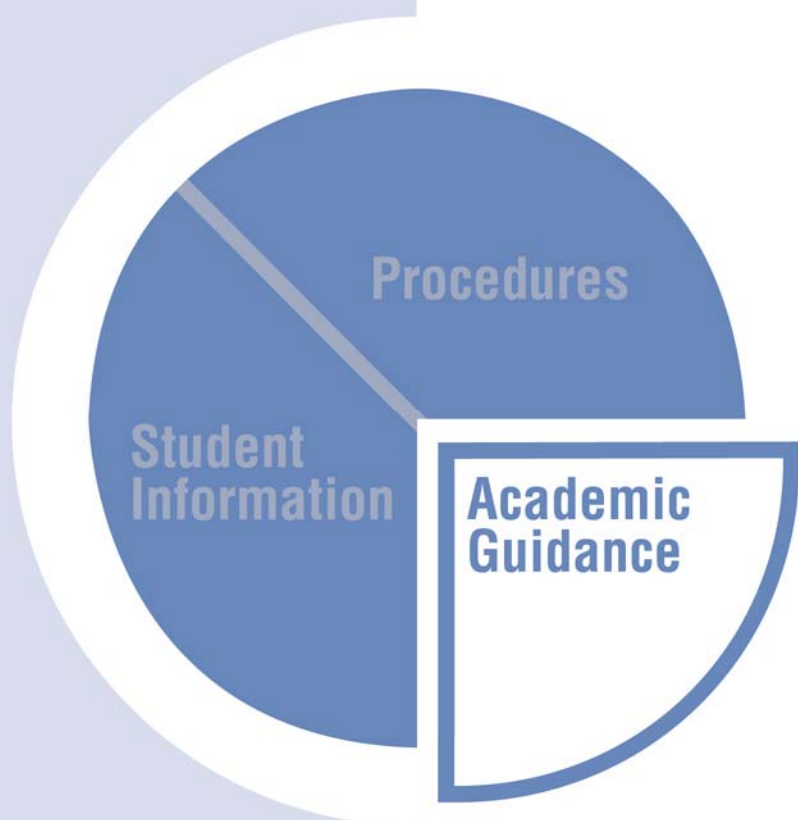




Quality Framework



D: Delivery & Management of
Programmes and Modules

**D4: Recognition of Prior Learning
(RPL) for Credit: A Guide for Staff**

NAPIER UNIVERSITY
EDINBURGH



Introduction

This document is intended to guide staff in assessing claims for uncertificated RPL and help students prepare these claims.

Primary Audience

RPL coordinators, Programme Leaders, and Module Leaders will find this a useful document.

Sources of Further Information

Procedures [Section 5.3](#).

Mike McDonagh, Lifelong Learning, x6103

Produced by:

Quality Enhancement Services

Authored by:

Mike McDonagh, Lifelong Learning, x6103

Edited by:

Emily Alder, x 6360

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RPL for Credit: Staff Guide

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1 Purpose of this Staff Guide

Napier University has a process that allows students to claim credit if they have achieved learning that has not previously been formally assessed. This process is called Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for credit.

This guide is for staff who wish to assist students make an RPL for credit claim and should be read in conjunction with [Section 5.3](#) of the Quality Framework (Procedures).

In this handbook you will find:

- an introduction to the general principles of RPL for credit
- a seven step process to assist students make a RPL for credit claim
- outlines of different RPL assessment methods for RPL claims
- links to proformas:
 - [D/PM/4](#) Certificated RPL Claim
 - [D/PM/5](#) Uncertificated RPL Claim
 - [D/PM/7](#) List of RPL Co-ordinators

and in [Appendix 2](#)

- Extract from SCQF RPL National Guidelines: Core Principles for RPL and Key Features of RPL ⁽¹⁾

2 RPL for Credit: Introduction

RPL for credit is the process of assessment and formal recognition of non-assessed, uncertificated learning that may have been achieved by students from work or other experience that has taken place before starting their degree programme. If students are successful in having this learning recognised they are able to gain academic credit that reflects their learning.

