passport can be found on the Europass website: http://europass.cedefop.eu.int

achievements as well as additional competences held by the learner in relation to technical, organisational, artistic and social skills. The Europass CV, and other extended CV formats, can be used as evidence of prior informal learning as part of a portfolio or to underpin a structured interview/oral assessment.

Portfolio: this term refers to a collection of materials which has been compiled by a learner to demonstrate what he or she has learnt.

The portfolio route for an RPL claim enables the learner to decide which learning experiences to draw upon and the particular pieces of evidence he or she will compile to demonstrate the learning outcomes or competences. Evidence can include direct evidence, which is material the learner produced at the time of the experience; reflective evidence, such as reflective accounts; and 'third party' evidence, such as references or testimonials from employers; tutors; colleagues and/or peers.

The process of compiling a portfolio can be highly rewarding, but is often resource-intensive. The learner requires detailed guidance on how to put together a portfolio, and in particular on the nature, range and volume of evidence required to demonstrate the learning.

Learners should be encouraged to reduce the volume of evidence by being selective in their choice of evidence and to cross reference evidence to more than one learning outcome or competence so that the process of compiling a portfolio becomes a more manageable exercise.

5.2.1.4 Assessment process for RPL claims

The learner must be advised of the assessment process as part of the guidance and support provided in the preparation of the RPL claim.

An RPL claim must include:

- clear statements about what was actually learned;
- supportive evidence that the learning claimed has been achieved.

Depending on the purpose of the claim, the assessor then determines **comparability** of this learning to either the:

- Particular requirements for entry to a programme in terms of knowledge, skills and understanding (for RPL for entry);
- Existing or negotiated individual programme unit or modules(for RPL for credit against particular units/module);
- The outcomes, or competences for part of a level in a particular subject or vocational area (for RPL for general or specific credit);
- The outcomes for an entire level (for RPL for general or specific credit).

Determining the **level of credit** for RPL claims for non-programme-specific credit or for part of, or an entire, level is a matter of professional judgement and is undertaken by reference to existing relevant credit-rated provision, or to the SCQF generic level descriptors These 'set out the characteristic generic outcomes of each level. They are intended to provide a general shared

understanding of each level and to allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning at different levels'[11]. The process of levelling and credit-rating prior informal learning which does not relate to a specific programme is similar to the process described in the SCQF Credit-rating Guidelines in relation to the credit-rating of programmes. [12]

Determining the **volume of credit** for RPL claims for non programme- specific credit or for part of, or an entire level of a programme is a matter of professional judgement and is undertaken by reference to existing relevant credit-rated provision or by a determination of the notional amount of time required by the 'average' learner, at a particular level to achieve the outcomes or competences claimed. One credit point represents the outcomes of learning achieved through ten notional hours of learning time.

The following widely applied **assessment criteria** can be used by staff to assist them in determining whether the evidence presented is satisfactory and appropriate:

- **Acceptability**: is there an appropriate match between the evidence presented and the learning outcomes being demonstrated; is the evidence reliable and valid?
- **Sufficiency:** is there a sufficient breadth and depth of evidence, including evidence of reflection, to demonstrate the achievement of the learning outcomes or competences claimed?
- **Authenticity**: is the evidence clearly the outcome of the learner's own effort?
- **Currency:** is what is being assessed current learning? Does the learner need to provide evidence of having kept the learning up-to-date, if the learning experience occurred some time ago?

These criteria should be accessible to learners to guide them in the preparation of their claim.

The RPL claim must be assessed by an appropriate subject expert(s) whose recommendation is considered and approved by the appropriate assessment board. The assessment procedures for RPL, including arrangements for external assessment, should be consistent with the normal assessment, and general quality assurance, procedures of the institution or organization. This includes the provision of an appeals process in order to protect the rights of the learner.

Prior informal or experiential learning which has been successfully credit-rated should be clearly indicated on a learner's transcript.

In some cases, it is possible for an RPL claim to be made for academic credit within a programme of study and simultaneously for vocational or professional recognition through a professional or statutory body or another awarding body.

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[11] SCQF *An introduction to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (SCQF, 2001)
[12] The SCQF Guidelines on Credit-rating are available in the downloads section of the SCQF website : www.scqf.org.uk

Any additional requirements in terms of evidence or assessment need to be clearly defined, and understood by the learner.

