RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING IN SCOTLAND

Report for project

“University Recognition of Prior Learning Centres – Bridging Higher Education with Vocational Education and Training”

Marina Shapira

Employment Research Institute
Edinburgh Napier University

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2. Scotland- Recognition of Prior Learning

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2.0 THIS REPORT

This report reviews policies and practices on the Prior Learning Recognition (RPL) in Scotland and aims to identify crucial factors for the success of the prior learning recognition processes. This report forms a part of the Work Package 2 of the project “University Recognition of Prior Learning Centres – Bridging Higher Education with Vocational Education and Training” that was funded by European Commission under the Lifelong Learning Programme.

The review is drawn on a range of sources: previous research commissioned by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and other RPL stakeholders, relevant academic research, seminars and conferences on RPL, interviews with the main stakeholders, and other information on research, policy and implementation of the RPL in Scotland. The sources used, and referred to in the report, are identified by previous research and by new internet search, and come from work in a number of sectors including Scottish government, qualification authorities, credit rating bodies, further education, adult education (lifelong learning, community education) and higher education, as well as various professional bodies.

THE STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

The structure of this report is as follows:

Part 1: RPL implementation in Scotland – historic overview, we start with an introduction to such concepts used in the repost as learning, prior learning and recognition of prior learning.

We then introduce the national and institutional context of lifelong learning and RPL in Scotland through describing relevant policies and the systems of Scottish education and Scottish qualifications.

We then proceed with description of main stages of RPL development and implementation in Scotland and discuss the crucial factors which enabled the development of RPL in Scotland, such as the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, Scottish system of qualifications, and credit transfer system

Part 2 considers how RPL is being developed and implemented in Scotland. We consider how different learning providers organise RPL process in terms of learners support and guidance, prior learning evidence gathering and documentation, learning assessment process and quality assurance mechanisms. This discussion is being summarised through identification of the main RPL stakeholders in Scotland and the main criteria of the RPL good practices. We then consider RPL regulatory requirements, funding for RPL, RPL promotion practices, and discuss how social acceptance for RPL could be increased. We concluded Part 2 with discussion of the main RPL barriers and challenges in Scotland.

Part 1 summarises the crucial factors which have been identified in the process of RPL implementation in Scotland.

Appendix 1 comprises further sources of information on RPL in Scotland.

Appendix 2 contains references.
2.1 RPL IMPLEMENTATION IN SCOTLAND – HISTORIC OVERVIEW

2.1.1 INTRODUCTION

In contemporary societies learning is increasingly moving away from a traditional classroom environment of formal educational institution.

Moreover, a transition from learning stage into working stage become more fragmented and individualised (Roberts et al 1994, Walther 2006), with individuals move for a prolonged period of time between work and education, re-entering the education multiple times and bringing their previous learning experience and work-based experience, and often simply life experience.

Learning processes are becoming increasingly individualized, fragmented, and many contemporary learning experiences are not formally certified and accredited.

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**LEARNING**

- **Learning is a continuous process of personal development**, which could occur in a variety of environments, circumstances and contexts.

- **Learning is increasingly individualised** and is seen as an umbrella definition for personal experiences, knowledge, skills and experiences obtained under a variety of personal circumstances of individuals from different life stages, socio-economic backgrounds, etc.

- Formal acknowledgment and validation of any learning process is possible only if one could identify the **outcomes of the learning**.

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2.1.1.1 WORKING DEFINITIONS OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF LEARNING AND RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING.

This new context in which learning is currently taking place is reflected in contemporary definitions of different types of learning, e.g. a definition given in a Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (EU 2000: Brussels), or the one used by CEDEFOP (European Centre for Development of Vacation Training). These EU definitions are adopted in Scotland by the
SCQF and used in the SCQF Guidelines on RPL (2005) to differentiate between different types of learning – formal, non-formal and informal/experiential ones.

**Formal learning** is that occurs in an organised and structured environment (e.g. in an education or training institution or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources); it is assessed and credit-rated and leads to recognised qualifications.

**Non-formal learning** is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and takes place alongside the mainstream system of education and training (e.g. in the workplace, through voluntary work or community-based learning).

Both formal and non-formal learning activities are intentional from the learner’s point of view, however only formal learning typically leads to validation, certification and qualifications. An extra effort should be made to recognise formally the outcomes of non-formal learning in a way that these outcomes would be valued outside the particular context where this learning occurred, and made them transferable into other outcomes, such as career progression, further learning, formal qualifications, etc.

Unlike the previous two types of learning, **informal or experiential learning** is usually unintended learning, which takes place through life and work experiences. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Often learners themselves do not recognise that they are involved in a process that contributes to the development of their experience and skills. This type of learning could only be formally recognised if a formalised process of recognition of prior or experiential learning experience is in place and both individuals and those who are responsible for the processes of formal accreditation of learning outcomes are actively aware about these processes and have access to them.

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**2.1.1.2 LEARNING AS A PROCESS VS. LEARNING AS AN OUTCOME**

There are two important aspects of learning – learning as a process and learning as an outcome. For learning being formally recognised there should be a possibility to disconnect the learning from its context (when, where, how, and under what circumstances it has occurred) and to identify learning outcomes, in terms of skills, knowledge and competences that individuals gained through that learning process.

The outcomes of a learning process make learning measurable, recognizable by other. Only if learning transformed from being an individual experience into a well-defined outcomes, which can be assessed and recoded and compared against a commonly acceptable framework, other people would recognise such learning.

Defining a learning by its outcomes is particularly vital for learning experiences that occurred outside the traditional classroom environment with formal learning providers, such as schools, colleges, and universities, when learning was occurring through life-course or work experience.

Validation of such learning would require a mechanism of identification of the outcomes of learning, a tool that could compare these outcomes with outcomes that are achieved through
formal learning programmes, and a procedure that would benchmarked these outcomes to a formal framework of qualifications, such as national and/or international qualification frameworks. Additionally, a societal consensus about the value of learning which was achieved outside formal educational institutions is also very important. The validated outcomes of informal learning should be socially acceptable, with learners, learning providers and employers all having trust in qualifications that were obtained as a result of recognition of prior learning.

2.1.1.3 RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) gained outside the formal education system is an essential tool which enables and facilitates life-long learning processes and contributes to building more just, socially mobile and knowledge-based society.

RPL positively contributes to individuals, to employers and learning providers, to the economy and to the society in general.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMPORTANCE OF THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR KNOWLEDGE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RPL positively contributes to individuals, to employers and learning providers, to the economy and to the society in general.</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ For individuals: The process of recondition of prior learning contributes first of all to the personal development of individuals because it</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Supports self-reflection and self-recognition of their own achievements and hence boosts their confidence and self-esteem</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Allows individuals to get their achievements formally recognized and hence enables them with an opportunity to proceed to further formal learning and training, or to have better career choices and progression based on the learning that they already achieved.</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ For employers RPL contributes to the employers and professional bodies because it</td>
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<tr>
<td>• simplifies the selection and recruitment processes,</td>
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<tr>
<td>• helps to identify and effectively address skill gaps,</td>
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<td>• helps to plan staff development,</td>
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<td>• helps to address the technological change</td>
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<td>• makes employees better skilled and qualified and more committed to the organization.</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ For learning providers</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increases participation in Further and Higher education of non-traditional learners</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Society and economy RPL ultimately contributes towards building more just, inclusive, socially mobile society and burgeoning economy through</td>
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<tr>
<td>• improving the employability (in particular, that of disadvantaged groups of population),</td>
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<td>• widening participation in Further and Higher Education the RPL</td>
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<tr>
<td>• increasing social inclusion and cohesion,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• facilitating social mobility, building a skilled, flexible and mobile workforce and improving general economic productivity and competitiveness.</td>
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</table>
Prior Learning Recognition (RPL), or the Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), or the Validating and Certificating of Learning Gained Outside Formal Education (such as schools, colleges and universities), are related to the recognition of non-formal learning, informal or experiential learning and training activities, which were undertaken but not certified.

RPL includes accreditation of non-formal and informal learning of individuals gained through life and work experience, through work-place related training programmes and courses, provided by private employers, professional bodies, voluntary organisations, public organisations, through benchmarking these learning outcomes to the formal qualifications framework, which in Scotland is the Scottish Credit Qualification Framework.

### AIMS OF PRIOR LEARNING RECOGNITION

- To accredit non-formal learning gained through work-place related training programmes and courses, through benchmarking this learning outcomes to the Scottish Credit Qualification Framework

- To provide link between informal learning process in which individuals are already engaged

- To link between personal and professional developments of learner and to enable the learners to make clear connections between the learning they have achieved and future learning opportunities

- To identify learning skills, which are transferrable between different learning and working contexts and environments.

### 2.1.1.5 RPL PROCESS

The RPL process involves three main actors: learners, evaluators of prior learning and a formal qualification framework.

The responsibility of the learners is to reflect on the prior learning process, recognize and describe their achievements and outcomes and provide an evidence for the learning. Learners require advice and guidance in process of identification of their informal and non-formal learning and in providing evidence for the learning.

This guidance is usually being provided by validators of informal and non-formal learning who (in the UK and Scotland) are usually learning providers. The validators need to assess, formalise and record the outcomes of learning obtained outside the formal education in a
consistent and unambiguous way and insure that the process of prior learning recognition is consistent and transparent.

Additionally, there should be a possibility to compare the informal/non-formal learning outcomes against commonly acceptable and recognisable formal qualifications or outcomes achieved through a formal programme of studies. Such comparison is possible through a formal qualifications framework that allows benchmarking knowledge experience and skills acquired outside formal education to the context of the qualification framework.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>THREE RPL ACTORS:</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Learners</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Reflect on the prior learning process,</td>
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<td>- Recognize and describe their achievements and outcomes</td>
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<td>- Provide evidence for the learning</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Validators (learning providers)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Provide learners with advice and guidance,</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Assess, formalize and record the outcomes of learning obtained outside the formal education in a consistent, transparent and unambiguous way</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A formal qualification framework</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Allows benchmarking knowledge experience and skills acquired outside formal education, through non-formal and informal learning to the context of the qualification framework</td>
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2.1.2 NATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS OF LIFELONG LEARNING AND RPL IN SCOTLAND

2.1.2.1 INTRODUCTION.

Specific national models of the recognition of prior learning are to a very large extent functions of the historical development and institutional characteristics of national education systems and labour markets, and are shaped by a number of processes such as ideological, political, policy, institutional, economic, etc.

Among such processes are

- wide political goals such as reducing socio-economic cleavages in a society through increasing participation in further/higher education of non-traditional learners;
- technological advances in general or standards in particular professions that require a mechanism, which insures an access of workers to a high-quality perpetuate work-based training;
- changed labour market where employer went on recognizing that formal education alone cannot endow job candidates with all essential qualities, but still they some formalized and verified process of trusted accreditation of skills gained through work-based experience and training;
- a possibility of benchmarking the non-formal skills and experience to the formal qualification framework, etc.

Therefore a successful development and implementation of national model of prior learning recognition require a clear understanding of the whole complex of factors that participate in the shaping of the PRL and are responsible for its successful implementation.

2.1.2.2 EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM IN SCOTLAND ITS RELEVANCE FOR LIFELONG LEARNING AND RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

SCOTTISH EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM

In the UK, there has been a devolved system of governance for education and training since 1999. Scotland has its own distinctive education and training systems with a particularly notable independence from other parts of the UK (e.g. Byrne and Raffe, 2005), which started to develop separately from those of England, Walsh and Northern Ireland long before political devolution, in particularly in respect to 3-18 education.

The governance, policy and funding for education and training in Scotland significantly diverged from that in the rest of the UK, since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 (Gallacher 2011).

