

Contribution of SCQF Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) Project to the REFINE project

1. Introduction

The Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) project has developed a set of national guidelines to underpin RPL provision in Scotland. Through its involvement in the REFINE project, as a self-funded partner, the development of the guidelines has taken into account the development of principles, approaches and tools for recognising prior informal learning at a European level.

This report will summarise the contribution of the SCQF project to the achievement of the objectives of the REFINE project.

2. The SCQF RPL project

2.1 Development of the guidelines

The development of the SCQF RPL guidelines addresses some of the recommendations of the Transfine project in terms of providing a *'framework that will promote the use of common tools by different sectors for different purposes with a common understanding of the principles and procedures to guarantee quality and legitimacy of the outcomes of recognition'* (Refine proposal)

The SCQF brings together all Scottish qualifications into a single unified framework. It gives every qualification a level and credit value. It has the capacity to recognise all forms of learning. The development of national guidelines for RPL was therefore an integral part of the implementation plan of the SCQF.

The guidelines are applicable across all post-16 education and training sectors in Scotland. The process of their development therefore needed to be as consultative and inclusive as possible. A national debate was held to bring together representatives of higher education institutions, colleges, Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), community learning and development; voluntary sector learning providers; workplace learning and training ; and professional bodies. The national debate was largely facilitated through free sector-based workshops held between April and June 2004.

The national debate enabled participants to discuss the key challenges and opportunities presented by RPL within the context of the SCQF; the proposed scope and nature of the guidelines and the core principles underpinning effective RPL provision. It was clear that in order to take into account the needs and goals of different learner groups across the sectors the guidelines could not be prescriptive but should encourage a wide range of different approaches. The core principles, agreed through the national debate, should be used by providers in developing and operating all RPL provision, regardless of purpose or context, to ensure learner-centred, quality-assured

and effective provision. One of the key outcomes of the national debate was the recognition of the need for cooperation and collaboration within and across sectors to ensure that the needs of learners are most effectively met. Guidance on the key features of the RPL process is also contained in the guidelines. This guidance reflects existing good practice and developments in practice at a national and European level. The guidelines suggest different approaches to learner support and indicate a range of tools which providers can use to recognise prior informal learning, including the Europass CV and Europass Language portfolio.

The guidelines are consistent with the Common European Principles for the Identification and Validation of Non-formal and Informal learning.

Consultation on the draft guidelines took place in January and February 2005. The final version of the guidelines has now been published and is available on the SCQF website: www.scqf.org.uk, along with the shorter RPL Core Principle and Key Features document and the Consultation Report.

2.2 Types of RPL within the SCQF

The guidelines make a distinction between RPL for personal/career development and RPL for credit. This can also be defined as formative recognition and summative recognition respectively. The formative recognition process, linked to personal/career development, may lead to summative recognition in the form of credit, or may be an end (or a beginning) in itself. This distinction between formative and summative recognition was originally informed by the draft *Common Principles for Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning*, Commission of European Communities (March 2004) ¹.

RPL for credit, otherwise known as the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), will continue to be provided by HEIs , colleges and SQA-approved learning and training providers..

RPL for personal/career development has a more developmental focus, compared to the 'credit exchange' model associated with most RPL for credit, or APEL, in the UK. ² Formative recognition has both retrospective and prospective dimensions. It can be linked to activities associated with confidence-building; planning further self development and identifying learning opportunities. The process enables learners to make clearer connections between the learning they have already achieved and future learning opportunities. It may result in the notional levelling of this learning within the SCQF to help identify individual learning pathways. This form of RPL is being explored predominantly within the context of community learning and development. It is recommended in the guidelines that links should be established between RPL and personal, or professional, development planning (PDP) across all sectors. The use of the Europass CV and Europass language portfolio can be used to support this process.

¹ Commission of European Communities (March 2004) *Common Principles for Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning*, Final Proposal from Working Group H (Making learning attractive and strengthening links between education, work and society)

² Butterworth,C. (1992) 'More than one bite at the APEL- contrasting models of accrediting prior learning', *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 16,(3) Autumn 1992 pp39-51

2.3 Other REFINE activities

Beyond the development of the guidelines, specific REFINE activities include:

- contact with Youthlink Scotland to pilot the Europass CV . Despite extensive liaison by the SCQF project team , the two organisations were unfortunately unable to undertake this piloting activity due to staff changes;
- Financial and activity reporting to the REFINE project team;
- In all dissemination events and workshops about the development and implementation of the guidelines, an explicit link has been made with the work of the REFINE project. These events include those organised by the SCQF as well as contributions in the form of keynote addresses and workshops at conferences organised by Universities Scotland; UALL; SEEC; Scottish Social Services Council. At the UK Presidency of the EU Conference 'Qualifications Frameworks in Europe: Learning across boundaries' in September 2005, the validation of non-formal and informal learning was a key theme. The development of the SCQF RPL guidelines, was the focus of a workshop at the conference. The collaborative approach taken in their development; the recognition of the European, as well as the national, context of development; and the ways in which RPL can be used within the SCQF generated significant interest among European colleagues.
- Response to questionnaire for REFINE Code of Practice for monitors, deliverers and users;
- Participation in 2nd REFINE project meeting in Rome and facilitation of workshop on the development of the SCQF RPL guidelines.

3. Conclusion

The SCQF has developed a national framework for RPL through a consultative and collaborative process across and within sectors. The guidelines recognise the range of different approaches that are used, and could be used, within sectors. The outcomes of the consultation on the draft guidelines indicate the need for continued sector-based and cross-sector collaboration in the implementation of the guidelines to enable the sharing of experience as well as greater consistency in approach. This is essential if all users of the process (learners; learning providers and receiving institutions) are to have confidence in the outcomes of the process. This collaborative focus underpins much of the current and planned development work in relation to RPL.

The process of development and implementation of the SCQF guidelines has embraced the REFINE goals of collaboration and cooperation across sectors. It has enabled practitioners to share expertise and raise their awareness of the different approaches and tools that can be used to recognise prior informal learning. It has contributed to the process of establishing '*dialogue between the sectors in order to promote the mutual understanding, confidence and trust that is necessary for mutual recognition*' (REFINE project proposal)

Through involvement in the REFINE project the SCQF has embraced developments at a European level and incorporated these in the production of the guidelines. The focus of the UK Presidency of the EU Conference in September 2005, was the consultation on the proposals for the European Qualifications Framework. It is clear that one of the key challenges will be the development of effective approaches to validate non-formal and informal learning, underpinned by the Common European Principles. The SCQF RPL guidelines themselves provide a model which may usefully support future RPL developments in Europe.

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