There are two main uses of RPL for credit:

1. Applicants to a degree programme may be able to undertake RPL to seek entry to a degree at Napier University if they do not have the normal entry requirements but can demonstrate that they have achieved the necessary prerequisite skills and knowledge through learning from prior experience (eg from the workplace) to succeed and benefit.
2. Students may be able to use RPL to gain academic credit within a degree programme at Napier University. Credit can be gained for module(s) within a degree, or indeed for entire level(s) of a degree, enabling students to enter the programme with 'advanced standing'. Credit may also be claimed within a programme once students have started on their degree programme.

RPL for credit can be undertaken by a wide range of individuals to assist them either enter University or as a contribution towards their degree programme, including:

- adults returning to education
- students wishing to improve their existing qualifications
- those wishing to retrain or change careers
- employees who have undertaken learning or training in the workplace
- people who have gained a range of skills and knowledge elsewhere eg through volunteering or activities within their community
- refugees and asylum seekers wishing confirmation of their qualifications from other countries

Students can gain credit for their uncertificated learning provided that it:

- can be assessed
- is relevant to their award
- is at an appropriate academic level

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) for credit is now an important element in many education and training programmes. RPL has been used for some considerable time in other countries, principally in the USA to allow mature students without formal qualifications access to higher education. The widest use of recognition of prior learning in the UK is in the field of vocational training, within the N/SVQ system, where individuals can use their work-based learning to gain vocational qualifications.

Napier University degree programmes have programme and module learning outcomes at each level. When following RPL procedures, students will be asked to

provide evidence to show that they have achieved the learning outcomes either at programme level or for specific modules for which they wish to claim credit. In effect students will 'map' the learning from their work and experience onto these outcomes.

The RPL for credit process requires that students demonstrate how they have already achieved certain learning outcomes by using approved school or Faculty RPL assessment methods. RPL Coordinators and RPL Advisers will help students identify the learning outcomes that they are required to meet and assist them prepare for the assessment of their claim for credit.

3 Who's who in RPL

RPL Coordinator

Each school or faculty has an RPL Coordinator who convenes the RPL Committee and oversees RPL assessments. When thinking about making an RPL for credit claim a student should first make contact with the RPL Coordinator who will explain the RPL assessment processes to them. See D/PM/7 for a complete [list of RPL coordinators](#).

RPL Adviser

The RPL Coordinator can identify an RPL Adviser (eg a module leader) who is a subject expert in the area where student wishes make a claim. The RPL Adviser will help the student prepare their claim for assessment leading to the award of credit.

RPL Assessor

RPL Assessor is a subject specialist who will not normally be involved in the preparation of the student's RPL claim. The RPL Assessor will assess the student's claim whether this is through written work, practical or oral presentation etc.

4 RPL Committees

RPL Committees have devolved authority from Faculty Boards to approve RPL assessment processes and agree student RPL claims for credit. The RPL Coordinator is convenor. Successful student RPL claims should be passed to the RPL committee via the RPL Coordinator for agreement. The RPL Committee reports regularly to the Faculty Quality Committee where the latter is responsible for quality management and enhancement of the RPL processes.

5 Assisting students to make an 'RPL for Credit' claim: Seven Steps

The logic of an RPL claim is simple: the student is asserting that he or she has already acquired valuable learning before they started their degree programme. Students are indicating that they already have the learning for some of the modules on their degree programme or have indeed achieved learning that maps onto whole levels or stages of the programme.

In order to have a student's learning assessed, staff should advise them through the steps in the pathway in below, which are outlined in the [Seven Steps flowchart](#) on page 9.

See Quality Framework Procedures [Section 5.3](#) for further information.

STEP 1

Student contacts the School RPL Coordinator.

Each school or faculty at Napier University has a RPL Coordinator who organises RPL assessment and is the first point of contact. The student should be put in touch with their RPL Coordinator in the first instance to discuss their proposed claim for credit (See D/PM/7 for a complete [list of RPL coordinators](#)). The RPL coordinator issues the student with the University's [\[link\]Student Guide to RPL](#) and may refer the student to a RPL Adviser in the appropriate subject area (this may be a lecturer, a module leader etc).

STEP 2

Areas of Learning

Once the student has read the University's [\[link\]Student Guide to RPL](#) he or she should then be assisted to identify clearly the main subject areas or topics into which he or she feels their prior learning most naturally falls. The student should do this with the help of an RPL Adviser who will assist them identify the modules against which they wish to make a claim for credit.

