

# European Inventory

on validation of informal and  
non-formal learning



# **European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning UNITED KINGDOM**

C3342 / December 2007

ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd.  
Marie Davidson

Update based on the United Kingdom chapter of the 2005 Inventory, by John  
Konrad (Konrad Associates International)

► Priestley House  
12-26 Albert Street  
Birmingham  
B4 7UD  
United Kingdom

**T +44 (0)121 616 3600**  
**F +44 (0)121 616 3699**  
**[www.ecotec.com](http://www.ecotec.com)**

# Contents

PAGE

---

<b>1.0</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>PUBLIC SECTOR .....</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1	Background to the development of validation in the UK .....	3
2.2	Current situation - the U.K Credit and Qualifications Frameworks .....	5
2.3	England and Northern Ireland .....	6
2.3.1	The Qualifications and Curriculum Framework (QCF).....	6
2.3.2	The Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL).....	6
2.3.3	Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement in Non-Accredited Learning (RARPA).....	8
2.4	<b>Wales .....</b>	<b>11</b>
2.4.1	The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) .....	11
2.4.2	Stakeholders Involved in the CQFW .....	12
2.4.3	CQFW Developments 2003-2006 .....	12
2.4.4	Recognising Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2006-2007 .....	13
2.4.5	The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) .....	14
2.4.6	Key Stakeholders .....	14
2.4.7	SCQF Developments 2003-2005 .....	14
2.4.8	Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) 2005-2007 .....	15
<b>3.0</b>	<b>PRIVATE SECTOR .....</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1	Case Study: Waste Management Industry Training and Advisory Board (WAMITAB).....	18
3.2	Case Study: SEMTA (Wales) .....	19
<b>4.0</b>	<b>THE THIRD SECTOR .....</b>	<b>20</b>
4.1	Case Study: Sylfaen Cymunedol, North Wales.....	20
4.2	Case Study: Volunteer Development Scotland.....	20
4.3	Case Study: Progress GB.....	21
<b>5.0</b>	<b>CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>22</b>

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

---

England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have all developed, or are in the process of developing, new credit and qualification frameworks. These frameworks potentially provide a single overarching structure for recognising formal, non-formal and informal learning in each U.K country. However, they are all at different stages of development and have different priorities:

- **Scotland** has a new qualification framework in place – The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and has developed a methodology for recognising both non-formal and informal learning within the new framework;
- **Wales** has a new qualification framework in place – The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) and has a methodology in place for incorporating non-formal learning within this. Work will start on incorporating informal learning later this year (2007);
- The framework for **England** and **Northern Ireland** (the Qualifications and Credit Framework, QCF)<sup>1</sup> has not been launched yet but once established has the capability to include non-formal or informal learning if it fits with QCF technical specifications and is assessed through QCF quality procedures.

Scotland and Wales are therefore ahead of England and Northern Ireland in developing a national approach to recognising non-formal and informal learning within their national qualification frameworks. This is largely due to the fact that they launched their new credit and qualification frameworks earlier, which has allowed them to start broadening the scope of their frameworks sooner. It could also be argued that Scotland and Wales have been more influenced by the European policy agenda.

With the absence of a national approach to accrediting non-formal and/or informal learning in England and Northern Ireland at this moment, the methods that are in place are more disparate and only available in specific learning sectors. For example, the 'Accreditation of Prior Learning' (APL) is a methodology specific to Higher (and some Further) Education Institutions whilst a methodology known as RARPA is relevant only to public funded Adult and Community Learning (ACL) provision. This is however likely to change in the near future.

<sup>1</sup> Please note that the QCF also applies to Wales and forms part of the CQFW.

## 2.0 PUBLIC SECTOR

---

### 2.1 Background to the development of validation in the UK<sup>1</sup>

Development of processes for recognition of non-formal and informal learning became prominent in UK assessment and qualifications policy during the mid 1980s. The main emphasis in policy and in operational programmes was on portfolio preparation, with two parallel strands of concern:

- Further education (level 2 and 3 vocational provision – ISCED Levels 3 and 4) inclusion measures – enable access and credit recognition for ‘non-traditional’ participants in education and training;
- Higher education entry for the rapidly growing HE sector.

Colleges and local authorities – particularly in the big metropolitan areas of the UK – set up numerous short courses aimed at supporting learners in the preparation of portfolios of evidence. These have not survived since they have been replaced by the insertion of recognition processes into mainstream qualifications policy.

During the 1980s, qualifications policy in the individual awarding bodies for general and vocational education and training was underdeveloped in relation to recognition of non-formal and informal learning – many higher level professional awards incorporated the need to demonstrate effective practice, but the notion of bringing achievements as exemption or as credit to the programmes (rather than demonstrating competence through practice undertaken during the learning programme) was seen as very novel.

