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Country report

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2016 update to the European inventory
on validation of non-formal and informal learning

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1 Introduction and evaluation

1.1 Abstract

Scotland's approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning (referred to as Recognition of Prior Learning or RPL) is unchanged and is linked to its national qualifications framework. Since 2014, a notable development is the introduction by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP) of a Guide to RPL that is delivered via an online tool. A key development in national guidelines since 2014 is the publication of a new edition of the SCQF Handbook, which serves as a technical guide for how the SCQF can be used to support and develop Scotland's lifelong learning agenda. The handbook is a guide and institutions are not obligated to follow or implement the principles and recommendations.

Alongside this, Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) are work-related, outcomes-based, competence-oriented qualifications. They are mainly targeted to people who are currently in work and provide evidence of professional competence; achievement of an SVQ shows that the individual can perform his or her job to national standards as agreed by the relevant industry or commercial sector. Overall, little has changed in the Scottish system of RPL, and arguably there has been very little progression in RPL policy or practice. The specific weaknesses remain largely similar as reported in 2014: RPL is perceived as expensive and time-consuming; there is a lack of explicit resourcing for RPL; there is no 'centre' for validation in Scotland and instead validation is the responsibility of providers with support and guidance from SCQFP; there is no national policy or strategy on RPL that obliges providers to offer RPL opportunities or that sets out a single set of practices or procedures.

1.2 Main changes since the 2014 update

Scotland's approach to validation of non-formal and informal learning (referred to as Recognition of Prior Learning or RPL) is unchanged and is linked to its national qualifications framework. RPL in this context covers prior formal, non-formal and informal learning in all sectors and can be used for both formative and summative outcomes.

Since 2014, a notable development is the introduction by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP) of an online Guide to RPL, which is designed to signpost users to a range of information relevant to their needs or interests, and also for providers of RPL.

A key development in national guidelines since 2014 is the publication of a new edition of the SCQF Handbook (SCQF, 2015), which serves as a technical guide for how the SCQF can be used to support and develop Scotland's lifelong learning agenda.

In the same way as reported in 2014, the 'model' of validation used in Scotland is to provide guidance/frameworks from a centralised perspective – from the SCQFP and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in Scotland (QAA Scotland), as well as the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), which has its own RPL policy – and for individual learning providers to choose how to implement RPL, from the design and delivery of the approach, to the decision on whether to charge fees to individuals.

There is no formal priority given to an education sector, but most activity appears to be in relation to higher education. The National RPL Framework for Higher Education (QAA Scotland, 2014) remains the key framework for RPL in this sector. The Framework attempts to locate RPL within broader developments linked to establishing more flexible and efficient learner journeys, a more flexible and accessible curriculum, and enabling greater participation in higher education by learners from a wide range of backgrounds.

In 2014, there were two national RPL networks (one run by the SCQFP and the Scottish Higher Education RPL Network, supported by QAA Scotland and Universities Scotland). The SCQFP RPL Network is no longer active.

Overall, little has changed in the Scottish system of RPL, and arguably there has been very little progression in RPL policy or practice. RPL has not received a greater amount of interest over the past two years from high level policy makers.

The specific strengths and weaknesses remain largely similar as reported in 2014. One of the barriers to take-up is a perception amongst providers that RPL is expensive and time-consuming. It can seem easier and cheaper to include a person in the cohort for a course, rather than to carry out a one-to-one process of RPL. Lack of explicit resourcing for RPL is also an important barrier, particularly in the college sector. For instance if a learner uses RPL to reduce the learning he/she needs to undertake in order to acquire a qualification, this can affect their 'status' and therefore the funding they are entitled to. This might mean that the learner is required to pay for the learning him/herself.

Another issue is that there is no 'centre' for validation in Scotland and instead validation is the responsibility of providers with support and guidance from SCQFP, QAA Scotland and SQA. This means that the trust in RPL procedures and achievements will depend on the provider in question.

Also, guidance and advice is provided at national level but there is no national policy or strategy on RPL that obliges providers to offer RPL opportunities or that sets out a single set of practices or procedures. Those providers that do offer RPL opportunities exhibit a wide variety of practices and procedures, which can be confusing to learners. To further improve the current arrangements, a national strategy would be needed, setting out the responsibilities of the different stakeholders involved. At the same time, SCQFP has limited capacity to promote RPL and to offer advice and guidance.

A strength of the Scottish approach is the speed and flexibility with which RPL procedures can be implemented. Different sectors and employers are able to participate if they wish.

A potential enabler towards increased use of RPL is to link it to other policy agendas, such as: Developing the Young Workforce (Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy); Outcome Agreements (setting out what colleges and universities plan to deliver in return for their funding from the Scottish Funding Council); closing gaps in educational attainment; Putting Learners at the Centre (wide-ranging reform of the full range of Government-funded post-16 education in Scotland); and, widening access to higher education.

There are no specific initiatives for validation in respect to migrants/refugees and other disadvantaged groups. However, migrants/refugees are target groups in the New Scots initiative, which is about integrating refugees and was developed by the Scottish Government in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) and the Scottish Refugee Council.

2 National perspective

2.1 Overarching approach to validation

As outlined in the 2014 country update, in Scotland, an overarching validation methodology known as 'Recognition of Prior Learning' (RPL) has been linked to the implementation of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). RPL is defined as:

"the process for recognising learning that has come from experience and/or previous formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts. This includes knowledge and skills gained within school, college and university and outside formal learning situations such as through life and work experiences." (SCQF, 2010).

There is no single policy or strategy on RPL in Scotland, and there is no one governmental body with responsibility for it. However, there are guidelines, tools and resources available, mainly delivered through the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP).

A key development in national policies and strategies since 2014 is the publication of a new edition of the SCQF Handbook (SCQF, 2015), which serves as a technical guide for how the SCQF can be used to support and develop Scotland's lifelong learning agenda.

The Handbook is aimed at Credit Rating Bodies, but is also said to be useful for staff in training organisations, Community Learning and Development (CLD) and schools, as well as employers, professional organisations, regulatory bodies, awarding bodies both in and out of Scotland, admissions officers and guidance staff in universities and colleges.

The Handbook is based on a revised set of 25 principles which replace the 47 Guidelines found in previous versions of the Handbook. These principles are high level statements and must be adhered to by Credit Rating Bodies.

The Handbook includes a dedicated section on RPL and notes that RPL is a process for recognising all types of learning, regardless of the context in which it has been acquired. It therefore covers learning that has its roots in experience, is acquired through informal means, as well as prior formal education and training. It describes three types of RPL:

- RPL for personal/career development (formative recognition);
- RPL to gain entry to a learning programme (summative recognition); and,
- RPL for the award of SCQF Credit Points to gain entry with credit or advanced standing in a programme/qualification (summative recognition).

Only summative recognition can lead to the award of SCQF Credit.

Thus the four stages of validation - identification, documentation, assessment and certification - are likely to be used to varying extents, depending on the type of recognition which is taking place.

The SCQF handbook (2015) sets out seven principles related to the delivery of RPL, as outlined below.