STEP 3

Modules and Learning Outcomes

The student should match identified areas of learning to the most appropriate modules on offer at Napier University. To do this the student may be best advised to consult the University's online [Modular Programmes Catalogue](#) and identify those module(s) that are relevant to the learning for which he or she wishes to claim credit.

Once a student has identified the modules that seem most appropriate they should be assisted to check the learning outcomes required for achievement of each module. This will assist the student gain a good idea of precisely what kind of experience, knowledge and understanding he or she will be required to evidence in order to process the RPL claim.

The number of modules a student may wish to claim will of course depend on the amount of learning from work or experience that student brings to their degree programme. At this stage students should now complete [RPL claim proforma](#) D-PM-5 and hand it to their RPL Coordinator.

STEP 4

RPL Assessment Methods

There are different RPL assessment methods for claims for credit and students should now discuss the assessment methods available in their school or faculty with their RPL Adviser and/or RPL Coordinator. There are specific RPL assessment methods available for some degree pathways. These methods are outlined in the next section called 'The Processes for assessing RPL claims'.

STEP 5

Student's Work Plan

Once the student has discussed their proposed RPL claim with their RPL Adviser and agreed the appropriate RPL assessment method(s) the student will have a better idea of the number of tasks, and the amount of work involved to prepare their claim.

Since students will have to set this work against other study commitments and/or the demands of their job students should be assisted to make a plan as to how and when they will be able to complete their claim. There may be no formal deadlines to meet. A principle of the RPL process is that it is always up to the claimant to complete the claim - or not. The responsibility completing the agreed RPL assessment method (e.g. presenting evidence, writing a reflective account, attending an interview) lies with the student.

STEP 6

Assessment of the RPL Claim

The RPL Adviser will help the student put together the claim whether it be assessment by reflective account, portfolio, interview preparation etc.

When the student is ready to make a claim an RPL Assessor who is a subject specialist should be identified. The RPL Assessor is not normally involved in the preparation of the student RPL claim. The RPL Assessor will assess the claim whether this is through written work, practical or oral presentation etc.

The RPL Assessor will be a member of the teaching staff who is familiar with the programme or module learning outcomes relating to the claim. He or she will have a good understanding of the level of knowledge and understanding that is required in the subject area by students on degree modules who are being assessed in conventional fashion. In this way students undertaking RPL can be sure that any credit that is awarded will be at the same standard and have the same status on the degree programme as that for any other student.

Normally the RPL Adviser and the RPL Assessor do not collaborate in the assessment procedures of the RPL claim to ensure that the process remains objective and satisfies the University's requirements for quality assurance.

Usually there will be just one RPL Assessor but if a student's claim addresses more than one main subject area then it may be that more than one RPL Assessor will be involved.

As with other kinds of assessment within the University the RPL Assessor's decision is final. On occasion however the RPL Assessor can ask the student to provide additional evidence for their claim, eg ask the student to attend a viva voce assessment.