During this time, major transfers of knowledge were occurring between North America and the UK on accreditation of prior learning, and the general interest in accreditation of prior learning policy circles during the mid 80s was assimilated into the early deliberations of the newly formed NCVQ (1987) and the existing SCOTVEC. This affected directly the design criteria for the then-new National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ). The design principles for these qualifications emphasised that the award of credit in the qualification should be independent of the mode, duration, and location of learning. The qualifications were designed as unitised, outcomes-based, competence-oriented, and assessed through evidence of performance. With this array of design principles, recognition of non-formal and informal learning was conceptualised as one means of generating evidence for the (accreditation) units, which comprised the qualification. This had two immediate effects:

<sup>1</sup> The information has been quoted from Refernet publication (2005/2006) Accumulating, transferring and validating learning; United Kingdom. CEDEFOP.

- Firstly, accreditation of prior achievements processes (as it was then designated – ‘Accreditation of Prior Achievement’, (APA) - to reflect the outcomes orientation) was integrated fully into the processes for qualifications. It sat alongside observation of current performance as simply another means of generating evidence. This elevated its status within qualifications and conveyed a new form of legitimacy.
- Secondly, by reducing its ‘special’ status, it suggested that accreditation of prior achievements did not need to be attended to in any special way. This was a negative consequence. The elements of self-reflection and careful support in the emerging portfolio construction provision were devalued. By just being ‘another means of collecting evidence’, the logistical problems in assembling evidence and the values of support and guidance were severely downplayed.

This led to accreditation of prior achievements processes being regarded as time-consuming and tedious, with many NVQ learners complaining of the tedious tasks involved in portfolio construction. Although no systematic figures are available, educators and trainers operating in the early years of NVQs (late 80s early 90s) commented that this led to a sharp reduction in the numbers using accreditation of prior achievements as a means of presenting evidence for achievement. Some later projects – such as the ‘paperless portfolio’ approach developed in Northern Ireland in the late 90s – have continued to try to relieve the practical problems of assembling evidence and modernise processes.

However, the NVQ philosophy and the continued emphasis on validation of informal and non-formal learning by researchers and policy makers held the topic on the policy agenda. NVQs comprise around 50% of the vocational qualifications awarded in the UK, and continue to emphasise recognition of prior learning as a means of generating evidence. In fact, the majority of the British awarding bodies include APA as an explicit part of qualifications policy. Information on the number of beneficiaries is limited but the European Commission published in 2000 that in the UK some 28,000 students had benefited from methods to recognise prior learning – and it has been presumed that this figure relates to the vocational qualifications<sup>1</sup>.

We have now provided a brief overview of historical developments. The following chapters focus on explaining the development of national systems for validation in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales – and provide more detail on key initiatives, such as APL and RARPA.

<sup>1</sup> Freitag, W. K. (2007) Permeability in education, vocational training and further education – the key to lifelong learning. The German Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

## 2.2 Current situation - the U.K Credit and Qualifications Frameworks

The qualification frameworks that have been/are being developed in each U.K country are all 'credit' frameworks, which have a number of similarities. They all adopt a common currency whereby 'units of learning' can be assigned a 'credit value'. For example, one credit may be awarded for learning outcomes achieved in 10 hours of learning time at a specified level of difficulty<sup>1</sup>. The levels of difficulty in England, Northern Ireland and Wales operate on a 9 point scale from entry level to level 8, whilst Scotland uses a scale ranging from entry level to level 12.

By using this system of awarding and assigning credit, it is possible to recognise learning outcomes achieved in any environment. For example, from mainstream qualifications achieved in a school, college or university to in-house training received within a company, non-formal learning undertaken in a voluntary sector organisation or even learning achieved through personal, work or leisure experiences. As long as there are specific learning outcomes that can be equated to certain 'units' of learning, credit can potentially be assigned or awarded. The key is to have robust quality assurance procedures in place to ensure that credit is awarded in a uniform manner across the board.

Assigning and awarding credit in this way allows parity to be achieved across the entire qualification framework. For example, allowing academic and vocational qualifications to be compared as well as equating mainstream qualifications with non-formal and informal learning. Hence:

- It allows learners to transfer between different types of courses e.g. from non-formal to more formal learning;
- It prevents learners from having to repeat units if they have completed them elsewhere;
- It allows learning to be recognised, even if full qualifications have not been achieved;
- It allows combinations of units to be studied, which may more closely match the student's individual learning requirements, and;
- It makes learning transferable across national boundaries.

In short, the U.K credit systems hope to offer more flexible qualification frameworks, which are better able to support learners through lifelong learning.

<sup>1</sup> The CQFW Credit Common Accord (2006);

## 2.3 England and Northern Ireland

### 2.3.1 The Qualifications and Curriculum Framework (QCF)

The QCF aims to have a broader scope than the current National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and will be capable of recognising the achievements of learners on any 'type' of learning activity, which could mean the inclusion of non-formal and informal learning. This is because credit can be awarded to any learning that fits QCF technical criteria and quality assurance procedures. However, there is no talk as yet of adopting specific methodologies for the inclusion of non-formal and informal learning in the way that the Welsh and Scottish models have done.

