

SCOTTISH ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON CREDIT AND ACCESS

**17-10-06
Item 3
Paper 42-07**

Summary of results of Scottish Executive scoping exercise on the Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) – higher education sector

Introduction

1. This paper contains a summary of the responses to the Scottish Executive's RPL scoping exercise from the higher education sector.
2. The Scottish Executive carried out the overall scoping exercise to:
 - identify the emerging issues surrounding the demand for RPL across the post-16 education and training sectors in Scotland and the ways in which this can be addressed
 - identify priority areas for development in terms of :
 - The purpose of RPL activity
 - The types of learners which should be targeted
 - Particular sectors in which this activity should be supported
3. The outcomes of the scoping exercise will be used to advise the Lifelong Learning Group within the Scottish Executive on the future policy direction for RPL within the context of the Lifelong Learning Strategy.

Recommendation

4. SACCA members are invited to note the contents of the summary and comment where appropriate.

Further information

5. For further information on the material covered in this paper please contact Alan Runcie or David Bottomley.

Scottish Executive Recognition of Prior informal Learning (RPL) Scoping Exercise

Executive Summary of Higher Education Institution (HEI) response to key questions

Responding Higher Education Institutions (HEIs):

Glasgow Caledonian University
Glasgow School of Art
Heriot Watt University
Open University in Scotland
Queen Margaret University College
Scottish Agricultural College
University of Aberdeen
University of Abertay
University of Edinburgh
University of Glasgow
University of Paisley
University of St Andrews
University of Stirling

Further clarification of the points listed below is provided in the full summary.

1. What are the key drivers for RPL activity within your institution and within the HE sector as a whole?

- Widening participation/access agenda:
- Fair Admissions process:
- Recognition of, and giving value to, knowledge and skills acquired at work and elsewhere
- Increasing access to flexible/part-time provision
- Personal Development Planning/career planning
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
- Employer engagement
- Supporting Equity and Diversity
- Social inclusion
- Promotion of Scottish Executives' Lifelong Learning agenda and need to align with European policies on lifelong learning
- Promotion of learner mobility and student choice

2. What are the main barriers to existing or increased RPL activity within your institution and the HE sector as a whole?

- No allocation of specific resource or funding line
- Lack of knowledge and understanding of the process at national and sectoral levels
- Lack of knowledge of the demand

- Lack of standardised processes
- Uncertainty regarding best operational model for RPL within institutions
- Need for staff development
- Professional body requirements
- Opposition by staff in some universities to concept and practice of RPL
- View that the use of current mechanisms of access and FE articulations may provide a better route to study in HEIs
- Resource –intensive nature and complexity of RPL support and assessment processes
- Difficulty of developing assessments of informal learning.
- Lack of acknowledgement that students from a diverse range of backgrounds entering HE programmes with RPL credit are normally highly motivated.
- Difficulty that life skills, generic skills or general knowledge cannot substitute for specific skills and knowledge required in some disciplines.
- The impact of an increasingly diverse student population, with a range of goals and individualised programmes, on the provision of continuing educational guidance and the complexity of administration.

3 What are the priority areas of development in terms of demand in the HE sector? For example in relation to:

a. Learner groups

- Mature students/ adult returners
- Part time students
- People wanting to change career or enhance existing qualifications
- Employees as part of their personal or career development
- Individuals actively engaged within the community and or community learning and development
- College students
- Refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers

b. Purpose of RPL activity

- To build confidence and motivation
- For 'pre-access'
- For access to programmes
- For credit within programmes of study
- As part of CPD programmes
- As part of PDP processes
- As a strategy to increase numbers of post graduate students,

c. Outcomes of RPL process- links to other strategies/targets

- Widening access
- Fair Admissions
- Student recruitment
- International student recruitment and progression
- Retention and progression
- Transition
- Community outreach
- Employability
- Increased employer liaison
- Promotion of work-based learning
- Quality Enhancement
- Targets concerning increasing the flexibility of study
- Scottish policies on lifelong learning
- Creative uses of the SCQF to facilitate learner progression
- Increasing the capacity to offer more employer-led post-graduate awards

d. Areas/settings

- Higher Education.
- On-line
- Community learning and development sector
- Work-based settings
- Voluntary sector
- College sector

e. Existing policies/processes/projects

See full summary

4. What would be the benefits of greater RPL activity within the HE sector? i.e. at a national level; sectoral level; organisational level; and to individual learners

Individual level

- Opening up opportunities of higher education to a wider range of non-traditional students
- Increased progression routes for learners and widening of student choice
- Enhanced student self-awareness, self confidence, and motivation
- Contribution to personal learning plans and career planning
- Enrichment of the learning experience for all students

Organisational/Sectoral level

- Greater consistency across institutions

- Assistance with meeting objectives of widening participation, lifelong learning and diversity agendas
- Encourages heterogeneity of the student body
- Improved viability of small, niche programmes for professional groups
- Increased engagement with employers and industry
- Strengthened employability links and opportunities
- Creation of a more flexible system
- Contribution to Fair Admissions
- Supporting the development of learning partnerships
- Supporting enhancement in learning and teaching
- Help to direct personal development planning
- Help to establish parity of esteem between academic and experiential/vocational learning
- Motivational for staff

National level

- Increased understanding of RPL and a unified process
- Meeting the needs of all types of learners and acknowledging their learning through experience where appropriate
- Link with economic regeneration and skills agenda: a more qualified, flexible workforce
- Achieving lifelong learning (LLL) targets
- Supporting legislative requirements e.g. Social Services sector

5. In what ways can RPL be used to enhance links with other sectors in order to meet learner needs more effectively?

- Collaboration with other providers across sectors and employing organisations
- Consistency of approach and application across the different sectors
- Ease transferability across institutions
- Awareness of usefulness of RPL (and the SCQF) and the process of decision-making about candidates should help to enhance the links between HE and FE, careers organisations, professional bodies, employers, employers' organisations
- Working more closely with Scottish Executive during the development of new legislation

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October 2006