Education system in Scotland has many (but not all) elements of a permeable education system, which facilitates the process of life-long learning and the recognition of prior learning (Raffe and Howieson, 2012). These elements were developed gradually over the last two decades and these developments were driven to a large extent by a notable commitment of Scottish Governments to the strategy of lifelong learning in Scotland.
The permeability of the system is facilitated by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework which assigns credits to qualifications and their component units. This SCQF is believed to be one of the most successful qualification frameworks because it is a “communication framework” (Raffe 2011), which provides a tool for seamless (or permeable) through its credits and level but which is voluntary in the sense that no one has to recognise or use the SCQF.

The permeability of the Scottish system of education is further facilitated by Scottish qualifications being outcomes based and only weakly linked to particular occupational or education destinations or to the mode or the length of study or to a particular institution and could be used for different purposes, such as an entry to the first year of a degree programme, an entry with advance standing to the degree programme (if a University recognises the credit it carries) or it could be used for employment.

**POLICY OF LIFELONG LEARNING**

The lifelong learning strategy became of on the main feature of the policy agenda for the consecutive Scottish Governments since 1999. Their programmes of governance were committed to provide “training for skills”, to widen access to further and higher education, to create a culture of lifelong learning and to increase adult participation in education and training.

Practical steps included establishing a department of Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning, which was separated from school education.

Several bodies were created to implement the Government Program on lifelong learning such as

1. Scottish Further Education Council (SFEFC),
2. Scottish University for Industry and Leardirect Scotland (to stimulate demand for lifelong learning),
3. Future Skills Scotland (to generate and publish labour market information),
4. Careers Scotland (all age career guidance service),
5. Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (a crucial infrastructure to implement the lifelong learning).

In addition to these efforts to create organisational basis for lifelong learning, since 2005 there were several important further collaborative initiatives towards creation of essential political financial and institutional prerequisites for the successful implementation of lifelong learning and RPL. The following six organisations became crucial for development of the lifelong learning and RPL in Scotland.

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**ELEMENTS THAT MAKE SCOTTISH SYSTEM OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING SUPPORTIVE FOR LIFELONG LEARNING AND RPL:**

- the modular type of Scottish qualifications,
- highly centralised system of qualifications award,
- credit arrangements in education and training and
- the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.
o A joint funding council for further and higher education, the Scottish Funding Council for Further and Higher Education (SFC), which contributed significantly to the development of more cohesive and effective system of tertiary education in Scotland. Colleges stated to be funded, directly which allowed then establishing a robust and coherent sector, which provides lifelong learning opportunities from basic to degree-level programmes (Gallacher, 2011).

o Skills Development Scotland (SDS) was established in 2008, which become responsible for work-training programmes (Modern Apprenticeships), information advice and guidance, literacy and numeracy campaign and financial support for part-time learners.

o The Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) become a single body with a responsibility for developing, validation and awarding of all qualifications, both academic and vocational, which were outside the realm of universities.

o the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) was launched in 2001. Cooperation from stakeholders insured that a majority of qualifications in Scotland were credit rated and included in the Framework. At this step a considerable volume of work has been also undertaken to include system of recognition if prior learning within the Framework and to ensure that people were credited for prior learning, that the lifelong learning process was not repetitive but additive and that there was a system in place that enabled people to more between different parts is education and lifelong learning systems (Gallacher 2011).

o Her Majesty Inspectorate for Education (HMIE) was another major organisation which influenced the development of lifelong learning through providing a quality assurance system in schools and colleges sectors.

o Finally, the Quality Assurance Agency Scotland (QAA) was established which assumed a responsibility for the quality assurance in the higher education sector.

These six organisations created the national Framework for provision of post-compulsory education and life-long learning in Scotland and enabled the development of PRL processes.

2.1.3. RPL DEVELOPMENTS AND IMPLEMENTATION IN SCOTLAND

There is a history of concern with the recognition of prior learning or learning beyond the formal curriculum in in Scotland for at least 30 years. In Scotland RPL has been linked to the lifelong learning strategy through skill development and to the implementation of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

In the beginning RPL was predominantly implemented in the Higher Education sector and was mainly focused on young people, in their final years of schooling and their initial post-school years.

However today, RPL aims to facilitate the recognition and transferability of skills for individuals of all ages. Therefore, RPL in Scotland become an essential tool that enables life-long learning through encouraging, recognition of and capitalising on prior informal learning.

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1 The SDS was established through ringing together national training programmes funded by the Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Careers Scotland and Scottish University for Industry.

2 It was established in 1998 through a merger of Scottish Examinations Board (school based qualifications), Scottish Vocational Education Council (college-based and work-based qualifications) and Scottish Vocation Qualifications (SVQs)

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experience which goes beyond the outcomes of the formal education system (e.g. Hart et al. 2010).

RPL in Scotland is being developed through different initiatives such as bringing about a better understanding of achievement by the learners themselves, creating effective mechanisms for making this understanding concrete, and finding ways to increase recognition of diverse achievement by learning providers and in the labour market (professional bodies and employers) (see part II of this report for the examples of major RPL projects in Scotland).

Today in Scotland RPL can be used for the formal validation of prior learning, for award of credits towards formal qualifications, in the admissions process to the institution of Higher Education, as a method of supporting personal development planning, career development, to form bridges between non-formal / informal learning and formal education and training (e.g. Hawley 2011, Whittaker 2010).

2.1.3.1 THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS ON RPL IN SCOTLAND

The following events and processes were crucial for the RPL in Scotland

- National debate on RPL (2004): change of term from ‘APEL’ to ‘RPL’
- The work on the National SCQF Guideline was conducted through the SCQR RPL Project which aimed to facilitate a national debate on the recognition of prior informal learning with the context of the SCQF.
- Production of Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework (SCQF) RPL guidelines (2005) which formed a chapter in the SCQF Handbook, and the RPL toolkit, which can be applied across all education and training sectors
- Production of SCQF RPL resource pack (2006): examples of practice
- Development and piloting of RPL resource packs and profiling tools for Community Learning and Development and Social Services sectors
- Development Activity on “Valuing Your Learning” Guidance on RPL in the NHS in Scotland
- Scottish Executive (SE) RPL scoping exercise (2006): to understand stakeholder views on priority areas of development, as well as barriers
- Skills for Scotland Strategy (2007): noted the importance of using the SCQF to encourage the recognition of informal learning.
- In 2007, the Scottish Government held a series of stakeholder events on assessment across Scotland at which recognition of achievement was one of the topics. In the same year, Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) commissioned two reports on aspects of the topic.
In 2008 the SCQF review of RPL in Scotland was conducted to establish the exportations if government and Stakeholders regarding the RPL; to determine the current landscape of RPL activities and existing practices and to learn about the views of stakeholders on where the focus for RPL should lie in (SCQF 2008).

In 2008 the Scottish Government, working with 12 local authorities, established a series of collaborative projects to identify effective approaches to recognising different kinds of achievement and to explore how barriers to recognition could be overcome.

In 2010 Skills for Scotland: Accelerating the Recovery and Increasing Sustainable Economic Growth was produced to refresh and supplement the original Strategy.

In 2010 International Bologna Seminar on RPL was held by the Scottish Government and QAA Scotland in collaboration with colleagues from Ireland and the Netherlands to establish a European RPL Network.

2.1.3.2 RPL in the context of Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

The methodology for RPL is based on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. One of the aims of SCQF is to support formative and summative recognition. SCQF support learners in identification of their level of competences and skills against the framework and in planning further their learning and career development.

Scottish government through its Skills Strategy for Scotland network (Skills for Scotland 2007) encourages all employers, learning providers, and awarding bodies to use the SCQF for RPL and to enable individuals to gain credit for learning they have already achieved. Work is also on-going – led by Skills Development Scotland and the SCQF Partnership - to identify how the framework can be used to support different learner groups, such as those at risk of dropping out of school, or at risk of losing their jobs.

THE SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK PARTNERSHIP

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQF Partnership) was established in 2006 to manage the Framework, to maintain its quality and integrity, to develop and maintain relationships with other frameworks in the UK, Europe and internationally promote, and develop the Framework as a tool to support lifelong learning.

Its members are:

- Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education;
- Scotland’s Colleges;
- Ministers of the Scottish Government;
- Scottish Qualifications Authority;
- Universities Scotland.
The SCQF was launched in 2001.

SCQF is a comprehensive qualifications framework with 12 levels which intends to accommodate all qualifications and assessed learning in Scotland.

Each level of a qualification shows how difficult the learning is. Each qualification in the framework, and each separate unit or component of a qualification, is given a number of credit points representing the volume of study and allocated to one of the twelve levels of the framework.

Credit points for each qualification is a way of describing the amount of learning, knowledge, skills or competence needed to achieve the qualification.

Each credit point equivalent to 10 hours' notional learning time) and have a minimum of a notional 10 hours of learning;

Each level on the Framework also has a set of 'descriptors' or competencies to help employers understand the range of skills an employee might demonstrate at that particular level.

The definitions of level and credit are based on learning outcomes;

Each qualification in the framework must be based on learning outcomes and the learning and its assessment are subject to appropriate quality assurance.

What Scottish Credit Qualification Framework (SCQF) does (SCQF 2009):

- provides a vocabulary for describing learning
- makes the relationships between qualifications and learning programmes clear;
- clarifies entry and exit points, and routes for progression;
- maximises the opportunities for credit transfer;
- assists learners to plan their progress and learning;
- minimises the duplication of learning

The SCQF is a communication framework which builds on a series of reforms to create a more coherent and unified qualification system and it is widely perceived as one of the most successful NVQs (Young, 2005).

The SCQF wider goals are to promote:

- trust to qualifications,
- cooperation between learning providers (organizations, professional bodies, colleges and universities)
- transferability of skill from life and work experience to education, from education to work, between organisations, and between countries.

The process of the development of SCQF was (Raffe 2009, 2011b):

- incremental, i.e. it proceeded through a series of reforms,
- consistent, i.e. the concept of credit unit was consistent across different sectors
- pragmatic i.e. it did not try to impose the qualification framework but merged existing frameworks, and no one has to recognise or use the SCQF

Main reforms that insured the successful implementation of the SCQF (Raffe et al. 2007-2008):

- In 1984 a national system of outcomes-based modules replaced much of the vocational education offered in colleges and schools.
- In 1999 a unified system of national qualifications (NQs) was created through a merger between the modular system of vocational qualification and school-based academic qualifications
- A framework for higher education, the Scottish credit accumulation and transfer system(SCOTCAT), began to be developed in the early 1990s.
- Scottish vocational qualifications framework (SVQs) was introduced in the early 1990s.
The process of the SCQF development in Scotland since the mid-1980s when a national system of outcomes-based modules replaced much of the vocational education offered in colleges and schools.

In 1999, this modular system was merged with academic school qualifications to create a unified system of national qualifications (NQs), which covered most institution-based academic and vocational qualifications below higher education.

A framework for higher education, the Scottish credit accumulation and transfer (SCOTCAT) system, began to be developed in the early 1990s. It rationalised university degree awards and enabled them to be linked with sub degree qualifications (higher national certificates and diplomas) awarded by the SQA.

A third framework, Scottish vocational qualifications (SVQs), was introduced in the early 1990s. SVQs are competence-based occupational qualifications, often delivered in the workplace, designed on principles similar to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) used elsewhere in the UK (Raffe et al. 2007).

These three frameworks, NQ, NVQ and SCOTCATS were merged together into SCQF is a comprehensive qualifications framework which intends to accommodate all qualifications and assessed learning in Scotland.

One of the aims of SCQF is to support formative and summative recognition. SCQF support learners in identification of their level of competences and skills against the framework and in planning further their learning and career development.

**Main reason of success of the SCQF in Scotland**

- SCQF if a “communication” framework which was established through an incremental and consistent process of reforms.
- Scotland is a small country with a relatively homogenous and cohesive education system.
- A single body, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), awards nearly all school qualifications and most of qualification delivered and colleges
- There is a long tradition of partnership and consensual policy-making in Scotland
- The process of the SCQF development started relatively early
- Qualifications based on learning outcomes, they are unitised
Scottish government through its Skills Strategy for Scotland network (Skills for Scotland 2007) encourages all employers, learning providers, and awarding bodies to use the SCQF for RPL and to enable individuals to gain credit for learning they have already achieved.