The tests and trials for the QCF will be completed in July 2008 with the launch of the QCF expected in August 2008. Since the QCF has not yet been launched, there is currently no single initiative governing the validation of informal and non-formal learning in England. There are however two other initiatives, APL and RARPA, that are currently being practised but which are limited in scope. APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning) recognises both non-formal and informal learning but is restricted to the Higher Education sector whilst RARPA recognises non-formal, but not informal learning and is restricted to public-funded post 16 training provision. APL has been in place since the early 1990s and has not changed since the last report was written, whilst RARPA has changed significantly since that time.

### 2.3.2 The Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)

The first mechanism to validate non-formal and informal learning in England originated from the Higher Education sector. They established a mechanism for 'Accrediting Prior Learning', in the early 1990s, which was not connected to any government policy. It originated from the education providers themselves, hence a 'bottom-up' approach. APL also applies to providers operating in Further Education.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) became interested in recognising non-formal learning as a route for those with relevant knowledge and experience but no traditional qualifications to gain access to higher education. The majority of universities and some further education training providers in the U.K have APL at either institution or departmental levels, or both<sup>1</sup>.

In September 2004, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education published a set of guidelines to support Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in accrediting prior learning. This provides an important quality assurance framework for further and higher education

<sup>1</sup> Leney T (2006) OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

institutions and thus maintains public confidence in the quality of education. These guidelines are extensive and can be found in “Guidelines on the Accreditation of Prior Learning” (September 2004), published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. The key principles for accrediting APL are as follows:

- Decisions regarding the accreditation of prior learning are a matter of academic judgement. The decision-making process and outcomes should be transparent and demonstrably rigorous and fair.
- Where limits exist on the proportion of learning that can be recognised through the accreditation process, these limits should be explicit<sup>1</sup>. The implications for progression, the award of any interim qualification and the classification or grading of a final qualification should be clear and transparent.
- Prior experiential and/or certificated learning that has been accredited by a provider should be clearly identified on students' transcripts.
- Providers should provide clear and accessible information for applicants, academic staff, examiners and stakeholders about its policies, procedures and practices for the accreditation of prior learning.
- The terminology, scope and boundaries used by a provider in its policies, procedures and practices for the accreditation of prior learning should be explicitly defined in information and guidance materials.
- Information and guidance materials outlining the process for the assessment of claims for the accreditation of prior experiential and/or previously certificated learning should be clear, accurate and easily understood.
- Providers should consider the range and forms of assessment appropriate to claims for the recognition of learning.
- The criteria used in judging a claim for the accreditation of prior learning should be explicit to applicants, academic staff, stakeholders, assessors and examiners.
- The assessment of learning derived from experience should generally be subject to the same internal and external quality assurance procedures as assessment of learning through more traditional routes. Assessment methods must be appropriate to the evidence provided, and the criteria used must be clear to applicants and staff.
- The locus of authority and responsibilities for making and verifying decisions about the accreditation of prior learning should be clearly specified.
- All associated with the accreditation of prior learning should have their roles clearly and explicitly defined. Full details of all roles and responsibilities should be available to all associated staff and applicants.

<sup>1</sup> Typically, these limits specify a normal maximum of 50% of the available credits for a particular qualification or, in the case of Bachelor's Degrees, for a particular Level.

- Appropriate arrangements should be developed for the training and support of all staff associated with the support, guidance and assessment of claims for the accreditation of prior learning.
- Clear guidance should be given to applicants about when a claim for the accreditation of prior learning may be submitted, the timescale for considering the claim and the outcome.
- Appropriate arrangements should be in place to support applicants submitting claims for the accreditation of prior learning and to provide feedback on decisions.
- Arrangements for the regular monitoring and review of policies and procedures for the accreditation of prior learning should be clearly established. These arrangements should be set within established institutional frameworks for quality assurance, management and enhancement.

#### 'Types' of Learning Accredited by HEIs

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) include one or all of the following 'types' of non-formal and informal learning in their approach to the 'accreditation of prior learning':

- Accreditation<sup>1</sup> of prior learning (APL);
- Accreditation of prior certificated learning (APCL);
- Accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL);
- Accreditation of prior certificated and/or experiential learning (AP[E/C]L);
- Accreditation of prior learning and achievement (APL&A).