- Credit Rating Bodies must ensure that within the process of credit rating, and in processes for RPL, they take due cognisance of the SCQF Level Descriptors and any other relevant reference points.
- The design and development of qualifications and learning programmes for the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) should facilitate and promote credit recognition for prior informal and non-formal learning and credit transfer.
- RPL is given for learning, not for experience alone.
- SCQF Credit Points awarded as a result of RPL for informal or non-formal learning are of the same value as credit gained through formal learning.
- RPL for the award of SCQF Credit Points must involve a formal assessment or acceptance of evidence of learning which is quality assured.
- The assessment procedures for RPL including Credit Transfer should be consistent with the normal assessment and general quality assurance of the organisation.
- The process of monitoring and reviewing the operation of RPL procedures, including those for Credit Transfer, should be clearly defined and integrated within the existing quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms of the organisation.

The handbook is a guide and institutions are not obligated to follow or implement the principles and recommendations.

The Handbook also states that RPL should be:

- Learner Focused;
- Accessible;

- Flexible;
- Reliable, transparent and consistent; and,
- Quality assured.

A second key development is the introduction in 2014 by SCQFP of a Guide to RPL¹, which is designed to signpost users to a range of information relevant to their needs or interests, and also for providers of RPL. **The Guide is delivered via an online tool** (see the section on Information, advice and guidance for further detail).

The ‘Facilitating the Recognition of Prior Learning Toolkit’ (SCQF, 2010) remains one of the key documents supporting RPL using the SCQF. The focus of the Toolkit is on recognising learning that is gained from experience rather than from formal learning. It is for use by learning and training providers, employers and human resource personnel. It contains a detailed explanation of RPL, how it fits with the SCQF, explains the process for organisations and provides a number of activities to support facilitators working with learners.

As described in the 2014 update, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) also has its own RPL policy (see SQA, 2016). SQA’s policy is to use recognition of prior learning as a method of assessing whether a learner’s experience and achievements meet the evidence requirements (i.e. the standard) of a SQA Unit or Units and which may or may not have been developed through a course of learning.

2.2 Validation in education and training

Guidance on RPL, most notably in the form of the SCQF Handbook (2015) and SCQF’s Guide and Toolkit, can be applied across all education and training sectors, including Higher Education (HE). Aside from the guidance however, there are no formal regulations or requirements for the provision of RPL and thus implementation varies across sectors and providers.

To address variation in practice and implementation, the Scottish HE RPL Network, commissioned by the QAA, developed **the National RPL Framework for Higher Education (QAA Scotland, 2014)**. This was said to represent a step change in supporting the further growth of RPL across the Scottish higher education sector. The Framework attempts to locate RPL within broader developments linked to establishing more flexible and efficient learner journeys, a more flexible and accessible curriculum, and enabling greater participation in higher education by learners from a wide range of backgrounds (see box below).

RPL National Framework for Higher Education

QAA Scotland developed a national framework for RPL, which was launched in April 2014, to support RPL developments at all levels across the sector, as outlined below:

At **Sector** level, the framework aims to allow HEIs and other organisations to share, develop and enhance practice in RPL in a consistent and sustainable manner, through:

- Sector principles to ensure a minimum benchmark for RPL policy and practice for HEIs,
- Raising awareness amongst senior policy managers in HEIs and other organisations of the value of RPL to widen participation and encourage the development of flexible, learner-centred curricula,
- Develop the Scottish HE RPL Network as a Community of Practice,
- Develop the Scottish HE RPL Network as a source of expertise in RPL policy and practice development.

¹ see <http://scqf.org.uk/rpl-introduction/>

At **institutional** level, the framework aims to reduce inconsistencies in RPL processes between and within HEIs, by:

- Implementing the Streamlining RPL Guidelines (QAA Scotland, 2012) at institutional level,
- Updating/refreshing examples of practice in the Guidelines,
- Developing understanding of RPL.

The framework aims to support **students** by raising awareness and increasing transparency of RPL and clearly identifying its benefits to them, in the following ways;

- Working with HEIs to encourage them to produce clear guidance and information for students,
- Developing resources and identifying good practice to help HEIs to achieve the above,
- Encouraging HEIs to raise awareness of the benefits of RPL for students.

Finally for **professional statutory and regulatory bodies** the framework aims to raise awareness of and increase transparency of RPL, and clearly identify the benefits of RPL to them, by:

- Developing clear and transparent guidance on RPL for professional, statutory and regulatory bodies,
- Working with professional statutory and regulatory bodies which have well established RPL practices to identify and share practice,
- Developing case studies of RPL in a professional statutory and regulatory body context.

The policy and practice in regard to RPL has not changed as far as SQA is concerned.

RPL can be used for the assessment of Units in the following types of qualification:

- Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (except Graded Units),
- Professional Development Awards,
- Scottish Vocational Qualifications,
- National Progression Awards,
- National Certificates,
- Awards.

There are also a range of Units and assessments which cannot be achieved through RPL, including for example where there are regulatory, professional or other statutory requirements.

For SQA, RPL is a method of assessment that is very rare in gaining qualifications in schools/general education, and while SQA is open to it in principle, there is no real demand for it from schools. In any case, schools and colleges would be responsible for carrying out the RPL process themselves and the qualifications would not be different, so SQA would not necessarily be aware of it.

However, Education Scotland, in their online information, suggest that education providers should be looking at how young people's achievements beyond formal qualifications might be recognised. This could be related to hobbies and interests (e.g. participation in a sport), youth work, volunteering, caring for a relative, activities they undertake in the life of the school. It is suggested that through these activities they develop important skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work, and that these should be recognised through things like certificates, diaries, online portfolios and award ceremonies. However, such skills and achievements are not validated in the context of formal qualifications.

No examples of validation in relation to Open Educational Resources (OER) could be obtained through the research for this report.

2.3 Validation and the labour market

Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs), in the same way as National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in England and Wales, are work-related, outcomes-based, competence-oriented qualifications which are based on national occupational standards (NOS²). They are mainly targeted to people who are currently in work and provide evidence of professional competence; achievement of an SVQ shows that the individual can perform his or her job to national standards as agreed by the relevant industry or commercial sector. SVQs are assessed through evidence of performance against certain work-related tasks, meaning that attendance at a learning provider may not be required – acquisition of skills and assessment of these can take place during day-to-day work. Assessments are based on evidence collected by the candidate (usually from their work) rather than formal exams (SQA, no date).

The SCQF Online Guide emphasises the role of informal recognition of the skills and knowledge gained through experience. This is said to provide a reflective process through which people can understand their existing knowledge, skills and abilities, the outcome of which may be: employability training, careers guidance, personal development planning, performance development reviews in work, CV building, and career development. The Guide states that this process of RPL is particularly valuable for young people who may have left school with little or no formal qualifications, the long-term unemployed and adults returning to work after a break. Recognising transferable skills and strengths, it says, can be a valuable process in supporting a transition into training, further education or work or simply to raise confidence and self-esteem and make a plan for the future.

SQA usually sees RPL operating in the context of Scottish Vocational Qualifications (often applied to apprenticeships) where portfolios are often used as means of assessment. For employer-delivered courses, SQA offers guidance when employers ask to recruit an individual on a course via the RPL approach.