Work is also on-going – led by Skills Development Scotland and the SCQF Partnership - to identify how the framework can be used to support different learner groups, such as those at risk of dropping out of school, or at risk of losing their jobs.

RPL WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF SCQF

RPL is seen by the SCQF partnership as an important tool which enables the implementation of the life-long learning culture in Scotland. The SCQF partnership aims (SCQF Operational Plan 2012):

- helping people of all ages and circumstances to access appropriate education and training over their lifetime, so as to fulfil their personal, social and economic potential;
- enabling employers, learners and the public in general to understand:
  - the full range of Scottish qualifications;
  - how qualifications relate to each other and to other forms of assessed learning;
  - how different types of qualification can contribute to improving the development and utilisation of the skills of the workforce;
  - how Scottish qualifications relate to qualifications in other countries;
  - how using level descriptors can assist with qualifications development
  - how using level descriptors can assist with benchmarking skills and experience.

SCQF PROVIDES A FRAMEWORK WHICH FULLY SUPPORTS BOTH CREDIT TRANSFER AND RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL):

- Single unified framework for all Scottish academic and vocational qualifications
- Outcomes-based : skills, knowledge & understanding
- Levels: complexity of learning (SCQF level descriptors)
- Credit points : volume of learning undertaken (average/notional learning time: i.e. 10 hours = 1credit point)
- SCQF level descriptors facilitate recognition of prior learning and vertical and horizontal progression routes by setting
2.1.3.3 RPL AND SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS SYSTEM

There are some particular characteristics of Scottish system of education and training that have been developed over time and allowed the system to become permeable in respect of facilitating the implementation of lifelong learning and RPL.

These feature include an absence of clear boundaries between general and vocational educations, more or less equal value which is given to general and vocational education, modularity of Scottish qualifications and a flexible nature of the most of these qualification which does not relate a particular occupational role, but allows several pathways from that qualification into further educational or professional development; credit arrangements and a possibility of credit accumulation and its transfer from lower to higher level learning program and program for education and training; a single body with a responsibility for developing, validation and awarding of all but university qualifications, and a successful national qualification framework Scottish Qualifications.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AND RPL

SCOTTISH VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

SVQs are in place since the 1980s. SVQs are available at five levels, based on National Occupational Standards for specific occupations (Raffe et al 2010). SVQs are the equivalent of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in the rest of the UK. SVQs are delivered by formal learning providers as well as by employers (Hawley 2010) in the workplace and/or in partnership with a college or a university. These qualifications are being awarded by several bodies including Scottish Qualifications Authorities (SQA), professional bodies and industry organizations, but they have to be formally accredited by the SQA\(^3\).

SVQs are usually used at lower-to-intermediate levels\(^4\). SVQ standards are devised by ‘standards-setting bodies’, i.e. the Sector Skills Councils for the relevant industry. Standards-setting bodies are made up of employers, trade unions and professional organisations.

Candidates for the SVQs have to produce evidence about their skills, knowledge and understanding specified in the standard of competence for that specific SVQ. Assessors decide which kind of evidence should be produced, help the candidates to collect and present that evidence, and then assess this evidence against particular occupational standards. The assessment is being them formally recorded.

The SVQs are based on the Standards of competence which are broken down into units and each unit is made up of descriptions of tasks that people have to perform in the area of work that the unit covers. Certificates are being awarded not only for the whole qualification but also for the completed units. Therefore, there is no need to complete all units at once, units can be completed at different times and could be combined together to achieve a full qualification.

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\(^3\) SQA is responsible for ensuring the organisations which offer its SVQ awards comply with minimum quality standards. Organisations wishing to award SVQs must have an appropriate management structure and processes in place, as well as the necessary staff, learning and assessment resources, and equipment.

\(^4\) In such sectors as banking, administration, construction, engineering, health and care, hospitality, etc.
Scandinavian qualifications are modular and flexible and loosely related to specific occupational roles. This means that each achieved qualification or a formal credit which was archived as a part of study towards a particular qualification could be used both for professional/career development as well for studies towards full qualification or towards more advances qualification. Because of the modularity al Scandinavian qualifications, different modules could be studies at different times and in different contexts, both formal and informal and then all contribute to the credit requirements for a particular qualification.
Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Scotland stands in a state of semi-independence from the rest of the UK. Since 1999 VET has been the responsibility of the Scottish Government and Parliament.

There is no clear boundary between vocational and general education in Scotland and this is being reflected in the diversified provision for VET (Howieson et al. 2012). Often VET does not based on a regulated system of occupations, however in many occupations there are strict professional requirements for qualifications and professional bodies decide what qualifications are appropriate for an entry into specific professional role as well as decide on the content of the qualification, for example in heath and care sector.

The main formal learning providers of the VET in Scotland are Scotland's colleges, which are publically funded institutions of further education. In addition to the colleges many professional bodies also provide vocational qualifications.

**Responsibilities for VET provision**
- VET in Scotland falls under the two Government departments:
  - Lifelong Learning Directorate (adult education and training) and
  - Schools Directorate (3-18 curriculum).
- Skills Development Scotland (SDS): (public training programmes and careers guidance),
- the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA): (most non-university qualifications),
- Scotland’s Colleges (curriculum development and support),
- the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) (funding teaching and learning provision, research and other activities in Scotland’s 43 colleges and 20 universities and higher education institutions),
- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE)
- The Alliance of Sector Skills Councils in Scotland
- The Scottish Modern Apprenticeships Group

**Scottish Vocational qualifications (SVQ)**
- In place since 1980
- Available at 5 levels
- Based on National Occupational Standards for specific occupations
- Delivered by formal learning providers and employers
- Being awarded by Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and professional bodies and organisations which are formally approved by SQA
- SVQ standards are devised by 'standards-setting bodies', i.e. the Sector Skills Councils for the relevant industry

**Other Qualifications in Scotland:**

**National Qualifications and Higher National Qualifications** are unit-based qualifications awarded by the SQA. Units may be taken separately or as part of group awards or National Courses.
- **National Certificates** available at lower and intermediate levels, represent one or two year studies, delivered as a rule in colleges; they include Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) National Progression Awards (NPAs), and Professional Development Awards (PDAs).
- **National Courses**: subject-specific courses at a range of levels which are the main certificates awarded in secondary schools. These include Highers and Advanced Highers which are the main currency for entry to university.

**University degrees**: Scottish universities award the following degrees: Bachelors (awarded at Honours or Ordinary level, typically on the basis of three or four years’ study respectively), Masters (typically one year) and Doctor (typically three or more years).

**Employer and professional awards**: These include awards by professional bodies in fields such as health and care, social services, accountancy, banking and engineering, as well as awards by employers ranging from the police and fire services to hoteliers and whisky distillers. (In some cases these qualification are jointly awarded with the SQA and credit rated).
2.1.3.4 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AND OTHER EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS IN RESPECT TO THE RPL.

Four factors give Scottish qualifications a great deal of flexibility and distinguish them from many other European systems.

- individual units are intended to have value in their own right and are given a relatively high status in the certification system;
- many qualifications are small in size, so that transfer may take the form of movement from one completed qualification to another rather than transfer of credit (see following sections about the credit transfer in Scotland) between qualifications;
- all qualifications can be delivered by any institution or organisation which meets the relevant requirements of the SQA;
- certification is carried out centrally by the SQA, which maintains a cumulative record of the achievements of individual learners. This means that credit transfer and accumulation are built into the SQA system, so that an individual achieving one or more SQA units in one or more institutions can automatically count it/them towards any full SQA qualification of which it is a component if she/he goes on to complete that qualification in another institution.

In terms of the vocational continuum described above, most SVQs aim to develop competence, many of the Higher National and National Qualifications delivered in colleges develop capability and some other National Qualifications, including some of those which form part of school or college programmes, are pre-vocational.
**EXAMPLES: RPL IN STIRLING UNIVERSITY**

**Aims:** University of Stirling provides with the RPL arrangements which encompasses both prior certifies and informal/experiential learning.

RPL remit in the University of Stirling includes:

- facilitated admission to a degree programme
- advanced entry to a programme
- exemption from parts of a programme’s requirements
- award of credit to count towards a programme’s requirements.

**Assessment:** The university of Stirling criteria of assessment the RPL applications based on

- Reliability /adequacy of the supporting evidence (official documents, transcripts)
- Relevance of the learning outcomes for the intended academic program
- Sufficiency of the presented evidence – does it support the volume and level of credit claimed and if the is a sufficient support for the claimed learning outcomes.
- Currency i.e. the learning is up-to-date according to standards of particular discipline (in practice, the prior leaning should normally fall within five years of the proposed start of date of new learning).

**Examples of Credit Transfer in the University of Stirling:**

- A Higher National Diploma in an appropriate subject and with an appropriate curriculum will be recognised as a level 8 and level 9 qualifications of up to 242 University of Stirling credits and equivalent to a combination of 11 University of Stirling 22-credit levels 7, 8 and 9 modules.
- A BA in an appropriate subject could be recognised as a level 8, 9 and 10 qualification and equivalent to a combination of up to 352 University of Stirling credits and equivalent to a combination of 16 University of Stirling 22-credit levels 8, 9 and 10 modules. This could be used to gain direct entry to an Honours year on an exceptional basis but ordinarily would be of up to 242 University of Stirling credits.
- RPL is being offered both on the undergraduate and post-graduate levels.
- Postgraduate level credit transfer would normally be at level 11; however a maximum of 30 credits at level 10 may be considered for specific postgraduate level articulation agreements.
- If students have sufficient credits for a complete certificate, they cannot incorporate this within a program on the same level but could transfer it towards a higher certificate level study

Ref: Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Guide, University of Stirling, Internet
http://www.stir.ac.uk/media/autoimport/data/assets/pdf/0012/33132/prior-recognition-guide.pdf
Qualifications in Scotland are credit-based, and built around a combination of shorter and longer programmes that normally have credit accumulation and progression routes built into them. Credit rating is the process of allocating an SCQF Level and SCQF Credit Points to a defined set of learning outcomes.

System of Credit Arrangements in academic and vocational education and training in Scotland was developed through several reforms since the 1980s and is vital for lifelong learning and the recondition of prior learning.

The system of credits allows describing any qualifications by means of a universal language. It enables learners to transfer credit gained through one qualification to another qualification or programme of study and is based on comparability of outcomes of different qualifications/elements of qualifications (e.g. Raffe 2011).

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**SYSTEM OF CREDIT TRANSFER IN SCOTLAND**

**Credit points** for each qualification are simply a way of describing the amount of learning, knowledge, skills or competence needed to achieve the qualification on that particular level. The system of credit arrangements for education and training in Scotland has two distinctive components, credit accumulation and credit transfer.

**Credit accumulation** refers to the process of accumulating credit through various learning programmes in order to achieve a qualification. Thus, the credit accumulation principle underpins the architecture of the many of the Scottish qualifications and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework itself (e.g. Raffe et al. 2011).

**Credit transfer** is the use of credit from one learning programme or qualification to contribute towards the requirements of another programme or qualification. Thus, credit transfer is an efficient way of enabling to build previous learning into the further learning towards higher qualifications and hence it allows reducing the amount of time spent on the further learning required for the latter.

