

# Learning outcomes: Recognising Prior Learning

Ruth Whittaker  
Caledonian Academy  
Glasgow Caledonian University

[rgwh@gcal.ac.uk](mailto:rgwh@gcal.ac.uk)

# Outline

- **Different types of prior learning.**
- **SCQF and prior learning**
- **What do we mean by Credit Transfer?**
- **What do we mean by RPL ?**
- **What are the outcomes of RPL ?**
- **What are the drivers for RPL development in Scotland?**
- **Learning outcomes approach - advantages & challenges for RPL**
- **Process of gaining credit for prior learning**
- **Examples - university & workplace contexts**

# Different types of prior learning

## ➤ **Formal learning:**

- takes place within the context of programmes delivered by learning and training providers
- is assessed and credit-rated.

## ➤ **Informal learning:**

- achieved through life and work experiences
- learning gained in non-formal contexts e.g. in the community, the workplace or independent learning
- not been previously assessed or credit-rated

# SCQF & prior learning

- SCQF aims to **support lifelong learning** through enabling more flexible progression across all learning sectors:
  - Enables learners, learning providers and employers to understand full range of Scottish qualifications and how they relate to each other
  - Assist in clarifying relationships between Scottish qualifications and those of rest of UK , Europe and beyond
  - Capacity to recognise all forms of learning through learning outcomes approach to award of credit
- Development and implementation of **national RPL guidelines** integral to SCQF implementation plan



# SCQF and prior learning

12		Doctorate		12
11		Masters	SVQ 5	11
10		Honours Degree		10
9		Ordinary Degree		9
8		HND / HE Diploma	SVQ 4	8
7	Advanced Higher	HNC / HE Certificate		7
6	Higher		SVQ 3	6
5	Intermediate 2		SVQ 2	5
4	Intermediate 1		SVQ 1	4
3	Access 3			3
2	Access 2			2
1	Access 1			1

# SCQF & prior learning

- National debate on RPL (2004): *change of term from 'APEL' to 'RPL'*
- Production of **Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework (SCQF) RPL guidelines** (2005): *formative and summative recognition*
- Production of **SCQF RPL resource pack** (2006): *examples of practice*
- Development and piloting of **RPL resource packs and profiling tools** for Community Learning and Development and Social Services sectors (2006-07)
- Development of **Flexible Entry (RPL and Credit transfer) Staff Development and Resource Packs for Scottish HE sector** (2006)
- Scottish Executive (SE) **RPL scoping exercise** (2006): *to understand stakeholder views on priority areas of development, as well as barriers*
- The **SCQF** is currently in discussion with stakeholders and the Scottish Government regarding **what form the support for RPL will take** over the next three years. This support is likely to focus on **mainstreaming RPL within organisations and institutions through building capacity and capability.**

# What do we mean by credit transfer?

- **Credit Transfer** : gives learners credit for their **prior formal or 'certificated' learning**. This means learning they have undertaken which has been assessed and for which they have been awarded qualifications or certificates, for example an SVQ; university module, Higher National unit or Higher National Certificate or Diploma or Professional Development Award.
- It can enable a learner to transfer credit gained through one qualification to another qualification or programme of study.
- Based on comparability of outcomes of different qualifications/elements of qualifications

# What do we mean by RPL ?

## ➤ **Recognition of Prior informal Learning (RPL)**

will involve a learner in :

- reflecting on life and work experiences and non-formal learning or training experiences
- identifying learning outcomes
- providing evidence of that learning

## ➤ Role of learning provider to provide effective support and manage process of recognition



# What do we mean by RPL ?

- The SCQF guidelines encourages the use of **RPL for personal and career development**, or formative recognition, and **RPL for credit**, or summative recognition.
- **Formative recognition** is linked to personal/career development & educational guidance.

**Purpose:** to build learner confidence and help learners make connections between previous learning and ways in they which can build on this to support further learning and development

# What do we mean by RPL ?

- **RPL for credit, or summative recognition**, involves assessing, and then credit rating learning gained through experience which took place before a learner embarks on a formal programme or qualification
- **Link between two forms of RPL** : Formative recognition can be preparatory stage to summative recognition ( building learner confidence and developing reflective skills e.g. use of profiling tools)

# What do we mean by RPL?

- **RPL for credit :context**
- Organisations which deliver **SCQF credit-rated** provision:
  - Colleges
  - Higher Education Institutions
  - SQA-approved centres
  - Other SCQF credit-rating bodies
- All organisations which deliver SCQF credit-rated provision can award a **general credit-rating**. The receiving institution determines the amount of **specific credit** a learner can be awarded within a particular programme within that institution or organisation