5.2.1.5 Credit limits for RPL within formal programmes of study

Programme limits, if any, on the credit that can be awarded for RPL within a programme of study should be clearly stated, as should any implications for progression, grading or classification. Institutional policy on credit limits should be consistently applied.

Double counting of credit should be avoided**.** RPL claims for credit may be based on learning which has already been credit-rated through prior certificated learning, for example, learning resulting from work-based experience whilst undertaking a formal programme of study, such as an HND**.** The risk of double counting of credit can also occur when RPL for a particular set of learning outcomes or competences is used to gain entry to a programme, and where the same learning outcomes are then used as the basis of a claim for credit within the new programme. Policies in relation the avoidance of double counting of credit will reflect the quality assurance procedures of the institution.

5.2.1.6 Fee process for RPL claims

If providers and receiving institutions decide to charge fees for the RPL process, the fee structure for RPL, i.e. the methodology for calculating fees, must be clearly stated and consistently applied. The costing mechanism for RPL procedures should be determined by providers and receiving institutions.

Any fees charged should reflect the amount of staff time spent in supporting and assessing RPL claims.

RPL modules or units should be considered by providers as a means of attracting funding and enabling part-time learners, for example, to access fee waivers.

5.2.1 7 Monitoring process for RPL procedures

The process of monitoring and reviewing the operation of RPL procedures should be clearly defined and integrated within the existing quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms of the learning provider.

Mechanisms for monitoring and reviewing RPL procedures may take into account:

- the number of learners undertaking RPL;
- the success rate of RPL claims;
- an evaluation of the learner experience, including the time taken by learners to undertake the RPL process;
- an evaluation of the staff experience, including the time spent by staff in supporting the RPL process and managing the process of recognition;
- a tracking of the progress of learners who have made successful RPL claims for credit;
- an evaluation of the effectiveness of any collaborative arrangements with other learning providers /learning partnerships/receiving institutions;
- reports from external assessors.

5.2.1 8 Support for staff engaged in support and assessment of RPL

Staff involved in the planning, development and operation of RPL procedures need to be provided with training, and continuing support for this role. This requires adequate resources.

The roles and responsibilities of both staff and learners in the RPL process need to be clearly defined.

The role played by staff in supporting and in assessing RPL claims should be clearly separated.

5.2.1.9 Integration of provision within quality assurance systems

RPL processes relating to learner support, assessment, credit-rating, and monitoring need to be fully integrated within institutional quality assurance systems to ensure transparency, consistency and reliability. RPL processes should be available for scrutiny by appropriate external quality assurance, for example by an external auditing body.

RPL as an entry route and a means of gaining credit within formal programmes of study should become more embedded within curriculum design and explicitly addressed at the programme approval stage. Where possible, learning outcomes should be expressed in a way that enables a variety of different routes for their achievement as well as the use of flexible modes of assessment.

6 SECTION SIX

Glossary of terms

Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL): a process, through which previously assessed and certificated learning is considered and, as appropriate recognised for academic or vocational purposes. This can also be known as **Credit Transfer**. A learner may combine an RPL claim with an APCL claim, in seeking entry to, or credit within, a formal programme of study.

Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL): a process through which learning achieved outside formal education or training systems is assessed and, as appropriate, recognised for academic or vocational purposes. In these guidelines this process is described as **RPL for credit**, or **summative assessment**.

Colleges: Scotland's forty-five colleges (of further and higher education) offer a range of programmes to meet the needs of individuals, communities and employers. Provision includes SQA qualifications, other vocational and academic qualifications and non formal learning and training.

Core Skills: a variety of broad, transferable skills and abilities relevant to the workplace, learning and life generally. The **SQA core skills framework** enables core skills units to be assessed in the workplace and within the context of SQA National Qualifications. The core skills are communication; numeracy; information technology; problem solving; and working with others. Core skills can be achieved at four levels. These are at levels 3-6 within the SCQF.

Credit-rating: a process of professional judgement leading to a statement on the level and volume of outcomes of learning.

HEIs, Higher Education Institutions: organisations providing education above Higher and Advanced Higher Grade. In Scotland there are fourteen universities and seven colleges of higher education

Learner: any individual who is engaged in any form of learning or training, whether non-formal or formal, or who is considering returning to learning.