2.3.1 Skills audits

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) have formulated a joint strategy – ‘Integrated Employment and Skills (IES)’ – which is designed to ensure that unemployed customers are supported through a Careers Information and Guidance (CIAG) service to develop Career Management Skills (CMS) to help them achieve sustainable employment training or learning. SDS focuses on enabling individuals to develop their own CMS, which will enable them to plan and pursue life, learning and work opportunities. A Career Management Skills Framework has been developed by SDS, Scottish Government, Education Scotland, SQA and other professional guidance practitioners and academics. The Framework outlines the knowledge, skills and behaviours that will help individuals manage and develop their careers throughout their working lives (SDS, 2016). It is used to inform the development and delivery of career information, advice and guidance services delivered by SDS.

Complementing the CMS Framework, SDS has developed a career management skills assessment process which is focused particularly on young people aged between 15-19, but can also be used with other age groups. However, it is not a mandatory requirement within IES. It is accessible to users through ‘My World of Work’, which is available on the internet: <https://www.myworldofwork.co.uk>. These tools are designed to provide information for individuals seeking to identify their skills, interests and motivations to support their career development.

² The same standards as those used in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It should be noted however that the future of NOS in England is uncertain, where NOS are no longer a mandatory requirement.

The SCQF Partnership has also prepared three guides which employers can use to help in the identification of skills and training needs:

- *How To: Use The SCQF in Recruitment and Staff Selection* – shows how the SCQF can be used to help employers to understand and describe the skills they need, enabling them to write effective person specifications;
- *How To: Use the SCQF for Workforce Development* – shows how to undertake a skills audit and identify any skills gaps using the SCQF; and,
- *The Employer Levelling Tool and Support Materials* – supports employers to allocate an SCQF level to a job role and give an indication of the level of knowledge and skills which a job holder at that level may require.

In 2013, the SCQF Partnership, Glasgow Caledonian University and SDS worked together to create the 'My Skills, My Future' resources, aimed at supporting individuals in identifying the skills they have gained from other experiences outwith formal qualifications. The resources are aimed primarily at young people who have left, or may be about to leave school with few or no formal qualifications. However, it can also be used with young people who may have been made redundant from their first job, adult returners or the long term unemployed. The resources can be used by advisers in a range of settings to help the users to identify the transferable skills they have developed in other settings (e.g. hobbies, part-time jobs etc.), to think about those skills through reflective practices, and map those skills using the SCQF as an informal benchmark. The resource also helps them to develop a set of competency based statements that can be used in a CV, to access further training or to use in job applications. Individuals can then work with advisers to agree a future plan of action based on their strengths. See the case study box at the end of this report for more details.

The SCQFP has developed a one-day free workshop for those wishing to use the resources with individuals. Those experienced with the practice can also attend Train the Trainer courses, which are designed to help advisors understand all aspects of delivering the My Skills My Future workshop to colleagues.

2.4 Validation and the third sector

RPL is less used in the third sector, in comparison to the public sector. However, some organisations within this sector have RPL processes and procedures in place.

One notable approach is the Awards Network³, a forum of twenty one, mainly third sector providers of non-formal learning awards in Scotland. One of the aims of the Network is to develop a Scottish framework for valuing, recognising and accrediting young people's achievements through non-formal education (Awards Network, 2016). Youth Awards offer significant opportunities for young people (14 plus) to develop the four Curriculum for Excellence capacities: successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens. They recognise young people's contributions in a variety of settings including youth work, volunteering, active citizenship, and formal education (Youth Scotland, 2016). Some youth awards have external accreditation and currency through the SCQF, while others have their own long-standing internal processes for validation and accreditation (Awards Network, 2011).

Many youth awards actively involve young people in the assessment of their own learning and in recognising their achievements through dialogue and record-keeping in portfolios and journals. Self-assessment, peer assessment, personal learning planning and portfolios are recognised reporting methods within CfE (Awards Network, 2011).

³ See internet: <http://www.awardsnetwork.org/>

An Education Scotland (2015) report found that young people are developing a wide range of skills through participation in youth awards. The skills most commonly recognised are communication, confidence, interpersonal skills, team working, leadership and employability. Inspectors found that most young people can talk confidently about the skills and experiences they are gaining from participation in awards. A few young people are progressing through award levels and from one award to another and to accredited learning. For some this is leading directly to employment in youth work. Employers reportedly value the skills and attitudes young people are gaining including commitment, determination and team work. The report notes that in almost all communities across Scotland, the number of young people participating in, completing, progressing and gaining accreditation through youth awards has increased over the last few years. The total number of youth awards completed in Scotland in 2014/15 exceeds 73 000, nearly 11 % of young people currently in school.

In addition to the work of the Awards Network, a main driver for this has been the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence. An increasing number of youth awards are being accredited and the use of SCQF levelling is beginning to help a range of stakeholders better understand the currency of each award.

Similarly, in relation to adults, the SCQF Partnership and Newbattle Abbey College supported the development of an Adult Achievement Award credit rated by Napier University. This Award provides a formal framework for informal and non-formal learning. It has at its heart an RPL process based on reflection on learning.

Another interesting project from the third sector relates to the recognition of non-formal learning young people acquire through their participation in scouting. It is described in the box below.

Scouts of Scotland – Non-formal Learning for young people

The aim of the Scottish scouting organisation is to support young people in their development, as outlined in their purpose:

“The purpose of Scouting is to contribute to the development of young people in achieving their full physical, intellectual, social and spiritual potential as individuals, as responsible citizens and as members of their local, national and international communities.”

The Scouting programme and award scheme is for young people from age 6 to 25. Work has been undertaken by Scouts of Scotland to map young people's learning from their scouting activities against the curriculum of the formal education system (the Curriculum for Excellence). The learning outcomes of the programme and scheme have been linked to the four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence: Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Effective Contributors and Responsible Citizens. In particular, 'Get Ahead: Scouting and Employability' is a guide for Explorers and Scout Network members' (Scouts, 2013) that is designed to help Explorers and Scout Network members identify a range of skills they have developed through Scouting, and show them how to include them in CVs, application forms and interview answers to gain an advantage.

Scouts for Scotland is now actively supporting its volunteers so that they can develop local partnerships with schools. For example, Armadale Academy in West Lothian has worked with Explorer Scouts and other young people who are undertaking volunteer leadership in their community, by offering them the chance to gain the new SQA Leadership Award. By supporting the Young Leaders and recognising the volunteering they were already doing, the school helped a number of its pupils to gain an additional qualification. Another example is Cairneyhill scouts, which offered scouts participating in a summer expedition to Japan the chance to recognise the learning they achieved during the trip in the form of a Personal Development SQA.

3 Links to national qualification systems

The methodology for RPL is based on the 12-level Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). This Framework aims to be all-inclusive and to take account of all types

of learning, including formal, non-formal and informal learning across all sectors (public, private and the voluntary sector). However, the framework is not intended to be used solely as a way of categorising and understanding qualifications or to formally credit prior learning. It is also intended to be used to support learners to identify their level of competences and skills against the framework and plan their learning and career development accordingly. The framework is therefore intended to support formative recognition, as well as summative recognition.

