

The  
Scottish Credit and Qualifications  
Framework

**Recognition of  
Prior Informal Learning (RPL)  
Project Summary**

April 2004



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# **Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) Project**

## **1. Project Aim**

The aim of the project is to facilitate a national debate on the recognition of prior informal learning (RPL) within the context of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). The key outcome of this debate will be the development of guidelines to support the implementation of RPL provision across all post-16 education and training sectors in Scotland.

The guidelines will form a section of the SCQF Handbook and will cover all prior learning which has not been previously assessed or credit-rated. This will include prior learning achieved through life and work experiences as well as prior learning gained in less formal contexts in community-based learning, work-based learning, continuing professional development and voluntary work. Developing effective mechanisms for recognising prior learning is an essential element of the successful implementation of the SCQF.

## **2. Purpose of the guidelines**

- To provide guidance to learning providers across all post-16 education sectors in Scotland on managing the process of recognising informal learning within the context of the SCQF
- To provide a core set of principles that will enable users of the SCQF to have confidence that there is a consistent approach to assessing and credit-rating prior informal learning
- To support the more widespread practice of recognising prior learning as part of the lifelong learning agenda in Scotland

## **Definition of formal, non-formal and informal learning**

The working definition of the different types of learning referred to in this project is derived from that used by the EU in its Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (2000, EU: Brussels):

- Formal learning takes place in education and training institutions leading to recognised diplomas and qualifications
- Non-formal learning takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training and does not typically lead to formal certification, e.g. learning and training activities undertaken in the workplace, voluntary sector or trade union and through community-based learning
- Informal learning can be defined as experiential learning and takes place through life and work experiences. It is often unintentional learning. The learner may not recognise at the time of the experience that it contributed to the development of their skills and knowledge. This recognition may only happen retrospectively through the RPL process, unless the experiences take place as part of a planned experiential, or work-based learning programme

## **Recognition of prior informal learning (RPL)**

The process of RPL can be undertaken by a learner for both personal and professional development and for gaining credit (for entry and/or credit within formal programmes of study).

RPL, often described as the Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), is a process engaged in by learners, or adults considering returning to learning, that involves describing experiences, reflecting on those experiences, identifying the learning associated with the experiences and providing evidence of their learning. The role of the learning provider is to provide effective support to the learner and to manage the process of recognising their prior informal learning in a clear and consistent manner.

## Types of RPL activities

- The formal recognition of prior informal learning can be used by a learner to gain entry to a programme of study within a college or a university, as an alternative to normal entry requirements, and also to gain credit towards a programme of study
- RPL activities, within both formal and non-formal settings, can be linked to the personal and professional development of learners. The RPL process enables learners to make clearer connections between the learning they have already achieved and future learning opportunities. Through the RPL process, learners can locate their learning in the Framework and plan how to build upon it. The personal value of engaging in the RPL process in terms of confidence-building and promoting self-direction is a key outcome. The RPL process provides a basis for enhancing self-knowledge in a way which encourages personal development and prepares learners not only for further learning, but also for the labour market
- RPL can recognise and enhance the informal learning processes in which individuals are already engaged, and provide links between that type of learning and other more formal types of learning. This can be achieved, for example, through the identification of learning skills which can be transferred between different learning contexts

## National Debate on RPL

The SCQF guidelines will be the outcome of the national debate on RPL by policy-makers and practitioners across the post-16 education and training sectors in Scotland. Sector-based SCQF RPL workshops are being held between April and June 2004:

27 April 2004	<b>Community Learning and Development and Adult Literacies,</b> West Park Centre, Dundee
12 May 2004	<b>Colleges; SQA,</b> Scottish Further Education Centre, Stirling
18 May 2004	<b>Higher Education Institutions,</b> Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow
8 June 2004	<b>Work-based Learning and Training Providers,</b> Holiday Inn West, Glasgow
15 June 2004	<b>Professional and Statutory Bodies,</b> SQA, Hanover House, Glasgow

For further details of these workshops please contact [Iain.White@sqa.org.uk](mailto:Iain.White@sqa.org.uk).

A project website is also supporting this national debate – [www.scaf.org.uk/rpl](http://www.scaf.org.uk/rpl).

In the development of the guidelines, links will be made with the EU-funded Refine Project to ensure that the guidelines complement other European developments in relation to RPL. The Refine Project is a follow-up to the Transfine Project and will be testing out methods of recognising prior learning across various European countries. The SCQF is a self-funded national partner in the project.

The SCQF RPL project time-scale is October 2003–March 2005

### **3. Phase 1** October 2003–March 2004

#### **Activities:**

- Research the current range of RPL activities both across and within each sector e.g. within:
  - Higher Education
  - Further Education
  - Community-based learning and development
  - Workplace learning and training
  - Voluntary organisations

This research activity will include an exploration and identification of:

- the context of learning
  - the type of learning being supported and assessed
  - the way in which it is being supported and assessed
  - the way in which the learning is creditrated (if appropriate)
  - the reasons RPL is being used and expected outcomes
- 
- Commence a national debate by key stakeholders on the issues pertinent to the recognition of prior informal learning within the context of the SCQF
  - Consider both European and non-European developments in RPL and, in particular, their relationship to credit and qualifications frameworks
  - Identify quality assurance issues in relation to RPL provision

#### **Output:**

Production of an interim report to SCQF Implementation Group's RPL Project Steering Group in May 2004. This will detail the outcomes of the research and identify issues requiring further exploration through the sector-based RPL workshops, in order to define and agree the scope and structure of the Guidelines.

#### **4. Phase 2** March 2004–November 2004

##### **Activities:**

Identify core operational principles and guidelines for RPL, through:

- Consideration of outcomes of Phase 1
- Consultation with key stakeholders through SCQF workshops
- Consideration of other European developments in the recognition of prior informal learning, in particular through links with the Refine Project

##### **Output:**

Production of a draft guidelines document and submission to the SCQF Implementation Group's RPL Project Steering Group for feedback.

#### **5. Phase 3** November 2004–March 2005

##### **Activities:**

- Incorporation of feedback from the RPL Project Steering Group into the draft document
- Guidelines consultation exercise managed through the RPL Project Steering Group

##### **Output:**

Production of final document incorporating outcomes of consultation process by March 2005 (preliminary final date, to be reviewed in November 2004).

## 6. Key Issues for discussion/exploration

- What types of informal learning activities are taking place across the different educational and training sectors within Scotland; what are the outcomes of these activities and are they assessed?
- What form of recognition of this learning would be useful to the learner; to the learning provider; to the community and to employers?
- In what ways can this learning be recognised in the form of credit-rating within the context of the SCQF and how can this be linked to the personal/professional development of the learner and the planning of future learning pathways?
- What models/mechanisms for recognition would work best within particular settings across each sector?
- What should be the nature and scope of SCQF guidelines on RPL in order to best support wider RPL activity and a more explicit link between non-formal and formal learning opportunities?
- What are the key Quality Assurance issues that require to be addressed in the guidelines?
- How can effective links be made between the work of this project and the work of other SCQF and relevant national and international projects?

For further information about the project please contact Ruth Whittaker, Project Consultant.

**Ruth Whittaker**

[rplproject@scqf.org.uk](mailto:rplproject@scqf.org.uk)



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