# What are the outcomes of RPL ?

## ➤ As a result of RPL people may:

- **Plan a learning pathway**; personal/career development plan which will build on their prior learning (**RPL for PCD/ formative recognition**)
- **Identify core, and other skills**, which they have gained through their life and work experiences which will help them to study, train or work effectively (**building learner confidence & supporting transitions**)
- **Gain entry** to a programme at college or university as alternative to traditional entry qualifications (**RPL for entry**)
- **Gain credit** within a programme or towards a qualification (**RPL for credit/ summative recognition**)
- See RPL: Learner Journey diagram

# Drivers for RPL development in Scotland

## ➤ National level:

- Lifelong Learning, Employability agendas, Skills Strategy for Scotland
  - “ Social inclusion and social justice
  - “ Skilled, flexible & mobile workforce
  - “ Improved economic productivity and competitiveness
- Legislation in some sectors regarding qualified workforce

## ➤ Learning provider:

- Widening participation and Flexible Delivery agendas:
  - “ Demographic change- need to target new student markets
  - “ Student retention and progression

# Learning outcomes-based approach

## RPL & credit transfer within context of SCQF:

- **Single unified framework** for all Scottish academic and vocational qualifications
- **Outcomes-based** : skills, knowledge & understanding
- **Levels**: complexity of learning ( SCQF level descriptors)
- **Credit points** : volume of learning undertaken (average/notional learning time: i.e. 10 hours = 1 credit point)
- **SCQF level descriptors** set out characteristic generic outcomes of each level relating to knowledge & understanding; practice; generic cognitive skills; communication, ICT & numeracy skills; autonomy, accountability & working with others - provide general shared understanding of each level and to allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning at different levels (SCQF, 2003) . **facilitate recognition of prior learning and vertical and horizontal progression routes**

# Learning outcomes-based approach

## Advantages for RPL/credit transfer:

- Separates teaching process from learning process i.e. enables flexibility in terms of when, how and where learning takes place
- LOs describe transferable skills, knowledge & understanding
- Can be used in retrospective terms ( i.e. what learner has already achieved through prior learning) as well as prospective terms ( i.e. what learner is expected to achieve through programme of learning)
- Units of learning described in outcomes terms, underpinned by SCQF level descriptors, enables easier comparison between different qualifications and different types of learning experiences in terms of credit transfer, RPL and progression
- Indication of threshold level of learning i.e. balance between specification of learning and openness to unexpected areas of learning (Moon, 2002)
- Expressing own learning through prior experience in terms of LOs can make comparisons/connections to outcomes of formal programmes easier for learners

# Learning outcome-based approach

## Challenges for RPL/Credit transfer :

- Usually **predicated on formal learning model**: experiential/informal learning process different starting point to that within formal learning (unless work-based learning programme)
- Easier to demonstrate LOs through prior experiential learning at **postgraduate level** (specialised, application to practice etc ) than at undergraduate level ( broader, fundamental concepts etc)
- RPL/credit transfer claims may be assessed on basis of whether **direct match, rather than broad comparison, which is difficult to demonstrate**
- **Difficulty of providing individualised programme** if not all LOs can be demonstrated through prior learning
- Issue of **extent to which all LOs need to be achieved** to pass module(s) : expectations of 100%?
- In terms of credit transfer from e.g. HN qualification to degree, LOs may be comparable, but differences in curricular content, learning, teaching, assessment approaches may lead to **difficulties in terms of transition & progression** for learners

# Process of gaining credit for prior learning

## 3 stages to process of awarding credit for prior learning :

1. **Initial advice and guidance** (what credit transfer /RPL involves, what credit limits there are for prior learning, what costs, roles & responsibilities of learner and tutor/advisor; and different learning pathways to qualification)
2. **Support** ( reflective process; understanding learning outcomes; identifying own learning outcomes; evidence gathering & selection)
3. **Recognition/assessment** ( assessment of evidence of achievement of learning outcomes and assessment criteria)

# Process of gaining credit for prior learning

## Key principles of RPL:

- Recognition is given for **learning** not experience
- Learning that is recognised should be **transferable** and not just context-specific
- **Learner** is responsible for identifying & demonstrating their learning
- Credit awarded through RPL is of **same value** as credit gained through informal learning