SCQF levels are based on a single set of Level Descriptors that are the common reference points and definitions which provide a way of recognising learning that is outcome-based and quality-assured, irrespective of whether that learning is academic, vocational, non-formal or informal (SCQF, 2012). The SCQF is based on Credit Points, with one SCQF Credit Point equating to a notional 10 hours of learning (based on the time judged to be required for an 'average' learner to achieve the learning outcomes).

Summative recognition of prior learning can be used to award SCQF Credit Points; following a formal assessment SCQF Credit Points can be awarded to recognise prior learning that has not already been assessed or credit rated, regardless of the context in which that learning was achieved. SCQF Credit Points awarded as a result of RPL are of the same value as credit gained through other formal learning. These Credit Points are the building blocks for Credit Transfer, which can help learners to gain access to different forms of education, give them advanced standing/entry into a course (for example, allowing them directly into the second or third year of a related degree programme instead of the first year) and supports both flexibility and progression.

The SCQF handbook (2015) recommends that the design and development of qualifications and learning programmes for the SCQF should facilitate and promote credit recognition for prior informal and non-formal learning and credit transfer. This would mean that learners can minimise any duplication of learning and develop their full personal, social and educational potential. The Handbook also recommends that the design of qualifications/learning programmes for the SCQF should make RPL and Credit Transfer as straightforward as possible, i.e. through writing clear learning outcomes and assessment and having a clear and consistent structure for the qualification/learning programme. Descriptions of qualifications/learning programmes should also include details of arrangements for possible RPL.

The SCQF Handbook states that in relation to Credit Transfer, a formal judgement (that is, it is recorded in some way) is made of how much specific credit for prior learning can be awarded in the context concerned. The process of recognising prior learning involves making a professional judgement as to what has been learned, how much learning has taken place and whether the learning is still current. Individual institutions should have their own regulations in place on this. The SQA also states that RPL can be used to assess complete or partial SQA Units. Where evidence can only be provided to partially meet the requirements of a unit, other methods of assessment must be used to complete the outstanding requirements, because the minimum level of awarding and certification is a complete SQA Unit. In some instances, it is possible to achieve a full 'Group Award' through RPL but SQA notes that it is unlikely that a learner would have sufficient prior learning and experience to do this (SQA, 2016).

In HE, RPL can be used to gain credit or exemption for qualifications, as well as to gain admission to a study programme. The Quality Code for HE states that any limit on the award of credit (where used) or exemption through RPL must be clearly stated in the HEI's regulations, as well as the way in which this credit can be used for the purposes of progression, the making of an intermediate or final award, and any grading or classification of that award.

For example, at Heriot Watt University (HWU) the policy on RPL stipulates that at undergraduate level at least 50 % of credits of the stage at which a student enters must be completed at HWU to qualify for the award associated with that stage. At the University of

the West of Scotland too, as a general rule of thumb, a student can be awarded through RPL a maximum of 50 % of the credit points at the level at which they wish to exit with an award.

4 Standards

An RPL claim for credit involves the comparison of the individual's learning against the aims and/or learning outcomes of the qualification or learning programme for which credit is being sought – this is the 'standard' used. The RPL process will determine the SCQF Level and the number of SCQF Credit Points that can be awarded to the individual.

As mentioned above, National Occupational Standards are used for the assessment of SVQs.

The SQA states that evidence to support prior learning assessment decisions must be valid, reliable and of equal rigour to the standard assessment of the Unit concerned. This means that the evidence should broadly match the evidence requirements specified in the Unit and reflect the SCQF level and credit value attached to the Unit. Also, previously attained qualifications may be used as evidence of prior learning as long as they have been awarded by a recognised awarding body or professional body. It is a Centre's responsibility to ensure that the content, level of demand and assessment approach of the prior attained qualification broadly matches the evidence requirements specified in the SQA Unit(s). A qualifications certificate on its own is unlikely to be sufficient evidence for assessment and verification purposes. This should be supported by module descriptors or equivalent which provide information on the level, demand, content and assessment of the previously attained qualification.

5 Organisations and institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

The **Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP)** was established in 2006. This partnership consists of:

- The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA);
- Colleges Scotland;
- The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA); and
- Universities Scotland.

The partnership is a registered charity and also a company limited by guarantee, which means that the development of the SCQF is centred on the learner and is not influenced by changes in policy.

As was the case in 2010, the SCQF Partnership has responsibility for maintaining the quality assurance and integrity of the SCQF, as well as its further promotion and development, whilst maintaining relationships with other frameworks in the UK, Europe and Internationally. The SCQF Partnership also offers advice and support for all types of stakeholders involved in RPL.

A key change since 2014 is that the national-level RPL network, operated by the SCQF Partnership, no longer exists. In the HE sector, there is still a **QAA Scotland/Universities Scotland HEI RPL network**, which is coordinated by QAA Scotland.

This network presents opportunities for learning to be shared amongst stakeholders across the sectors of learning, work and the third sector. Furthermore, the ongoing activity to maintain interest in RPL and strengthen the support materials available to providers should help to ensure that Scotland's devolved approach to RPL (where responsibility for implementation lies with the learning providers) continues to develop. In the Higher

Education sector, the National RPL Framework is likely to strengthen future developments even further. The HEI RPL network is also involved in the European RPL Network.

As indicated above, the SQA also has its own RPL policy, relating to SQA awards.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS)⁴ provides career information, advice and guidance services and works closely with the SCQF Partnership in the implementation of RPL and the SCQF in Scotland. The 'My Strengths' diagnostics tools described above in Section 2.2 are one of the SDS services offered through its 'My World of Work' online portal⁵.

Whilst national-level frameworks are in place for RPL, responsibility for the actual design and implementation of RPL procedures lies with individual education providers. The allocation of responsibilities for the different aspects of validation is described in more detail below.

Education and training providers:

As noted above, responsibility for the delivery of RPL is held at the level of the provider and thus there is considerable diversity in the way RPL is implemented. The design of individual RPL procedures, provision of counselling and guidance, assessment, internal quality assurance and evaluation are all undertaken by the individual provider.

Only universities, colleges and other SCQF Credit Rating Bodies (CRBs) can formally award SCQF Levels and Credit Points through RPL. These are the organisations responsible for allocating a level of learning and number of credit points to a qualification or learning. Since the establishment of the SCQF in 2001, there has been a significant increase in the number of CRBs, which now include all publicly-funded tertiary colleges and a number of other approved organisations, as well as the SQA and higher education institutions (HEIs), which were the original CRBs.

Individual HEIs prepare their own RPL guidelines but these should be consistent with the SCQF guidelines, which all universities subscribe to. In developing and implementing RPL, HEIs must also align their policies and procedures to the UK Quality Code, Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (QAA).

The RPL national Framework for Scottish Higher Education (QAA Scotland, 2014), which includes agreed sector level principles, is aligned to the UK Quality Code. It is thought that RPL is standard practice in most HEIs in Scotland. In some institutions this is focussed on certain fields of study, in others it is focussed at certain levels.

External quality assurance of the credit rating bodies is the responsibility of Education Scotland (for colleges), the Scottish Government and external auditors (for SQA). In HE, the responsibility for external QA lies with QAA Scotland and for other Credit Rating Bodies with SCQFP.

Private sector actors (including social partners)

RPL is less used in the private sector, in comparison to the public sector. However, there are a small number of organisations within this sector which have RPL processes and procedures in place.

