Quality Assurance and RPL : Developing a National RPL Framework for Higher Education in Scotland

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Workshop outline

- Changing HE landscape in Scotland
- Quality in Scotland
- The Quality Enhancement Framework
- National RPL Framework Development
- Scottish RPL HEI Network and Streamlining Guidelines : enhancing approaches to RPL
- GCU Example and Key Issues for further development
- Discussion /activity

Changing HE landscape in Scotland

- **Role of HE in supporting Scotland's economic growth**
- **Scottish Government/Scottish Funding Council requirements** for universities:
  - to work more closely in partnership with other HEIs and colleges to meet regional economic needs and provide more seamless progression pathways between college and universities (articulation)
  - develop more flexible provision to meet workforce development needs.
  - Widen participation by increasing recruitment and retention of non-traditional learners
- **Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill , 2012** Reforming post-16 education system
- **Funding drivers** and **Funding challenges**

Quality in Scotland

- 2002- shift from Quality Assurance to Quality Enhancement
- support higher education institutions in Scotland in managing the quality of the student learning experience and to provide public confidence in the quality and standards of higher education
- focus on continuous improvement: a developmental agenda rather than a remedial one

The Quality Enhancement Framework

- **a comprehensive programme of institution-led subject reviews**, carried out by higher education institutions with guidance from the Scottish Funding Council
- **Enhancement-led institutional review:** external reviews run by QAA Scotland that involve all Scottish higher education institutions over a four-year cycle
- **improved forms of public information about quality**, based on addressing the different needs of a range of stakeholders including students and employers
- **a greater voice for student representatives,** involving **students in quality management** in higher education. **Sparqs** (**s**tudent **pa**rticipation in **q**uality **s**cotland), hosted by NUS Scotland
- **a national programme of Enhancement Themes**, managed by QAA Scotland. The programme encourages academic staff, support staff and students to share current good practice and collectively generate ideas and models for innovation in learning and teaching.
  - Graduates for the 21st Century: Graduate attributes
  - Developing and Supporting the Curriculum

Why develop a Framework for RPL?

- **Policy drivers**
  - QAA Scotland views RPL as being of strategic importance:
    - Developing flexible and learner-centred programmes
    - Widening access and participation in higher education.
  - Scottish Government:

> *"There is some excellent practice in recognising prior learning. We want to ensure such practice is adopted as a minimum benchmark across the sector, ensuring that entry to courses happens at Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) levels which properly reflect people's academic and wider experience."*
>
> ***Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the learner journey (para. 50)***

- **National Framework seen as a way for all institutions to develop and enhance RPL provision in Scotland's Universities:**
  - Address barriers and challenges
  - Work collaboratively with each other and other stakeholders

Barriers (some) to developing and expanding RPL practice

- Lack of awareness of the potential for RPL opportunities in students and staff
- Inconsistent policies and practices between and within institutions which make it difficult for the following to engage with RPL
  - Professional bodies
  - Staff
  - Students
- Resource intensive or a perception that it is resource intensive
- Pockets of good practice being developed but not being shared
- Lack of staff development opportunities to help build capacity in RPL practice
- Perceptions that 'informal' learning, or learning outside traditional HE contexts, is worth less than 'formal learning' by some stakeholders.

RPL in Scotland: Stakeholders

- Scottish HEI RPL Network
- QAA Scotland/Universities Scotland
  - US Learning and Teaching Committee
  - Enhancement Themes
  - Quality Code
- SCQF Partnership
- Scottish Government
- Scottish Funding Council
- Students
- Professional RPL Networks
  - Scottish Social Services RPL Special Interest Group
  - NHS Education Scotland
- European Networks

Building a National Framework for RPL in Scotland's Universities

The key purpose of the Framework will be to:

- ❑ expand and embed RPL to a much wider extent in the sector within the context of 'flexible learning pathways'
- ❑ raise awareness of and increase transparency of RPL processes for staff and students.
- ❑ reduce inconsistencies in RPL processes between and within HEIs
- ❑ allow HEIs and other organisations to share and develop practice in RPL in a consistent and sustainable manner.