There **are three main types of credit transfer** in Scotland (e.g. Howieson et al 2012):

- from general and pre-vocational learning into mainstream VET; this includes most transitions into mainstream VET from school, from training programmes designed for young people or adults at risk of exclusion and from other types of non-formal and informal learning;
- between different types of mainstream VET, for example, between college-based and work-based provision, between different colleges or training providers or between different qualifications (and especially those awarded by different bodies); and
- between VET and university, in particular between colleges’ sub-degree provision (HNCs and HNDs) and universities’ degree-level provision
The credit arrangements for education and training enables an accumulative approach to learning, makes skills achieved through learning transparent and the learning itself transferable and provides a seamless transition between different stages and modes of learning. Therefore, the existing of credit transfer arrangements is crucial for RPL (e.g. Howieson et al. 2012).

### RPL IN THE CREDIT TRANSFER CONTEXT

- Separates teaching process from learning process i.e. enables flexibility in terms of when, how and where learning takes place
- Learning outcomes describe transferable skills, knowledge & understanding
- Can be used in retrospective terms (i.e. what is already achieved through prior learning) as well as prospective terms (i.e. what learner is expected to achieve)
- Enables easy comparison between different qualifications and different types of learning experiences in terms of credit transfer, RPL and progression
- Enables easier comparisons/connections for learners between the outcomes of experiential/non-formal learning to outcomes of formal programmes easier for learners

Credit system gives learners credit for their prior assessed learning. This means learning for which they have been awarded qualifications or certificates, for example an SVQ, university module, Higher National unit or Higher National Certificate or Diploma or Professional Development Award.

### CREDIT TRANSFER AND NOT-FORMAL/INFORMAL LEARNING

The SQA has guidelines relating to credit transfer from for non-formal learning (Inspire Scotland 2008). Thus, SQA has developed a Work Role Effectiveness Unit (SQA 2007) that enables candidates currently or recently in employment to claim credit for carrying out a work role effectively and to plan for future personal and professional development.

The assessment process for the based on the evidence gathered by the candidate and verified by the employer.

The SQA have developed support materials and guidelines that are easily accessible on the SQA website, for both tutors and candidates that can be used to support the delivery of the Unit.

SCQF level descriptors facilitate recognition of prior learning and vertical and horizontal progression routes by setting out ‘characteristic generic outcomes of each level’ relating to knowledge & understanding; practice; generic cognitive skills; communication, ICT & numeracy skills; autonomy, accountability & working with others - ‘provide general shared understanding of each level and to allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning at different levels’ (SCQF, 2003).
Accreditation of non-formal learning is more difficult than accreditation of formal learning. Similarly, work-based learning is easier to accredit than informal experiential learning.

Furthermore, it is easier to assess credit transfer claims for specialised knowledge than for general learning. For example, in Higher Education it is easier to demonstrate learning outcomes through prior experiential learning at postgraduate level (specialised, application to practice) than at undergraduate level (broader, fundamental concepts).

Credit transfer claims are supposed to be assessed on the basis of whether direct match, rather than broad comparison. However, direct match is not always possible for the assessment of informal experiential learning.

Transition from one to another learning environment could be difficult for learners. For example, credit transfer from further education to a degree programme is problematic because although learning outcomes may be comparable, there are differences in curricular content, learning, teaching, assessment approaches may lead to difficulties in terms of transition & progression for learners.

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**RPL & CREDIT TRANSFER PROCESS AS PART OF QUALIFICATION ACHIEVEMENT**

Figure A6.1 RPL & Credit Transfer process as part of qualification achievement (RPL and Credit Transfer Guidelines for the Practice Learning Qualifications, SSSC, 2007)

- Standards/Learning outcomes
- Does the learner have relevant prior credit/qualifications?
  - NO
  - YES
    - Refer to Mapping Exercise
    - Identify programme outcomes which this prior learning demonstrates
    - Tutor/Mentor/Assessor records original evidence of credit
- Does the learner have relevant prior experience?
  - NO
  - YES
    - Plan and agree learning activities to achieve programme outcomes
    - Learner undertakes agreed programme of learning
    - Learner gathers and selects evidence for Collection of Evidence
    - Learner submits Collection of Evidence for assessment
- Learner supported in identifying programme outcomes which this prior learning and evidence demonstrates
- Learner supported in reflecting on experience to identify learning and evidence
- Tutor/Mentor/Assessor provides feedback on draft presentation of evidence
SCQF CREDIT RATING BODIES

The current SCQF Credit Rating Bodies are the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), Scotland’s colleges and other organisations that have the approval of the SCQF Partnership Board. A full list of SCQF Credit Rating Bodies is available on the SCQF website at www.scqf.org.uk.

A key aspect of credit rating is the quality assurance of the process itself. It is important that all providers of education and training, learners, employers and the public in general have a shared confidence that the level and credit value of any programme, qualification or individual learner achievement has been determined in accordance with agreed, clear and robust processes, criteria and principles.

The *SCQF Handbook: User Guide* (2009) contains the SCQF Credit Rating Guidelines which are statements of principles and procedures that enable all users of the SCQF, including learners themselves, to have confidence that there is a consistent approach to determining the level and credit value of learning within the SCQF (e.g. see Table 2). All organisations approved as an SCQF Credit Rating Body must adhere to the SCQF Credit Rating Guidelines as set out in the SCQF Handbook.

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5 To be approved as an SCQF Credit Rating Body the organisations must also demonstrate that:
- They are a body of good standing, showing a successful track record in the design and delivery of learning provision in Scotland. The organisation must be secure, stable and viable, and have an understanding and knowledge of educational system in Scotland.
- They have robust quality assurance system in place for programme design approval, validation, accreditation, assessment or other related activities and has evidence, through internal and external review, that this quality assurance system is valid and reliable.
- They has the capacity and commitment to operate as an SCQF Credit Rating Body and ensures that its credit rating processes and procedures link to and function within its existing quality assurance system.

When approved as an SCQF Credit Rating Body, individual organisation can credit rate though own qualifications and learning programmes (SCQF Handbook 2009).
RPL in Scotland is being delivered within the context of the SCQF.

As we discussed in the previous part of this report, SCQF is communication framework. This means that no one has an obligation to recognise it and use it. The development of the SCQF did not have an aim to impose the Framework. The main aim was to develop a tool that would allow to achieve wide policy goals such as create a seamless education system with easy transitions from its one level to another, to promote trust to qualifications, to enable a cooperation between learning providers (organizations, professional bodies, colleges and universities) and to make qualifications more transparent and skill more transferrable from life and work experience to education, from education to work, between organisations, and between countries.

In this context there are no legal obligations in Scotland for anyone to carry out RPL both in terms of assessment and accreditation of prior learning and in terms of recognition of prior accredited learning for further formal learning admission purposes, or career purposes.

Apart from the RPL guidance outlined in the SCQF handbook and Toolkit (2005) there are no formal regulation or requirements for the provision of the RPL. The focus of the RPL activities is on producing guidelines for practitioners, building confidence in learners in RPL and encouraging the employers to use RPL for validate their work-based programmes, for staff recruiting and staff development, etc.

Therefore, implementation of the RPL varies across different sectors, institutions and from one individual case to another. For example, within the SCQF context, there is a formal correspondence between the National Diploma ND (further education qualification which is normally awarded by Scotland’s colleges but also by some professional bodies), and the two first years of study towards an academic degree in a university. However, while some universities have RPL procedures in place, which allow those with ND entre with articulation to the second or the third year of the university program, other universities would admit candidates with such qualification only to the first year of a degree program or impose additional conditions which should be meet to allow articulation. Similarly, employers do not have statutory obligation to provide their employees with paid (or even unpaid) time for learning toward RPL.
Individual, organisations, learning providers and professional bodies are getting involved in RPL for all sorts of reasons. The RPL provision in Scotland is patchy and the RPL practices are unevenly developed. However, the SCQF partnership, the Quality Assurance Agency and RPL Network, in collaboration with learning providers, employers and professional bodies are undertaking a wide spectrum of activities aiming to promote RPL and make it widely used and socially accepted through ensuring its transparency, availability, affordability, and high quality.

ARTICULATION AGREEMENTS EXAMPLE:

University of Stirling has articulation arrangements with some Further Education colleges/international colleges/institutions/access courses. Such agreements can be made only when the coherence of the programme of study across the two institutions is clearly demonstrated and the support needs of individual learners can be clearly met.

Such agreements must clearly specify:
- The entry and subject (if applicable) requirements (e.g. the HNQ or equivalent achievement required by the college student),
- Credit transfer arrangements if applicable, (e.g. the SCQF level and credit points which will be credited to the college student upon entry to the University);
- Progression routes (e.g. the particular programme(s) of study at the University to which entry is assured).

NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL RPL FRAMEWORK

**National level RPL network** was established by the SCQF Partnership and includes representatives across different education and training sectors, including employers, professional bodies and the Scottish Government. The network's programme of work is based on activities to support the use of RPL within formal education and training, in the workplace, in the community and in relation to careers guidance. The SCQF RPL Network has developed a generic version of a toolkit for RPL, based on a tool which had been developed for the social services sector. This new toolkit, which is available from the SCQF website, can be used by learning and training providers, employers and human resources personnel.

**Quality Assurance Agency Scotland (QAA)** coordinated the QAA/Universities Scotland HEI RPL network, which is working on identifying ways of developing more standardised processes for the RPL. The network facilitates the sharing of good practice among HEIs and on developing case studies of good practice. The HEI RPL network is also involved in a European RPL network (with partners from Ireland and the Netherlands).

**RPL Interest Group** was set in the Social Service sector to promote and develop further the RPL work that has already been undertaken in the sector. This group is being co-ordinated by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) aims to evaluate the PRL practices in the sector.

Finally, the **Scottish Qualification Authority SQA acts** as a regulatory body with a statutory role to authorise and approve vocational qualifications (including SVQs) and awarding bodies. It is responsible for ensuring that each SVQ satisfies national standards and is offered by an approved awarding body. SQA works in partnership with industry bodies to ensure that the quality of SVQs is upheld.
2.2.2.1 RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE PRL DELIVERY IN SCOTLAND

There is no single body responsible for the delivery of the RPL. These responsibilities are held with the learning provider.

Therefore RPL is being implemented in a variety of ways. The learning provider designs the RPL procedures, i.e. provision of counselling and guidance, assessment, internal quality assurance and evaluation.

However, only the SCQF Credit rating body can formally award SCQF Levels and Credit Points through RPL (see section 2.5.3. on the credit rating bodies).

RPL in Scotland is being delivered by employers, by professional bodies, by colleges and universities.

Colleges and universities offer RPL for individuals as well as collaborate with professional bodies and public and private employers for providing RPL for mapping work-based training programmes against SCQF and awarding the SCQF credits and qualifications on different levels of the Framework.

In addition, universities are using RPL for academic admission both to the first years of the degree program as well as for the addition with advance standing of those who gain the RPL credits towards partial requirements of academic programmes.

2.2.2 STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVEMENT

The main RPL stakeholders in Scotland are SCQF partnership, Quality Assurance Agency, RPL network, credit rating and qualification awarding bodies, learning providers, employers, professional bodies, guidance and employability agencies, Scottish government,

**RPL Main Stakeholders**
- SCQF partnership
- Scottish Qualification Authority
- Quality Assurance Agency
- RPL Network
- Employers
- Colleges
- Universities
- Scottish Government
- Guidance sector: e.g. Skill Development Scotland, Career Scotland
- Sector Skill Councils
- Professional bodies and organisations: e.g. Scottish Social Services Council, Scottish Police College, Communities Scotland
- SQA rating centres
- Other approved credit rating bodies
RPL in Scotland is supported by the QAA/Universities Scotland RPL Network.

The Network was established to promote the development of RPL in Higher education in Scotland, through for sharing practice and research in RPL in Scotland, in the UK, in Europe and internationally. The Network is developing RPL guidelines for the RPL support and assessment in different sectors.

In particular the RPL Network aims to link in post-Bologna developments in Europe via European RPL network.

One of the important feature of the Network is that it aims to link RPL in Higher Education into other RPL developments in Scotland, e.g. in work place, professional bodies, colleges.