Some examples have been identified for this report of RPL policies and practices relating to learning in the workplace (within both the public and private sectors):

- As described in the 2014 update, the Scottish Police College has an RPL policy in place. Working together with the University of the West of Scotland (UWS), the Scottish Police College allows entry/access, exemptions/credits, direct entry to year 2 or 3 and full award of the BA in police studies and other CPD qualifications;

⁴ See internet: <http://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/>

⁵ See internet: <http://www.myworldofwork.co.uk/>

- Several RPL initiatives can be found within the National Health Service (NHS)⁶;
- RPL is offered through the Skills Passports used in different sectors (see the UK – England and Northern Ireland report for more detail); and,
- In the health and social care sector, an RPL profiling tool was developed as the result of a pilot project which took place between 2006 and 2008 (see the case study produced for the 2010 Inventory update which describes this project in more detail). This profiling tool has been adapted by Kinross and Perth council (KPC) for its work with the long-term unemployed. The new tool allows the users to prepare evidence for a portfolio, based on reflection on their experiences and skills. An assessor supports the user through a professional discussion, enabling the learner to match his/her learning to SVQ units and identify supporting evidence.

6 Information, advice and guidance

6.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

At national level, information on RPL is provided on the SCQF website. **A key development is the introduction in 2014 of a Guide to Recognition of Prior Learning⁷**, which is an online resource from SCQF designed to signpost users to a range of information relevant to their needs or interests in RPL. It highlights the different ways in which RPL can be utilised and attempts to clarify some of the jargon. It is designed to support learners who may be interested in using RPL and providers of RPL, such as colleges, universities, employers, sector skills bodies and awarding bodies. For RPL providers it attempts to offer some guidance and examples on the implementation of RPL processes.

RPL case studies are also available from the website, which demonstrate how the use of RPL has benefited learners, employees and employers.

The QAA Quality Code includes an indicator which states that HEIs must make sure that “Those who might be eligible for the recognition of prior learning are made aware of the opportunities available, and are supported throughout the process of application and assessment for recognition.” The Code goes on to state that the form of support offered to individuals who wish to undergo an RPL process will vary according to the “higher education provider’s approach to RPL and the nature and number of claims it receives”.

Examples of universities’ approaches to engaging and informing potential RPL candidates include:

- An Education Guidance Adviser from the Lifelong Learning Academy at UWS meets with potential RPL candidates and gives them information on the university’s RPL procedures, as well as initial guidance on reflection and how to formulate learning outcomes relating to their prior learning.
- UHI have flexible entry RPL guidelines and a handbook for students on how to access/follow these guidelines.
- Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) has School, Advisors’ and Assessors’ Guides to support the implementation of the GCU RPL Policy as well as a Guide for Students and an on-line Expression of Interest form.

In the aforementioned small study of learners’ experiences of RPL within the HE sector some students suggested that there needed to be more ‘clarity’ and explanation before the learner starts the RPL process, or during the initial induction period: *“This lack of clarity*

⁶ See Internet: [http://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/education-and-training/educational-development/initiatives/recognition-of-prior-learning-\(rpl\).aspx](http://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/education-and-training/educational-development/initiatives/recognition-of-prior-learning-(rpl).aspx)

⁷ See Internet: <http://scqf.org.uk/rpl-introduction/>

affected some understanding of the requirements and impacted negatively on some students who felt that they had to do more work than was absolutely necessary to get the credit, or felt a little aggrieved because what they thought was the case turned out not to be” (Harris et al. 2012).

6.2 Information, advice and guidance

In the Guide to Recognition of Prior Learning the tool gives tailored information about the type of RPL being considered, which mainly includes next steps, what to expect and signposting to resources.

Organisations that support young people who may have left school with little or no formal qualifications, those who are unemployed and adult returners include Skills Development Scotland, local authorities and private training providers. The first contact point would be Skills Development Scotland or Jobcentre Plus who would assess a person’s particular needs and either offer support or signpost to other organisations that could help (SCQF, 2015). It is the role of Skills Development Scotland to provide information to individuals about employment and learning opportunities. The ‘My World of Work’⁸ website signposts individuals to the SCQF website to find out more information about RPL.

Often careers guidance staff or training providers will be supporting those who are looking to get into work or further training and these will be accessed through Skills Development Scotland. Individual guidance providers would refer individuals to a learning provider, if they identified RPL as an appropriate pathway for the individual. Within learning providers, guidance may be provided by APL coordinators, where these exist, or guidance or teaching staff. For those looking for career development, support may come from a line manager or HR team depending on the size of the organisation.

6.3 Measures to enhance the awareness of validation initiatives and practices amongst guidance practitioners

The SCQF Online Guide is aimed at organisations/providers as well as learners. Providers are given the same set of options as for learners described in the section above. They are presented with further information about requirements and how to proceed.

The SCQF Partnership offers workshops for staff working with learners wishing to make RPL claims. This currently includes a workshop on Supporting Learners (for staff in institutions who receive and assess RPL claims from learners and wish to increase their knowledge on how to support individuals through the RPL process; and, Setting up institutional processes (for staff in colleges, universities and other organisations, who wish to set up processes and procedures and consider implementing an RPL policy in their organisation).

7 Validation practitioners

7.1 Profile of validation practitioners

‘Qualified practitioners’ should assess the evidence provided by the learner and quality assure the process, according to the SCQF Handbook (SCQF, 2015). However, it is not clear what ‘qualified practitioners’ means in practice.

The SCQF Toolkit (SCQF, 2010) recommends that learning providers and employers who are implementing RPL identify appropriate ‘facilitators’ who can support learners to gain recognition of their learning.

⁸ See Internet: <http://www.myworldofwork.co.uk>

The facilitator could be a line manager, supervisor, mentor, experienced colleague, teacher or trainer. The Toolkit states that the facilitator needs to have the knowledge and skills required to ensure that the learner knows how to generate the evidence of learning required.

Their role is to:

- Provide learners with information and guidance on the RPL process;
- Help learners to understand the ways in which they can learn through their experience and the RPL process;
- Help learners to understand and use the SCQF Level Descriptors, the learning outcomes of their required qualification/learning programme, or the specific job requirements as the benchmarks against which their learning will be measured;
- Support learners to identify learning gained through experience, selecting and producing evidence of that learning, and identifying areas for further learning;
- Provide guidance on gathering and presenting evidence of learning;
- Work with the assessor in order to understand the requirements for assessment so that the learner can be guided appropriately.

In Higher Education, institutions vary as to whether they take a centralised or devolved approach to the delivery of RPL. Most Scottish HEIs operate a devolved system; responsibility for RPL is held at a faculty/school/department level and there is no or little central coordination or support (Whittaker et al. 2011). At GCU for example, the Admissions Service records RPL applications centrally but guidance, support, assessment and monitoring associated with the RPL process are undertaken at School and programme level and integrated within normal assessment and QA processes (Whittaker and Brown, 2012). The School of Health and Life Sciences at GCU has a School RPL Coordinator and RPL Administrator to support and monitor RPL activity across the School. However, at the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI), there is a central RPL Panel which considers all RPL claims within the University. The idea behind having a central panel is to promote consistency in the application of RPL standards, as well as acceptance across the University. Queen Margaret University also has a central RPL panel, with representatives from all subject areas within the School of Health Sciences. This panel ensures that more complex applications for RPL are assessed with rigour and transparency⁹.