'Bringing to life' the SCQF RPL core principles for the Scottish HE sector

Aims of National Framework Project

At sector level

- allow HEIs and other organisations to share, develop and enhance practice in RPL in a consistent and sustainable manner.
  - *Develop RPL Network as a Community of Practice*
  - *RPL Network seen as a source of expertise*

At institutional level

- reduce inconsistencies in RPL processes between and within HEIs
  - *Network helps identify important aspects of processes that could be adopted by all HEIs i.e. build on Guidelines*
- raise awareness amongst institutional staff at strategic and policy level of the value of RPL as a method to widen participation and encourage the development of flexible, learner-centred curricula.
  - *QAA/US to engage strategic groups e.g. Scottish Government, Learning and Teaching Committee, SHEEC, VPs L&T*

At practitioner level

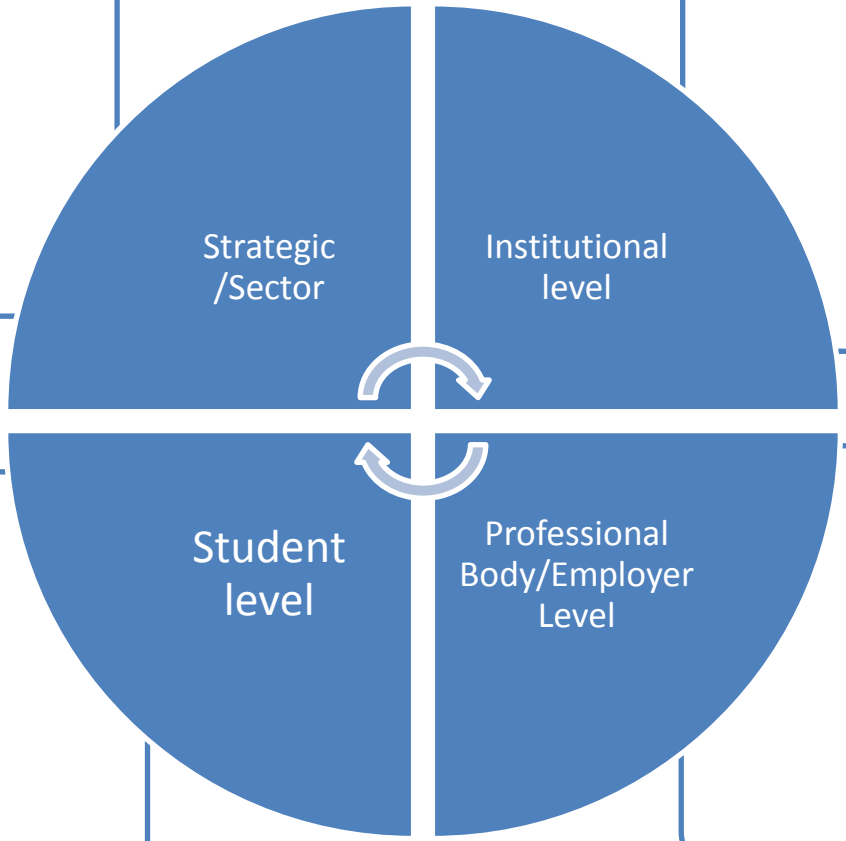
- raise awareness of and increase transparency of RPL processes for staff who have a practitioner focus.
- offer tools that will help practitioners develop and enhance RPL
  - *Network builds on and develops existing tools including RPL Guidelines and other toolkits, offers examples of practice*

For students

- raise awareness and increase transparency of RPL for students and clearly identify the benefits of RPL to them.
  - *Network develops guidance for students, offers examples of practice*

4 Levels of the Framework

- Minimum benchmark for RPL
- strategic/sector level guidance/principles
- Raise awareness at this level



- Implementation of streamlining guidelines at institutional level
- Update/refresh examples of practice
- Tools for evaluation of Guidelines
- Develop understanding

- Guidance & information
- Resources & toolkits
- Raise awareness

- Guidance on RPL for employers
- Develop resources/case studies
- Raise awareness

QAA/Universities Scotland RPL HEI Network: Purpose

- Vehicle for sharing practice and research in RPL to assist development in Scottish sector
- Raise awareness of developments in the rest of the UK, Europe and internationally
- Link into post-Bologna developments
- Link into other RPL developments via SCQF RPL Network and international research community

QAA/Universities Scotland RPL HEI Network: Programme of work 2011-13

- Developing guidelines for streamlining RPL processes
- Researching the effectiveness of RPL from the learner perspective
- Developing and supporting the Curriculum Enhancement Theme
- Developing a national RPL Framework

