



Flexible entry resource pack

Recognising prior informal learning and credit transfer within the context of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

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Introduction

This *Flexible entry resource pack* has been developed as part of the Enhancement Theme for Flexible Delivery. The pack has been produced through the development project **Supporting the development of the flexible curriculum: flexible entry and flexible programmes**.

The purpose of the pack is to:

- support staff within the higher education (HE) sector in implementing the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) Guidelines* and *Credit Transfer Guidelines*
- support the use of the *Flexible entry staff development pack*.

The pack illustrates the ways in which flexible entry can be developed and used within the context of the SCQF. It should be viewed as a growing resource that will be added to through the continuing work of the HE Coordination Group for Flexible Entry. Further examples of practice and resources could be provided as more innovative forms of support, assessment and credit rating are developed within higher education institutions (HEIs).

The examples of practice (Part 1) and resources (Part 2) contained in the pack have been provided by members of the HE Coordination Group for Flexible Entry and through SCQF RPL development work, which has been undertaken to produce another version of the SCQF RPL resource pack that is applicable across all post-16 education and training sectors.

Please note that many institutions providing the examples and materials in the pack are still using the former terms:

- accreditation of prior learning (APL), which is now referred to as flexible entry
- accreditation of prior certificated learning (APCL), which is now referred to as credit transfer
- accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL), which is now referred to as RPL.

Part 1 of the pack contains examples of practice – descriptions of RPL and credit transfer processes and procedures that have been developed within particular programmes, towards qualifications, or across organisations.

Part 2 contains RPL procedural documentation and resource materials, which have been provided by some of the HEIs featured in Part 1.

If you would like to contribute an example for inclusion in the pack, please contact QAA Scotland (tel: 0141 572 3421; email: enhancement@qaa.ac.uk).

Part 1: Examples of practice

Recognising prior informal learning

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Context of RPL process/development

- **Within a programme:** Caledonian Degree and potentially other programmes in the University.
- **Across the organisation:** Valuing Learning from Experience (VaLEx) modules could provide the basis of centralised RPL support service across the University (under review).
- **With other organisations:** model piloted through European Socrates-Grundtvig project, VaLEx, with University of Stirling and University of Warwick (in the UK).

Purpose of RPL process/development

- To enable learners to gain entry to/credit within a particular programme or towards a particular qualification.
- To develop/operate procedures within a department or across an organisation.
- To develop/use an RPL approach as part of personal or professional development planning or educational and career guidance.

Details of key features of RPL process

Valuing Learning from Experience

The VaLEx modules at GCU have been developed as part of the EU-funded Socrates-Grundtvig project, VaLEx.

The project has piloted an RPL model in seven European countries. The model targets hard-to-reach learners from traditionally socially excluded groups who lack successful experience of formal learning and self-confidence as learners, or are excluded for reasons of ethnicity, migration, disability or other social or economic factors.

The development of the VaLEx modules underpins the support materials – an RPL toolkit – which have been piloted. Providing this support within the context of modules enables the allocation of resources to the RPL process, and gives learners a valuable outcome to the process in terms of the award of credit.

GCU VaLEx modules

GCU has approved two VaLEx modules to provide generic group support to students undertaking RPL. These modules represent a two-stage approach to RPL.

VaLEx I – this module focuses on enabling learners to recognise the knowledge and skills they have gained through their prior informal or experiential learning, in order to:

- increase their self-confidence as learners
- enable them to make an explicit connection between informal learning situations and formal learning opportunities, to support their transition into formal learning
- identify educational/career opportunities in a wider sense.

VaLEx II – this module can be a vehicle for achieving credit for prior informal or experiential learning within the University. The module:

- supports learners in the process of making an RPL claim for credit
- recognises the learning undertaken in the process of compiling an RPL claim for credit
- increases opportunities for learners to gain access to HE at the appropriate level.

The first module (VaLEx I) provides the basis for the first stage of RPL, that of formative recognition; the second module (VaLEx II) supports the second stage, summative recognition.

By providing RPL guidance within the context of credit-bearing modules, the staff resources needed for this process can be provided. The modules also enable learners not already registered on a GCU programme to register as associate students, thus increasing their familiarity with the University. Students registered on the modules also have access to fee waivers on the same basis as part-time students, thereby increasing access for low-income groups.

Both modules have been approved within the context of the Caledonian Degree within GAPS (General Academic and Professional Studies). It is available to Caledonian degree students, to students on other programmes across the University, and to learners outside the institution, on an associate student basis. VaLEx 1 was recently piloted in partnership with The Wise Group in Glasgow (as part of the VaLEx project) with a group of women who are refugees and asylum seekers.

Students undertaking VaLEx I have the option of continuing directly to VaLEx II. The use of two half-modules enables some students to complete the process at the formative recognition stage while still gaining credit for completion.

The VaLEx modules aim to:

- provide a vehicle to support students to prepare an RPL claim for credit within their programme of study
- complement personal development planning (PDP) approaches
- contribute to the widening access and participation agenda by opening new routes into programmes for new learners who would not otherwise consider HE as an option
- highlight the role of educational guidance and PDP for all learners
- give transparency to the implementation of RPL measures throughout the University.

The VaLEx toolkit developed by the VaLEx project comprises:

- a learners' guide to RPL
- a tutors' pack, containing:
 - a practical guide
 - a theoretical guide
 - support materials.

These materials are available in Part 2 of the resource pack.

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Context of RPL process/development

- **Within a programme:** Caledonian BA/BSc by negotiated learning.
- **Towards qualifications:** Certificate, Diploma or Degree (including Hons).

Purpose of RPL process/development

- To enable learners to gain entry to/credit within a particular programme or towards a particular qualification.
- To develop/operate procedures within a department or across an organisation.
- To develop/use an RPL approach within a programme (eg return to learn, personal and career development, confidence-building, adult literacy and numeracy, core skills development, access provision).
- To develop/use an RPL approach as part of personal or professional development planning or educational and career guidance.

Details of key features of RPL process

Students using RPL for entry would be interviewed and the claim discussed. Appropriate evidence criteria would then be agreed in order to submit a claim, or students could embark on two 10-credit modules.

VaLEx modules can be used to put together the claim. To gain credit within a programme, students could again embark on either of the above two routes, or take a 20-credit assisted Lifepace Learning module to put the claim together in the form of learning outcomes. Full support is given on an individualised basis for this. For the second two routes (the 10-credit or 20-credit modules), module descriptors are provided; in the latter case, students would also complete a personal module descriptor dictating their own learning outcomes.

All three routes are fully supported by a tutor assisting students on an individualised basis. The credit gained would be general credit for the Caledonian Degree. If students wanted specific credit on another programme, the transfer of credit gained would need to be specifically negotiated with the admitting department.

There are technically no limits for RPL, though it would be difficult for someone to gain a full degree by RPL and there would need to be compliance with university regulations.

The work is assessed against level benchmarks (using Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) materials) for abilities, knowledge and so forth at various

levels. Although these options are available, there has not been a request for APEL since developing the Caledonian Degree, apart from one student who used route three (the 20-credit module) and paid a normal module fee (£210).

Assessment for the non-modular route would follow the university system and would be agreed with a module expert and then the Associate Director Quality. The modular routes would be assessed by a module expert and then a selection of work sent to an external assessor for quality assurance purposes, as with any other module. The modules are not treated differently to any other module in the University, and the same rigour and quality procedures are expected.

Only one experienced member of staff runs the Lifespace Learning module at the moment. The same lecturer would be involved with the VaLEx modules, though it would be necessary to increase the number of people involved and train appropriate staff if this area expands. In addition, if the non-modular route increases, the programme team will develop its own methods for RPL procedures in line with university procedures for assisting students and assessing their work.

RPL work that is already accredited, for example Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND), is taken at face value and awarded appropriate credit towards the programme or for entry: HNC entry to level 2 and HND entry to level 3. Other qualifications are investigated; the programme leader makes appropriate decisions when the level of the qualification is unclear, or it is uncertain what amount the qualification (eg professional qualifications) is worth. This applies both for entry and as part of the programme.

The SCQF is used as extensively and as liberally as possible, to encourage all people to gain credit for **all** learning, however gained.

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Context of RPL process/development

Across the organisation.

Purpose of RPL process/development

- To enable learners to gain credit within programmes.
- To develop/operate procedures within a department or across an organisation.

Details of key features of RPL process

Napier has a university-wide RPL framework which enables students to gain credit for their prior informal learning.

Each school has an RPL coordinator who convenes the school's RPL committee and oversees RPL processes in the school. The RPL coordinator can identify an RPL adviser (eg a module leader) who is a subject expert in the area where a student wishes to make a claim. A seven-step system assists students to make a claim for RPL for credit. There are a range of RPL procedures for assessing claims for credit. Schools have specific RPL procedures in place for different degree pathways. These can include:

- a reflective account
- project work
- an interview/oral assessment
- assessment on demand
- simulation/observation of practice
- mapping of learning outcomes
- a portfolio.

