
INTEGRATION OF EDUCATION SYSTEM'S ELEMENTS IN THE EVERYDAY LIFE (ON EXAMPLE OF RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING IN SCOTLAND)¹

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1. Introduction

The idea and practices of recognition of prior learning (RPL) have been formed and shaped by the interrelation of different historical, social, economic and political processes. Education has been influenced by the changing socio-economic and cultural conditions of late modernity referred to as a globalisation². New closer relationship was established between economy and education. Technological advances make learning less confined to the educational institution environment and to a particular life-stage, but demand continuous professional developments through learning. At the same time, the character of employment was changes – there is less and less common to spend the whole working life within the same profession, let alone with the same employer. Working careers are becoming more individualised and fragmented, with people moving between education and employment multiple times throughout their adult lives. If previously transition from education to work largely coincided with the transition from youth into adult life, today these transitions became blurred and fragmented. Societal changes as well as changes in the nature of employment lead to individualisation and fragmentation of working careers, and attracted many atypical adult learners back into education.

This new context in which learning is currently taking place is reflected in contemporary definitions of different types of learning³. According to these definitions there are three types of learning. *Formal learning* is that occurs in an organised and structured environment and leads to recognised qualifications. *Non-formal learning* is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning and takes place alongside the mainstream system of education and training (e.g. in the workplace). Finally, *informal or experiential learning* is usually unintended learning, which takes place through life and work experiences. Both formal and non-formal learning activities are intentional from

¹ This paper is based on the report “University Recognition of Prior Learning Centers – Bridging Higher Education with Vocational Education and Training prepared for the European Commission Lifelong Learning Programme Leonardo da Vinci –Transfer of Innovation. It was presented at the International conference on “Social Construction of Reality: Chances and Risks for Human Communications”, Yerevan State University, Faculty of Sociology, Yerevan, September 25-27, Armenia.

² **Harris, J.** “Ways of seeing the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): What contribution can such practices make to social inclusion?”, *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 1999, Vol 31, N 2, pp. 124-139.

³ **Memorandum on Lifelong Learning.** Brussels, 2000.

the learner's point of view, however only formal learning typically leads to validation, certification and qualifications. An extra effort should be made to recognise formally the outcomes of non-formal learning. Recognition of the outcomes of informal learning is the most challenging task that requires a formalised process of recognition of prior or experiential learning experience.

There are two important aspects of learning – learning as a process and learning as an outcome. For learning being formally recognised there should be a possibility to disconnect the learning from its context (when, where, how, and under what circumstances it has occurred) and to identify learning outcomes, in terms of skills, knowledge and competences that individuals gained through that learning process. The outcomes of a learning process make learning measurable, recognizable by other. Defining learning by its outcomes is particularly important for learning experiences that occurred outside the traditional formal learning environment⁴.

*Recognition of prior learning*⁵ (RPL) is related to the recognition (validation, accreditation and certification) of uncertified non-formal, informal or experiential learning activities, gained through life and work experience, through work-place related training programmes and courses, provided by private employers, professional bodies, voluntary organisations, public organisations.

Specific national models of the recognition of prior learning are shaped by a whole complex of factors, which reflect historical, political, institutional and economic processes. In particular, the RPL developments might be shaped by wide political goals such as reducing socio-economic cleavages in a society through increasing participation of non-traditional learners in further/higher education; by technological advances in general; by standards in particular professions that require an access of workers to a high-quality perpetuate work-based training; by changed labour market where employers recognise that formal education alone cannot endow job candidates with all essential qualities, but still they require some formalized and verified process of trusted accreditation of skills gained through work-based experience and training. Characteristics of national education systems, such as degree of their permeability, types of national qualifications and qualifications frameworks, would in turn facilitate or hinder the RPL development.

There is a history of concern with the recognition of prior learning or learning beyond the formal curriculum in Scotland for at least 30 years. RPL in Scotland is being developed through different initiatives for over a decade⁶ and has been linked to the lifelong learning strategy through skill development, and to the implementation of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). RPL in Scotland become an essential tool that enables life-long learning through encouraging, recognition of and capitalising on prior informal

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Also known as the Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), or the Validating and Certifying of Learning Gained Outside Formal Education (such as schools, colleges and universities).

⁶ **Hawley, J.** European Inventory on Validation of Nonformal and Informal Learning 2010 Country Report, UK (Scotland), Cedefop, 2010.

learning experience which goes beyond the outcomes of the formal education system⁷. Today in Scotland RPL can be used as a method of supporting personal development and career development, for formal validation of prior learning, for award of credits towards formal qualifications, as well as to bridge between non-formal/informal and vocational learning and training and formal education system, in the admissions process to the institution of Higher Education⁸.