The learning could therefore be previously certified or based on "experiences outside the formal and training systems".<sup>2</sup>

### 2.3.3 Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement in Non-Accredited Learning (RARPA)

Public sector interest in validating non-formal (not including informal) learning commenced in 2001<sup>3</sup> when the Learning and Skills Council commissioned the former Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) and the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) to look at ways of quality assuring non-formal education. The LSCs deemed this necessary because they were concerned about the quality of their non-formal

<sup>1</sup> Accreditation is used as the English language equivalent of Validation. "The process of assessing and recognising a wide range of knowledge, know-how, skills and competences, which people develop throughout their lives within different environments, for example through education, work and leisure activities. informal / non-formal learning." Tissot P (2004), Terminology of vocational training policy, CEDEFOP, page 161.

<sup>2</sup> "Guidelines on the Accreditation of Prior Learning" (September 2004), published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

<sup>3</sup> Implementing Measures for Success (2007) Published by the Learning and Skills Council

training provision, particularly the unaccredited courses they were funding through the Adult and Community Learning (ACL) sector.

The work that the LSDA and NIACE carried out between 2001 and 2002 resulted in the development of a model for quality assuring non-formal learning in the ACL sector, which became known as 'recognising and recording progress and achievement' or RARPA. It was tested through a range of pilot projects between 2003 and 2004, embedded during 2005 and 2006 and now, in 2007, it is a key part of the LSC's quality assurance strategy - 'Implementing Measures for Success' (January 2007). This strategy is now in operation throughout England and hence gives the accreditation of 'non-formal' learning a very specific focus. All LSC funded ACL providers are now obligated to evaluate non-formal learning through the use of the RARPA method.

RARPA is the only method used by the Learning and Skills Councils to monitor non-formal learning and does not include 'informal' learning, as defined by the European Union. Currently this method is only applied to the ACL sector (since this is where most public funded non-formal learning is carried out), but it is constantly evolving. Further tests will be carried out during Summer 2007 to consider applications of the methodology to the Further Education (FE) Sector, the Work Based Learning (WBL) Sector and Sixth Form Colleges. It is therefore envisaged that RARPA will be the quality assurance mechanism used to monitor public funded non-formal learning throughout the post 16 learning and skills sector in England.

The RARPA method is envisaged to have such a broad application because it has been embedded into ALI and Ofsted's<sup>1</sup> 'Common Inspection Framework' (CIF). The CIF is the methodology used by all training providers in England to monitor and evaluate training provision. By incorporating RARPA into this framework, the monitoring of non-formal learning becomes another element of each provider's evaluation commitment. Moreover, because it has been adapted in line with the CIF, the method is broadly familiar to providers, which should facilitate the implementation of RARPA.

### The RARPA Method

As specified in John Konrad's 2004 report, the RARPA approach is based around the application of a five-stage process to all programmes of learning:

- **Aims** appropriate to an individual learner or groups of learners;
- **Initial assessment** to establish the learner's starting point;

<sup>1</sup> ALI is the organisation responsible for inspecting Adult and Community Learning (ACL) providers whilst OFSTED is responsible for monitoring primary and secondary schools.

- **Identification of appropriately challenging learning objectives** (initial, renegotiated and revised);
- **Recognition and recording of progress and achievement during the programme (formative assessment)** including tutor feedback to learners, learner reflection, progress reviews;
- **End of programme learner self-assessment, tutor summative assessment, review of overall progress and achievement** in relation to appropriately challenging learning objectives identified at the beginning or during the programme. It may include recognition of learning outcomes not specified during the programme.

Within each of the above stages, a number of questions can be asked, that link to the Common Inspection Framework (CIF)<sup>1</sup>.

Element of Staged Process	Mapping to CIF Questions
Aims appropriate to an individual learner or groups of learners (clearly stated learning aims)	How well do programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of the learners?
Initial assessment to establish the learner's starting point	How well do learners achieve? How effective are teaching, training and learning?
Identification of appropriately challenging learning objectives (initial, renegotiated and revised)	How well do learners achieve? How effective are teaching, training and learning? How well do programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners?
Recognition and recording of progress and achievement during the programme (formative assessment) including tutor feedback to learners, learner reflection, progress reviews	How well do learners achieve? How effective are teaching, training and learning?
End of programme learner self-assessment, tutor summative assessment, review of overall progress and achievement	How well do learners achieve? How effective are teaching, training and learning? How well are learners guided and supported?

### RARPA and the QCF

Although the RARPA approach was initially developed to raise the credibility/ quality assure 'non-formal' learning, the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) have agreed that the RARPA approach should be developed to support learners transferring from 'non-formal' to more 'formal' learning. The obligatory use of RARPA in England since January 2007 should therefore help to widen participation in formal learning.

<sup>1</sup> Implementing Measures for Success (2007) Published by the Learning and Skills Council

To support the new focus on recognising 'non-formal' learning, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) (a non-departmental regulatory body funded by the Department for Education and Skills) has been tasked with modifying the qualifications framework in England. Hence the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), which currently does not recognise non-formal learning carried out by the ACL sector will, in the future, incorporate this form of learning within the new QCF.