School RPL committees have devolved authority from faculty boards to approve school RPL procedures and agree students' RPL for credit claims. The school RPL committee reports regularly to the faculty quality committee where the latter is responsible for the quality management and enhancement of the school's RPL processes.

A staff guide provides information and guidance to staff on the RPL framework, and makes explicit connections with the *SCQF RPL Guidelines*. A student guide to RPL and a publicity leaflet have also been produced.

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Context of RPL process/development

- **Within a programme:** BA Honours Financial Services.
- **Towards a qualification:** BA Honours Financial Services.

Purpose of RPL process/development

- To enable learners to gain entry to/credit within a particular programme or towards a particular qualification.

Details of key features of RPL process

The RPL process enables students with work experience and professional qualifications within the financial services sector to obtain direct entry at an advanced stage of the BA Honours degree programme. Effectively, their experiential learning is assessed and exemption granted for 90 credits at level 1 of the degree programme and 90 credits at level 2. Any additional exemptions are awarded on the basis of certificated learning up to a maximum of 30 credits at levels 1 and 2 and 120 credits at level 3.

Applicants are required to complete a questionnaire which asks them to demonstrate the extent to which their experience in the workplace has enabled them to accumulate learning equivalent to the learning outcomes of the first two years of the degree programme. A copy of the questionnaire is provided in Part 2 of the resource pack, along with the assessment form used by the member of staff conducting the assessment.

As there have been relatively small numbers of applicants to date, it has been relatively straightforward to offer guidance on completion of the questionnaire on a one-to-one basis, usually by telephone. Similarly, only a limited level of support has been required for staff.

No charge is made for granting the exemptions on the basis of certificated or experiential learning.

At present, the award of credit for experiential learning is restricted to the levels of credit mentioned above. However, it is anticipated that credits will be awarded for the whole of levels 1 and 2 of the programme on this basis in the near future. At this stage, it is intended to restrict the award of credit above level 2 to certificated learning.

The student guide to RPL for the BA Hons Financial Services and the assessor's guide are also available in Part 2 of the resource pack.

Organisation: Robert Gordon University

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Context of RPL process/development

Across the organisation.

Purpose of RPL process/development

- To enable learners to gain entry to/credit within a particular programme or towards a particular qualification.
- To develop/operate procedures within a department or across an organisation.
- To develop/use an RPL approach within a programme (eg return to learn, personal and career development, confidence-building, adult literacy and numeracy, core skills development, access provision).
- To develop/use an RPL approach as part of personal or professional development planning or educational and career guidance.

Details of key features of RPL process

- Information on RPL is provided to all applicants as part of the course information.
- At a pre-RPL process meeting with applicants, appropriate advice and guidance are given on a needs basis.
- The process recognises both formal and informal learning, and credit is allocated and/or transferred as appropriate.
- Where appropriate, a mapping process is used to ensure coverage of content and context for the module/course or part thereof for which RPL is being sought, as well as to ensure comparability in terms of quality and standards.
- All RPL decisions must be ratified by the relevant course/programme assessment board.
- The process is underpinned by the SCQF national guidelines and managed at school/course level using procedures devised centrally for the institution by the Academic Affairs Department.

An APL or APEL claim for achievement of relevant learning outcomes/modules (or part thereof) can be made via a range of formats. These include:

- a reflective account
- project work

- an interview/oral assessment
- assessment on demand
- mapping of learning outcomes
- a portfolio
- existing work-based learning practices in evaluation and assessment.

To ensure the effectiveness and quality of the process, staff development, guidance and support are provided centrally via CELT/Academic Affairs Department on matters of policy, procedure and implementation.

Organisation: University of Abertay

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Context of RPL process/development

Across the organisation.

Purpose of RPL process/development

- To develop/operate procedures within a department or across an organisation.

Details of key features of RPL process

The University of Abertay has recently revised its APL procedures to take into account the impact of the widespread use of the SCQF and the *SCQF RPL Guidelines*. The University's APL/APEL coordinator is the central point of contact for all enquiries regarding APL and APEL. The coordinator maintains links with the advisers and assessors, and ensures that the Registrar is kept informed of any credits awarded through APL and APEL. The coordinator also maintains administrative systems for APL and APEL, and provides a support mechanism for staff and students throughout the claim process. A range of different formats for APEL may be used:

- a reflective account
- project reports
- an interview/oral assessment
- assessment on demand
- mapping of learning outcomes
- a portfolio of work
- a progress file or other record of achievement of learning, for example the Europass Curriculum Vitae (CV).

Staff development for the coordinator, advisers and assessors is arranged by the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT). In determining appropriate staff development, CELT considers current specifications for training in assessment processes, for example Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) units for assessors and verifiers.

To help in ensuring a consistent approach across the University, the APL/APEL coordinator convenes an annual meeting of advisers to consider the operation of the accreditation process.

The student guide to APL and APEL is being revised in light of these procedures. The student guide, the APL/APEL procedures and a summary of the University's approach to RPL are being publicised on the University's intranet site and promoted as a service aimed at enhancing access to programmes in the context of lifelong learning.

The University of Abertay's procedures for the accreditation of prior learning are available in Part 2 of the resource pack.

Organisation: University of Paisley

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Context of RPL process/development

- **Within a programme:** It is possible to incorporate RPL into most programmes within the University, providing all prerequisites are met. It may not be possible to incorporate RPL where the qualification is governed by a professional body, for example nurse training or teacher training.
- **Towards a qualification:** As above. RPL can be incorporated up to a maximum of 50 per cent of the exiting level (eg 300 points for an unclassified degree). However, in practice it is likely that a claim for this much credit would be a combination of certificated and uncertificated learning.
- **Across the organisation:** The University encourages RPL within programmes of study where appropriate (see above), and it is considered as part of the validation process.

Purpose of RPL process/development

- To enable learners to gain entry to/credit within a particular programme or towards a particular qualification.
- To develop/operate procedures within a department or across an organisation.
- To develop/use an RPL approach within a programme (eg return to learn, personal and career development, confidence-building, adult literacy and numeracy, core skills development, access provision).
- To develop/use an RPL approach as part of personal or professional development planning or educational and career guidance.

Details of key features of RPL process

The University of Paisley has an APL coordinator located within the Centre for Lifelong Learning. The APL coordinator provides advice and guidance on RPL to staff and students across the University, and ensures that there is consistency within the RPL approach used and the supervision and assessment of RPL claims. The supervision and assessment of RPL claims are carried out at school level.

The University has written guidelines on RPL for students and staff. RPL may be transferred into a programme of study providing it is at the appropriate level and the subject content 'fits' with study at the University to create a coherent programme. Students make a claim to have acquired knowledge and skills. The responsibility for

supporting the claim with evidence rests with the student. Although students need help in this, the primary responsibility must remain theirs. Claimants are allocated a supervisor, who is an academic member of staff with expertise in the subject area.

Identification of learning comes through systematic reflection on experience. This has three stages:

- Experiences are looked at, and those where learning has occurred are selected.
- Clear statements are written about what was actually learned.
- Evidence in support of the claim to learning is collected and collated.

Assessment is the responsibility of academic staff. All claims for APEL are double-marked and are open to external examination. Claims for credit are not graded, so it is not possible to claim credit at level 4 (honours level); the result of the claim is given only as a pass or fail.

The claim must include a written account that complements the portfolio of evidence. This should be a focused piece of writing placing the learning achieved into context. It should draw all the supporting evidence into an academic framework properly referenced and clearly demonstrating how learning has progressed.

The written account should provide a clear guide through the supplementary evidence contained within the portfolio. The written account should:

- refer to the statements of learning and the evidence
- describe how the learning has developed over time
- demonstrate the ability to reflect on learning
- clearly demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant academic theory.

Where a claim is for more than 30 points, there is a presentation and a viva voce in addition to the written submission and portfolio.

The University of Paisley's staff guidelines and student guidelines are available in Part 2 of the resource pack.

Organisation: University of Paisley (Diploma of Higher Education in Nursing Open Learning Conversion)

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Context of RPL process/development

- **Within a programme:** Diploma of Higher Education in Nursing Open Learning Conversion.

Purpose of RPL process/development

- To enable learners to gain entry to/credit within a particular programme or towards a particular qualification.
- To develop/use an RPL approach as part of personal or professional development planning or educational and career guidance.

Details of key features of RPL process

Accreditation of experience-derived learning (AEDL) is part of the conversion programme currently offered to second-level nurses (enrolled nurses) at the University of Paisley, and is a prime example of RPL in action.

The process was specifically developed to provide an opportunity for second-level nurses to have experience attained since qualifying accredited within the practice component of a conversion programme leading to a professional qualification as a first-level registered nurse.