In this paper we consider the development of RPL policies and practices in Scotland and discuss if contemporary RPL processes promote social inclusion and enhance social mobility through widening participation in higher education of different types of learners, such as adult learners, people with professional qualifications and especially those who do not have formal qualifications to meet the university formal entry requirements.

This paper is drawn on a range of sources: previous research, commissioned by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and other RPL stakeholders, relevant academic research, internet search, seminars and conferences on RPL, interviews with the main stakeholders, and other information on research, policy and implementation of the RPL in Scotland.

2. National and institutional context for recognition of prior learning in Scotland.

2.1 National Education Systems and RPL.

In respect to the potential of education system to facilitate life-long learning and to recognise prior learning the European education systems could be categorised in a number of ways⁹. For example, distinction could be made between the systems that are more education-based and those that have a significant component of a work-based training e.g. through apprenticeships for young people. The UK provides a good example for the first type of the education system with a majority of 14-18 years old staying in full-time education in schools and colleges while Germany illustrates the second type.

Another important distinction could be made between education systems, which use selection and tracking versus seamless (or permeable) education systems¹⁰. These two ideal types of education systems can be contrasted along five main dimensions, which determine whether the education system has crucial elements to provide a basis for lifelong learning and RPL (see Table 1 with a summary of key features of these two types of education systems).

⁷ **Hart, J.** "Recognising Achievement Literature Review and Model for Managing Recognition Processes". Scottish Government, 2010.

⁸ RPL and Credit Transfer Guidelines for the Practice Learning Qualifications, 2007.

⁹ **Hodgson, A., Spours, K., Waring, M.** (eds). Post-Compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning across the United Kingdom. Bedford Way Papers, London: University of London Institute of Education, 2011.

¹⁰ **Raffe, D. and Howieson, C.** Hybrid qualifications in a credit-based system: Scottish Higher National Certificates and Diplomas, in T.Deissinger, J.Aff, A.Fuller and C.Jørgensen (eds). Hybrid Qualifications - structural and political issues in the context of European VET policy, Bern: Peter Lang, 2012.

Table 1. Type of education systems in respect to its potential for facilitating lifelong learning and prior learning recognition.

Type of education system	Type of learning provision	Type of learners progress	Comparative value of vocational vs. general training	Learners' outcomes	Qualification	Basis for life-long learning and RPL
Permeable or Seamless.	Modular, with short courses; all learning becomes a basis for further learning	Vertical, horizontal, diagonal	Equal	Do not depend on the type of the institution, mode, duration or (in) formality of the education	Qualifications are a basis for further learning and are linked to future occupational roles	Enables lifelong learning and RPL
Tracking or Selective	Continuous and accumulative; Any new stage of learning is based on the previous. Might be a basis for selection and rejection	Vertical; sometimes demands or "back-track" with repeating a level of learning	Different (general training values higher)	Might be a function of the institution, mode, duration or (in)formality of the education	Based on previous education outcomes	Hinders LLL and RPL

The first dimension distinguishes between the types of the learning provision. In permeable or seamless education systems the learning provision is modular with different modules could be completed independently; in the selective system learning is continuous and learner could move to the next stage only if completed all previous stages. The second dimension distinguishes between the types of learners' progress. In selective education systems learners progress vertically – to get to a particular stage of learning they need to go through all previous stages (and sometimes also to repeat previous stages, if these stages have not been certified formally or learners did not achieve "pass" requirements). By contrast, in a seamless system, learners can progress vertically, horizontally or diagonally with no dead ends or barriers. The third dimension determines how easy it is possible to move between academic and vocational learning. Because in seamless system general and vocational learning have equal value, learners can move between them easily, while in selective education system those who were once tracked in the vocational training may find it very difficult to enrol in further academic education. The fourth dimension relates to learning outcomes. In a permeable system these outcomes do not depend on the institutional context of learning (type of institution, mode of study), while in selective systems the outcomes might be a function of such context. Finally, qualifications in seamless systems are linked to future occupational roles as well as provide a basis for further learning, while in selective education systems qualifications are mostly based on the educational outcomes and serve as a "licence to practice". Therefore, seamless permeable education systems provide a good basis for the recognition of prior learning and

life-long learning while selective systems have many barriers to the RPL and life-long learning¹¹.