# Process of gaining credit for prior learning

## RPL Learner support :

- Two forms of support ( mentor/tutor/assessor)
  - Support for RPL process ( e.g. planning learning pathway; support for reflective process; evidence gathering & selection)
  - Support in subject, vocational, professional area (e.g. level, knowledge, skills and values)
    - “ Written/e-learning resources
    - “ Individual tutorials/meetings
    - “ Group sessions
    - “ Electronic communication



# Process of gaining credit for prior learning

## Evidence gathering mechanisms:

- Reflective account
- Project work
- Interview/oral assessment/professional discussion
- Assessment on demand
- Simulation/observation of practice
- Mapping of Learning Outcomes
- Profiling
- Europass CV
- Portfolio

# Process of gaining credit for prior learning

## Key guidance in evidence gathering:

- Streamlined approaches should be used to make the process manageable for the learner, Tutor/Mentor and Assessor.
- Balance of direct and reflective evidence.
- Be highly selective in choice of evidence and cross reference evidence to more than one standard or learning outcome .

# Process of gaining credit for prior learning

## Assessing prior learning

Learner must submit claim in form that

- **Makes clear written statements about what actually learnt i.e. learning outcomes**
- **Provides supportive evidence that learning claimed has occurred**
- **Appropriate SCQF level**
- **Demonstrates comparability between outcomes of her prior informal learning with the learning outcomes of module, unit, part of a level or entire level of qualification for which seeking credit**
- **Meets Assessment criteria :**
  - Acceptability
  - Sufficiency
  - Authenticity
  - Currency

# Process of gaining credit for prior learning

## Ensuring Quality

- All RPL processes should be quality assured to make sure of consistency, transparency and accessibility (SCQF RPL core principles) .
- Integrating recognition of prior learning within programme design and delivery : LOs should be expressed in a way that enables a variety of different routes for their achievement as well as the use of different modes of assessment/evidence.
- Training and support for staff involved in supporting learners in RPL process
- Use of SCQF core principles & key features of RPL : RPL Guidelines ([www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk))

# Examples

## University of West of Scotland

- Centralised/partnership approach- APL Coordinator
- APEL claims workshops
- Systematic reflection to identify learning
- Students write statements of learning
  - Cognitive skills that have been achieved
  - Complexity of situation in which learning has taken place
  - Extent to which learning been achieved independently or under supervision
  - Specify how prior learning may contribute to specific programme of study & reflect ways in which individual has changed as result of going through learning process
  - Use SCQF level descriptors as guide
- Matching of statements to learning outcomes of module(s) for which seeking credit

# Examples

## Glasgow Caledonian University

- Devolved approach- responsibility of Schools (Heads of Learning, Teaching & Quality)
- University Guidelines for Flexible Entry (RPL & Credit Transfer): consistent with SCQF RPL Guidelines; all Schools follow same process, but support and evidence gathering mechanisms for RPL vary to suit needs of school, programme and student group
- Flexible Entry: Guide for Students
- School-based RPL advisor
- Flexible Entry Claim form based on recent learning with clear comparability to the learning outcomes of the proposed programme; mechanism for tracking progress of claim from initial enquiry to assessment & credit-rating decision.