Streamlining RPL Support and Assessment processes project

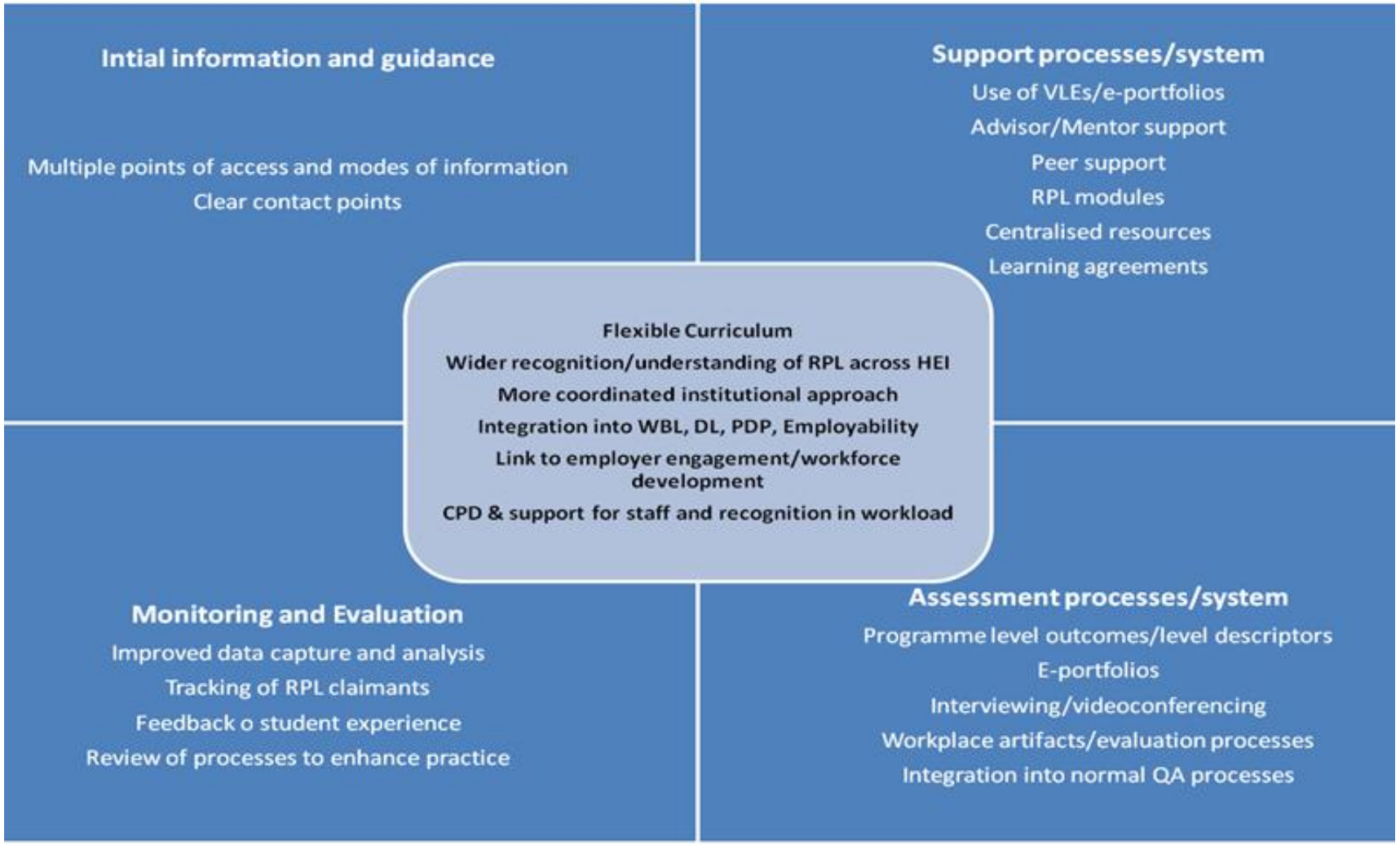
Purpose:	To support the Scottish HEI RPL Network in the development of guidelines for the streamlining of RPL support and assessment for the HE sector
Timescale:	CRLL commissioned by QAA to undertake the project between April and July 2011
Approach:	3 Phases 1. On-line scoping study 2. Web-based survey 3. Follow up telephone interviews
Outcomes:	• Scoping study (separate resource) • Recommendations for HEIs: key areas of development and institutional enablers • Typology to support development of guidelines

Enabling RPL in institutions

Streamlining and enhancing RPL support and assessment within HEIs require a set of enablers related to:

- **Policy and process** that mainstreams and integrates RPL within admissions, learning, teaching and assessment strategies and quality assurance mechanisms;
- **Curriculum design** that explicitly addresses flexible modes of entry, progression and delivery;
- **Clear points of contact** for RPL for potential applicants, existing students and staff;
- **Building staff capacity and capability** ,linked to the need for CPD opportunities and the increased visibility of RPL across the institution and in staff workload;
- **Greater use of technology-enhanced** RPL provision through VLEs and e-portfolios as part of a blended learning approach
- **Integration of RPL processes** within related developments such as PDP, employability,WBL and distance learning; and
- **Data gathering and analysis** to ensure effective monitoring, tracking and evaluation as part of a process

QAA RPL Streamlining Guidelines for HE



Designing a flexible curriculum

Flexible entry routes and alternative routes to credit should be addressed at the point of programme design rather than programme delivery.

What does this mean?

- Design of learning outcomes
- Building on learning
- Integration in WBL programmes
- Links to educational or personal and professional development planning

Developing enhanced support system/processes

Exploiting the use of VLEs and technology-enhanced learning as part of a blended learning approach.

What does this mean?

- e-portfolios and other e-learning tools, on-line forums or centralised resources to support the RPL process.
- Supporting a learning process, rather than simply evidence gathering.
- Supporting the integration of RPL into the mainstream curriculum
- Meeting professional development needs of staff in terms of the pedagogic use and application of new learning technologies
- Use of RPL credit-bearing modules
- Use of exemplars and case studies
- Developing mechanisms for peer support
- Use of learning agreements.

Developing enhanced assessment system/processes

Need to develop more effective, simplified assessment mechanisms linked to greater understanding of the nature and process of informal learning

What does this mean?

- Mapping against programme level outcomes or level descriptors
- Greater use of level descriptors to enable the articulation of prior informal learning into learning outcomes that are more relevant to this type of learning;
- Greater use of e-portfolios
- More use of structured interviewing ; greater use of video-conferencing;
- workplace-derived artefacts and existing workplace learning practices in evaluation and assessment.
- Crucial role of advisor

Clarifying roles & responsibilities

Role of RPL Advisor	Role of RPL Assessor
•Provide initial guidance on RPL process •Facilitate opportunities for further learning and development •Support learners in reflective process, including links between learning and work practice •Support learners in selection & production of evidence •Provide feedback and guidance •Avoid/Explain academic jargon •Encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning and help build their confidence	•Be a subject expert with experience of using a range of assessment methods •Understand process of learning gained through experience , which is different from formal learning process •Be requested to assess only learning outcomes they are competent to assess and make a judgement on comparability •Determine whether the learner has the likely ability to achieve the learning outcomes of the programme he or she is seeking to enter •Determine whether the learner is capable of applying new learning in a new context

Example: GCU RPL Policy

- Commitment to recognising all learning
- Embedded in Quality Assurance system
- Definitions and use of RPL at GCU
- RPL process at GCU
- Roles and responsibilities
- Support process for learners
- RPL as part of the overall assessment strategy
- Credit limits and fees for RPL
- Support and guidance for staff
- Monitoring and review processes

Process of gaining recognition for prior learning

3 stages to process of gaining recognition for prior learning:

1. Initial advice and guidance
2. Support
3. Recognition: assessment and award of entry to or credit within programme or qualification at GCU

Key principles of RPL:

- Recognition is given for learning not experience
- Learning that is recognised should be transferable
- Learner responsibility
- RPL credit of equal value

Implementing RPL policy at GCU

- **Resources** for GCU Schools, RPL Advisors, RPL Assessors, Students; CPD programme for staff
- Developing use of **e-portfolios** and online support; **new approaches to assessment** eg use of level descriptors
- Enhancing integration of RPL within student records system; **Monitoring and evaluation** RPL at School and Institutional level : School /departmental RPL **coordinators**
- Developing new **Learning, Teaching, Assessment strategy**, GCU **Work-based Learning Strategy**, GCU **Employability strategy**

Key issues for further development

Development of alternative approaches to recognising informal learning within university programmes :valuing professional competences in their own right

Mainstreaming the recognition of informal learning within the curriculum and as well in terms of progression pathways.

Use of RPL to recognise and build on skills linked to employability.

More extensive use of learning technologies which support RPL as a learning process with greater learner control

Workshop discussion/activity

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