In the UK, there has been a devolved system of governance for education and training, since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999¹². However, Scotland's education and training system was characterised with a particularly notable independence from other parts of the UK¹³, (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) long before the political devolution, in particular in respect to 3-18 education. Education system in Scotland has many elements of a seamless or permeable education system, which facilitates the process of life-long learning and the recognition of prior learning¹⁴. Among the most important elements that shaped this permeable nature of Scottish system of education and therefore allowed it to become supportive for lifelong learning and RPL are the modular type of Scottish qualifications, highly centralised system of qualifications award, credit arrangements in education and training and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. These elements were developed gradually over the last two decades. Thus, Scottish education system is general, without apparent dead-ends and boundaries between general and vocational educations, and with more or less equal value which is given to general and vocational education. Scottish qualifications are modular, and flexible, individual modules are small in size and can be completed at different times and settings, they are weakly related to the mode or the length of study or to a particular institution¹⁵, so that a qualification could be built up gradually over the period of time; Scottish qualifications are outcomes based and only weakly linked to particular education destinations. Furthermore, the permeability of the education system in Scotland system is facilitated by the long-term and consistent policy towards developing a lifelong learning culture and a corresponding organizational infrastructure that supports its implementation in Scotland. Finally, the permeability of the Scottish education is facilitated by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), the national qualifications framework, which assigns credits to qualifications and their component units, and is believed to be one of the most successful national qualification frameworks¹⁶.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² **Gallacher, J.** "Organizational arrangements in Scotland". in Hodgson, A. and Spours K. Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning Across the United Kingdom: Policy, Organisation and Governance, Bedford Way Papers, 2011.

¹³ **Raffe, D. and Byrne, D.** *CES Briefing No. 34*, Edinburgh: Centre for Educational Sociology, University of Edinburgh, 2005.

¹⁴ Raffe, D. and C. Howieson (2012,) Hybrid qualifications in a credit-based system: Scottish Higher National Certificates and Diplomas, in T. Deissinger, J. Aff, A. Fuller and C. Jørgensen (eds) Hybrid Qualifications - structural and political issues in the context of European VET policy, Bern: Peter Lang.

¹⁵ For example National Diploma which is being awarded by further education colleges and by some professional bodies, carries credit equivalent of the first two years of a four-year Honours degree academic programme. Therefore this qualification can be used for entry to the first year of a degree programme, for entry with advance standing to the degree programme or it could be used for employment.

¹⁶ **Howieson, C., Raffe, D. and A. Kinsella.** Credit systems for lifelong learning: final country report on Scotland, 2012.

2.2. The national framework for post-compulsory education and lifelong learning in Scotland

The lifelong learning strategy became one of the main features of the policy agenda in Scotland since 1999¹⁷. Consecutive Scottish Governments were committed to provide “training for skills”, to widen access to further and higher education, to create a culture of lifelong learning and to increase adult participation in education and training¹⁸. Since the late 1990s a crucial infrastructure to implement the lifelong learning policy was developed. This infrastructure included: the Scottish Funding Council for Further and Higher Education (SFC)¹⁹, Skills Development Scotland (SDS²⁰), the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA)²¹, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)²², Her Majesty Inspectorate for Education (HMIE) and the Quality Assurance Agency Scotland (QAA)²³. These six organisations created the national Framework for provision of post-compulsory education and lifelong learning in Scotland and enabled the development of PRL processes.

2.3 RPL in the context of Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

Lifelong learning inevitably include not only formal learning through educational institutions, but also informal learning through life and work experience, and/or learning which although was provided in a formal environment, was not assessed and certified. Lifelong learning strategy cannot be implemented without an efficient tool that allows identification of the outcomes of prior learning, obtained outside of formal education system, and recognition and validation of these outcomes. Recognition of Prior Learning is an intrinsic part of a strategy for developing a learning society which is based on life-long learning approach. Furthermore a tool is needed that enables a comparison between the outcomes of informal learning with outcomes that are achieved through formal learning programmes. Such tool is being provides by national qualifications frameworks, which in Scotland is the Scottish Credits and Qualifications Framework²⁴.

¹⁷ **Raffe, D.** Foreword, pp. x-xii, in A. Hodgson, K.Spours and M.Waring (eds) *Post-Compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning across the United Kingdom*. Bedford Way Papers, London: University of London Institute of Education, 2011b.

¹⁸ *Skills for Scotland: Scottish Government Lifelong Skills Strategy, 2007*. Internet: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/09/06091114/0>

¹⁹ **Gallacher, J.** “Organizational arrangements in Scotland”. in Hodgson, A. and K. Spours. *Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning Across the United Kingdom: Policy, Organisation and Governance*, Bedford Way Papers, 2011.

²⁰ Skills Development Scotland was established in 2008, and become responsible for work-training programs information advice and guidance, literacy and numeracy campaign and financial support for part-time learners.

²¹ The Scottish Qualification Authority become a single body with a responsibility for developing, validation and awarding of all qualifications, both academic and vocational, which were outside the realm of universities.

²² was launched in 2001.

²³ *Quality Assurance Agency Scotland (QAA)* was established which assumed a responsibility for the quality assurance in the higher education sector.