Network collaborates with Scottish Government, various Skill Sector Councils, community leaning providers, employability services, Professional bodies, colleges and universities.

RPL NETWORK ACTIVITIES (IN COLLABORATION WITH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)

- Piloting of various RPL modules with and developing RPL resources for specific groups of learners:
  - community-based learners,
  - young people “at risk”,
  - health and care sectors workers,
  - new immigrants (OU,2008) and
  - refugees (e.g. GCU CARA project 2007).
- Universities which participate in these activities were:
  - Open University Scotland,
  - Edinburgh Napier University
  - Glasgow Caledonian University,
  - Stirling University;
  - University of West of Scotland 2009
  - Queen Margaret University.
  - Open University
- In particular, through these projects were developed
  - RPL profiling, guidance and work experience model developed to support refugee academics to gain employment in the higher education sector in the UK and developing (Glasgow Caledonian University);
  - educational programme in Open University Scotland, to support the transition into further and higher education of refugees and new migrants;
  - RPL Toolkit for use by learning and training providers, employers and human resource personnel. (copy is downloadable)
  - Integration of the RPL in the curriculum through provided flexible entry and flexible delivery of academic programmes, based on the assessment of the prior learning outcomes.
  - Assessment/credit rating services for employers, organisations and professional bodies for academic validation of learning in the work-place or learning for professional qualifications (e.g. Edinburgh Napier University).
RPL policies and practices exist in many Scottish Universities

- to map outcomes of prior informal learning against SCQF/QAA level descriptors;
- to support the development of the flexible curriculum with flexible entry and flexible programmes in the context of the SCQF.
- to facilitate transition into further and higher education and employment if immigrants and refugees
- for assessment/credit rating services for employers, organisations and professional bodies

Examples of good RPL policies and practices exist in a number of Scottish Universities such as Glasgow Caledonian University, University of Stirling, Edinburgh Napier University, Edinburgh Queen Margaret University, University of West of Scotland and Open University.

**EXAMPLE RPL IN QUEEN MARGARET UNIVERSITY QMU, SCHOOL OF HEALTH SCIENCES:**

**Aims:** Accredited prior leaning may be used to
- gain access to a program for candidates who do not meet formal entry requirements
- or to claim exemption from a specific part of a program
- gain accreditation of prior learning (not-certified formal, worked based, informal).

**RPL process:** Candidates receive an advice about the RPL. If students or candidates apply for accreditation of non-certificated formal or work-based learning, they are given a mentor (named academic tutor) to advice on their portfolio of evidence to support claim for credit. Recognition of prior leaning can be achieved both prior to enrolment in the academic program or after the enrolment.

**Advice and guidance** about prior learning (formal and informal) is provided. This is carried out through individual meetings and the Orientation RPL Workshops. Those who apply for accreditation of prior non-accredited or work-based learning are given a tutor or advisors on their portfolio of evidence; in addition there a module on student directed work-based learning within the program of studies.

**Assessment:** The candidates/students are guided and supported in writing statements of experiential of learning plus a portfolio which is double marked by academic staff. In addition students will undertake a short presentation and question and answer session on the work produced with a subject panel and external examiners.

**Articulation.** The QMU RPL provided with arrangements for articulation. This includes
1. exemption from studies, based on prior certificated learning, or
2. the award of credit for prior experiential learning.

The exemption could be given from core requirements or from ‘elective’ choices of the program. Through the assessment of prior certified learning candidates and students could gain up to 120 credit points (approximately a half of the Bachelor Degree requirements).

A school wide **multi-professional RPL panel** within QMU considers all complex applications. This panel encompasses all health science professional programmes at different levels, ensuring rigour and transparency of decision-making.
The RPL resources (such as various RPL employer and learner toolkits, skill passports, etc. [see appendix 1]) developed through different projects have a potential for further development with college and community education providers.

One of the RPL activities which is being developed by Scottish government, and the SCQF partnership aims to increase awareness among school leavers about the potential of colleges for the recognition of their informal and non-formal learning experience and about potential pathways into Higher Education and University degree programmes which colleges offer.

Indeed, although Scotland’s colleges are the main providers of the SVQs, they also offer an alternative way of accessing university courses/qualifications to those young people who left school without sufficient academic qualifications and credits to enter a university program (for example Higher National Certificates which are being awarded by Scottish colleges are satisfying entry requirements for many University degree programmes) or to enter university degree program with an articulation.

At the moment, wider PRL policy goal is to provide further support of transition from college to university (see SCQF 2012: Articulation for all).

In particular there are proposals to consider legislation that would introduce a statutory framework guaranteeing articulation from college to university (i.e. entry in the second or the third year of the university degree programme).

RPL in the workplace in used in Scotland in the number of sectors, such Social Services, Community education, Health sector, Finance sector, Scottish Police Force, etc. PRL is also used in cross-sectoral work.

Professional bodies have the responsibility of maintaining industry wide standards for their sector and in delivering relevant industry qualifications. Industries are competing to attract new entrants and retain existing employees.

Therefore professional bodies in different sectors of the industry are looking to attract individuals with existing skills that are transferable often from other sectors and other countries through

- identifying existing skills and competencies of individuals and
- enabling them to gain credit and potential exemptions from part of the professional bodies’ required qualifications, as well as
- through offering them pathways from professional qualifications into advanced stage of studies towards academic degrees (through existing RPL agreements with a number of Scottish and UK universities).
The CCR offers a credit rating service within the context of SCQF to employers, professional bodies and organizations, which provide learning for their employers.

The CCR allocates academic credit for work-based training and learning and works in a conjunction with subject credit rating experts from the Edinburgh Napier University.

The CCR validates and allocates academic credit from the SCQR for non-formal work-based learning (i.e. in-house training through the programmes and courses provided by employers, professional bodies, etc.) informal learning (i.e. learning through work) and also carries out accreditation of full awards.

CCR works closely with organisations that provide learning. Through discussions with organizations CCR helps them with the completion of proformas that set the organisational learning in the context of the SCQF and with the submission of the relevant course documentation. This documentation is used by the CCR staff and other credit-raters for academic credit allocation.

Timescales are variable and dependent on the amount of learning to be considers for credit and level.

Credit rating of learning through training courses and programmes provided by the employer takes about three month. There credits are awarded to those who successfully complete the learning and can be used for further learning e.g. towards formal qualifications. Those who successfully completed the credit-rated learning are getting Certificates which benchmark the learners achievements to the CSQF.

Accreditation of awards takes longer due to the validation procedure that must be followed.

Informal learning The accreditation of the informal learning through work is accomplished on the individual basis.

Clients The client base of the CCR is wide and includes many organization from

- Public sector e.g.: City of Edinburgh Health and Social Care, Scottish Police Service, Registers of Scotland)
- Private sector e.g.: BAE Systems
- Voluntary sector e.g.: Richmond Fellowship Scotland, Couple Counselling Scotland)
- Professional bodies e.g.: Chartered Institute of Bankers in Scotland, Institute of Chartered of Secretaries and Administrators, Institute of Management Consultancy, NHS Scotland
- education and training organisations IBP Academy, International Correspondence School, Ross International.
The Chartered Institute of Bankers in Scotland (CIOBS) uses RPL through offering flexible professional qualifications, with a range of entry and exit points. They cater for a wide range of learners, such as:
- people without formal qualifications and relevant work experience,
- those who do not have formal qualifications in banking and finance but have relevant work-based experience,
- those with academic qualifications and degrees.

Thus, their financial services qualifications such as
- Chartered Banker Certificate
- Chartered Banker
- Professional Banker Certificate
- Professional Banker Diploma
- Financial Planning qualifications

are aimed at those who want to certify relevant experience in the industry, as well as those who want to continue and study for a degree.

**RPL within the professional body:** Chartered Bankers are eligible for the award of Diploma in Financial Planning upon completion of the 30-credit Diploma. Additional four 30-credit subjects qualify Charter bankers for the award of Advanced Diploma in Financial Planning. Those candidates who meet the work experience requirements can then apply for 'Chartered Financial Planner' professional qualification.

**International RPL agreements:** There is an agreement that those who received Professional Banker Diploma fulfilled award requirements for Diploma of Financial Services at level 3 of Australian Qualification framework Offered by the Pinnacle Financial Services Academy, Australia. Additionally, the CIOBS and the Hong Kong Institute of Bankers (HKIB) have an agreement of mutual recognition for their issuing qualifications.

**RPL agreements with Universities:** There is a number of arrangements in place with different HE providers about “top up” courses which qualify the holders of Chartered Banker Institute qualifications for entry in the one year top up program for BA degree business management qualification (for example with university of Lincoln, UK or University of Derby, UK;)

Holders of Chartered Banker qualification of the CIOBS by examination are only required to complete two modules and one project for the award of MSc in Professional Banking qualification or for accelerated entry degree qualification into MBA program in the universities.

The institute in cooperation with Bangor University (UK) also offers Chartered Banker MBA (including accelerated route Holders of approved professional banking qualification and super-accelerated route for the recognized MBA holders, however, non-MBA Master degree are also considered on individual basis)
Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) are industry-led, independent organisations that cover a specific sector across the UK. SSCs have the responsibility for identifying the skills needs of workers in their sector, and ensuring that there is adequate provision of high quality training that will meet those needs.

A number of SSCs (in collaboration with Skills Development Scotland and SCFQ) have developed and introduced Skills Passports for their sector to be used by employers and employees. A Skills Passport is an individual’s portable verified record of all of their skills, qualifications and achievements, whether it is experience, on-the-job training or a qualification, which is hosted online and automatically transfers on to their CV.

Skills passports based on the recognition that in all modern economies there are aspects of an individual’s capability, character and potential that formal certification and examination systems do not necessarily reveal. Informal data and other forms of evidence may therefore also form an important part of the individual’s record (Inspire Scotland 2008).

Employees gain an official record of their achievements that enables them to link their skills and experience to career paths and qualifications within the sector in which they work.

Employers can see their employees achievements at a glance. This has the benefit of enabling employers to reduce unnecessary training by targeting training where it is needed. Employers can use skills passports for recruitment, workforce development, to job appraisal schemes,

There is potential for individuals to gain recognition for qualifications, formal/informal learning and experiential learning held within a Skills Passport that links to the SCQF levels (Inspire Scotland 2008).

In community learning and development sector SCQF project was undertaken to promote RPL, through development of online RPL profiling tool to support those who work with young people to complete qualifications such as SVQ3 in Youth Work or Modern Apprenticeships. Information on the RPL online profiling tool is available at www.rplspace.co.uk.

The tool allows employees to benchmark their learning against the National Occupational Standards for Youth Work and is supported by a learner pack, a mentor pack, various handouts and a jargon buster. There is a potential to develop this tool further to support RPL in CLD or other sectors.

The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) registers people who work in the social services sector and regulating their education and training. The SCQF Partnership set up a Social Services project managed through the SSSC that enables employees to use their experiential learning to work towards qualifications for registration with SSSC and for continuous employee development. The RPL-SVQ project developed materials to support learners as
they grow in confidence, recognize the skills and knowledge they have learned from previous experience, and develop the capacity to think and write reflectively. The materials also support learners through assessments towards SVQ3 in Health and Social Care. RPL

EXAMPLE: RPL IN SECTORS, COMMUNITY EDUCATION (COMMUNITIES SCOTLAND 2007)

**Aims:** Many Community Education workers, although have experience, personal traits and skills that qualify them for various work roles in the CLD sector, yet lack formal qualifications. This SCQF project was undertaken by Community Learning and Development (CLD) to promote RPL and was carried out during 2005-2006 in six local authorities and involved 20 youth workers. This pilot project aimed to develop an RPL profiling tool in order to help community workers

- to reflect on their prior learning and recognise their own achievements,
- to apply for credit for their prior learning within the CLD sector,
- to benchmark their learning against the National Occupational Standards for Youth Work
- to complete qualification (such as SVQ3 in Youth Work or Modern Apprenticeships)

**Outputs:** The project shaped the RPL process in CLD sector through producing

- sector specific RPL promotional materials
- Introductory RPL leaflet for staff
- Mentor pack
- Learner pack
- On-line RPL profiling tool.