In practical terms, this means that a student that has completed a non-accredited course in the ACL sector may be able to proceed to an accredited training course. The quality assurance process (RARPA) enables the non-formal learner to gain a certain number of 'credits' for completing their course. The learner can then chose whether to 'bank, accumulate or transfer'<sup>1</sup> these 'credits' and hence could be given the option to use their credits towards a more formal learning route.

### The Limitations of RARPA

Despite the important and expanding remit of RARPA as a means of accrediting public funded, non-formal learning, it should be noted that RARPA does not include informal learning. It also does not have an application for Higher Education Institutions, employers (the private sector) or the voluntary sector. Considering that a considerable amount of unaccredited learning is carried out by these sectors, RARPA is certainly not an overarching, single initiative to validate informal and non-formal learning in England.

## **2.4 Wales**

In Wales, the key initiative for validating non-formal and informal learning is the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW).

### **2.4.1 The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)**

The CQFW is an all-inclusive framework, incorporating formal, non-formal and informal learning across all learning environments. The CQFW includes all 'types' of learning across the public sector i.e. higher and further education, the adult and community learning sector, work-based learning and the 14-19 age group as well as across the private sector (e.g. in-house training) and voluntary sectors. It is clear from this that the Welsh means of validating non-formal and informal learning fit well with, and have been influenced by, the European Commission's policy agenda.

<sup>1</sup> [www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk)

## 2.4.2 Stakeholders Involved in the CQFW

The Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS), part of the Welsh Assembly Government, largely funds CQFW (although there has been some support from the European Social Fund objectives 1 and 3)<sup>1</sup>. DCELLS Qualifications and Curriculum Division includes regulatory activity (formerly ACCAC, the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales) and the CQFW team; hence the department has overall responsibility for administering and quality assuring the initiative.

DCELLS works closely with a number of bodies to ensure the CQFW is compatible with the rest of the U.K and Europe. With respect to the QCF, which forms one of the pillars of the CQFW, there is cohesion with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in England and the Council for Curriculum, Examination and Assessment (CCEA) in Northern Ireland. Work is also being carried out to ensure comparability and compatibility with the European Qualifications Framework.

Due to the all-encompassing nature of the CQFW, the initiative is reliant on the support, co-ordination and 'buy in' of a wide range of organisations. These include<sup>2</sup> the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), Higher Education Wales, the Welsh Higher Education Credit Consortium, the Open College Network in Wales, Careers Wales, ESTYN (the inspector of education and training in Wales), NIACE, Sector Skills Councils as well as individual training providers, higher and further education institutions, businesses and voluntary sector organisations.

## 2.4.3 CQFW Developments 2003-2006

The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales was launched in 2003. Its first priorities, as detailed in the 2003-2006 Implementation Plan included<sup>3</sup>:

- Piloting and testing the quality assurance framework (the Credit Common Accord);
- Introducing credit rating across the Higher Education sector in Wales;
- Developing a marketing plan for the CQFW;
- Designing a credit related national funding system;
- Developing a more flexible Welsh curriculum (e.g. including the Welsh Baccalaureate, Modern Skills Diploma for Adults etc);
- Working in partnership to ensure quality assurance is in place;
- Accessing ESF support;
- Creating a lifelong learning pathway and qualification database i.e. to provide learners with an on-going record of achievement.

<sup>1</sup> CQFW Implementation Plan (2006)

<sup>2</sup> CQFW Implementation Plan (2006)

<sup>3</sup> CQFW Implementation Plan (2003)

At present, it is therefore the case that the quality assurance principles needed to underpin the CQFW are in place, credit has been completely endorsed by the Higher Education sector in Wales and ESF support has been achieved. Significant progress has been made in all other areas and will be taken forward further in the Implementation Plan 2006-2009.

#### 2.4.4 Recognising Non-Formal and Informal Learning 2006-2007

Now that the quality assurance principles are in place and the priority HE Sector has a credit system, the CQFW has been able to start work on incorporating non-formal learning. This is a priority within the Implementation Plan 2006-2009, which explicitly states that the CQFW will aim to build capacity within the non-formal learning arena e.g. 14-19, Adult and Continuing Learning, in-house company training, voluntary, community and commercial provision. In addition, the CQFW team will also work with more organisations to enable them to become recognised as accrediting bodies i.e. to be able to assign or award credit to non-formal learning.

A document has been produced entitled the “Recognition of Non-Formal Learning, Working Document” (2006), which enables applicant organisations to apply for recognition for their non-formal learning to be assigned and/or awarded credit. This application form clearly parallels the principles of the Credit Common Accord. For example, in determining why the learning should be awarded credit, in what units, at what level of difficulty etc. At the time of writing this documentation and related processes are being trialled. The administrative process needed to incorporate non-formal learning into the CQFW is therefore at an advanced stage of development.