STEP 7

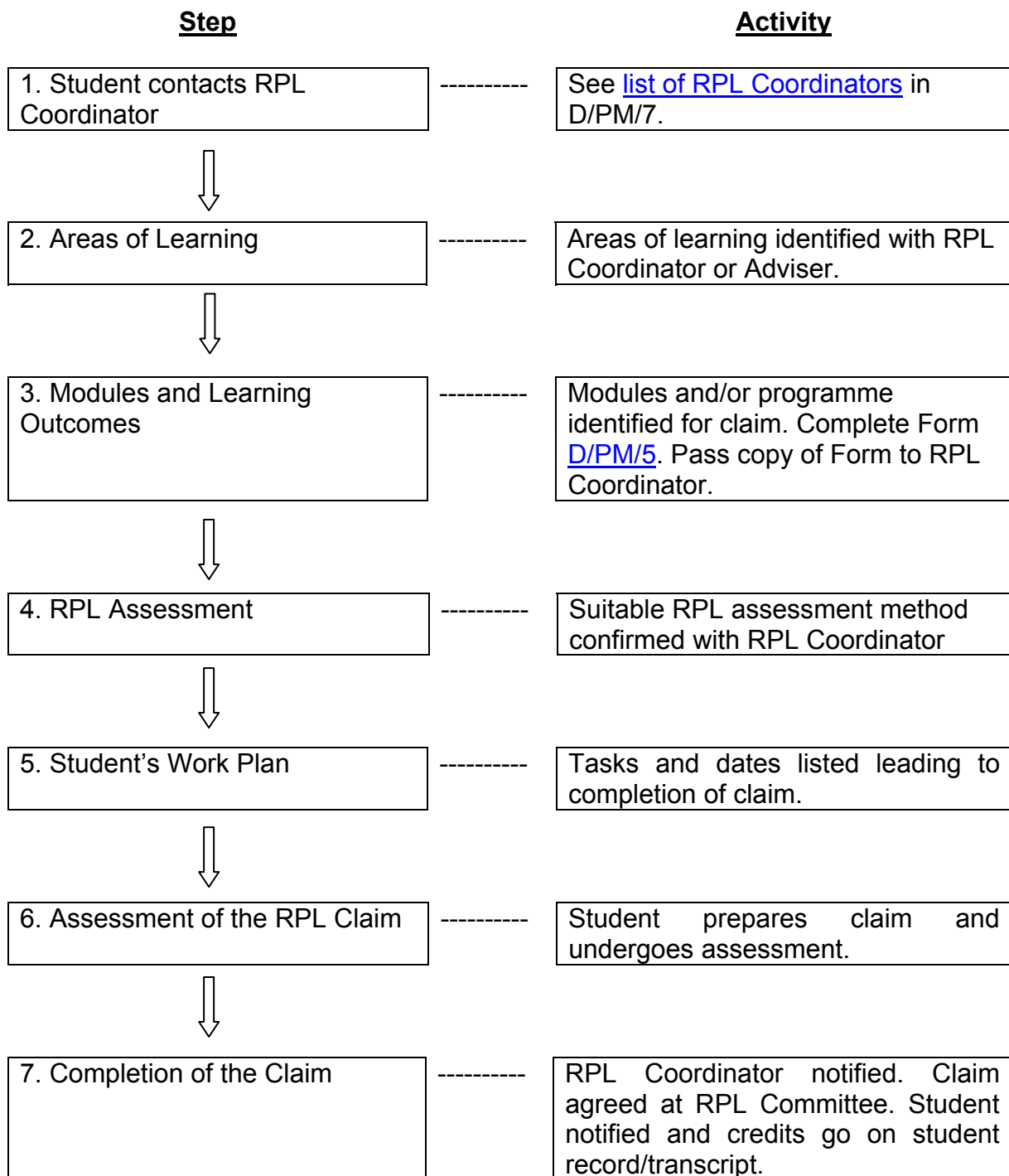
Completion of the Claim

When the student's RPL claim has been assessed the RPL Assessor notifies the RPL Coordinator.

The RPL Coordinator arranges that successful assessments for RPL claims are agreed at the RPL Committee and the student is notified in writing.

The credits claimed towards any programme or for any specific module(s) where the claim is successful will be added to the student's record and will be printed on their Record of Academic Achievement against the module(s) or programme level(s). These credits will count towards the student's degree award.

5.1 Flowchart: Seven Steps to the RPL Claim



6 RPL Assessment Methods

The different methods for assessing RPL claims for credit include:

- Direct mapping of learning outcomes
- Project work
- Interview/oral assessment
- Assessment on demand
- Simulation/observation of practice
- Portfolio

Mapping of learning outcomes: written statements of learning achieved within the workplace context can be defined by the student and mapped onto the outcomes of module(s) or programme, as a means of demonstrating their achievement. This approach enables the student to reflect on his or her experiences and make clear connections between these past experiences and the learning that has resulted. This can be a more streamlined approach and is useful when a student is claiming a substantial amount of credit within a programme, against particular levels.

Project work: this can demonstrate a student's prior learning if he or she has undertaken a particular work-related or community-based activity. This might include:

- The solution of a work-related problem
- The development of a strategy to meet a perceived need
- The management of a project
- The implementation of change to existing systems

Structured interview/oral assessment: interviews can be used as a valid process when making an RPL claim against module learning outcomes. Normally an interview schedule or proforma will be used by the RPL Assessor to ensure consistency. The interviewer will record the key outcomes of the interview, so that the process is transparent.