The aforementioned small study of learners' experiences of RPL within the HE sector found that support for RPL was generally provided by allocated members of academic staff within the institution (except in one case, where the learner indicated that she had not received any support at all) (Harris et al, 2012). Some examples of how universities allocate staff to the RPL process are outlined below:

- At UWS RPL claims are supported by a (central) Education Guidance Adviser and also a subject specialist;
- The University of Abertay has an APEL coordinator and assessor in each academic school;
- At GCU, there are School and Departmental RPL Coordinators and academic staff also act as RPL Advisers and/or Assessors (Whittaker and Brown, 2012).

⁹ For more details of the Queen Margaret University RPL policy for the School of Health Sciences, see the case study prepared for the QAA, available at: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/QueenMargaret_RPL.pdf and the RPL policy, available at: <http://www.qmu.ac.uk/quality/qm/AZindex.htm#r>

7.2 Qualification requirements

No specific qualifications requirements for RPL practitioners have been identified through the research.

7.3 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

The SCQFP offers workshops to support the use of the Handbook by further explaining credit rating and the RPL.

A Review of RPL and the SCQF RPL toolkit carried out by Kerson Associates Ltd found that a few organisations in the public sector have some RPL guidance and training in place for staff (and stakeholders). The review found little evidence of such guidance and training in the private and third sectors.

The Review found that knowledge of the SCQF RPL toolkit is mainly limited to people actively involved in RPL, mainly working in the public sector. It tends to be used as a supplementary resource. In the small number of cases where the toolkit had been embedded into RPL practices and procedures, it tends to be used in relation to project or pilot activities. It is mainly used to support formative validation, i.e. to assist learners in describing their existing knowledge and skills and to provide guidance to learners about what next steps they might take in terms of their learning. It is also used sometimes to evaluate prior learning when deciding on suitability for entry to a learning programme or qualification.

SQA does not require staff involved in delivering RPL to take additional training before conducting RPL assessments.

As noted in the 2014 update, the Quality Assurance Agency for Scotland has also developed a 'Flexible Entry Staff Development Pack' (Enhancement Themes, no date) for HE personnel (both academic and administrative staff). The QAA has also produced a document called 'Streamlining Recognition of Prior Learning Guidelines' (Whittaker and Brown, 2012) that is intended to support the university sector in Scotland *"in developing and implementing more streamlined, enhanced approaches to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) support and assessment"*.

Individual universities often have policies and/or guidance notes which can be referred to by staff involved in delivering RPL, for instance:

- GCU has a RPL policy (GCU, 2014) which provides details of the university's RPL process and quality assurance mechanisms, including flowcharts and key roles. The University has also developed RPL resources, support and CPD opportunities for staff.
- The Robert Gordon University (RGU) School of Nursing and Midwifery RPL guidelines (RGU, 2012) provide details of academic regulation and professional requirements, as well as an overview of the Recognition and Accreditation of Prior Learning process, including a flowchart.
- Heriot-Watt University has a Policy on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Transfer (Heriot-Watt, 2015a). It sets out the key requirements for awarding credit for prior learning to enable an applicant to gain advanced entry to a programme and/ or to gain exemption from individual courses within a programme. There are also a set of procedures (Heriot-Watt, 2015b) that detail the application process, awarding credit and allocating levels, restrictions on prior learning and approval procedures.
- Dundee University's RPL policy includes statements on the definition, structure, assessment and criteria for RPL.

There are also some examples of more focused support for university staff involved in delivering RPL. For example, staff at UWS are offered CPD opportunities through its Lifelong Learning Academy; UHI offers staff training in RPL several times a year and on request, which is run by the University's RPL Adviser; GCU provides RPL Advisor and Assessor

workshops for staff through GCU LEAD (Learning Enhancement and Academic Development).

Nevertheless, CPD for staff is identified as one of the institutional 'enablers' required to streamline and enhance RPL support and assessment processes in the HE sector in Scotland. Staff capacity and capability needs to be built up in relation to both providing support and undertaking assessment related to RPL. This could be through the provision of training but also through support for peer-to-peer interaction, such as through a Virtual Community of Practice (Whittaker et al. 2011).

8 Quality assurance

It is suggested that an organisation should set out its policy position on RPL and it is recommended that any policies and procedures emerge from, or are integrated into, quality assurance systems which are already in place in the organisation. This should cover how the processes of RPL and Credit Transfer are regularly monitored and reviewed, which should be a formal process which records the outcomes and rationale for any changes (SCQF, 2015).

The award of credit for prior learning can be carried out by SCQF Credit Rating Bodies, within the context of clearly defined quality assurance mechanisms (SCQF, 2015). CRBs are approved by the SCQF in accordance with the Quality Assurance Model for SCQF Partnership Approved Credit Rating Bodies (SCQF, 2013).

The SQA holds a regulatory, i.e. quality assurance role, for its qualifications. Through its external verification procedures, learning providers' procedures for RPL will be quality assured, as part of the overall quality assurance (i.e. audit) process.

As explained in the 2014 update, individual learning providers have their own quality assurance systems/procedures in place. Systems verifiers and external verifiers from awarding bodies, including the SQA, ensure that assessors across the country are assessing to the same standards – including assessments of non-formal and informal learning. It is recommended (SCQF, 2015) that the same types of quality assurance systems should be used as for any other type of formal assessment, e.g. internal and external moderation/verification, appeals, etc.

The SQA RPL policy states that RPL should be subject to the same internal verification by Centres as other methods of assessment. At the same time, SQA will also adopt the same approach to quality assurance as it would for any other method of assessment. Appeals from learners are required to follow the same process applicable to standard assessment of the Unit(s) or Group Award and/or Centre type concerned (SQA, 2016).

In HE, as outlined in the UK report covering England and Northern Ireland, the Quality Assurance Agency for HE (QAA) has a Quality Code for HE, which is 'the definitive reference point for all UK HE providers' (QAA, 2016). The Quality Code sets out the 'expectations' that all providers of UK HE are required to meet (the Code applies to England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland). RPL is given significantly more emphasis in the new Quality Code and is specifically included in a chapter entitled 'Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning', as well as in the chapter on Admissions. By bringing together assessment in relation to formal learning and RPL in one chapter, the aim was to demonstrate that both forms of assessment share common principles and that the quality assurance of RPL should be as firmly embedded as quality assurance for any other aspect of HE provision.

In HE, the quality assurance of RPL assessment processes tend to be the same as the normal quality assurance processes for programme assessment (Whittaker and Brown, 2012). The QAA oversees how well individual universities and colleges meet their responsibilities. The introduction of the new 'expectations' in the QAA Quality Code marks a

significant change, as previously the Academic Infrastructure did not set out any mandatory requirements. RPL has now been included in the expectation relating to assessment:

Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.

This means that from August 2014, RPL has been taken into account in the reviews of HE institutions which are carried out by the QAA on a four to six yearly basis. This could potentially raise the profile of RPL. Nevertheless, the actual implementation of RPL remains very much within the hands of the individual HEI.

Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms at an institutional level are identified as one of the key institutional enablers required to streamline and enhance RPL support and assessment processes. A lack of formal evaluation of RPL has been identified and improved monitoring is also needed in order to support a process of reviewing and enhancing practice (Whittaker et al. 2011).

A national level evaluation framework was not identified through the research. Individual projects may be subject to internal or external evaluation.

9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

9.1 Funding

There is no national funding framework for the actual implementation of RPL (nationally-funded projects include, for example, the work on the new RPL Guides). Implementation is funded at the level of the sector, provider or by the individuals themselves. In Higher Education, there is generally no charge for RPL which takes place as part of the admissions process but RPL claims for credit tend to be subject to a fee, which varies across institutions (OECD, 2007). The SQA charges standard fees regardless of the assessment approach (RPL is seen as a method of assessing).

9.2 Distribution of costs

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 or guidance on how much providers should charge. With regard to HE, the QAA Quality Code states only that there should be clear information on how much institutions charge for an RPL procedure.

9.3 Evidence of benefits to individuals

As is the case in many other European countries, data on participation in RPL is scarce.

A small study of learners' experiences of RPL within the HE sector¹⁰ found that all of the learners consulted felt that the RPL process helped them to develop their knowledge and skills, by enabling them to:

- *“revisit and consolidate existing knowledge and experience;*
- *develop their academic writing;*
- *recognise, acknowledge and gain credit from experience; and*
- *develop an academic mind-set which was advantageous to their future academic study.”*

On a more personal level, the learners felt the RPL process:

- *“provided a general sense of achievement,*
- *raised confidence,*
- *developed reflection and thinking styles, and*
- *enabled manageable engagement with formal learning by shortening the time to gain their degree.”*

Finally, *“the realisation by them that the learning they had from life experience was useful and valuable appeared to provide them with a certain sense of fulfilment”.*

9.3.1 Data on flows of beneficiaries

No data is available.

¹⁰ Based on a sample of nine students, from three universities

9.4 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.4.1 Validation trends

No data is available at national level on the number of people who have undergone RPL in Scotland. A recent study found that RPL is most commonly used in the public sector, notably the HE sector, where HEIs are most likely to have a RPL policy, processes and procedures in place.

In HE, it has been noted that RPL monitoring and data collection needs to be improved. Many HEIs are already trying to address this issue and to use integrated student management information systems to improve data capture and analysis (Whittaker and Brown, 2012).

9.4.2 Validation users

No data is available.

9.4.3 Validation and migrants / refugees and other disadvantaged groups

There are no specific initiatives for validation in respect to migrants/refugees and other disadvantaged groups. However, migrants/refugees are target groups in the New Scots initiative, which is about integrating refugees and was developed by the Scottish Government in partnership with COSLA and the Scottish Refugee Council.

The strategy (COSLA, Scottish Refugee Council and Scottish Government, 2013), includes six action plans on the needs of dispersed asylum seekers; employability and welfare; housing; education; health; and, communities and social connections. One of the actions for education is that refugees and asylum seekers are supported to use pre-existing qualifications and access appropriate employment/additional education opportunities as a result.

10 Validation methods

RPL for the award of SCQF credit points should involve formal assessment or acceptance of evidence of learning which is quality assured (SCQF, 2015). The assessment procedures for RPL, including credit transfer, should be consistent with the normal assessment and quality assurance of the organisation (SCQF, 2015).

Information on the methods used for validation in Scotland could only be identified in relation to the HE sector, where the predominant form of assessment for RPL is via a portfolio¹¹. Some examples of university assessment methods are:

- At UWS (UWS, 2016), all claims for prior experiential learning are: double marked, open to external examination, presented and noted at the appropriate subject panel, awarded a pass or fail only and will not be graded, assessed for the approved level and volume of credit. Most candidates complete set exercises where they reflect on their experience, a personal chronology linked to academic goals, identification of learning outcomes which should clearly capture and reflect learning, a justification that learning is at the appropriate academic level. Assessment is based on a portfolio which will have three main elements: the set of learning outcomes, a written account of learning (3 000 to 5 000 words), a collection of appropriate and valid evidence in support of the claim.
- At Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU), a wide range of evidence-gathering mechanisms can be used for RPL. For example, within the School of Health and Life Sciences, an RPL Mapping Tool aligned to SCQF level descriptors can be used. This

¹¹ Based on a sample of nine students, from three universities

tool enables applicants who do not have an honours degree and wish to apply directly for admission to a postgraduate programme to demonstrate their learning through experience within the context of their professional roles, responsibilities and activities within their field of practice.

- Various assessment methods are used at the University of Abertay, including direct observation of practice, simulation or role play, presentation of artefacts, assessment on demand, written assignments, oral examinations and portfolios (Whittaker and Brown, 2012).

A small study of learners' experiences of RPL within the HE sector¹² found a wide range of assessment methods being used, from CVs and essays to portfolios, vivas and presentations. Some academic writing and the application of theory and practice were involved in all claims. Evidence used to support the claims included statements of learning from current job roles and the workplace.

The same study found that the format of the claim (i.e. the documentation the learners presented as evidence of their learning) was not consistent for the credit amount being claimed. For example, two of the learners consulted for the study each wanted to claim 240 credits, but while one was required to produce a reflective account of 1 200 words, together with a CV, the other had to prepare a 5 000 word essay, supporting evidence and a presentation. Another learner, only claiming for 120 credits, prepared a 5 000-word experience statement, a formal, 6 000-word academic report and had to give a presentation to an assessment panel. Whilst the study does recognise these claims were from different institutions and that further detailed analysis would be required to determine whether indeed there is an issue of inequality, it does suggest that this is something for consideration (Harris et al. 2012). The study also notes that all of the experience used to support the RPL claims was taken from a work perspective (none from a personal or everyday experience perspective).

Again with regard to the HE sector, according to the QAA scoping study mentioned earlier (see introduction) one of the institutional enablers required in the sector is the use of technology to enhance the RPL process. For example, this might be through the use of VLEs, technology-enhanced learning, ePortfolios or other e-learning tools (Whittaker et al. 2011).

Research conducted by SQA has indicated that the use of RPL in its qualifications is relatively limited but learner portfolios are the most commonly used method.

SVQs are awarded on the basis of an assessment of evidence, usually collected through work, that the individual has the skills, knowledge and understanding set out in the relevant NOS.

On the basis of the information gathered for this report, it seems that the most commonly used methods at the different stages of the validation process (in the HE sector and for SQA qualifications) are:

	Identification	Documentation	Assessment
Debate			
Declarative methods			
Interview			X
Observation			X
Portfolio method		X (HE and SQA)	X (HE and SQA)
Presentation			X

¹² Based on a sample of nine students, from three universities

	Identification	Documentation	Assessment
Simulation and evidence extracted from work		X	X
Tests and examinations			
Other (e.g. e-learning methods) – please specify		Written assignments	

The Review of RPL and the SCQF RPL Toolkit (Kerson Associates, 2013) found that in Scotland, RPL is most commonly applied in the public sector, notably in HE. Examples of RPL in use identified through the Review include:

- National Health Service (NHS) projects with healthcare support workers, estates staff and dental nurses, looking at the use of RPL to support the acquisition of credit/exemptions/qualifications;
- Universities using RPL to support both admissions and the award of credit at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, as well as using RPL within the context of work-based learning programmes; and,
- Local councils offering RPL within schools and lifelong learning settings, e.g. to ensure learners are offered appropriate learning opportunities.