The AEDL instrument and process

The AEDL instrument comprises 56 key elements of competence that can be linked to the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) standards of proficiency for entry to Part 1, sub-level 1, of the Professional Register (NMC, 2004b). They are classified in three sections:

Section 1 – communication skills (verbal, non-verbal, written)

Section 2 – management skills (leadership, decision-making, problem-solving)

Section 3 – care and health promotion.

Successful accreditation of key elements during the AEDL process is indicative of competences achieved by experienced second-level nurses. Each key element comprises three levels or categories of attainment, representing knowledge and skills

derived from an individual's initial professional training and subsequent experience as a qualified nurse.

Mechanism for gathering and presenting evidence of learning

Evidence of current practice is provided by means of critical incidents, which are everyday occurrences in practice that students record and analyse. The critical incidents are gathered over a three-month period. Prior learning is identified through students' systematic reflection on their own actions within the context of a situation and clarification of what they might do should a similar situation occur in future. A statement clearly demonstrating the relevance of a key element to a specific action within a critical incident is written for each key element claimed. To ensure that a broad range of skills is demonstrated, a maximum of four key elements can be claimed for each critical incident. This means that in order to support all 56 key elements, a student is required to document about 20 critical incidents. A practice supervisor who is a first-level registered nurse employed within the same area of practice as the student verifies the authenticity of the critical incidents.

Demonstration of competence is facilitated by tutor counsellors, who assist students to consider the evidence required to satisfy three categories of attainment or levels of learning from experience related to each key element. Students provide further written evidence to demonstrate the level of knowledge and skill acquired in relation to each key element claimed. Using a schedule of questions as a guide, the student and the tutor counsellor determine the validity of the evidence provided. Each key element can attract a maximum score of three points according to the level of competence attained:

- Know** For a score of 1, students must demonstrate knowledge from their previous second-level training related to a key element.
- Can do** For a score of 2, students must demonstrate that they are able to apply that knowledge to their practice at a level of proficiency of a qualified second-level nurse.
- Can do plus** For a score of 3, students must demonstrate that they are able to practice at the level of a competent first-level nurse. All three categories of attainment must be demonstrated to achieve a score of 3.

Category of attainment statements indicate the information required to make a satisfactory claim.

Accreditation process

On completion of the process, the sum of the scores achieved for each key element claimed is converted into credit points. It is possible to achieve up to four credit points, each one of which is equivalent to 15 weeks of unsupervised practice in students' own area of employment during the conversion programme. This credit enables students to retain their contract of employment throughout the programme. However, NMC and European Commission (EC) regulations governing the theoretical and practical elements of programmes leading to first-level professional registration must be met regardless of the credit awarded.

The review process also provides an opportunity to identify potential learning goals relating to the 56 key elements that could be achieved during the conversion programme, enabling planned practice experiences to be clearly focused.

Following review of the evidence by the student and tutor counsellor, the student submits a completed profile of competence for summative assessment in week 14 of the programme. This means that students' efforts in preparing their claim are also accredited.

A more extensive description of this process is available in Part 2 of the resource pack, giving fuller details of: the AEDL instrument and process; mechanism for gathering and presenting evidence of learning; the accreditation process; initial guidance for learners; support mechanisms for learners; the recognition/assessment process; monitoring and review; support for staff; quality assurance; the perceived benefits of AEDL; references.

Organisation: University of St Andrews

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Context of RPL process/development

- **Within a programme:** MA Evening Degree Programme.

Purpose of RPL process/development

- To enable learners to gain entry to/credit within a particular programme or towards a particular qualification.
- To develop/use an RPL approach within a programme (eg return to learn, personal and career development, access provision).

Details of key features of RPL process

The MA Evening Degree programme at the University of St Andrews is a part-time general degree designed specifically for adults. It has open access – students do not need any previous qualifications other than the ability to benefit from higher education.

The degree is completely flexible. Students may study on one or two nights per week, and opportunities exist for them to import modules from daytime study – or indeed to transfer to full-time daytime study.

The MA Evening Degree programme is designed to allow students to import up to 180 credits for previous HE work – that is, they may be granted credit for up to 50 per cent of their degree programme.

A general degree comprises study of a number of different subject areas. So the credit that students may import is not specific, but can be for **any** accredited previous HE study, or equivalent professional qualification.

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Context of RPL process/development

- **Within a programme:** pilot within an access programme.
- **Towards a qualification:** access/entry route as an alternative to an access programme or part of it, targeting applicants for a part-time (day and evening) programme).
- **Across the organisation:** possibility of introduction as an access/entry route across the University.
- **With other organisations:** model piloted through European Grundtvig project VaLEx with Glasgow Caledonian University (see earlier example) and University of Warwick (in the UK).

Purpose of RPL process/development

- To enable learners to gain entry to/credit within a particular programme or towards a particular qualification. Development is underway to introduce the RPL 1 module to social care workers, in conjunction with the Dementia Services Development Centre (Human Sciences Faculty) and a council's social work department, as a preparatory/access route into a specific e-unit, and to complement work-based learning processes.
- To develop/operate procedures within a department or across an organisation. Currently, the Institute of Education's RPL routes are being developed for specific professional programmes, and across the University (see below).
- To develop/use an RPL approach within a part-time access programme (in the Dementia Services Development Centre).
- To develop/use an RPL approach as part of personal or professional development planning or educational and career guidance.

Details of key features of RPL process*Institutional recognition and strategy*

The VaLEx (Valuing Learning from Experience) Grundtvig project enabled the development of an RPL module as part of a wider institutional drive to draft an RPL strategy, which is embedded in the University's learning and teaching quality enhancement strategy.

The aim was to recognise experiential learning and start to give institutional direction for the process. (The University of Stirling had administrative procedures concerning the award of notional credits for those with prior certificated learning, but little in the way of procedures for awarding credit for experiential learning, except in the Department of Nursing and Midwifery). At present, the new RPL strategy enables candidates to be awarded up to a maximum of 252 SCQF credits in recognition of prior learning (to include certificated learning, experiential learning or a combination of both). The strategy recognises the developmental and forward-planning (for future learning) aspects of the new RPL procedures, and encompasses a PDP approach.

The VaLEx model

The project has piloted an RPL model in seven European countries. The VaLEx model targets hard-to-reach learners from traditionally socially excluded groups who lack successful experience of formal learning and self-confidence as learners, or are excluded for reasons of ethnicity, migration, disability or some other social or economic factors.

The RPL modules being developed at Stirling therefore make use of this model and the supporting material (toolkit) being developed through VaLEx. They provide learners with a valuable outcome to the process in terms of the award of credit.

So far, one RPL module (RPL 1) has been validated through the University's quality assurance process, as part of a two-stage approach to RPL. It carries 11 SCQF credits and is offered at SCQF level 7. The second module, RPL 2 (recognition and accreditation of prior learning) will seek to give advanced/specific credit into a programme.

RPL 1: This module is designed to become an alternative (or concurrent) access route into university. It will be used mainly for new learners who wish to explore their experiential learning in order to prepare for university study. The module focuses on enabling learners to recognise the knowledge and skills they have gained through their prior informal or experiential learning, in order to:

- increase their self-confidence as learners
- enable them to make an explicit connection between informal learning situations and formal learning opportunities, to support their transition into formal learning
- identify educational/career opportunities in a wider sense
- become familiar with different genres of writing and learning strategies.

RPL 2: The RPL2 module will be a vehicle for achieving advanced/specific credit for prior informal or experiential learning within the University. It is planned to discuss and negotiate with departments appropriate routes for their programmes. Development is currently taking place within the Institute of Education concerning one professional programme.

The existing RPL module is a first attempt to combine a guidance-led, structured, academic group and individual process to help potential undergraduates to carry out a self-recognition and evaluation process to articulate their learning goals within a supported PDP approach.

The RPL 2 module will be available for those who have successfully completed RPL1, or for those who come with substantial prior experiential learning (particularly professional experience of at least three years), and a professional and educational goal already articulated. The level at which this module will be awarded is still being discussed.

The new RPL1 module is being piloted with two distinct groups in spring 2006:

- 1 the current part-time access cohort (as a credit-bearing option in semester 2) for those who wish to make their experience explicit through structured reflection and portfolio writing
- 2 a group of experienced but unqualified care home managers from a local authority (still to be confirmed), in conjunction with training officers from the Dementia Services Development Centre.

The VaLEx toolkit developed by the VaLEx project comprises:

- a learners' guide to RPL
- a tutors' pack, containing:
 - a practical guide
 - a theoretical guide
 - support materials.

These materials are available in Part 2 of the resource pack.

Organisation: Volunteer Development Scotland (in partnership with the University of Dundee)

Contact details (for further information):

Elizabeth Holden

Volunteer Development Scotland (VDS)

Unit 157-158

Stirling Enterprise Park

Stirling

FK7 7RP

Tel: 01786 47959

Email: elizabeth.holden@vds.org.uk

Context of RPL process/development

- **With other organisations:** partnership work with University of Dundee.