Interviewing can provide a good opportunity for the student to provide further clarification on the nature and outcomes of their prior learning and to discuss their goals in terms of further learning and development.

Assessment on demand: students can undertake traditional forms of assessment where appropriate. A student can undertake the existing assessment for a particular module, or he/she can undertake one that has been specially devised.

Observation of practice/simulation: direct observation of a student's skills, knowledge and understanding can take place in an appropriate context, such as the workplace. If the student does not have the opportunity through his or her workplace to demonstrate particular skills and knowledge, a simulation or role-play could be used.

Portfolio: this refers to a collection of materials that have been compiled by a student to demonstrate what he or she has learnt.

The portfolio method of claiming RPL enables the student to decide which learning experiences to draw upon and the particular pieces of evidence he or she will compile to demonstrate the learning outcomes or competences. Evidence can include direct evidence, which is material the student produced at the time of the experience; reflective evidence, such as reflective accounts; and 'third party' evidence, such as references or testimonials from employers, tutors, colleagues and/or peers.

The process of compiling a portfolio can be highly rewarding, but is usually resource-intensive. The student requires guidance on how to put together a portfolio, and in particular on the nature, range and volume of evidence required to demonstrate the learning.

For exemplars of different types of RPL procedures see the handbook: Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for Credit: Exemplars and Case Studies, Napier University, 2005 [\(4\)](#)

7 Assessment of learning for RPL claims

The student should be advised of the assessment process as part of the guidance and support provided in the preparation of the RPL claim.

A student's RPL claim will include:

- clear statements about what was actually learned;
- supportive evidence that the learning claimed has been achieved.

Depending on the purpose of the claim, the RPL Assessor then determines equivalence of this learning in terms against:

- the requirements for entry to a programme in terms of knowledge, skills and understanding (for RPL for entry)

Or in terms of credit and levels against:

- existing modules (awarding RPL credit for modules)
- the outcomes for entire levels or parts of levels on a particular degree programme (awarding RPL credit for advanced entry)

The following widely applied RPL assessment criteria should be used by staff to assist in determining whether the learning evidenced is satisfactory and appropriate:

- **Acceptability:** is there an appropriate match between the evidence presented and the learning outcomes being demonstrated ie is the evidence reliable and valid?
- **Sufficiency:** is there a sufficient breadth and depth of evidence, including evidence of reflection, to demonstrate the achievement of the learning outcomes claimed?
- **Authenticity:** is the evidence clearly the outcome of the student's own effort?
- **Currency:** is what is being assessed current learning? If the learning experience occurred some time ago, does the student provide evidence of having kept the learning up-to-date?

The above criteria are in the student RPL Handbook. Again the RPL assessment procedures should be agreed through the school RPL Committee to satisfy the University's procedures for audit and quality enhancement.

Note that in some cases, it is possible for students to make an RPL claim for academic credit within a degree programme while simultaneously claiming for recognition through a professional or statutory body or another awarding body.

8 Credit limits for RPL claims within a University award

The number of credits students can undertake through the University's RPL process is only limited by the minimum number of credits required to be studied for a University award (eg in the case of undergraduate awards a minimum of 60 University credits are required to be studied for the Cert HE, DipHE and the Bachelors degree; a minimum of 120 University credits are required to be studied for the Honours degree).

Double counting of credit should be avoided. RPL claims for credit may be based on learning which has already been credit-rated through prior certificated learning, for example, learning resulting from work-based experience whilst undertaking a formal programme of study, such as an HND.

The risk of double counting of credit can also occur where RPL for a particular set of learning outcomes is used to gain entry to a degree programme, and where an attempt may then be made to utilise the same learning as the basis of a claim for credit against modules within the same degree programme.

Appendix 1

Bibliography

1. Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework: RPL National Guidelines, SCQF, 2005
2. University-wide RPL Framework, Napier University, 2003.
3. A Student Guide to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for Credit, Napier University, 2005.
4. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for Credit: Exemplars and Case Studies, Napier University, 2005

Further Reading

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Appendix 2

Extract from: SCQF RPL National Guidelines

The Scottish Executive has identified Informal Learning (uncertificated learning) as one of the five strands in its Lifelong Learning Agenda. The SCQF RPL National Guidelines ⁽¹⁾ are an important national initiative aimed at encouraging individuals to focus on their uncertificated learning in terms of their personal development within the context of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.