There is a significant level of interest in applying for recognition from across the learning and training sectors. The interested organisations range in size and scope from Sector Skills Councils (e.g. SEMTA the SSC for science, engineering and manufacturing) to third sector community organisations (e.g. Sylfaen Cymunedol, based in North West Wales).

With respect to informal learning, work to develop systems and processes to incorporate this into the CQFW are scheduled to commence in winter 2007. This work will be informed by the outcomes of the trial of recognition of non-formal learning and the learning gained through other CQFW-sponsored projects.

#### Scotland

In Scotland, the key initiative for validating non-formal and informal learning within the SCQF Framework is a methodology known as ‘Recognition of Prior Learning’ (RPL).

#### 2.4.5 The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) was launched in 2001, making Scotland the first U.K country to adopt a credit rating system. As with the Welsh model, it aims to provide an all-inclusive framework, including formal, non-formal and informal learning across all learning sectors (public, private and the voluntary sector).

#### 2.4.6 Key Stakeholders

On the 7<sup>th</sup> November 2006, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership was established. This partnership consists of:

- The Association of Scotland's Colleges (ASC);
- The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA);
- Scottish Ministers;
- Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), and;
- Universities Scotland.

This expands on the previously joint partnership arrangements of the Scottish Executive's Department for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

The partnership is a company limited by guarantee, which has "responsibility for maintaining the quality assurance and integrity of the Framework, as well as its further promotion and development, whilst maintaining relationships with other frameworks in the U.K, Europe and Internationally"<sup>1</sup>.

#### 2.4.7 SCQF Developments 2003-2005

Between 2003-2005 i.e. the duration of the National Implementation Plan, the SCQF focused on credit rating mainstream qualifications e.g. higher education, Scottish Qualification Certificate, Higher National Units, SVQs etc. Once this had been completed it started work on credit rating courses outside of the SQA/HEI remit and began to look at areas such as community learning and development. At this time, developing the SCQF was naturally underpinned by significant work in establishing quality assurance principles, capacity building, developing a communications strategy etc.

During this time, developmental work started in assessing how non-formal and informal learning could be incorporated into the framework.

<sup>1</sup> Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework SCQF Update 7 (April 2007)

#### 2.4.8 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) 2005-2007

Since July 2005, there has been a methodology in place for 'Recognising Prior Learning' (RPL). RPL in Scotland has two 'types' of recognition, RPL for personal/career development (formative recognition) and RPL for credit (summative recognition)<sup>1</sup>.

- RPL for personal/career development focuses on the process of enabling learners to make clearer connections between the learning they have already achieved and future learning opportunities. The SCQF can be used to support this process through the mapping, or notional levelling, of this learning in order to identify future potential learning pathways as part of an educational guidance process;
- RPL for credit is often described as Accreditation of Experiential Learning (APEL), although the term RPL is becoming increasingly used. Since this is a resource intensive process, the methodology encourages the use of existing tools for support and assessment, as well as the development of more innovative, less resource intensive approaches, such as on-line tools, group support, and more streamlined forms of assessment.

The methodology for both formative recognition and summative recognition are documented in the SCQF's Guidelines. These guidelines<sup>2</sup>:

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

Now that the administrative support needed to incorporate informal learning into the SCQF is in place, any organisation or individual who is interested in applying for their non-formal or informal learning to be recognised can do so, through the recognised, awarding bodies.

It is not known, however, how many organisations or individuals have **benefited from RPL** since it was launched. This is because the Scottish government does not fund RPL and therefore does not monitor the uptake of RPL. The only RPL projects that are monitored

<sup>1</sup> [www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk)

<sup>2</sup> [www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk)

are special projects that have been funded by the public sector. The following table presents projects that have been undertaken<sup>1</sup>.

#### Examples of publicly funded RPL projects

##### **Social services<sup>2</sup>**

Within the social services sector, project work has been carried out with learners from Crossreach, ORCHA, Viewpoint and Inclusion Glasgow to recognise learning that has not been previously assessed within SVQ 2 or 3 (Scottish Vocational Qualifications). The purpose being to enable learners to complete the course without duplicating effort. The first stage of the project is now complete and two work-based programmes of learning have been credit rated and the materials and guidelines from this will be available later in the year.

Also within the social services sector, universities in Scotland are looking at ways of allowing credit transfer from informal-experiential learning to gain entry onto a Degree in Social Work<sup>3</sup>. This project will track learners at Glasgow Caledonian University and Open University, which includes advanced entry using RPL.

##### **Community learning**

Within Community Learning and Development (CLD), North Ayrshire and South Lanarkshire CLD staff will be amongst the first to use the on-line tool for Recognition of Prior Learning to support their work in the delivery of SVQ3 in Youth Work and Modern Apprenticeships<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Gallacher J Et. Al. (June 2006) Evaluation of the Achievements of the SCQF against the National Implementation Plan: An overview of Emerging Issues. Published by the Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning Glasgow Caledonian University.