Purpose of RPL process/development

- To enable learners to gain entry to/credit within a particular programme.

Details of key features of RPL process

Volunteer Development Scotland, in partnership with the University of Dundee, offers a pathway on Volunteer Management within the BA in Professional Development.

Students require a minimum of HNC for access. However, where experienced managers cannot meet this requirement, VDS works with them to build a portfolio of prior learning that the University can recognise as an entry to the pathway at level 8.

VDS provides support for students to build a portfolio for RPL and submit it to the University. In the initial stages, the University supported VDS staff in training them to consider methods of gathering suitable evidence.

To date, three students – all involved in working with and managing volunteers – have entered the programme by RPL routes. One of them agreed to share her experience of RPL for the following case study.

Case study: building a portfolio on prior learning

In August 2004, I was presented with the opportunity to work towards achieving a Volunteer Development Scotland Award in Volunteer Management. Having worked in the voluntary sector for over six years, I had a wealth of practical experience, but no written qualifications to back it up. Therefore I jumped at the chance to gain this qualification.

The qualification itself is completed through the University of Dundee, and there was a basic qualification entry level which I did not have. To overcome this, VDS considered my application on the merits of the experience I had gained working in the voluntary sector, and felt that I should collate a portfolio of my prior learning in order to make my case for entry to the course.

The thought of creating a portfolio filled me with terror – all I could think was, ‘There’s no way I’ll be accepted’. However, when I actually began putting on paper the work I had done over the years, my confidence began to grow. I approached previous and current managers for supporting references, which they duly gave. My supporting statement allowed me to detail various pieces of work I had completed, and by the end of the process my train of thought had changed completely. I had more confidence in my own abilities and finally thought, ‘Yes, I can do this!’

With support from VDS, I completed my record of prior learning, and on submission it was accepted by the University. This was a great step forward for me and gave me the opportunity to join the degree programme in Professional Development. I am delighted to say that, to date, I have successfully completed several modules.

Credit transfer

Organisation: The Open University (OU) in Scotland

Contact details (for further information):

Robin Harding

Science Staff Tutor

The Open University in Scotland

10 Drumsheugh Gardens

Edinburgh

EH3 7QJ

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Context of credit transfer process/development

- **Within a programme:** Open University named honours degrees.
- **Towards a qualification:** Open University general degrees.
- **With other organisations:** credit rating of courses provided by professional bodies – mapping their courses against OU courses.

Details of key features of credit transfer process

The OU has a detailed website which gives a good picture of how it deals with credit transfer (<http://www3.open.ac.uk/credit-transfer/index.shtml>).

Students need to provide detailed information on courses/qualifications.

Credit transfer towards OU general degrees is relatively simple; it is more complex if students want to use credit towards named degrees. The OU needs to ensure that the credit coming in meets the learning outcomes for the particular programme.

Organisation: University of Paisley

Contact details (for further information):

Lea McKay

APL Coordinator

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University of Paisley

Paisley

PA1 2BE

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Email: lea.mckay@paisley.ac.uk

Context of credit transfer process/development

- **Within a programme:** It is possible to transfer credit into most programmes within the University, providing all prerequisites are met. It may not be possible to transfer credit where the qualification is governed by a professional body, for example nurse training or teacher training.
- **Towards a qualification:** As above. Credit can be transferred up to a maximum of 50 per cent of the exiting level (eg 300 points for an unclassified degree).
- **Across the organisation:** The University encourages the transfer of credit where appropriate.
- **With other organisations:** The University has an accreditation process whereby a credit recommendation can be given to courses/training delivered by other organisations. The procedure for this is currently under review.

Details of key features of credit transfer process

Credit transferred into a programme should be entered as specific credit. The amount of specific credit that can be counted towards an award is seen as an admissions issue and is the responsibility of admissions officers. It is hoped that the 'Banner' system currently being developed will facilitate the recording of all incidences of credit transfer.

At present, transferred credit is only recorded on the transcripts of part-time students within the Centre for Lifelong Learning. For these students, specific credit is entered by education guidance advisers, who effectively act as admissions officers for part-time programmes. Education guidance advisers make use of resources such as the OU website and the National Information Recognition Centre website (www.NARIC.org.uk).

We are currently developing a credit database which will act as a resource for university staff. Credit already held is entered at the start of the programme. Appropriate credit can be gained outside the University and transferred into a student's programme as specific credit at any time.

Organisation: Robert Gordon University

Contact details (for further information):

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Context of credit transfer process/development

- **Within a programme:** Master of Arts Higher Education Learning and Teaching (MA HELT).
- **Towards a qualification:** postgraduate qualifications.
- **Across the organisation:** quality assurance and enhancement.
- **With other organisations:** Higher Education Academy and other UK higher education institutions.

Details of key features of credit transfer process

- Information on the possibility of credit transfer under the auspices of APL is provided to all applicants as part of the course entry requirements.
- At a pre-process meeting with applicants, appropriate advice and guidance on credit transfer are given on a needs basis.
- Credit transfer for the course can be based on both formal and informal learning. The amount of credit transfer allowed is determined by mapping applicants' prior certificated or outcomes of prior experiential learning against the HELT course's intended learning outcomes as well as the limit permitted under the University's academic regulations.
- All decisions made by the course leader with regard credit transfer must be ratified by the relevant course/programme assessment board.
- The process is underpinned by the SCQF national guidelines and managed at school/course level using procedures centrally devised for the institution by the Academic Affairs Department.

Part 2: Resource documents

University of Abertay, Dundee

Procedures for the accreditation of prior learning

1 Policy

The University is committed to the principle of credit accumulation and transfer. Appropriate learning, wherever it occurs – provided it can be assessed – may be recognised for academic credit towards an award. Credit for prior learning may be gained via APL or APEL. In either case, this credit may be used to facilitate entry to a programme of study or to contribute, within appropriate limits, towards the achievement of part of a stage of a programme.

2 APL and APEL

The accreditation of prior learning refers to the procedures the University employs to award credit for learning which has taken place in an educational or training programme. Such learning may be certified by a recognised institution or it may not.

The accreditation of prior experiential learning is the process whereby the University evaluates learning which has taken place through life or work experiences. The outcomes of the learning experience will not normally have been previously formally assessed or certificated.

In both APL and APEL, the learning must be current. Currency is concerned with ensuring that the actual concepts learnt have not become dated, and that the student can still use what has been learnt to underpin further study. Normally, learning should have taken place within the past five years, unless there is evidence of activities that have maintained the currency of the learning (eg using what has been learnt in the course of carrying out an occupation).

The most common application of APL or APEL is where students wish to claim that they have already achieved the learning outcomes of part of a stage of a programme and wish to be exempted from studying one or more modules. APL or APEL may also be used where applicants to a programme of study do not possess the formal entry qualifications and wish to claim that they have achieved an equivalent level of learning.

The maximum amount of credit transfer is set out in the academic regulations. In advising students on whether to proceed with an APL/APEL application, consideration should also be given to the consequences of adopting a part-time study mode, such as the potential impact on financial support from the Student Awards Agency for Scotland or missing out on some programme-wide learning experiences.

2.1 APL

The learning considered for accreditation may be either formal learning or non-formal learning.

Formal learning takes place within the context of programmes delivered by learning and training providers, such as a higher education institution or a training organisation. This learning will have been assessed, credit rated and certificated.

Non-formal learning takes place within learning and training activities that do not lead to formal certification or credit rating. The learning may or may not have been assessed. Typical activities may be company training schemes, trade union programmes and continuing professional development (CPD) courses.

In order to make a judgement on a student's prior learning, a detailed outline of the content of the learning undertaken, along with any formal certificate of the award, must be submitted. To authenticate the learning it may be necessary for a university representative to contact the institution named on the certificate to authenticate the application.

2.2 APEL

In APEL, the learning will have taken place as part of the applicant's work or life experience. The applicant will be required to undertake assessment to enable the validation of the learning outcomes, as the University can only award credit for assessed learning. A large number of assessment tools are available, but the most common are the submission of a portfolio of work or carrying out a formal written assessment.

3 Admission with advanced standing or entry to the first stage of a programme

In most cases, the judgement of whether a qualification is deemed equivalent to the specified entry qualifications (into the first stage or a subsequent stage of a programme) is a matter for the admissions tutor and does not invoke the APL process. APL is only to be used where there are difficulties in obtaining information about the standing of the qualification from standard reference sources, or where the applicant is seeking exemption from part of a stage of a programme.

Claims for considering prior experiential learning for entry to a programme are made in the context of the expected achieved outcomes to fulfil the normal entry qualifications of a programme. The maximum amount of credit for APEL for entry with advanced standing to undergraduate programmes is normally 120 credits; for entry to postgraduate programmes it is normally 240 credits at SCQF levels 9 and 10.