These outputs served for

- confidence-building;
- a career development or appraisal process;
- a training needs analysis; or
- to support workers in gaining credit for their prior informal
- learning towards an academic or vocational qualification.

**Profiling tool** that was developed throughout the project enables

- **Learners:**
  - to explore their current work practice in a positive and critical manner,
  - to identify relevant learning experiences, reflect on the level of their abilities and breadth of skills and knowledge applied to their own practice,
  - to understand the value of their previous experience in terms of how it relates to core competence and related knowledge,
  - to relate prior learning them to the National Occupational Standards;
- **Assessors:**
  - to make more use of prior learning and experience when assessing knowledge and competence
  - to accredit prior learning identified through the tool through the SVQ assessment process

**Main conclusions from the project:**

RPL helped greatly in improving workers self-confidence, improved job-performance, and created motivation and basis for further professional development and studying towards formal qualifications.

The project identified a need for RPL mentor training. It highlighted that the groups approach to RPL is very valuable because it allows participants to benefit from peer support and networking, to share information, experience and practice.

One of the important conclusions was that the RPL tool should be used not only for support in achievement of work-based qualifications but also be integrated into CPD and organisational training programmes.

**Further developments** included

- *Community Learning and Development Portfolio* (2008-09): Recognition of learning, experience and achievement of part-time paid and volunteer workers operating within the field of community learning and development (CLD)
- The *Learner Passport* project (2009-11) records all the learning in which a learner is involved and can be used to track what they have learnt.
Career Scotland: RPL is used by Career Scotland in assisting individuals in understanding articulation of qualification routes and access points to further learning based on existing qualification levels, only recently the steps were made to use RPL for non-accredited learning by guidance agencies and employability services (Inspire Scotland 2008).

To turn use of RPL for informal and non-accredited learning into routine practice, it is necessary to provide training for career advisors and prepare them to assist individuals with RPL of informal learning in

- help with formative recognition
- identifying pathways into summative recognition;
- explanation how RPL work with job seekers would also include
- explanation the meaning of RPL in terms of occupational prospects, opportunities for studies, etc.

Recently, Skills Development Scotland in collaboration with the SCQF Partnership developed two RPL resources, an RPL Profiling Tool and RPL Guidelines for people who have been made redundant.

The aim of the RPL tool is to assist young people in school and post-school learners to identify the skills they have developed through formal and informal learning and to ‘notionally’ benchmark this learning to the SCQF Framework. The tool was used by Careers Advisers with the young people to assist them with planning their next steps into education, training and employment. The tool has been piloted with young people in secondary schools across Scotland and has generated a great deal of interest from various partners/stakeholders from within education and the voluntary sector.

In addition to the above RPL Profiling tool Skills Development Scotland has been piloting RPL Guidelines for people who have been made redundant to help them to:

- identify the skills they have gained throughout their life through formal and informal learning
- describe these skills in a way which is helpful to employers, learning and training providers
- consider how they can further develop their skills
- think about their next steps into employment, training or learning.

2.2.3 THE STAGES IN RPL PROCESS

There are two main stages in any RPL process (Whittaker 2008).

The first stage includes initial advice, guidance and support. At this stage RPL providers introduce learners to the RPL process and to its basic components and explain what is work it practice: e.g. what does credit points mean, what is credit transfer, how much credit could be awarded for prior learning, how this learning may be used for further learning toward formal
qualifications and different learning pathways to qualification; what costs, roles and responsibilities of learner and tutor/advisor in the RPL. Learners are being provided support throughout reflective process, understanding learning outcomes, identifying own learning outcomes and evidence gathering and selection.

The second stage of RPL is the stage of formal recognition, i.e. the stage when validators conduct formal assessment of the gathered prior learning evidence.

**Stages of RPL:**

1. **Initial advice and guidance** (what credit transfer /RPL involves, what credit limits there are for prior learning, what costs, roles & responsibilities of learner and tutor/advisor; and different learning pathways to qualification)

2. **Support** (reflective process; understanding learning outcomes; identifying own learning outcomes; evidence gathering & selection)

3. **Recognition/assessment** (assessment of evidence of achievement of learning outcomes and assessment criteria)

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### 2.2.3.1 RPL LEARNER SUPPORT:

There are three forms of support for learners available:

1. support with the “logistics” of the RPL process such as planning learning pathway;
2. support for reflective process; evidence gathering & selection (e.g. applicant are guided in becoming highly selective in their choice of evidence and to cross-reference evidence to more than one standard or learning outcome),
3. and support in subject, vocational, professional area such as level, knowledge, skills and values. The support is usually being provided by mentors through individual meeting and tutorials or through groups sessions, but it could be also carried out through electronic communication or through a referral to but learners could be also referred to written/e-learning resources (SCQF RPL Guidelines 2005)

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### 2.2.3.2 GATHERING RPL EVIDENCE

Evidence of learning for RPL can be gathered in a number of different ways, that include reflective accounts, project works, interviews, observation of work performance, using profiling tools, producing evidence portfolio, etc. (SCQF RPL Guidelines 2005)

**Examples of gathering evidence of learning for RPL:**

- Reflective account
- Project work
- Interview/oral assessment/professional discussion
- 'Assessment on demand'
- Simulation/observation of practice
- Mapping of Learning Outcomes
- Profiling
- Europass CV
- Portfolio
There is well developed guidance for learners, the RPL mentors and the staff that assessing the RPL regarding the evidence gathering in order to ensure that the evidence meets assessment criteria which relate to accessibility, sufficiency, authenticity and currency of the submitted evidence.

(SCQF RPL Guidance 2005):

### RPL Assessment Criteria

(SCQF RPL guidance 2005):

- **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 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 longer than 5 years ago?

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2.2.3.3 ASSESSING PRIOR LEARNING

Learner must submit claim in form that makes clear written statements about what actually learnt i.e. learning outcomes and provides supportive evidence that learning claimed has occurred at appropriate SCQF level.

The statement must demonstrate comparability between outcomes of the prior informal learning with the learning outcomes of module, unit, part of a level or entire level of qualification for which seeking credit. The learning must meet the assessment criteria specified in section 3.3.2.

All universities require to submit written statements for the RPL claim support, however some universities also require oral presentations and examinations either for all claims (e.g. Queen Margaret University) or for claims that exceed certain amount of credit points (e.g. University of West of Scotland). Some Universities (e.g. University of Stirling), in the statements about their RPL policies emphasise the requirement for the RPL claim to meet the formal assessment criteria (section 3.3.2), while others say stress more the importance of the compatibility of informal learning to the formal requirements of the University programmes and (e.g. Glasgow Caledonian University).

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6 [www.qmu.ac.uk/quality/documents/RPL%20summary%20guide.doc](http://www.qmu.ac.uk/quality/documents/RPL%20summary%20guide.doc)
7 [http://www.uws.ac.uk/schoolsdepts/capd/strategies.asp](http://www.uws.ac.uk/schoolsdepts/capd/strategies.asp)
2.2.4 RPL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality assurance (QA) is crucially important for RPL. All RPL processes should be quality assured to make sure of consistency, transparency and accessibility (SCQF RPL core principles).

RPL should be integrated within academic programme design and delivery; learning outcomes should be expressed in a way that enables a variety of different routes for their achievement as well as the use of different modes of assessment/evidence. Staff that is involved in RPL should receive training and support

- Training and support for staff involved in supporting learners in RPL process
- Use of SCQF core principles & key features of RPL : RPL Guidelines (www.scqf.org.uk)

SCQF follows the principles of quality assurance (QA) specified in the European guidelines for quality assurance in Education and Training (CEDEFOP 2008).

A Quality Committee for the SCQF has an important responsibility to insure that RPL is being carried out in a way that does not violate the quality and integrity of the SCQF. All RPL processes should be quality assured to make sure of consistency, transparency and accessibility (SCQF RPL core principles).

According to the SCQF handbook, the award of credit for prior learning can only be carried out by SCQF Credit Rating Bodies, within the context of clearly defined quality assurance mechanisms. Organisations wishing to become credit rating bodies are subject to a rigorous application process (see section 2.6.2).

Quality assurance term used in the SCQF Credit rating bodies include the Criteria for Becoming ac SCQF Rating body, the application process, the approval process through which such bodies are recognised as an SCQF Credit Rating bodies and the way in which they subsequently carry out their credit rating activities.

2.2.4.1 RPL QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

A number of bodies, such as Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), practice-based learning providers and regulatory and professional bodies have a responsibility to ensure the quality of practice-based learning. Additional context for RPL quality insurance is being provided through

- the Scottish Higher Education Standard Framework,
- the Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, and
- the Enhancement Themes programme.
- Standards and frameworks defined by professional regulatory bodies provide a key context for professional practice-based learning.
Standards and frameworks defined by professional regulatory bodies provide a key context for professional practice-based learning. Regulatory requirements of different professional bodies vary in relation to (a) supervision/mentoring requirements, (b) assessment of practice, and (c) amount of time in practice-based learning.

SCQF through different RPL projects identified following key aspect in respect to quality accordance process (e.g. SCQF 2009, Inspire Scotland 2008, Whittaker 2008):

- Verification of RPL should focus on ensuring that the use of the SCQF Level Descriptors is consistently applied.
- RPL needs to be fully integrated within the training/learning programme provider’s existing quality assurance systems to ensure transparency, consistency and reliability.
- Learning programmes be available for scrutiny by appropriate external quality assurance, for example by an awarding body or an external auditing body.
- Processes for RPL need to build into programme design stage to ensure accessibility and greater ease of use, from both learner and provider perspective.
- Staff involved in the planning, development and operation of RPL need to be provided with training, and continuing support for this role, which requires adequate resources.

### 2.2.5 SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE

A societal consensus about the value of learning which was achieved outside formal educational institutions is very important.

The validated outcomes of informal learning should be socially acceptable, with learners, learning providers and employers all having trust in qualifications that were obtained as a result of recognition of prior learning. Such trust would depend on whether there is a robust quality assurance mechanism in place regarding the process of validation of informal learning. Additionally, social acceptance of the validated prior learning would depend on the type of national education system and on the national ethos in generally. Thus, validated outcomes of informal learning would be more acceptable if education system is flexible and permissive, without dead-end venues but with an opportunity to move between its general and vocational branches, and vocational qualifications having the same value as general academic qualifications among general public.

Furthermore, if national ethos holds a high esteem for learning as an essential process of personal development, then any learning would be valued in the same way in a society. However, in a society where only learning gained through a traditional formal educational environment is valued, people would trust less to validated outcomes of non-formal learning. These societal attitudes to validation of informal or non-formal learning are subject to change through policy efforts, which promote ideas of life-long learning, and ensure that qualifications gained through the validation of non-formal learning are subject to a robust quality assurance process and have the same high quality standards as traditional qualifications.
Evidence suggests that there is a support for the use of SCQF and RPL among individual and organization in Scotland and there is an awareness that they contribute both to individual wellbeing and to the Scottish economy. In Scotland traditionally general and vocational qualifications hold similar values and this facilitates further the acceptance of RPL.

Scottish Government support RPL as an efficient tool for providing the workforce with an opportunity to access learning and qualifications and to develop appropriate skills, and for ensuring a sustainable economic growth.

However, the RPL report (Inspire Scotland 2008) identifies that more work could be done to increase the social acceptance for RPL.

To create and reinforce trust in and acceptability of RPL processes undertaken in different contexts and make learning achievements identified/accredited through RPL processes to be more widely accepted by employers and learning providers, across and between sectors, there is a need to ensure that there is a RPL model in place that is clear, transparent, not over complicated to apply with a robust quality assurance mechanisms.