<sup>2</sup> SCQF Update 7 (April 2007)

<sup>3</sup> [www.scqf.org.uk/who18.asp](http://www.scqf.org.uk/who18.asp)

<sup>4</sup> SCQF Update 7 (April 2007)

## 3.0 PRIVATE SECTOR

---

The organisations that are involved in recognising non-formal and informal learning in the private sector, throughout the U.K, are the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs). There are 25 SSCs in the U.K, which are monitored and funded by the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA). The SSCs are tasked with:

- Reducing skills gaps and shortages;
- Improving productivity, business and public services performance;
- Increasing opportunities to boost the skills and productivity of everyone in the sector's workforce; and;
- Improving learning supply including apprenticeships, higher education and National Occupational Standards (NOS).

The Skills for Business Network (SfBN) i.e. the network of 25 SSCs, emerged from other employer networks (industry training boards, NTOs etc) and therefore have been involved with recognition of non-formal and informal learning for sometime, albeit without co-ordination, adopting a 'bottom-up' approach<sup>1</sup>. The difference now is that with the launch of the new credit frameworks, the SSCs will be working with key partners in all four countries to ensure a co-ordinated approach to recognising non-formal and informal learning.

Currently, the SSCs are looking at the credit frameworks in a number of ways. For example, looking at how National Occupational Standards (NOS) can relate to credit and developing new Sector Qualification Strategies (SQS), which outline current and future learning and qualifications needs by employers within the context of the new frameworks<sup>2</sup>.

The rest of this chapter provides examples of how private sector organisations have recognised non-formal and/or informal learning within their industry sectors.

<sup>1</sup> Leney T (2006) OECD Activity on Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

<sup>2</sup> [www.ssda.org.uk](http://www.ssda.org.uk)

### 3.1 Case Study: Waste Management Industry Training and Advisory Board (WAMITAB)

WAMITAB was established in 1989 with a remit to determine and advise on policy and standards of education, qualifications and training for all employees in the Waste Management Industry. WAMITAB is the awarding body for the waste management industry in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and joint awarding body, with SQA, for qualifications in Scotland<sup>1</sup>.

WAMITAB first became interested in the emerging credit and qualification frameworks in 2004. They could see that adopting credit values for their vocational qualifications would allow their learners to:

- Achieve mutual recognition with other qualifications. For example, allowing them to progress from one NVQ to another or from NVQ to academic qualifications both within and across industry sectors;
- Avoid repetition of units, particularly in skills such as communication skills, customer care, health and safety etc, which appear in many qualifications within and across industry sectors.

As a result, since April 2006, WAMITAB have had 90% of their vocational courses accredited within the Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales (CQFW). These units are mostly NVQs and range from levels 1 to 4 i.e. from operator through to manager level. Due to the fact that NVQs are competence-based qualifications, this system does facilitate the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. However, strictly speaking, NVQs are mainstream, formal qualifications.

With respect to using the credit system to full effect, WAMITAB will therefore need to wait for the mechanisms in place to recognise non-formal and informal learning to take full effect. They will also need to wait for the CQFW to incorporate more units of learning before students will see the full benefits of the new framework.

Currently, 'Accreditation of Prior Learning' (APL) is still the most common mechanism for recognising prior learning. This is a process which has been in place since WAMITAB was first established and offers students exemptions from units of learning if they can provide evidence that they have already undertaken this training. This process involves an assessor comparing units of learning, identifying any shortfalls in knowledge, assessing whether the past learning is up-to-date etc.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.wamitab.org.uk/>

### **3.2 Case Study: SEMTA (Wales)**

SEMTA is the Sector Skills Council for Science, Engineering and Manufacturing. It operates U.K wide with representatives employed in each region.

In Wales, SEMTA has recently worked with the new credit framework (CQFW) to allow employees undertaking in-house training programmes to gain recognition for their learning and development. The in-house training could include technical training, company induction schemes, health and safety, Continued Professional Development (CPD) etc. However, for a unit to be accredited it has to satisfy the CQFW requirement of 'one unit achieving certain learning outcomes in 10 hours of learning time' and has to adhere to CQFW quality procedures.

SEMTA works with a number of companies e.g. Airbus, Robert Bosch, Flowform in assigning and awarding credit to in-house training - sizing and levelling their training against CQFW criteria and against National Occupational Standards (NOS).

The main reasons for looking at ways to accredit in-house training are that it:

- Allows employers to build more flexible learning programmes;
- Provides employees with a means of recognising their training and competencies, which can help them with their career progression and future learning.

## 4.0 THE THIRD SECTOR

---

In Scotland and Wales, where systems for recognising non-formal and informal learning are in place, a number of voluntary sector organisations have had learning programmes accredited within the national credit and qualifications frameworks.