SCQF RPL National Guidelines have been devised by the SCQF national working group for RPL and are aimed at all academic levels. The Guidelines provide a range of helpful information and while being consistent they are not prescriptive. The Guidelines contain guidance and good practice on RPL processes and procedures.

The Core Principles and Key Features of RPL presented below have been extracted from the SCQF RPL National Guidelines by way of further information. More information is available in the Guidelines themselves.

1. SCQF RPL Guidelines: Core principles of RPL

Core principles from SCQF RPL Guidelines relating to over-arching RPL processes appear below.

A variety of different approaches to RPL can be developed and utilised by learning providers to meet the needs and goals of learner groups across the different sectors. All RPL provision, however, whether for personal/career development or for credit, should be underpinned by the following core principles. The aim of the core principles is to ensure effective, quality-assured practice that will enable all users of the SCQF to have confidence in the outcomes of RPL. By identifying core principles as the parameters within which all RPL provision within the context of the SCQF should operate consistency will be more feasibly achieved.

Learner-focussed: RPL should be a gateway, and not a barrier, to learning. RPL should promote the positive aspects of an individual's learning experience (as opposed to its deficiency). RPL should be a voluntary activity on the part of the learner. The learner's needs and reasons for recognition should be paramount.

Accessibility: RPL should be an accessible and inclusive process, applicable to all learners at all levels. Accessibility can be facilitated through:

- Initial information and advice (awareness raising);
- Manageable systems in terms of time and money from the perspective of both learner and learning provider;
- Easy to understand and easy to implement processes;
- Embedding of RPL in the programme design stage in order to become an integral part of college and HEI provision, rather than an 'add-on', marginal activity.

Flexibility: A range of different approaches to RPL in terms of both support and assessment should be encouraged to address the diversity of learner needs, goals and experiences across the different sectors.

Reliability, transparency and consistency: In managing RPL processes are necessary to ensure confidence in the outcomes.

Clarity of role definition: The roles and responsibilities of learner; learning provider; and receiving institution should be clearly defined. Staff involved in managing and supporting the RPL process should be provided with appropriate training and support.

Quality: RPL should be underpinned by Quality Assurance mechanisms. Moderation of RPL for personal and career development should focus on ensuring that the standards of notional levelling are consistently applied. Moderation of RPL for credit should be integrated within existing quality assurance processes and should be available for scrutiny for appropriate external quality assurance, for example by an external auditing body.

Collaboration: Collaboration between sectors should be encouraged in order to meet the needs of the learner more effectively. Links should be encouraged between learning providers and receiving institutions, and between these and organisations such as Careers Scotland, in supporting learners and potential learners to gain recognition for their prior informal learning within the context of the SCQF. Collaboration should extend to the sharing of case studies; examples of good practice; and approaches to support and assessment.

2. SCQF RPL Guidelines: Key Features of RPL for credit

Key features form the SCQF RPL Guidelines on RPL procedures per appear below.

Learning providers may need to consider the following key features when developing and operating processes of summative recognition, or RPL for credit:

- initial guidance on the RPL process
- supporting learners in reflective process, identifying learning through experience (skills, knowledge and understanding), selecting and presenting evidence of that learning, identifying areas for further learning)
- mechanisms for making RPL claims
- assessment process for RPL claims
- credit limits for RPL within formal programmes of study
- fee process for RPL claims
- monitoring process for RPL procedures
- support for staff engaged in support and assessment of RPL
- integration of provision within quality assurance systems

Additional Guidance Notes on Key Features

The following additional guidance notes may be helpful to learning providers in considering the key features of the RPL process:

Initial guidance on the RPL process

Learners, or adults considering returning to learn, should be given preliminary information and guidance on RPL in terms of the principles, policy, procedures and any cost involved. The learning provider should ensure a learner clearly understands each stage of the process and has realistic expectations regarding the possible outcomes of RPL before he or she makes the decision to undertake RPL.