²⁴ **Whittaker, R.** SCQF Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) Draft Guidelines, Report on Consultation, 2005.

A formal qualification framework, such as SCQF, provides with a possibility to compare the informal/non-formal learning outcomes against commonly acceptable and recognisable formal qualifications or outcomes, achieved through a formal programme of studies and allows benchmarking knowledge experience and skills acquired outside formal education to the context of the qualification framework²⁵. SCQF was one of the first comprehensive national qualifications frameworks (NQFs)²⁶ and is believed to be one of the most successful national qualification frameworks²⁷.

Unlike those regulatory qualifications frameworks which are being introduced with an aim to transform or reform education system, the SCQF is a communications framework²⁸. It means that the SCQF is a voluntary descriptive framework that aims to make an existing education and qualifications systems more transparent and coherent, and existing qualifications more widely understood accepted and used. SCQF is a comprehensive qualifications framework with 12 levels, which intends to accommodate all qualifications and assessed learning in Scotland. SCQF provides a vocabulary for describing learning, facilitates understanding of qualifications in terms of the information they convey to an employer about prospective workers' knowledge and skills. SCQF makes the relationships between qualifications and learning programmes clear by explaining how qualifications relate to each other and thus can be combined to build pathways within and across occupations and education system; it clarifies entry and exit points and routes for progression and also shows how Scottish qualifications are related to wider regional meta-frameworks of qualifications (such as European Qualifications Framework)²⁹.

The process of the SCQF development in Scotland was incremental and consistent and started since the mid-1980s. It was built through a series of reforms that created a highly coherent and unified qualification system. Through these reforms three qualifications frameworks were developed: National Qualifications (NQs), (covered academic and vocational qualifications below Higher Education); a framework for Higher Education, the Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SCOTCAT) system; and the Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs)³⁰. These three networks were merged together into SCQF.

²⁵ SCQF Handbook: User Guide. internet: www.SCQF.org.uk , 2009.

²⁶ **Young, M.** 'National Vocational Qualifications in the United Kingdom: Their origins and legacy'. International Labour Office, Skills and Employability Department. -Geneva: ILO, 2010. 1 v. (web pdf) International Labour Office; Skills and Employability Dept., 2010.

²⁷ **Howieson, C., Raffe, D. and A. Kinsella.** Credit systems for lifelong learning: final country report on Scotland, final report, 2012.

²⁸ **Raffe, D.** "National Qualifications Frameworks: what can be learnt from the international experience?", *Journal of Contemporary Educational Studies*, 4/2011, 2011c., pp.52-65

²⁹ SCQF Handbook: User Guide. internet: www.SCQF.org.uk , 2009.

³⁰ SVQs are competence-based occupational qualifications, delivered mostly in Scotland's Further education colleges and in the workplace, and they are designed on principles similar to national vocational qualifications used elsewhere in the UK.

2.2 RPL and System of Credit Arrangements

The credit arrangements that exist in Scottish system of education allows accumulate a credit from several learning programmes and transfer it from lower to higher level learning programs. The credit transfer and accumulation is built into the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) system, which carries out all certifications and maintains a cumulative record of the achievements of individual learners. This system of credit transfer is supported by the SCQF. All qualifications included in the SCQF are based on Credit Points built around a combination of shorter and longer programmes (units, modules) that normally have credit accumulation and progression routes built into them. The system of credits allows describing any qualifications by means of a universal language. It enables an accumulative approach to learning, makes skills achieved through learning transparent and the learning itself transferable and provides a seamless transition between different stages and modes of learning³¹.

Credit transfer system is essential for RPL because it separates teaching process from learning process. It overlooks the learning context (when, where and under what circumstances the earning took place) and is based instead on the learning outcomes which describe transferable skills, knowledge and understanding. Credit transfer can be used in retrospective terms (i.e. what is already achieved through prior learning) as well as prospective terms (i.e. what learner is expected to achieve).

RPL can be used to award SCQF Credit Points toward any qualification (or for full qualification awards). RPL can be also used are a bridge between informal and formal learning, e.g. for credit award for informal prior learning that qualifies individuals for further formal studies^{32,33}. The practices of using RPL for award exist in many by many higher education institutions (HEI) in Scotland. In such universities as Stirling, Glasgow Caledonian³⁴, the University of West of Scotland³⁵, Edinburgh Napier University³⁶ and Queen Margaret University³⁷.

³¹ **Raffe, D., Howieson, C. and Hart, J.** Credit systems for lifelong learning: CS3L background report on Scotland, report to the German Federal Institute of Vocational Training, Edinburgh: Centre for Educational Sociology, Edinburgh, 2010.