4 Making a claim for APL or APEL

Claims for APL or APEL credit and the subsequent award of any credit are made in accordance with section B4 of the University's academic regulations. The maximum amount of credit that can be claimed is defined by regulations B4.6 and B4.7. Regulation B4.5 precludes credit being claimed for part of a module or part of a CPD short course.

Double-counting of credit must be avoided. For example, a qualification and experience equivalent to that qualification cannot both be assigned credit. If a programme structure contains a 15-credit module, it is not possible to assign 30 credits to achievement of the module outcomes. If a qualification has been used as an entry qualification, it cannot also be used for credit against a subsequent stage of a university programme.

Applicants are responsible for initiating claims and for supplying the University with the relevant information within a defined timescale.

The University's APL/APEL coordinator provides applicants with first-line advice and assistance. Once an applicant has contacted the APL/APEL coordinator and discussed the general basis for a claim, the coordinator arranges an interview with the relevant adviser(s). The adviser establishes whether the applicant is eligible to proceed with a claim for APL/APEL and, if so, assists with establishing how best to proceed with the claim.

Applications should normally be made before the beginning of the academic year in which the credit is to be applied. Exceptionally, APL/APEL claims in respect of modules delivered in semester 2 may be made up to two months before the start of the delivery of the modules. In structuring their programme of studies, students must not assume APL/APEL credits to have been granted until they have received an official statement to that effect.

An adviser, who is a subject specialist, helps the applicant to prepare a claim by assisting in identifying the type of evidence required. An assessor then matches the level of prior learning with the modules for which credit is to be claimed, based on a comparison of learning outcomes. In doing this, the assessor takes note of the achievement of relevant stage or programme outcomes.

Once the assessor has completed the examination of the evidence, they inform the APL/APEL coordinator, who arranges for the student's record to include the credits awarded and for the student to be informed of the outcome of the claim. In accordance with regulation B4.9, no grades are associated with the credit awarded unless Senate has specifically approved this through a programme-specific regulation.

All successful claims for credit are recorded on the student records system and are presented to the relevant programme assessment boards. All credits awarded are recorded on the students' transcripts.

5 Format of a claim for non-formal APL or APEL

Claims for non-formal APL or APEL may take the form of one or more of the following:

- a reflective account
- project reports
- an interview/oral assessment
- assessment on demand (eg sitting an examination paper or carrying out an assignment)
- mapping of learning outcomes
- a portfolio of work
- a progress file or other record of achievement of learning, such as the proposed European CV which forms part of the Europass.

In some APEL claims based on work experience, verification of the claim may require the use of references from an employer.

The learning must be current. The normal limit is that the learning should have taken place within the past five years. However, this depends on the subject area; for instance, in some advanced technology areas the period of currency may be shorter than five years. There may also be situations in which the learning took place more than five years ago, but evidence of recent experience has enhanced the currency of the knowledge or skills.

6 Role of the APL/APEL coordinator

The coordinator is the University's central point of contact for all enquiries regarding APL and APEL. Likewise, the coordinator maintains communicative links with the advisers and assessors and ensures that the Registrar is kept informed of any credits awarded through APL or APEL. The coordinator establishes and maintains administrative systems for APL and APEL, and provides a support mechanism for staff and students throughout the period of the APL/APEL claim.

7 Role of the adviser

The adviser's role is to provide advice and guidance to the student throughout the process of compiling a claim for credit. In the case of APL based on certified learning, the adviser's role is to assist applicants in identifying the relevant information on their programme of study. If the learning has taken place within the SCQF, this process is made easier because of the ready access to information on credit volume and level; normally, the adviser role can be readily carried out by the relevant module tutor or divisional leader without the need for additional training.

In general, the support provided for APEL and non-formal APL involves:

- encouraging reflection
- helping to identify the sources of learning
- helping with selection of the evidence of learning
- providing feedback on the presentation of the submission.

The adviser also provides subject-specific advice that focuses on the subject matter of the learning. This involves:

- advising if the subject matter is likely to be at the level claimed
- clarifying the meaning of the learning outcomes within modules and programmes as well as agreeing the student's own learning outcomes
- agreeing on the structure of the submission and the criteria for assessment
- advising on which types of evidence are appropriate to the learning outcomes and the level of analysis required
- advising how to relate the learning from experience to the learning outcomes
- advising on the amount of credit to be claimed, including consideration of whether the success of subsequent study may be put in jeopardy by missing out on the opportunity to study specific modules against which credit might be claimed.

8 Role of the assessor

The assessor assesses and authenticates the details contained in the application. The assessor is then able to match the amount of specific credit that can count towards the award.

In general, the assessor must ensure that the evidence contained within the submission is satisfactory and appropriate. To this end, the assessor exercises academic judgement and considers:

Acceptability: the match between the evidence and the learning outcomes. Is the evidence relevant and reliable?

Sufficiency: is the evidence sufficient to demonstrate achievement of the outcomes? Is the volume of credit appropriate?

Authenticity: whether the evidence is clearly related to the student's own learning

Currency: the topicality of the learning.

9 Staff development

Staff development for the coordinator, advisers and assessors is arranged by CELT. In determining appropriate staff development, CELT takes into account current specifications for training in assessment processes, for example SQA units for assessors and verifiers.

10 Charges for APL and APEL

The University normally makes a charge for processing applications for APL/APEL credits. This charge is payable prior to consideration of the application and is not refundable, irrespective of the outcome of the application. The charges for APL/APEL are determined by the Planning and Resources Committee in the same way as other fees.

11 Information on APL and APEL

It is recommended that the student guide to APL and APEL be revised in the light of these procedures.

It is recommended that the student guide to APEL, these procedures and a summary of the University's approach to the recognition of prior learning be publicised on the University's intranet site and promoted as a service aimed at enhancing access to programmes and, in the context of lifelong learning, recognising credit for previous learning.

12 Complaints and appeals

It is recommended that both the student complaints policy and the academic appeals policy be modified to provide explicit references to their application to complaints and appeals arising from claims for APL/APEL.

13 Quality assurance of APL and APEL

Both APL and APEL are subject to oversight by external examiners, and any APL or APEL at SCQF level 9 and above should be brought to the attention of the relevant external examiner. The external examiner's role is concerned with providing a view on the academic standards, policy and procedures associated with APL or APEL. External examiners do not have authority to change APL or APEL decisions.

To help in ensuring a consistent approach across the University, it is recommended that the APL/APEL coordinator should convene an annual meeting of advisers to consider the operation of the accreditation process. The notes of this meeting would be submitted to the Quality Assurance Committee. It is also recommended that the operation of APL/APEL should be considered within the subject review process.

14 Arrangements for administering APL and APEL

The responsibility for maintaining the administrative arrangements for APL and APEL – including the publication of appropriate information and the maintenance of any associated forms – shall lie with the Registrar, who will liaise with heads of school and services as appropriate.

15 Future developments – RPL

The background to these procedures, including the principles underlying their revision in 2005, is contained in the Quality Assurance Committee's discussion paper on the accreditation of prior learning. These procedures take fully into account the development of the SCQF and the definitions of formal and informal learning as defined within the Bologna process. In 2005, SCQF produced a consultation paper on the recognition of prior learning. The University's procedures currently only address the APEL aspects of RPL, that is, the allocation of credit to prior experiential learning. RPL also includes the recognition of prior experiential learning as part of an informal learning process that may eventually lead to the allocation of credit.

16 Further guidance

Further guidance on APL/APEL may be found in the following sources:

QAA (2004) *Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning*, available at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/apl/default.asp>

SCQF (2005) *Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Informal Learning*, available at <http://scqf.org.uk>

UCAS (2005) *Curriculum and Qualifications – Accreditation of Prior Learning*, available at <http://www.ucas.ac.uk/candq/apl/>

Document revised to take into account the discussion at the Quality Assurance Committee on 1 June 2005.

Appendix: Glossary of terms for APL

APEL	Accreditation of prior experiential learning – the process of allocating credit to learning that has taken place in the past through informal learning.
APL	Accreditation of prior learning – the process of allocating credit to learning that has taken place in the past through either formal or non-formal learning.
Formal learning	Learning which takes place within education or training programmes and is both assessed and credit rated.
General credit	This refers to credit which is awarded for learning which does not relate to a particular programme of study. Like all credits it must be assigned an SCQF level.
Non-formal learning	Learning which takes place through specific learning or training activities, for example in the workplace, voluntary sector or a trade union, which may be (but not always) assessed and which is not credit rated.
Informal learning	Learning which takes place through life and work experiences. Informal learning is rarely assessed or credit rated.
RPL	Recognition of prior learning – the general term for the recognition of past informal learning either as a formative process or as a summative process in which credit is awarded. The latter case is referred to as APEL within Abertay University.
Specific credit	This refers to credit that can be related to the learning outcomes of an Abertay module or stage of a programme.