Learning Providers: all organisations across all education and training sectors which provide formal or non-formal learning and training**.**

Notional levelling: this is the process linked to RPL for personal/career development or formative recognition, which involves mapping an individual's learning onto the SCQF in order to identify possible progression routes, or an individual learning pathway. The determination of a notional level for a learner's defined outcomes, achieved through prior informal learning, is undertaken by reference to outcomes within existing levelled or credit-rated provision or in relation to SCQF level descriptors. Unlike credit, the outcome of notional levelling is not necessarily transferable between learning providers but is a useful form of guidance for the learner and can be a useful source of information to other learning providers, or to employers about a learner's knowledge, skills and abilities.

Outcomes: a statement of competences, including knowledge, skills and values, capable of being demonstrated at the end of a process of learning.

Personal/ Professional Development Planning : a process of planning further learning and development within the context of a formal or non-formal programme of learning or training; or within the workplace; or as part of continuing professional development. The process normally involves reflection upon prior and current learning and development in order to facilitate the planning process.

Professional judgement: a decision reached by those best qualified through experience and knowledge of the discipline, field of study, profession, trade or area of skill.

SCQF credit-rating organisations: currently only SQA and HEIs can award SCQF credit. These organisations can award both general and specific credit for learning. SQA awards SCQF credit to learning through the delivery and assessment of its qualifications by SQA-approved centres. **General credit** relates to the agreed determination of level and volume of learning within the SCQF. **Specific credit** is that which is recognised as being relevant for entry to, or credit within a particular programme.

SCQF Level Descriptors: these define the characteristic generic outcomes for each of the twelve levels of the SCQF. They are intended to be indicative rather than prescriptive and any defined SCQF credit is not required to encompass all five areas of competence. The five broad headings, under which the generic outcomes at each level are defined, are knowledge and understanding; practice (applied knowledge and understanding); generic cognitive skills, such as evaluation and critical analysis; communication, numeracy and IT skills; and autonomy, accountability and working with others.

SQA, Scottish Qualifications Authority: The SQA is the national body for Scotland with responsibility for the development, accreditation, assessment and certification of qualifications other than degrees. SQA approve centres to deliver and assess qualifications

SQA Approved Centres: organisations approved as SQA centres to offer specific qualifications. Centres can be private training providers whose sole purpose is the delivery of training and the assessment of candidates; private and public sector companies who offer training to their employees, as well as schools and colleges.

SVQs, Scottish Vocational Qualifications: SVQs are based on **national occupational standards** (standards of performance developed by representatives from industry, commerce and education). They are usually achieved in the workplace and combine work-based competences and the knowledge needed to acquire those skills. Some SVQs or SVQ Units are incorporated into other awards or programmes including Higher National Certificates (HNC) and Modern Apprenticeships. There are SVQs for nearly all occupations in Scotland. SVQs help people to progress throughout their working life. They are available at five levels making them suitable for people starting out on a career and for people with many years of experience.

Receiving Institution or organisation: the college, other SQA approved centre, or HEI which provides the programme to which the learner is seeking entry to and/or credit within through RPL. The receiving institution determines how much specific credit can be recognised within a particular programme.

Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL): a process which acknowledges, and values publicly, learning which has been achieved outside formal education or training systems.

RPL for Personal/Career Development or **formative assessment**: a process of recognising learning achieved outside formal education or training systems within the context of further learning and development. This process can be linked to confidence-building; identifying individual learning pathways; a notional levelling of learning within the context of the SCQF; supporting the transition between informal, non-formal and formal learning; and preparation for the process of RPL for credit.

RPL for Credit, or **summative assessment**: a process of assessing learning achieved outside of formal education or training systems which is recognised, if appropriate, for academic or vocational purposes. This process is also known as **APEL**. This process can enable a learner to gain entry to a programme of formal learning if the outcomes of their prior informal learning are judged as equivalent to the entry requirements to the programme; to gain credit within a programme of formal learning if the outcomes of his/her prior informal learning are judged as equivalent to the outcomes of the programme to which he/she is seeking credit. Credit can be awarded for elements of the programme, i.e. units or modules, or parts of a level, or for an entire level. Most programmes have limits in the amount of credit that can be awarded through RPL.