³² **Raffe, D., Gallacher, J. and Toman, N.** "The Scottish credit and qualification Framework: lessons for the EQF". European journal of vocational training – No 42/43, 2007/3 - 2008/1

³³ **Raffe, D.** The role of learning outcomes in National Qualifications Frameworks, in S.Bohlinger and G.Muenchhausen (eds) Validierung von Lernergebnissen - Recognition and Validation of Prior Learning. Bielefeld: Bertelsmann, 2011d, pp.87-104.

³⁴ RPL Policy Handbook, Glasgow Caledonian University, 2011, http://www.gcu.ac.uk/quality/handbook/Documents/GCU_RPL_Policy_May2011.pdf

³⁵ University of West of Scotland, Lifelong Learning Academy, <http://www.uws.ac.uk/lifelonglearning/>

³⁶ Centre for Credit Rating, Edinburgh Napier ~University, www.napier.ac.uk/creditrating/Pages/Home.aspx

³⁷ Summary Guide on RPL. Queen Margaret University. www.qmu.ac.uk/quality/documents/RPL%20summary%20guide.doc

3. RPL process: stages and implementation.

There are two main stages in any RPL process^{38,39}. The first stage includes initial advice, guidance and support, the second stage of RPL is the stage of formal recognition. A quality assurance is essential for the RPL success and should be built into both stages, which should be consistent, transparent and assessable⁴⁰ to make RPL processes socially acceptable and credible^{41,42,43}. Learners often require a help and guidance while they reflect on their prior learning and produce an evidence of their knowledge and skills for formal evaluation. This help and guidance in Scotland is usually being provided by formal learning providers, e.g. Higher Education institution, which also carries out the validation of prior learning through benchmark the outcomes of the learning to SCQF⁴⁴.

Implementation of RPL in Scotland varies across different sectors, institutions and from one individual case to another. There are no legal obligations in Scotland for anyone to carry out RPL both in terms of assessment and accreditation of prior learning, and in terms of recognition of prior accredited learning for further formal learning admission purposes, or career purposes. Apart from the RPL guidance outlined in the SCQF⁴⁵ handbook and Toolkit⁴⁶, there is no formal regulation or requirements for the provision of RPL. There is no single body responsible for the delivery of the RPL. These responsibilities are held with the learning provider⁴⁷. Therefore RPL is being implemented in a variety of ways. RPL in Scotland is being delivered by learning providers, i.e. by professional bodies, by colleges and universities, by employers. The learning provider designs the RPL procedures, i.e. provision of counselling and guidance, assessment, internal quality assurance and evaluation.

³⁸ Whittaker, R. Recognising Prior Learning in Community Learning and Development using the SCQF, Research for Communities Scotland, Report 81, 2007a

³⁹ Whittaker, R. CARA Pathfinder Project: Development of RPL profiling, guidance and work experience model for refugee academics. Glasgow Caledonian University and Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA) Resource pack, 2007b

⁴⁰ SCQF (2006). SCQF RPL Resource Pack Parts 1: Examples of Practice and Part 2 Resource Materials 2006. internet: www.SCQF.org.uk

⁴¹ A number of bodies, such as Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), practice-based learning providers and regulatory and professional bodies have a responsibility to ensure the quality of practice-based learning.

⁴² SCQF (2007). Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Guidelines. SCQF Handbook, 2007 Volume 2. internet: www.SCQF.org.uk

⁴³ SCQF Handbook: User Guide. internet: www.SCQF.org.uk, 2009.

⁴⁴ SCQF (2007). Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Guidelines. SCQF Handbook, 2007 Volume 2. internet: www.SCQF.org.uk

⁴⁵ The focus of the SCQF RPL activities is on producing guidelines for practitioners, building confidence in learners in RPL and encouraging the employers to use RPL to validate their work-based programmes, for staff recruiting and staff development, etc.

⁴⁶ SSSC Scottish Credit & Qualification Frameworks (SCQF) Social Services Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (EPL) pilot. Evaluation report-phase two, 2008. NHS Scotland (2008). A Guide to Healthcare Support Worker Education and Role Development. <http://www.hcswworkkit.nhs.uk/media/742116/guide%20to%20role%20development.pdf>

⁴⁷ SCQF. Articulation for all. Conference. Scottish Funding Council, Great Glasgow Articulation partnership. internet: www.gap.org.uk, 2011

4. RPL delivery across different sectors.

4.1 RPL in Scottish Universities and colleges

Colleges and universities offer RPL for individuals as well as collaborate with professional bodies and employers for providing RPL for benchmarking work-based training programmes to SCQF. RPL is used for student admission (as an alternative to normal addition requirements), for exemption from a part of the degree programme requirements (known as articulation), for entry into a degree program and for full certification/degree award for non-certified work-based training⁴⁸. Variations among universities in their articulation policies are a good example of an absence of formal regulation for RPL. Within the SCQF context, there is a formal correspondence between the National Diploma (ND)⁴⁹, and the two first years of study towards an academic degree in a university. However, while some universities have RPL procedures in place, which allow those with ND entre with articulation to the second or the third year of the university program, other universities would admit candidates with such qualification only to the first year of a degree program or impose additional conditions, which should be meet to allow articulation.