Napier University

Student guide to RPL for BA Hons Financial Services

BA Honours in Financial Services: the flexible programme

Demonstration of prior learning

Introduction

As you will be entering the degree programme at an advanced stage, we must be satisfied that you have the skills, ability and knowledge to do so and part of this will be accounted for by other qualifications which you may hold. However, in addition, there are a number of learning outcomes which students achieve in the first two years of study which help to equip them for the challenges they face in the latter part of the degree programme.

In order to confirm that you have achieved these outcomes through your work experience or other studies, we would like you to complete the attached questionnaire which asks you to provide a reflective account of your experience to date. There are six sections which cover the following areas:

- 1 prior qualifications
- 2 business knowledge and awareness
- 3 information in business
- 4 quantitative skills
- 5 other, more generic skills
- 6 any other relevant information.

Some guidance is provided on what we are seeking under each of the headings. However, one way of approaching the questions is to think of a situation you were in or a task you had to undertake, the action you took which demonstrated the use or application of the particular skill, experience or knowledge, and the result you achieved. Where you feel it is appropriate, please attach any material which provides evidence of the learning you have achieved.

Napier University

BA Honours in Financial Services: the flexible programme

Demonstration of prior learning

1 Prior qualifications

Please list your qualifications and the dates when they were achieved.

2 Business knowledge and awareness

In this section, we are looking for evidence of:

- general business knowledge
- specific awareness of key business areas and their application within a business environment.

Set out ways in which your work experience to date has provided you with an understanding of the following business areas.

2.1 Economics

What do you understand by the term economics and how do you feel your knowledge of economics is reflected in your work? In what ways have you used economic data at work and how has it helped you to achieve your objectives?

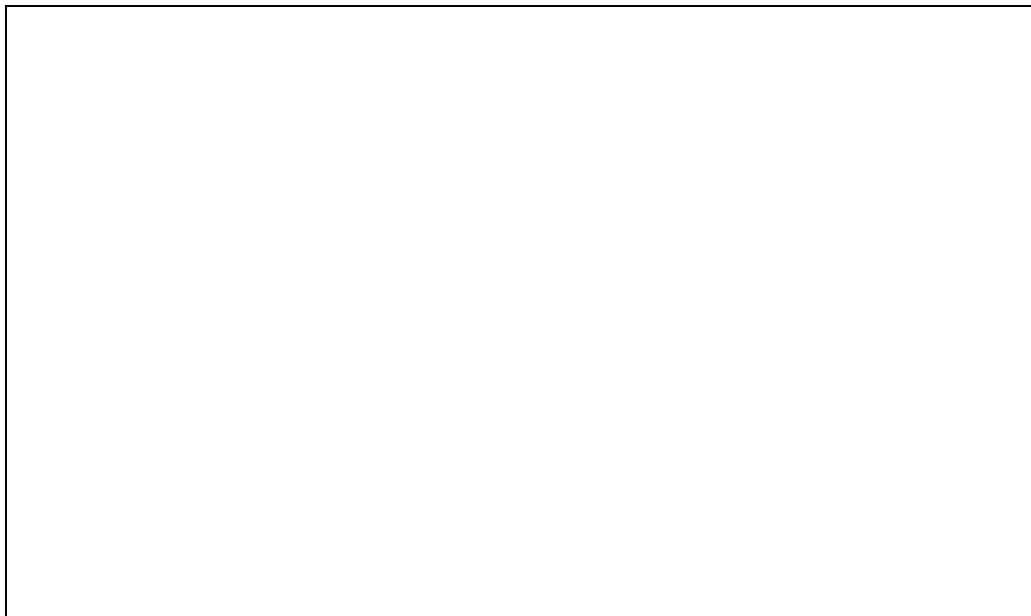
2.2 *Accounting*

In what ways do you use accounting and finance at work? What do you think is the purpose of a company's annual report and accounts, and who would use the report and accounts and for what purpose?



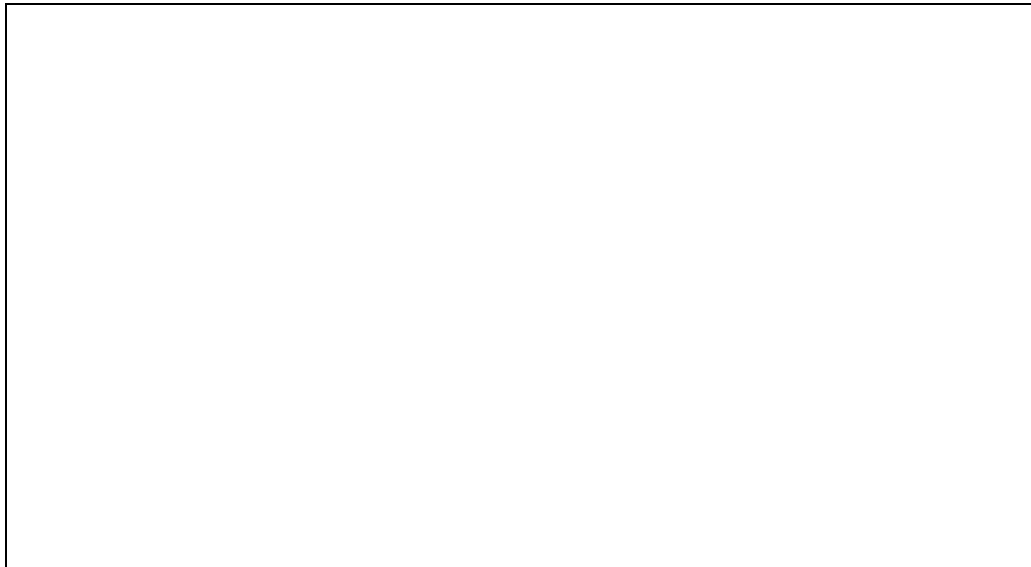
2.3 *Marketing*

What do you think marketing is? In what ways are you involved in marketing within your organisation? Provide some examples of the ways in which your organisation's marketing strategy is implemented.



2.4 Law

What legislation governs or has an impact on the way in which you do your job?
Provide examples to illustrate your answer.

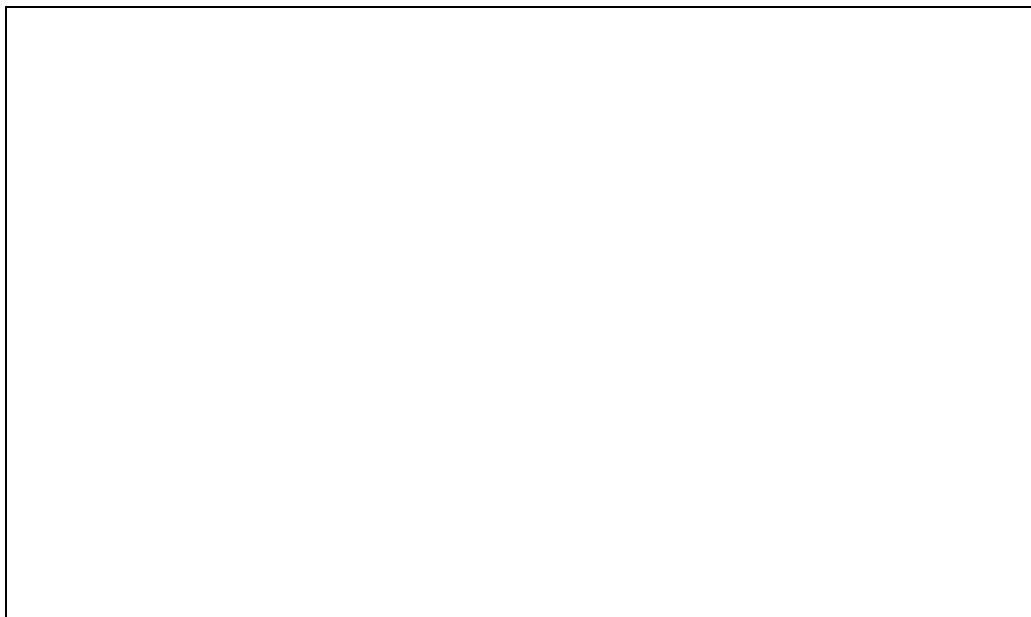


3 Information in business

In this section, we are looking for evidence of:

- understanding of the importance and uses of information in a business environment
- the ability to interpret data for business use.

Use the space below to detail some of the ways in which you use information and information systems at work, and the benefits their use provides. How do you use information and how does it help you to do your job?



4 Quantitative skills

In this section, we are looking for evidence of:

- experience of using information technology (IT) in the workplace in:
 - collecting and using data
 - problem-solving.

Provide examples of some of the systems and/or programmes you have experience of using at work. How do they work, what is their purpose, and what have you achieved through their use?