Such information should be provided in written or electronic form, as well as through discussion. This information should be clear, accurate and accessible. If the learner decides to proceed with RPL, the learning provider should organise appropriate support for the RPL process.

Supporting learners in identifying or providing evidence of learning

Each stage of the RPL process should be clearly defined and appropriate support provided for each stage.

Learners making a claim for RPL for credit will require support for the RPL process itself, as well as support in the subject, vocational or professional area in which they are making the RPL claim.

Support for the RPL process includes:

- Helping to identify learning experiences
- Helping to develop the skills necessary for reflection on those experiences
- Helping to identify and express the learning achieved as outcomes or competences, which can be related to those within units/modules or programmes
- Helping to identify the transferability of the skills, knowledge and understanding gained through prior informal learning
- Helping to identify and select evidence of learning
- Helping to identify areas for further learning and development
- Advising on way in which to present evidence of learning
- Providing feedback on the presentation of the RPL claim.

Support in the subject, vocational or professional area includes:

- Advising if the prior informal learning is likely to be at the appropriate level for the purposes of the claim
- Clarifying outcomes of competences within units/modules or programmes and/or agreeing the learner's own outcomes or competences
- Advising on the structure of the submission and criteria for assessment
- Advising on which types of evidence are appropriate to the learning outcomes or competences
- Advising on the level of analysis, or integration of relevant theory, required in the submission
- Advising on the way in which any further learning or development required to supplement the claim can be undertaken
- Providing feedback on draft submissions where appropriate.

Support can be provided through:

- **Written or e-learning materials**, such as guides; workbooks; self-study materials; existing or specially devised self-evaluation or diagnostic tools; personal or professional development planning tools individual and group reflective exercises; RPL literature; exemplar RPL claims;
- **Individual tutorials/meetings** which provide focussed guidance in relation to a learner's individual RPL claim;
- **Group sessions** which can range from those which are informal meetings of learners as part of a process to encourage peer group support to those which are highly structured, task-based and tutor-led, possibly as part of a

wider programme of learning, or an RPL unit/module. Group approaches to RPL support make better use of limited resources and often provide a more positive, less isolating experience of RPL for learners.

If appropriate, collaborative arrangements for support can be agreed between learning providers; employers and voluntary organisations; and other organisations such as Careers Scotland.

Monitoring process for RPL procedures

The process of monitoring and reviewing the operation of RPL procedures should be clearly defined and integrated within the existing quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms of the learning provider.

Mechanisms for monitoring and reviewing RPL procedures may include:

- Monitoring of number of learners undertaking RPL;
- Success rate of RPL claims;
- Time taken by learners to undertake RPL process;
- Time spent by staff in supporting RPL process and managing the process of recognition;
- Evaluation of the learner experience;
- Evaluation of the staff experience;
- Tracking of progress on part of learners who have made successful RPL claims for credit;
- Evaluation of effectiveness any collaborative arrangements with other learning providers /learning partnerships/receiving institutions;
- Reports from external assessors.

Support for staff engaged in support and assessment of RPL

- Staff involved in the planning, development and operation of RPL procedures need to be provided with training, and continuing support for this role, as well as adequate resources.
- The roles and responsibilities of both staff and learners in the RPL process need to be clearly defined.
- The role played by staff in supporting and in assessing RPL claims should be clearly separated.

Integration of provision within quality assurance systems

- RPL processes relating to learner support, assessment, credit-rating, and monitoring need to be fully integrated within institutional quality assurance systems to ensure transparency, consistency and reliability. RPL processes should be available for scrutiny by appropriate external quality assurance, for example by an external auditing body.
- RPL as an entry route and a means of gaining credit within formal programmes of study should become more embedded within curriculum design and explicitly addressed at the programme approval stage. Where possible, learning outcomes should be expressed in a way that enables a variety of different routes for their achievement as well as the use of flexible modes of assessment.

Index of Documents

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Note: April 2003

The framework consists of a number of linked documents that provide guidance on key academic activities. Each has been developed to be stand-alone so that they are as accessible and relevant as possible. Over time, additional guidance documents will be added and these will be identified through feedback from staff, developments in Napier's quality assurance arrangements and the external environment.