4.2 RPL across professional organization and bodies in Scotland

PRL in professional bodies. RPL in the workplace in used in Scotland in the number of sectors, such Social Services, Community education, Health sector, Finance sector, Scottish Police Force, etc. PRL is also used in cross-sectoral work. Professional bodies have the responsibility of maintaining industry wide standards for their sector and in delivering relevant industry qualifications. Industries are competing to attract new entrants and retain existing employees. Therefore professional bodies in different sectors of the industry are looking to attract individuals with existing skills that are transferable often from other sectors and other countries through identifying existing skills and competencies of individuals, enabling them to gain credit and potential exemptions from part of the professional bodies' required qualifications, as well as through offering them pathways from professional qualifications into advanced stage of studies towards academic qualifications.

RPL in Social Services sector^{50,51}: The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) registers people who work in the social services sector and regulating their education and training. To register with SSSC workers need to achieve a particular level of professional qualifications within a year of their work. The SCQF Partnership set up a Social Services RPL project that enables employees

⁴⁸ E.g. **Howieson, C. and Croxford, L.** Students' Experience of the Transition from HN to Degree Study, Final Report to ELRAH, Edinburgh: Centre for Educational Sociology, University of Edinburgh, 2011.

⁴⁹ (National Diploma further education qualification which is normally awarded by Scotland's colleges but also by some professional bodies)

⁵⁰ A. SSSC. RPL and Credit Transfer Guidelines for the Practice Learning Qualifications

B. SSSC. Scottish Credit & Qualification Frameworks (SCQF) Social Services Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (EPL) pilot. Evaluation report-phase two, 2007.

⁵¹QAA Scotland (2011). "Key aspects of Practice-based learning in teaching, nursing and social work in Scotland". Report to QAA Scotland. www.qaa.ac.uk

to use their experiential learning to work towards qualifications for registration with SSSC and for continuous employee development.

RPL and guidance agencies and employability service providers: RPL is used by guidance agencies and employability service providers. Recently guidance agencies and employability services⁵² started to use RPL tools with people who have been made redundant, to help them to identify and describe the skills they have gained throughout their life through formal and informal learning, and to consider how they can further develop and transfer these skills into employment, training or learning⁵³. Schools and Careers Advisers use RPL Profiling Tool to assist young people with planning their next steps into education, training and employment⁵⁴.

5. Crossing Borders between everyday life and education systems

Contemporary learning processes and practices are not restricted by institutional/sectorial boundaries and takes place in a variety of settings (Whittaker, et. al. 2003). These include higher and further education institutions, institutes of vocational training, educational centres and community based centres; learning may be education provider based; employer/professional body based; government based, etc. Therefore RPL might be defined as a mean of crossing borders and breaking down barriers between everyday life and formal education, with implications for the nature of higher education teaching and study. Some sectors are very good in developing RPL (skill sectors and professional bodies in particular) practices, while other sectors and in particular, higher education institutions are still safeguard their borders from atypical learners.

One of the most important political claims that makes RPL is that the recognition of prior learning gained outside the formal education system pays an important societal role in contributing to greater social inclusion, social cohesion, social mobility^{55,56}, through enabling and facilitating life-long learning processes and widening access to formal qualifications, and higher education for those who were previously excluded from it. Is there empirical research evidence that supports this claim? Who benefits from RPL the most?

One might expect that RPL would be developed into effective tool for engaging in higher education a-typical learners⁵⁷. These a-typical learners are often older (in their mid-thirties-forties), who left school at earliest opportunity

⁵² Whittaker, R. CARA Pathfinder Project: Development of RPL profiling, guidance and work experience model for refugee academics. Glasgow Caledonian University and Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA) Resource pack, 2007.

⁵³ Inspire Scotland. A Review of the Recognition of Prior Learning. Final Report, SCQF <http://www.scqf.org.uk/Resources/Downloads.aspx>, 2008.

⁵⁴ RPL Profiling tool was developed by Skills Development Scotland in collaboration with the SCQF Partnership

⁵⁵ Whittaker, R et al. Flexible Delivery Quality Enhancement Theme. Supporting the Development of the Flexible Curriculum Final Report, QAA, 2006. http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/documents/flexibledelivery/flexible_delivery_QAA_122.pdf

⁵⁶ SCQF SCQF RPL Guidelines. Internet: <http://www.scqf.org.uk/Resources/Downloads.aspx>, 2005.