The rest of this chapter focuses on providing examples of how voluntary sector organisations have recognised non-formal and/or informal learning.

### 4.1 Case Study: Sylfaen Cymunedol, North Wales

Sylfaen Cymunedol is a community development project, which aims to influence change in communities. It achieves this through engaging community development activists in relevant learning and development programmes. These programmes help to identify the problems/issues inherent within the communities and, importantly, how these issues should be tackled. Often this leads to the development of new services, for example, a new purpose built nursery etc.

Initially the learning programmes provided by Sylfaen Cymunedol were not recognised. The charity started to look for ways of accrediting their training largely because they wanted their learners to gain confidence and encourage them to proceed with further learning and development. The CQFW, via the Open College Network, offered them an opportunity to do this by providing a flexible means of “accrediting learning wherever and however it took place”. They found that they could assign credit values to all of their units of learning, for example confidence building, introduction to community development, working with young people etc in a way that they could not with the traditional NVQ system.

In order to achieve credit, the learners have to complete a ‘portfolio’, which consists of a number of ‘task sheets’. For example, learners may be expected to carry out a community audit and evidence their learning by taking photographs, writing a short report etc. An Internal and External Verifier proceed to review the portfolios before credits are awarded. This assures quality and provides the learner with an opportunity to transfer their credit to other forms of learning.

### 4.2 Case Study: Volunteer Development Scotland

This is a voluntary sector learning and training provider, which provides a short one-day course to volunteer organisations on developing volunteer portfolios. The portfolios can be

developed to assist volunteer organisations in the training and development of volunteers. RPL is highlighted as a means of assessing experience and training to provide evidence for use in further or higher education or in employment<sup>1</sup>.

### 4.3 Case Study: Progress GB

Some third sector organisations play an important role in working with disadvantaged groups. VINFL can provide for the social and economic integration of disadvantaged groups (such as immigrants, older workers or disengaged young people) by demonstrating to them and to the outside world their abilities and achievements, as demonstrated in the example given below.

#### Progress GB, using VINFL to help refugees, UK

'Progress GB' is a development partnership funded by the ESF EQUAL programme. Its lead partner is NIACE<sup>2</sup>, a non-governmental organisation working for more and different adult learners. The purpose of the Progress-GB Development Partnership is to pilot and disseminate innovative approaches that will support employers to overcome skill shortages, by promoting inclusive work practices, and to address the needs of refugee and migrant workers to develop and adapt their skills for the UK labour market through a range of lifelong learning opportunities.

People who come to the UK from other countries encounter considerable difficulties in gaining recognition for their existing skills, experience and qualifications. As part of the Progress GB project, the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies at the University of Birmingham has developed new models to support recognition through skills auditing, work experience, top-up training, and developing migrants' awareness of the UK labour market.

Refugees are offered an assessment by an advisor, who discusses the programme and audits candidates' language and skills levels. They are then directed to a package of products that can include a vocational orientation programme, which identifies gaps in ability and further appropriate training, a vocational language programme and general labour market orientation programmes. In some vocational areas, skills can be accredited whilst on the orientation programme. Once they are work-ready, refugees are offered a supervised work experience placement, where, in some sectors, a mentor is assigned to help them integrate into the workplace. Throughout the process, refugees are offered ongoing assistance with looking for a job or becoming self-employed, and may leave the programme at any time to take up paid employment.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> OECD (2006) Scottish Contribution to UK Report on Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

<sup>2</sup> National Institute of Adult Continuing Education: <http://www.niace.org.uk/>

<sup>3</sup> Taken from 'Overcoming Barriers', a dissemination leaflet for Progress GB, available at: <http://www.equal-works.com/ProductHome.aspx?ety=2eeca14b-594c-42b0-885d-39c555eaf280>

## 5.0 CONCLUSIONS

---

Traditionally, there has been no legal framework for recognition and validation of non-formal /informal learning within education and training in the UK due to its voluntarist approach to education and training in general. Although some administrative measures for the recognition of such learning have been introduced across the devolved administrations, they do not constitute a legal framework.

However, all of the qualification frameworks emerging throughout the U.K are 'credit' frameworks, which will be compatible with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

The frameworks in England/Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland are at different stages of development. Currently, it is the Scottish and Welsh frameworks that are the most advanced in incorporating non-formal and informal learning. This is because they have adopted specific methodological approaches, quality assurance procedures etc aimed at incorporating these 'types' of learning into their national qualification frameworks.

The QCF in England and Northern Ireland does not exempt informal and non-formal learning from being included within the framework. However, it will not be known until it is launched how much non-formal or informal learning will in fact be included or whether specific methodologies will be put in place to co-ordinate a national approach to validation. At the moment methodologies such as APL and RARPA are prime examples of individual validation initiatives in England.