Two interesting examples from the HE sector have been identified for this update. These are described in turn, in the two boxes below.

Making Experience Count, University of the West of Scotland

The University of the West of Scotland (UWS) follows a centralised approach to the application of RPL- the university's Lifelong Learning Academy is the focus for advice and guidance to students and staff on RPL. The Academy offers a module (credit rated 10 points at SCQF level 7) called 'Making Experience Count', which provides information, advice and guidance to students wishing to make a RPL claim. The module helps students to make connections between learning they have already acquired through both formal and non-formal situations and the contribution this may make to future learning. By developing a clearer understanding of knowledge and skills already gained participants are able to use this to influence decisions about the direction they wish to take in terms of further learning, employment or community activity.

The module aims to:

- Promote recognition of strengths and skills gained through RPL to increase self-confidence and motivation,
- Develop personal learning outcomes linked to prior learning and the SCQF level descriptors,
- Provide evidence of learning and skills aligned to learning outcomes with particular reference to further study or personal and professional development.

The module has been further developed to support RPL bridging mechanisms within a number of degree programmes which allow entry with advanced standing for experienced professional staff through RPL. Notable examples are towards the BSc Childhood Practice, BSc Health Studies and BSc Occupational Safety and Health. Potential applicants for RPL undertake this module to gain an understanding of the process required to submit a claim for accreditation. Through workshops students are tutored on the process and are provided with an information pack with all the required information, including guidelines to prepare them for the task of making a claim for RPL.

When undertaking a subsequent claim for RPL students are provided with an Academic Supervisor with relevant expertise. Extensive feedback is provided at each stage and on completion the student submits a portfolio of evidence for assessment. This is double marked and is subject to external examination. All successful claims for RPL are considered at subject panels and follow

UWS's quality assurance framework and regulations for an award.

The Making Experience Count module is offered at a nominal fee of GBP 30 (EUR 35). At present there is no additional fee for the process of supervising and assessing RPL for credit towards an award.

In the academic year 2012-13, over 50 students successfully completed the Making Experience Count module and subsequently make a successful claim for RPL. They were able to access degree programmes with advanced standing incorporating credit gained through RPL.

Recognition of Experiential and Accredited Learning Project (REAL)

The Scottish REAL Toolkit (University of Stirling, 2016), which was produced as part of this European project, is designed to assist adult educators so that what they have learned through their professional experience with learners might be recognised. The Scottish REAL Toolkit is designed to address the perceived need for adult educators' learning to be recognised by employers, universities and colleges.

The Competency Framework set out in this toolkit was created at the University of Stirling, in partnership with Learning Link Scotland, the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework Partnership and input from adult educators. The Framework was initially put together from existing National Occupational Standards (NOS). National Occupational Standards (NOS) describe what a person needs to do, know and understand in their job, in order to carry out their role in a consistent and competent way.

The REAL Competency Framework allows adult educators in Scotland to map their own skills, knowledge and competencies against the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, at levels 7 to 10. The Toolkit assists Adult Educators in this matching process whilst supporting the writing of reflective accounts that evidence their self-assessment. The resulting portfolio can be used to back up claims for admissions to courses of study, to produce excellent job applications and exemplar responses during job interviews. The toolkit can also support Continuous Professional Development (CPD) processes, or goal setting for those who wish to improve their work with learners and develop excellence in the practice of adult education.

In terms of specific target groups, an interesting example is the 'My Skills, My Future' resources, which are targeted mainly at young people at risk of leaving school early, or who have already left school with few or no formal qualifications. It is described in the box below.

My Skills, My Future

The 'My Skills, My Future' resources are primarily targeted at young people who are considered to be at risk of leaving school, or who have already left school, with few or no formal qualifications. They can also be used with young people who have been made redundant from their first job, adult returners to the workplace or the long-term unemployed.

The resources can be used by advisers in a range of settings to help the users to identify the transferable skills they have developed in other settings (e.g. hobbies, part-time jobs etc), to think about those skills through reflective practices, and map those skills using the SCQF as an informal benchmark. The tools use a contextualised version of the SCQF level descriptors, to make it easier for young people to understand them. The resources also help the young people to write competence-based statements for a CV or application for further learning.

The My Skills, My Future resources have already been used with a range of individuals, including

young people leaving care settings. This initial use of the resources has highlighted some potential benefits, which are:

- The resources help individuals clearly understand their range of skills
- They can help the users in a decision-making process regarding future career or further training
- By helping individuals to understand where their learning sits on the SCQF, their self-confidence and aspirations can be raised which helps build self-confidence and raises aspirations
- Using the resources can be a way of generating evidence towards certain SQA awards

The My Skills My Future resources were developed by the SCQF Partnership, Glasgow Caledonian University's Centre for Learning Enhancement and Academic Development (GCU LEAD) and Skills Development Scotland (SDS), working in partnership. The resources were launched in May 2013 and have been disseminated via training workshops for advisers (which have been fully subscribed).

Another project targeted at a specific group is the Leonardo da Vinci-funded project 'Age Management in Practice (AMaP)', which is described in the box below.

Age Management in Practice (AMaP)

The Centre for Lifelong Learning at the University of Strathclyde is the coordinating partner of the AMaP project, which aims to support older workers (aged 50+) to access and participate in Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET), and to increase awareness of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The project also takes account of the employer perspective on the challenge of the ageing workforce, by seeking current views and attitudes towards older workers and promoting the implementation of age management practices. Other partner organisations are from Germany, Greece, Poland, Portugal and Sweden.

The AMaP learning model aims to engage and inspire older workers to re-engage in learning and development and to help them to find out more about the value of VET/CVET and lifelong learning. It was inspired mainly by two other models: the Realising Your Potential (RYP) model, from the University of Strathclyde, addressed to older workers; and the Recognition and Validation of Competences methodologies used in Portugal for the adult population in general. The learning model activities are based around questions such as:

- What have I achieved in my life?
- Where do I want to go now?

The piloting of the learning model took place in Portugal, Germany and Poland and a total of 67 older workers successfully completed the learning programme in the three countries.

More information about the project can be found at: <http://www.a-map.eu/>

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- EQF AG Members for Scotland



Country report UK- Scotland

2016 update to the European inventory on
validation of non-formal and informal learning

The 2012 Council recommendation on validation encourages Member States to put in place national arrangements for validation by 2018. These arrangements will enable individuals to increase the visibility and value of their knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside formal education and training: at work, at home or in voluntary activities.

This country report is one of 36 that, together with a synthesis report and thematic reports, constitute the European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. The inventory is a regularly updated overview of validation practices and arrangements in all Member States, EFTA countries and Turkey. It is a reference point for information on validation in Europe. It is organised around the principles defined in the 2012 Council Recommendation that were further elaborated in the European guidelines for validation. This is its sixth update (2004, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2014 and 2016).



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