# Examples

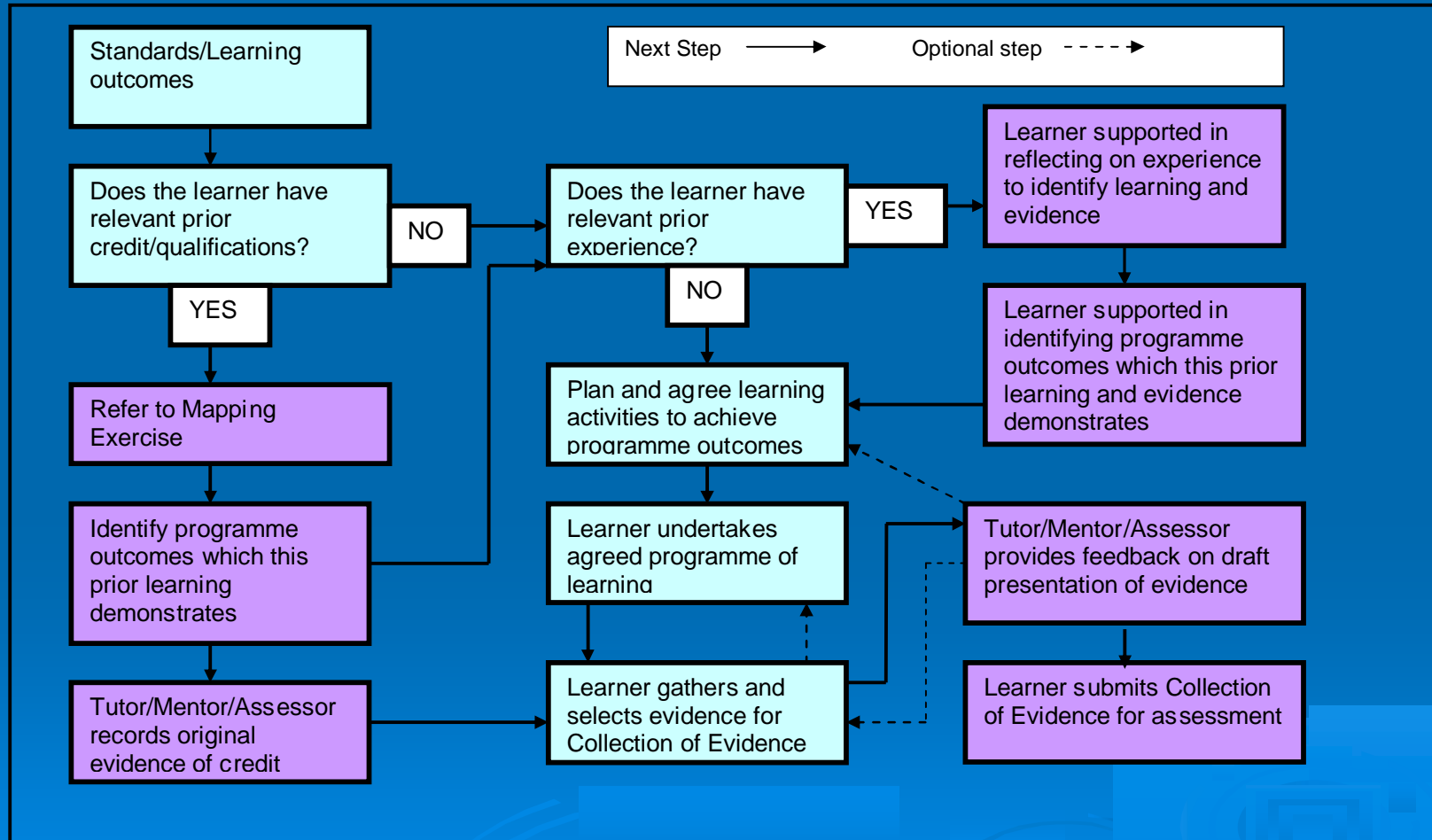
## University of Stirling

- Valuing Learning from Experience (Valex )EU project (GCU & Stirling Scottish partners): RPL model & toolkit . formative recognition and summative recognition, group model
- RPL module for entry into and credit against Access programme: partnership SWAP, Forth Valley College & Access to Industry:
  - Reflecting on learning from experiences & learning from community/adult learning programmes
  - Academic assignment giving credit against an Access or SWAP programme module
- Exploring RPL routes for professional/CPD programmes (LO focus, evidenced through reflective/academic writing

# Example

- **Social Services sector**
- Vocational/professional qualifications & workforce development : social care; practice learning; early years education
- **RPL Resource Pack** - formative recognition: confidence-building, reflective process, reflective writing
- **RPL profiling tool**- staged approach to summative assessment
- An effective and resource efficient way of undertaking the credit rating of prior learning is to incorporate this within the **overall planning and assessment process** for achievement of a qualification, rather than to undertake it as a separate, discrete process .

# Example of RPL & Credit Transfer process as part of qualification achievement



## Example of RPL process as part of qualification achievement

- Recognition and credit-rating of prior learning is therefore incorporated into the assessment process for the qualification as a whole.
- A learner can present evidence for achievement of learning outcomes based on:
  - Prior qualifications
  - Prior informal learning
  - Learning undertaken as part of a planned programme of learning ( work-based, provider-based, e-learning, blended learning etc)

# Useful resources

- SCQF Handbook : RPL Guidelines & Credit Transfer Guidelines [www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk)
- SCQF Social Services RPL Resource Pack (SSSC,2007)
- SCQF Social Services RPL Profiling Tool (SSSC,2007)
- SCQF Social Services RPL Mentor Guidance Pack (SSSC,2007)
- Practice Learning Qualifications Social Services (PLQ(SS)) Guidelines for Credit Transfer and Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) (Scottish Social Services Networks, 2007)

# Discussion

- What are the advantages of using a learning outcomes approach in the recognition of prior learning within your own contexts?
- What are the disadvantages/challenges?
- To what extent is the approach to RPL in Scotland, and the examples of practice, given transferable to your own contexts?
- What approaches are you currently using and what are your plans for future developments?