Individuals in turn need to know that the RPL accredited process is as valued as formal routes to qualifications, that the RPL would be less time consuming and expensive that formal studies towards qualifications, and that they would receive adequate guidance and support for the RPL process.

### 2.2.6 FINANCIAL RESOURCES

RPL incurs both direct and indirect costs. The direct costs are the fees which must be paid to the awarding body:

- approval fees;
- registration and certification fees for each candidate;
- and verification costs.

Indirect costs include

- the resources needed for training and development;
- the loss of work time from staff carrying out assessments and verification,
- the loss of work time from candidates and

Organisations can charge costs for the provision of RPL. These are decided at the level of the organisation and there are no national level rules on how much providers should charge – costs are reported to be from GBP 50 upwards. These fees vary across institutions from a proportion of or the full cost of the module applied for.

For example at the UHI Millennium Institute, no fees are charged for RPL relating to admissions as charging at this point is felt to be against the University’s participation strategy, since it would present a barrier to entry. Fees are charged however for RPL relating to exemptions, which can be waived in certain circumstances, such as if the student makes a case for hardship.
There is no national funding framework for RPL. It is funded at the level of the sector, provider or by the individuals themselves.

For instance, employers or employer bodies often cover costs to show their commitment to workforce development.

In Higher Education, there is generally no charge for RPL which takes place as part of the admissions (i.e. for persons applying to join a course) but RPL claims for credit in HE (i.e. to achieve a module) tend to be subject to a fee (Hawley 2011).

For example, at Glasgow Caledonian University, fees are normally determined by the staff time spent in RPL support and assessment. The fee therefore varies according to the level of support involved but will be a minimum of GBP 50, and a maximum of 50% of the module fee (Hawley 2011).

2.2.7 INFORMATION AVAILABILITY

The information on the RPL in Scotland (e.g. SCQF RPL guidelines, various reports on RPL in Scotland, etc.) is freely available from the SCQF, QAA websites. RPL information is also available from the websites of professional bodies, voluntary organizations, higher and further education institution.

Additionally, many RPL resources, such as RPL kits, profiling tools, skills passports, etc., developed by the RPL Network in cooperation with SCQF, QAA, Skill Sector Counsels, SSSC, as well as various case RPL studies conducted by the RPL Network are freely available on for download on the organisational websites and pages.

Many professional bodies, such as Chartered Institute of Bankers in Scotland (CIBS), Institute of Chartered of Secretaries and Administrators, Institute of Management Consultancy, NHS Scotland, include information about RPL processes on their main pages to demonstrate how the professional qualifications awarded by these bodies could be transferred into academic credit and used for further academic learning with for a degree through adding additional one or two years of studies at universities which have RPL arrangements with these particular professional bodies (see part II for details). For example, on the homepage of the SIBS is stated:

…Chartered Banker is the gold standard in banking qualifications. We have joined forces with the UK’s top rated Bangor University to offer a groundbreaking qualification that allows you to gain the dual award of an MBA in banking and finance, together with Chartered Banker status. Click here for more information.

SCQF partnership, QAA and the RPL Network conducted a series of the RPL seminars and workshops and the materials from these events are available from the SCQF and QAA websites.

EXAMPLES OF THE WEBSITES WITH RPL INFORMATION:

SCQF: http://www.scqf.org.uk/RPL
Quality Assurance Agency: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Scotland/DevelopmentAndEnhancement/Pages/RPL-Network-project.aspx
Centre for Credit Rating, Edinburgh Napier University http://www.napier.ac.uk/creditrating/Pages/Home.aspx
Scottish Social Service Council
2.2.8 PROMOTION

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is promoting the understanding of the framework among employers and is carrying out a campaign which explains both to organisations in different sectors, employers and employees a range of qualifications available in Scotland and the benefits for individuals, learning providers, professional organisations and employers in using RPL. There benefits are identified through various RPL pilot projects conducted by SCQF and/or QAA in partnership with different sectors,

Promotion of PRL – statement of the RPL benefits

For individuals:

- Time saving – compared with formal learning, not need to repeat already achieved learning
- Shorter route to further qualifications
- Recognition of learning in alternative settings: work-based and experiential learning as well as for formal non-accredited learning
- Potential for individuals to review their skills and competences and to widen their career choices.
- Basis for lifelong learning

For employers/organisation:

- Helps in recruitment process to identify desired skills
- Helps in planning professional training and development activities for existing staff
- Gain credit for organisations own in-house training programmes which raises the profile of the organisation and attracts potential employees with appropriate skills
- Reduction in time and costs of employees training and professional development

For learning providers:

- Potential to increase student enrolment through attracting non-traditional learner

Guidance agencies and employability service providers

- Assist individual in finding further learning opportunities
- Help individuals to transfer their informal learning to the job market

Professional bodies

- Identify existing skills and competencies of individuals
- Enable them to gain credit and potential exemptions from part of the professional bodies’ required qualifications
- Increasing membership
- Encouraging individuals with transferable skills into the industry
- Retaining employees within the industry by providing clear career pathways
One of the main challenges is the socio-economic profile of Scottish population, especially of its young segment. There is a wide achievement gap on the upper-primary and especially the secondary levels, among 12-18 years old, which is closely associated with the socio-economic status and inequalities appear to widen beyond the end of compulsory school (Croxford 2000, 2009; Raffe et al. 2006). Furthermore, Scotland has one of the highest proportions in the OECD of young people who are not in education, employment or training (Scottish Executive 2007).

The way to face these challenges is to ensure that young people beyond compulsory education have clearly defined learning and training opportunities and accessible pathways into learning and training (Raffe et al. 2011). This task needs involvement of social partners (i.e. employers, professional organizations and trade unions).

**Individual level challenges** On the level of individuals the main challenges result from a wide achievement gap in later primary and secondary education, which closely associates associated with socio-economic status; and the need for ‘socially broader and more successful participation in upper secondary education and greater equity in higher education’ (OECD 2008, p.15).

A current policy termed 16-plus Learning Choices aims to enhance opportunities through local partnerships of education providers, voluntary organisations and employers, with a particular emphasis on non-formal and informal learning as a means to continue the participation of the most disadvantaged or disengaged young people.

**Structural level challenges.** On the structural level the challenges involve different stakeholders – Scottish Government, Qualification authorities, education system, professional bodies, learning providers and employers.

One of the main challenges facing Scottish education is to provide a full range of opportunities with progression into employment and further/higher education, for the full cohort of young people completing compulsory education.

One of the main challenges facing policy makers us to put more effort in promoting equal access to skills and learning for everyone, to create parity of esteem between vocational and general learning.

Learning providers need to create more flexible and diverse approaches to skill development and training. They should be encouraged to take more active part in insuring wider participation, a continuity of learning provision through the recondition of prior learning.

Different stakeholders should be encouraged (i.e. employers, professional organizations, learning providers) to used more widely SCQF for the RPL, e.g. for enabling individuals to move smoothly through learning environments, getting credit for learning they have already achieved’.
2.2.9.2. CRITERIA OF RPL GOOD PRACTICES

Overall RPL has a significant contribution to the skills upgrading in Scotland and it is a useful tool for employers which help them both to identify skills during the recruitment process as well as in planning and carrying out employee development processes (2008 SCQF).

There are many examples of good RPL practices in Scotland. These examples are provided in detail in Part II of this report.

Overall, the following key features of successful RPL process were identified through the SCQF RPL review (SCQF Handbook, 2009):

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### RPL CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS IN SCOTLAND (2008 SCQF REVIEW)

- The provision of RPL is patchy and not consistently accessible across all education/training providers, industry sectors, or across the country.
- RPL practice varies across different organization and more activities should be carried out to share the RPL practice across sectors.
- RPL policies, systems and practices need to be embedded in the day to day operation of the learning providers’ business.
- It is necessary increase RPL awareness, understanding and use of RPL.
- The SCQF RPL network should be developed and support the increase on both the demand side for RPL with learners and the supply side in learning providers and awarding bodies to meet the potential demand.
- RPL need dedicated resources.

### MAIN BARRIERS

- A lack flexibility in providing recognition of prior learning and access to and credit towards other more formal learning.
- The need to make RPL services affordable and manageable for learners and learning providers.
- Institutional and attitudinal barriers on the part of learning provider staff, professional bodies and others.
- The need for reliability, respectability and sustainability of RPL services.
CRITERIA OF RPL GOOD PRACTICES

- **(Information)** – learners should have an access to information and on the RPL procedures that are in place in the organisation;
  - **(Costs)** - Organization should provide clear details of the costs for RPL;
  - **(Recognition)** Learners should be supported in the **reflective** process to:
    - identify learning through experience (skills, knowledge and understanding);
    - reflect on previous experience;
    - select and present evidence of that learning;
    - identify areas for further learning.
  - **(Clear mechanisms)** for making RPL claims must be in place.
  - **(Staff training)** Appropriately trained, supported and resourced staff should assist learners to provide evidence of their learning.
  - **(Guidance and support)** Evidence of learning can be gathered in a number of different ways and learners should be provided with guidance on the method to be used.
  - **(Qualifications Framework)** Learning should be benchmarked within the context of the national qualification framework (e.g. SCQF);
  - **(Outcome based assessment of learning)** this requires a formal assessment of learning and determining if the learning outcomes from experience and informal learning are compatible to the
    - existing qualification of individual learning programme
    - particular entry requirements for a qualification or learning programme
    - learning outcomes for an entire or for part of the SCQF Level of a qualification or learning programme
  - **(Pathways)** Learning pathways should be identified.
  - **(Transition)** Learners should be supported in making transition between learning contexts and formal learning (e.g. provided with information on the core learning skills required to successfully undertake a formal qualification or learning programme)
  - **(Assessment)** Staff should have clear guidelines in supporting learners and assessment of RPL (e.g. will require guidance to compare learning achievements against the aims and/or outcomes of the qualification or learning programme for which they want SCQF Credit Points);
  - **(Monitoring)** RPL procedures should be monitored and become within the overall quality assurance systems.
2.3 SUMMARY: CRITICAL FACTORS IDENTIFIED IN THE PROCESS OF RPL IMPLEMENTATION IN SCOTLAND.

FACTOR 1. RPL DEVELOPMENTS BEING BACKED WITH CONSTANT POLICY INTEREST AND BEING A PART OF CONSISTENT, INCREMENTAL AND PRAGMATIC POLICY TOWARDS SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

One of the most important factors that enables the development and implementation of current RPL system in Scotland is that the RPL processes were backed with a consistent policy interest in skill development and lifelong learning among several consecutive Scottish governments.

RPL was developed within the context of lifelong learning policy and SCQF.

A series of reforms that created a basis for RPL include

- a national system of outcomes-based modules in education and training;
- a unified system of national qualifications (NQs);
- the Scottish credit accumulation and transfer system (SCOTCAT);
- Scottish vocational qualifications framework (SVQs);
- merger of existing qualification frameworks such as NQs, SVQs and SCOTCATS together into SCQF;
- centralisation of qualifications award with SQA;

These processes were incremental, consistent and pragmatic, they did not try to change existing education and training systems, but rather aimed to develop a tool for seamless transitions between different levels of education and training and for lifelong learning and the development of skills.

FACTOR 2: DEVELOPMENT OF RPL IN THE CONTEXT OF LIFELONG LEARNING (LLL) POLICY, WHICH ESTABLISHED IMPORTANT IDEOLOGICAL, POLITICAL, INSTITUTIONAL AND ORGANISATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Another crucial factor for the success of RPL processes in Scotland is that RPL become an intrinsic part of a strategy for developing a learning society which is based on lifelong learning approach.

In Scotland since the late 1990s lifelong learning continued to remain a key aspect of a policy agenda different Scottish governments put notable efforts into developing policy towards “training for skills”, widening access to further and higher education, creating a culture of lifelong learning and increasing adult participation in education and training. Thus, the lifelong learning policies aimed at skill development for all ages and at all levels of education.