5 Generic skills

In this section, we are looking for evidence of your ability to:

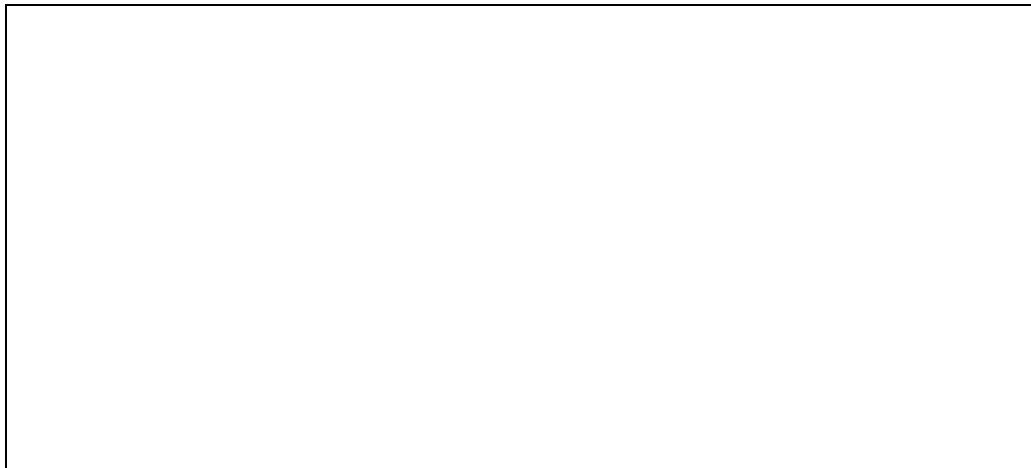
- communicate effectively both orally and in writing
- work independently and as part of a team
- use initiative
- research a topic and report on your findings.

Use the space below to demonstrate, using examples, how you have acquired these skills through your work experience to date.

5.1 Effective communication



5.2 *Working independently*



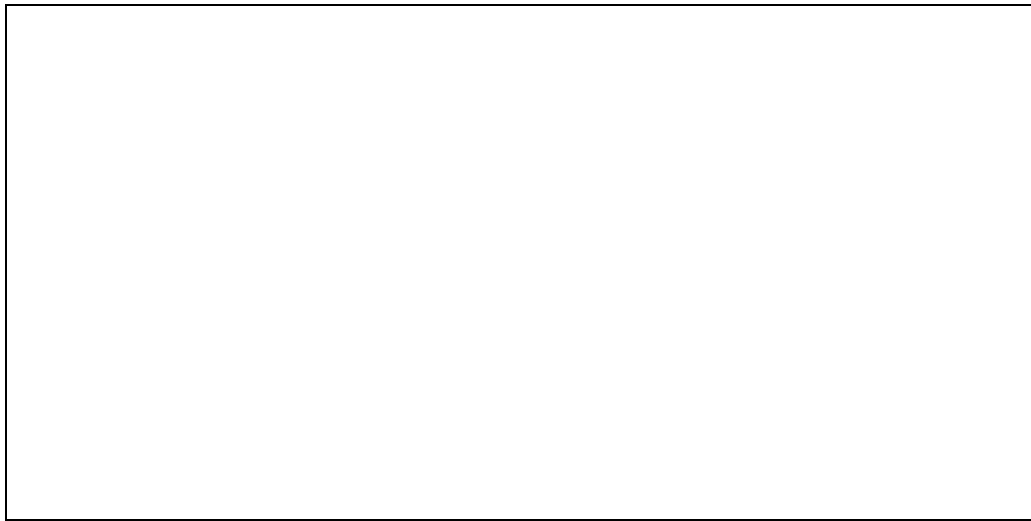
5.3 *Working in a team*



5.4 *Using initiative*



5.5 *Researching a topic*



6 Any other relevant information

(Completion of this section is optional)



Napier University

Assessor's guide to RPL for BA Hons Financial Services, Financial Planning Pathway

Accreditation of prior learning

Assessment of reflective account

The assessor should consider each section of the applicant's reflective account and comment on the extent to which the responses and any accompanying evidence demonstrate the achievement of learning under each heading. Finally, an overall assessment of the account should be made and a decision taken on the suitability of the applicant for entry to the programme. The appropriate entry point should be identified on the basis of the content of the reflective account and the applicant's prior qualifications.

1 Prior qualifications

Confirm that these are appropriate for entry to the programme.

Assessor's comments

2 Business knowledge and awareness

Look for evidence of:

- general business knowledge
- specific awareness of key business areas:
 - economics
 - accounting
 - marketing
 - law
- appreciation of the application of these areas within a business environment.

Assessor's comments

3 Information in business

Look for evidence of:

- understanding of the importance and uses of information in a business environment
- the ability to interpret data for business use.

Assessor's comments

4 Quantitative skills

Look for evidence of:

- experience of using IT in the workplace
- the use of technology in collecting and using data and in problem-solving.

Assessor's comments

5 Generic skills

Look for evidence of the ability to:

- communicate effectively orally and in writing
- work independently and as part of a team
- use initiative
- research a topic and report on the findings.

Assessor's comments

6 Any other relevant information

Note any points which have relevance to the application and accreditation processes.

Assessor's comments

Overall assessment

(1) The applicant's prior qualifications and experiential learning, as demonstrated in the reflective account, are sufficient to allow entry to the Financial Planning Pathway with the following level of accreditation:

270 credits 300 credits 330 credits 360 credits (circle as appropriate)

(2) The applicant has not demonstrated a sufficient level of experiential learning to allow entry to the Financial Planning Pathway.

Delete (1) or (2) as appropriate.

University of Paisley
APEL Working Group

Recognition of prior learning
– staff guidelines

The APEL Working Group reviewed the University of Paisley's APL/APEL policy and procedures. Membership of the working group was drawn from each of the then faculties, Registry and the Department of Continuing Education and was chaired by the APL coordinator. These guidelines have been developed drawing on the experience of both Paisley and other universities in this area over the past 10 years.

Introduction

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- The University's appeals procedures apply.
- Credit awarded should be recorded on the student's academic transcript wherever possible.

Can both APL and APEL be claimed?

It may well be that a claim for credit includes both certificated and experiential learning. This is not a problem, so long as appropriate evidence can be provided to support the claim.

Can an award be gained through APL or APEL alone?

The short answer to this is NO. Individuals are expected to build on prior learning through study at the University. If, for example, a student had gained 120 points at SCQF level 7 (SHE level 1) and 15 points at SCQF level 8 (SHE level 2) through a combination of APL and APEL, s/he would not be eligible for a Certificate of Higher Education even though s/he would have more than the required number of points, namely 120 at SCQF level 7 (SHE level 1). However, the award of a Diploma of Higher Education could be gained by accumulating a further 105 credit points (seven modules) at SCQF level 8 (SHE level 2) through study at the University.

As a general rule of thumb, students can be awarded through APL/APEL a maximum of 50 per cent of the credit points at the level at which they wish to exit with an award. Hence the maximum prior credit which can be given towards an award is as follows:

Certificate of Higher Education	60 points at SCQF level 7 (SHE level 1)
Diploma of Higher Education	120 points at SCQF level 7+ (SHE level 1) 60 points at SCQF level 8 (SHE level 2)

Degree	120 points at SCQF level 7+ (SHE level 1)
	120 points at SCQF level 8+ (SHE level 2)
	60 points at SCQF level 9 (SHE level 3)
Postgraduate Diploma	60 points at SCQF level 11 (SHE level M)
Master's	90 points at SCQF level 11 (SHE level M)

Identification of experiential learning

This is not an easy task and guidance is needed. Where a group of students are considering APEL claims, workshops are held to explain and discuss the procedure for making a claim. These are facilitated by the APL coordinator. If this is not possible, students are invited to attend an information session with the APL coordinator. Where schools have developed expertise in APEL, this function may be carried out by the appropriate admissions officer or programme leader.

Writing statements of learning

Statements of learning should be relevant to the award the student is working towards and should be at the appropriate level. Credit can be awarded at SCQF levels 7, 8 and 9 (SHE levels 1, 2 and 3) at undergraduate level, and at SCQF level 11 (SHE level M) for postgraduate awards. For more information on identifying levels, please refer to the sections on academic levels, below. Students need advice and support when constructing statements of learning. They should be allocated a supervisor with expertise in the appropriate subject area.

Each statement of learning should reflect the following:

- the situation(s) in which learning was achieved
- the level of supervision
- the complexity of the situation in which the learning was achieved.

Statements of learning should clearly specify how prior learning may contribute to the specific programme of study. They should reflect the ways in which the individual has changed as a result of going through a learning process. This may include the following:

Subject-based statements reflecting knowledge and comprehension. The student should demonstrate the ability to apply this knowledge in different situations.