⁵⁷ Harris, J. "Ways of seeing the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): What contribution can such practices make to social inclusion?" *Studies in Education of Adults*, 1999, V. 33(2): 124-139.

to engage in paid work and who often lack post-compulsory level qualifications. Their educational and career choices were defined by their class and gender specific identities, shaped by their upbringing, educational experiences, opportunity structures they saw at the time (e.g. Crossan et. al., 2003). Does RPL offer those disengaged learners a mechanism of inclusion in further learning and higher education, through recognition and accreditation of their informal/experiential/work-based learning as an alternative to normal entry requirements into academic programme of studies?

However, existing research evidence from the early 2000s does not seem to support the expectation that RPL acts as a mean of social mobility and widening participation in higher education for a-typical or disengaged learners, through providing an access to education for those who lack formal upper-secondary level qualifications or post-compulsory educational experience. In 2003 Australian Qualification Framework Advisory Board summarised the characteristics of the RPL students in Australia: mid-career, established in the workforce, older, work full-time, in associate-professional, professional or managerial occupations^{58,59}, many of these already had experience of post-compulsory education and training. In 2002 Cleary et al⁶⁰ reported similar findings based on international RPL practices. In 2006 Whittaker et al⁶¹ reported that accreditation of prior learning was not linked to social inclusion in France, Finland, Spain, England and Scotland, and those who benefited from APEL were predominantly white, middle class, with prior academic qualification and national of the countries where they lived.

Since these results were reported, Scotland saw a further intensified development of RPL policy and processes in many countries, and in particular, in Scotland. It is important to develop evaluation of contemporary RPL processes against such criteria as the extent to which RPL processes offer opportunities of engagement into academic studied towards the higher education qualifications for different types of learners and in particular, for learners who do not have a previous experience of tertiary education. There are some examples of RPL practices in Scotland that target disengaged learners, however these examples are very unevenly distributed across different universities, with most of the universities using RPL for *articulation* or advanced entry for those who already have tertiary or professional qualifications. Higher education sector offers in terms of RPL significantly less to those who do not have formal qualifications, and seek recognition of prior informal or experiential learning to

⁵⁸ **Cameron, R., Miller, P.** 'RPL: why has it failed to act as a mechanism for social change', paper presented to the Social Change in the 21st Century Conference, Centre for Social Change Research, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, 29 October, 2004.

⁵⁹ **Cameron, R.** 'Recipes for recognition and lifelong learning: Community based approaches to fostering learning transitions' Making Connections: Transition to University conference, QUT, 2004, 26-28 September, Brisbane. <http://www.carseldine.qut.edu.au/about/whatson.jsp>

⁶⁰ **Cleary, P., Whittaker, R., Gallacher, J., Merrill, B., Jokinen, L., Carette, M.** Social inclusion through APEL: the learners' perspective. European Commission: Socrates-Grundtvig Project. Glasgow: Glasgow Caledonian University, 2002.

⁶¹ **Whittaker, S, Whittaker, R. and Cleary, P.** 'Understanding the transformative dimension of RPL' in Anderson P. & Harris, J (ed) Re-theorising the Recognition of Prior Learning RPL, NIACE, 2006.

enter studies towards advanced degrees. Examples of good practices exist in the Edinburgh Napier University, University of Stirling, and Glasgow Caledonian University. These universities have a transparent and well managed RPL policy that targets learners from different backgrounds, including those who do not have formal qualifications. However there are also universities (for example the University of Edinburgh) which offer very few RPL options and only to people with tertiary education experience and professional qualification (e.g. health practitioners).

6. Conclusions

RPL developments in Scotland are being backed with constant policy interest and are a part of consistent, incremental and pragmatic policy towards skills development. RPL is developing in the context of Lifelong learning policy, which established important ideological, political, institutional and organisational frameworks for the implementation of RPL. The features of Scottish education system provide a good basis for life- learning and recognition of prior learning strategies.

One of the important impediments to RPL in Scotland is a lack of statutory regulations in relation to RPL. Individuals do not have a legal entitlement for recognition of their prior learning. Learning providers do not have an obligation to assess and recognise prior learning. Similarly, employers do not have an obligation to grant their employees with time and recourses for RPL. As a result, at the moment, despite of many good RPL practices that exist in Scotland, the RPL provision there is patchy and lacks consistency. RPL very often becomes a private and very laborious errand for individuals who are seeking the recognition of their prior and especially informal, non-formal or experiential leaning. The numbers of individuals who do through any kind of RPL processes in Scottish universities every year are modest and vary from one university to another, from tens to few hundreds at most. The information about RPL is not always readily available and often the degree of transparency of the RPL processes on the web-pages of different Scottish Universities reflect the degree to which a particular university welcome students from non-traditional learning backgrounds. Therefore, along developing the RPL institutional capacities of learning providers, and providing learning with an access to better information and support, it is crucial to develop a legal framework for RPL. Such frameworks exist in several European countries with highly developed mechanisms for validation of prior informal learning (e.g. France, Portugal, Denmark, and Netherlands). Individuals in these countries have statutory right to RPL and employees are entitled for paid-time for preparation for RPL, as a part of their professional learning and development processes.