LLL policies included establishing and developing important ideological, political, institutional and organisational frameworks for their implementation which paved way for the subsequent RPL development and implementation. The following organisations were
created for provision of post-compulsory education and lifelong learning in Scotland, and they all played an important role in the RPL development:

- Scottish Funding Council for Further and Higher Education (SFC)
- Skills Development Scotland (SDS)
- Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA)
- Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)
- Her Majesty Inspectorate for Education (HMIE)
- Quality Assurance Agency Scotland (QAA)

**FACTOR 3: RPL IN THE CONTEXT OF SCOTTISH SYSTEM OF EDUCATION**

The features of the Scottish education system provide a good basis for the recognition of prior learning and life-long learning.

- It has many elements of the permeable education system which facilitates the process of life-long learning and the recognition of prior learning. It means that it does not have selection and tracking into general and vocational education, it gives a similar value to general and vocational qualifications and there are no dead-ends in the system, so learners could move between vocational and general tracks.
- Among the most important elements that shaped the Scottish system of education and allowed it becoming supportive for lifelong learning and RPL are
  - Outcome-based, unitised and modular type of Scottish qualifications,
  - highly centralised system of qualifications award,
  - credit arrangements in education and training
  - Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
- These elements of the Scottish system of education were developed gradually and consistently over the last two decades.

**FACTOR 4: RPL IN THE CONTEXT OF LEARNING OUTCOMES BASED APPROACH AND THE SYSTEM OF SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS**

For the process of formal recognition of learning there should be a possibility to disconnect learning from its context and to identify learning outcomes in terms of skills, knowledge and competences that individual gained through that learning process, which could identify, documented, assessed and recorded.

Defining learning by its outcomes, without specifying the context where these outcomes were obtained is particularly vital for learning experiences that occurred outside the traditional classroom environment with formal learning providers.

The RPL process is being facilitated by the nature of Scottish qualifications which are:

- outcomes based
- modular and flexible
- most of them are not related to a particular occupational role, but allows several pathways from that qualification into further educational or professional development
• all qualifications can be delivered by any institution or organisation which meets the relevant requirements of the SQA.
• certification is carried out centrally by the SQA, which maintains a cumulative record of the achievements of individual learners.

➢ In particular, Scottish vocational qualifications (SVQs) offer a main opportunity for individuals to have their non-formal (work-based) or experiential learning recognised through a qualification because:
  • SVQs concentrate on the outcomes (in terms of competences and skills) of leanings
  • Assessment for the SVQ is based on the process of incorporation of candidate’s prior learning experience
  • SVQs often are loosely tied to a particular job tasks and allow several pathways for transition both into work and into further formal education and training.
  • SVQs are broken down into units. Certificates are being awarded not only for the whole qualification but also for the completed units.

FACTOR 5: RPL AND SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

One of the most important critical factor for a successful implementation of RPL is a presence of a developed National Qualification Framework which
  - supports formative and summative recondition of prior leaning
  - allows benchmarking learning outcomes to a formal system of qualifications
  - improves understanding of qualifications
  - explains how qualifications relate to each other
  - shows how national qualification are related to wider regional meta-frameworks of qualification.

The Scottish credit and qualifications framework (SCQF) was one of the first comprehensive national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). The SCQF is a communication framework which builds on a series of reforms to create a more coherent and unified qualification system.

SCQF fully supports both credit transfer and Recognition of Prior Learning by enables employers, learners and the public in general to understand:
  - how using level descriptors can assist with benchmarking skills and experience
  - the full range of Scottish qualifications;
  - how qualifications relate to each other and to other forms of assessed learning;
  - how different types of qualification can contribute to improving the development, and utilisation, of the skills of the workforce;
  - how using level descriptors can assist with qualifications development

The SCQF wider goals can be defined as to promote trust to qualifications, cooperation between learning providers (organizations, professional bodies, colleges and universities) and subsequent transferability of skill from life and work experience to education, from education to work, between organisations, and between countries.
FACTOR 6: RPL AND CREDIT TRANSFER ARRANGEMENT

Credit accumulation and transfer arrangement in education and training in Scotland is another crucial element of Scottish education system that facilitates RPL.

Qualifications in Scotland are based on the process of allocating an SCQF Level and SCQF Credit Points to a defined set of learning outcomes. Programmes of studies consists of units (modules) and full qualification is built around a combination of shorter and longer programmes that normally have credit accumulation and progression routes built into them.

The credit arrangement for education and training

- enables an accumulative approach to learning, makes skills achieved through learning transparent and the learning itself transferable and provides a seamless transition between different stages and modes of learning. Therefore, the existing of credit transfer arrangements are crucial for RPL;
- separates teaching process from learning process i.e. enables flexibility in terms of when, how and where learning takes place;
- learning outcomes describe transferable skills, knowledge & understanding;
- can be used in retrospective terms (i.e. what is already achieved through prior learning) as well as prospective terms (i.e. what learner is expected to achieve);
- enables easy comparison between different qualifications and different types of learning experiences in terms of credit transfer, RPL and progression;
- enables easier comparisons/connections for learners between the outcomes of experiential/non-formal learning to outcomes of formal programmes.

FACTOR 7: INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR RPL

Another crucial factor of success for RPL in Scotland is existing National level RPL Network which was established by the SCQF Partnership and includes representatives across different education and training sectors, including employers, professional bodies and the Scottish Government. National level RPL network was established by the SCQF Partnership and includes representatives across different education and training sectors, including employers, professional bodies and the Scottish Government.

The network’s is based on activities to support the use of RPL within formal education and training, in the workplace, in the community and in relation to careers guidance. Quality Assurance Agency Scotland (QAA) coordinated the QAA / Universities Scotland HEI RPL network, which is working on identifying ways of developing more standardised processes for the RPL, RPL Interest Group was set in the Social Service sector to promote and develop further the RPL work that has been already undertaken in the sector. This groups is being co-ordinated by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) aims to evaluate the PRL practices in the sector.

Finally, the Scottish Qualification Authority SQA acts as a regulatory body with a statutory role to authorise and approve vocational qualifications (including SVQs) and awarding bodies. It is responsible for ensuring that each SVQ satisfies national standards and is offered
by an approved awarding body. SQA works in partnership with industry bodies to ensure that the quality of SVQs is upheld.

FACTOR 8: CO-OPERATION BETWEEN DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS

Examples from the report show that many successful activities and RPL good practices in Scotland exist through co-operation between different stakeholders – universities, workplace, qualification award authorities, credit rating bodies, employers and professional bodies.

Indeed this kind of co-operation is crucial for the RPL success due to the very nature of the RPL which goes beyond institutional setting and sectorial boundaries and is based on the principle of bringing skills and competences acquired in one setting into another setting through a formal validation of learning experiences.

FACTOR 9: DEVELOPING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY TO PROVIDE RPL PROVISION

Developing institutional capacities for RPL provision are crucial for the success of RPL. In Scotland such institutional capacities are being developed unevenly are seen as one of important institutional challenges to RPL and recommendations on future RPL practices in Scotland (Inspire Scotland 2008) suggest their further development.

These institutional capacities include:

- The RPL process should be embedded in the institutional policies, systems, processes and everyday working practices and become the norm rather than the exception
- Staff awareness about RPL should be constantly developed
- Staff should be encouraged and supported in respect to RPL
- Clear mechanism should exist that states how employers could exercise their RPL right should be developed
- Staff should be entitled for personal development and training through RPL through gaining some paid time for learning and development, which is a statutory right of employers in several European countries with highly developed mechanisms for validation of learning gained formal educational environment (e.g. France, Portugal, Denmark, Netherlands).
- Staff which is responsible for the RPL process (guidance, support and assessment) should receive adequate training
- Quality assurance mechanisms need to be developed further
APPENDIX 1. SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION ON RPL
(with links)

A1.1 SCQF Partnership resources

1. A Guide to SCQF Publications
2. Nomenclature Explained - a guide to naming qualifications and learning programmes for the SCQF
3. SCQF Credit Points Explained
   SCQF Credit Rating Criteria Explained
   Guidelines to Promote and Support the Credit Rating Process in Colleges in Scotland
   SCQF Update 16
   Realizing Your Potential - a guide to the SCQF for lifelong learners (16+)
4. Achievement Counts 2011 - a guide to credits and qualifications for school-age learners
5. Credit Where Credit's Due - a guide to credits and qualifications for parents and carers
   A4 Framework Guide - a comprehensive guide to the Framework for learners, learning providers and employers
6. Summary of the credit points for qualifications - a guide for employers (explains how employers of all sizes can use the SCQF in recruitment and workforce development; also provides information on understanding SCQF levels and using the SCQF Level Descriptors).
7. Employer Leaflet - a short guide to how the SCQF Framework can help employers
8. Employer Toolkit: “Would you credit it?” - a short guide for employers describing the benefits of having learning programs credit rated and recognized on the SCQF
   A3 Framework Diagram - for anyone with an interest in learning and Scottish qualifications
9. The SCQF Explained - a guide to the role of the SCQF in lifelong learning
   Qualifications can cross boundaries leaflet - for anyone with an interest in how qualifications compare in the UK and Ireland
12. SCQF Level Descriptors Booklet (A5)
13. Quality Assurance Model: Guidance Notes for CRBs
14. Overview of Quality Assurance
15. Credit Rating and Benchmarking: What's the Difference?

A1.2 SOCIAL SERVICES

1. Understanding the SCQF - An initial guide for Early Education and Childcare (PDF - 73.9KB)
2. Social Services Toolkit:
   SSSC RPL Resource Pack
   SSSC RPL Profiling Tool
   SSSC RPL Mentor Guidance Pack
   SSSC RPL Links to SVQ3

A1.3 HEALTHCARE

2. SCQF Levels Descriptors Guidance for NHS 2007
3. SCQF Valuing Your Learning RPL Guidance Leaflet 2007
4. NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF) Leaflet 2007
5. SCQF NHS leaflet 2007

A1.4 RESOURCES FOR POLICY MAKERS

1. SCQF Partnership Strategic Plan 2011-2014
2. SCQF Operational Plan 2011-2012
3. SCQF Annual Report 2010-11
4. Scoping Exercise on International Comparisons with China and India Implementation of the EQF in the UK 2010-2011
5. Qualifications Frameworks of the UK EQF Report (Updated March 2010)
7. SCQF College Credit Rating Pilot(2006)
9. SVQ Titles & the SCQF
10. SCQF Scoping Study for Migrant Workers

A1.5 COMMUNITY LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

1. CLD CPD Portfolio
   CLD CPD Blank Forms (A resource for Community Learning and Development staff to record learning, experience and achievements)
2. Community Learning and Development Online Profiling Tool and Support Materials
3. SCQF Collaborative Projects - RPL Portfolio (Poster)
4. CLDMS SCQF Community Activist Training (Poster)
5. CLDMS SCQF Posters ( Levelling of non-accredited ALN Learning; Mapping Youth Worker Training; Collaborative Projects)
6. CLDMS SCQF Projects - Update on progress (2008)
7. Assessment Methods for selected short courses
8. Critical understanding of SCQF within adult education in the voluntary sector
9. Recognizing Prior Learning in Community Learning and Development using the SCQF

A1.6 OTHER RESOURCES

1. “Re-theorising the recognition of prior learning” – www.niace.org.uk
2. Candidate Guide Work Role Effectiveness, published by SQA: www.sqa.org.uk
3. UHI Millenium Institute website: www.uhi.ac.uk
4. University of the West of Scotland website: www.paisley.ac.uk
5. Anniesland College Website: www.anniesland.ac.uk
6. Scottish Social Services Council Website: www.sssc.uk.com

Flexible Entry Staff Development Pack, RPL and Credit Transfer within the SCQF, Feb 2006
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APPENDIX 2. REFERENCES


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