RPL allows people to bring their informal learning and life experiences into formal education, to enter the formal education from different starting points, at different levels, with their own assets and to progress through it at their own pace, from different starting points. Overall, existing evidence shows that RPL in Scotland indeed has a potential to become an important tool that breaks borders between everyday life and informal learning experiences, which people acquire during the life course, at work, and through voluntary activities,

and formal education systems. Through RPL formal education is becoming more and more individualised. Recognition of prior learning by formal learning providers, and especially by universities means a societal recognition that individuals nowadays can enter formal post-compulsory education with very different life-luggage – some come straight from school, while others after establishing a professional career; some bring with them experience of tertiary or higher education, while others do not have formal qualifications that qualify them for a university entry; some people want a formal recognition of their professional skills they got for a better advance at work, while others want to gain through RPL an opportunity to enter advanced academic studies.

RPL helps people without previous experience of post-compulsory education to realise that there is no unbridgeable gap between what they were doing in their everyday and working life and formal education; RPL gives people a message the knowledge obtained through their unique life experience is valuable, practical, and that it could be recognised and validated and efficiently for gaining formal educational qualifications.

In the contemporary world with its dynamic labour markets and continuous technological advances, where learning through life is essential for becoming a successful individual, the role of RPL cannot be overestimated.

ՄԱՐԻՆԱ ՇԱՊԻՐԱ – Կրթական համակարգի տարրերի ներառումն առօրյա կյանքում (Շոտլանդիայում չհավատարմագրված կրթության ճանաչման օրինակով) – Հոդվածում քննարկվում է չհավատարմագրված կրթական համակարգի ճանաչման և հավաստագրման քաղաքականությունը (Recognition of Prior Learning, RPL), որը ներառում է մասնագիտական գիտելիքների ամբողջությունը ստացված պաշտոնական կրթական համակարգից դուրս՝ մասնագիտական և հասարակական կազմակերպություններում ընդգրկվածության միջոցով: Հոդվածում վերլուծվում է Շոտլանդիայի փորձը, նկարագրվում է այն ազգային և ինստիտուցիոնալ համատեքստը, որտեղ զարգանում է այդ քաղաքականությունը: Չհավատարմագրված կրթական համակարգի զարգացումը պայմանավորված է Բոլոնիայի կրթական չափորոշիչների տարրերից մեկի՝ շարունակական կրթության (Life-Long Learning) ռազմավարության ներդրման գործընթացով, որի տեսանկյունից կարևորվում է մասնագիտական գիտելիքների ստացումը ողջ կյանքի ընթացքում: Ներկայացվում են Շոտլանդիայի կառավարության մոտեցումները չհավատարմագրված կրթական համակարգի ճանաչման և հավաստագրման գործընթացին, ինչպես նաև այն հարցը, թե որքանով է հնարավոր ժամանակակից RPL գործընթացները տարբեր սոցիալական խմբերի ներկայացուցիչներին սոցիալական ներառման ավելի մեծ հնարավորություն տալ: Շոտլանդիայի մի շարք համալսարաններում RPL փորձի իրականացման հաջող օրինակները կարող են օգտագործվել այլ պետությունների կրթական համակարգերում և նպաստել սոցիալական որոշ շերտերի սոցիալական մոբիլության ապահովմանը:

МАРИНА ШАПИРА – *Интегрированность элементов системы образования в повседневную жизнь (на примере признания неформального образования в Шотландии)*. – Политика и методы программы Признания неформального образования (RPL) в Шотландии – важный современный пример того, как повседневная жизнь пересекается с системой образования. В статье описана национальная и институциональная среда в Шотландии, в которой возникла и развивается эта политика. Проанализированы факторы, способствующие успешному воплощению на практике политики RPL, и то, в какой степени она делает высшее образование привлекательным для представителей разных социальных категорий. На данный момент шотландские университеты значительно различаются уровнем развития RPL. Однако успешная реализация RPL в ряде шотландских вузов может стать эффективным инструментом социальной мобильности. Она также может послужить примером для национальных образовательных стратегий Армении (с учётом взаимосвязей системы высшего образования с потребностями общества).