Personal statements, including interpersonal skills such as teamwork and negotiation and interpersonal qualities like motivation, initiative and critical self-reflection. Where credit is being claimed against a particular module (ie the student is matching the aims and objectives or learning outcomes of a taught module), the credit level is normally the level awarded to a student taking the module on a taught basis. If prior experiential learning does not fit with the aims and objectives or learning outcomes of a module, the student has to consider the issue of what level of learning is to be claimed and how best to transfer that learning into statements which can be effectively assessed. The credit awarded for prior learning is directly related to the complexity of knowledge and the difficulty of the subject matter. Students may find it useful to consider learning as having six facets, namely:

KNOWLEDGE, COMPREHENSION, APPLICATION, ANALYSIS, SYNTHESIS and EVALUATION.

Statements of learning should specify the cognitive skills that have been achieved, the complexity of the situation in which the learning has taken place, and whether the learning has been achieved independently or under supervision.

Statements of learning should make use of the following format:

‘As a result of prior and current learning I am able to show that I have.....’

The verb used should indicate the level of the credit claimed, for example:

- ‘understand’ reflects credit at SCQF level 7 (SHE level 1)
- ‘analyse’ reflects credit at SCQF level 8 (SHE level 2)
- ‘synthesise/evaluate’ reflects credit at SCQF level 9 (SHE level 3)

Reference should be made to the appropriate level descriptor when constructing statements of learning. This gives some idea of the terminology associated with each level.

Academic level

Once the applicant has a firm idea of the areas where significant learning may have occurred, s/he now needs to think about whether evidence of learning at the appropriate academic level can be provided. The following descriptors mirror those outlined within the SCQF and set out generic outcomes characteristic of each level. They are intended to provide a general understanding of each level and to allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning acquired informally or through courses or training programmes which have not been credit rated. They are intended to assist in determining levels of learning and the construction of statements of learning. It is not expected that all of the characteristics need be met.

SCQF level 7 (SHE level 1)

Knowledge and understanding

You should be able to demonstrate and/or work with:

- a broad knowledge of the subject/discipline in general
- knowledge that is imbedded in the main theories, concepts and principles
- an awareness of the evolving/changing nature of knowledge and understanding
- an understanding of the difference between explanations based in evidence and/or research and other forms of explanation and of the importance of this difference.

Practice: applied knowledge and understanding

You should be able to use some of the basic and routine professional skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with the subject/discipline in both routine and non-routine situations.

Generic cognitive skills

You should be able to:

- present and evaluate arguments, information and ideas which are routine to the subject/discipline
- use a range of approaches to address defined and/or routine problems and issues within familiar contexts.

Communication, information and communications technology (ICT) and numeracy skills

You should be able to use a wide range of routine skills and some advanced skills associated with the subject discipline. For example:

- convey complex ideas in a well-structured and coherent form
- use a range of forms of communication effectively in both familiar and new contexts
- use standard applications to process and obtain a variety of information and data
- use a range of numerical and graphical skills in combination
- use numerical and graphical data to measure progress and achieve goals/targets.

Autonomy, accountability and working with others

You should be able to:

- show some initiative and independence in carrying out defined activities at a professional level
- take supervision in less familiar areas of work
- take some managerial responsibility for the work of others within a defined and supervised structure
- manage limited resources within defined areas of work
- take the lead in implementing agreed plans in familiar or defined contexts
- take account of your own and others' roles and responsibilities in carrying out and evaluating tasks
- work with others in support of current professional practice under guidance.

SCQF level 8 (SHE level 2)

Knowledge and understanding

You should be able to demonstrate and/or work with:

- a broad knowledge of the scope, defining features and main areas of a subject discipline
- detailed knowledge in some areas
- understanding of a limited range of core theories, principles and contexts
- limited knowledge and understanding of some major current issues and specialisms
- an outline knowledge and understanding of research and equivalent academic processes.

Practice: applied knowledge and understanding

You should be able to:

- use a range of routine skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with a subject/discipline, a few of which are advanced or complex
- carry out routine lines of enquiry, development or investigation into professional-level problems and issues
- adapt routine practices within accepted standards.

Generic cognitive skills

You should be able to:

- undertake critical analysis, evaluation and/or synthesis of ideas, concepts, information and issues which are within the common understandings of the subject/discipline
- use a range of approaches to formulate evidence-based solutions/responses to defined and/or routine problems/issues
- critically evaluate evidence-based solutions/responses to defined and/or routine problems/issues.

Communication, ICT and numeracy skills

You should be able to use a range of routine skills and some advanced and specialised skills associated with the subject/discipline. For example:

- convey complex information to a range of audiences and for a range of purposes
- use a range of standard applications to process and obtain data
- use and evaluate numerical and graphical data to measure progress and achieve goals/targets.

Autonomy, accountability and working with others

You should be able to:

- exercise autonomy and initiative in some activities at a professional level
- take significant managerial and supervisory responsibility for the work of others in defined areas of work
- manage resources within defined areas of work
- take the lead on planning in familiar or defined contexts
- take continuing account of own and others' roles, responsibilities and contributions in carrying out and evaluating tasks
- work in support of current professional practice under guidance
- deal with ethical and professional issues in accordance with current professional and/or ethical codes or practices under guidance.

SCQF level 9 (SHE level 3)

Knowledge and understanding

You should be able to demonstrate and/or work with:

- a broad and integrated knowledge and understanding of the scope, main areas and boundaries of a subject/discipline
- a critical understanding of a selection of the main theories, principles, concepts and terminology
- knowledge that is detailed in some areas and/or knowledge of one or more specialisms that are informed by forefront developments.

Practice: applied knowledge and understanding

You should be able to:

- use a selection of the principal skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with the subject/discipline
- use a few skills, techniques, practices and/or materials that are specialised or advanced
- practise routine methods of enquiry and/or research
- practise in a range of professional-level contexts which include a degree of unpredictability.

Generic cognitive skills

You should be able to:

- undertake critical analysis, evaluation and/or synthesis of ideas, concepts, information and issues
- identify and analyse routine professional problems and issues
- draw on a range of sources in making judgements.

Communication, ICT and numeracy skills

You should be able to use a range of routine skills and some advanced and specialised skills in support of established practices in a subject/discipline. For example:

- make formal and informal presentations on standard/mainstream topics in the subject/discipline to a range of audiences
- use a range of IT applications to support and enhance work
- interpret, use and evaluate numerical and graphical data to achieve goals/targets.

Autonomy, accountability and working with others

You should be able to:

- exercise autonomy and initiative in some activities at a professional level
- take some responsibility for the work of others and for a range of resources

- practise in ways which take account of your own and others' roles and responsibilities
- work under guidance with qualified practitioners
- deal with ethical and professional issues in accordance with current professional and/or ethical codes or practices, seeking guidance where appropriate.

SCQF level 10 (SHE level 4)

As APEL claims are not graded, credit cannot be awarded at honours level.

SCQF level 11 (SHE level M)

Knowledge and understanding

You should be able to demonstrate and/or work with:

- knowledge that covers and integrates most, if not all, of the main areas of a subject/discipline, including their features, boundaries, terminology and conventions
- a critical understanding of the main theories, principles and concepts
- a critical understanding of a range of specialised theories, principles and concepts
- extensive, detailed, critical knowledge and understanding in one or more specialisms, much of which is at or informed by developments at the forefront of a subject/discipline
- critical awareness of current issues in a subject/discipline and one or more specialisms.

Practice: applied knowledge and understanding

You should be able to:

- use a significant range of the principal skills, techniques, practices and/or materials that are associated with a subject/discipline
- use a range of specialised skills, techniques, practices and/or materials which are at the forefront or are informed by forefront developments
- apply a range of standard and specialised research or equivalent instruments of enquiry
- plan and execute a significant project of research, investigation or development
- demonstrate originality or creativity in the application of knowledge, understanding and/or practices
- practise in a wide and often unpredictable variety of professional-level contexts.

Generic cognitive skills

You should be able to:

- apply critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis to issues which are at the forefront or informed by developments at the forefront of a subject/discipline

- identify, conceptualise and define new and abstract problems and issues
- develop original and creative responses to problems and issues
- critically review, consolidate and extend knowledge, skills, practices and thinking in a subject/discipline
- deal with complex issues and make informed judgements in situations in the absence of complete or consistent data/information.

Communication, ICT and numeracy skills

You should be able to use a range of advanced and specialised skills as appropriate to a subject/discipline. For example:

- communicate, using appropriate methods, to a range of audiences with different levels of knowledge/expertise
- communicate with peers, more senior colleagues and specialists
- use a wide range of software to support and enhance work at this level, and specify new software or refinements/improvements to existing software to increase effectiveness
- undertake critical evaluations of a wide range of numerical and graphical data.

Autonomy, accountability and working with others

You should be able to:

- exercise substantial autonomy and initiative in professional and equivalent activities
- take responsibility for your own work and/or significant responsibility for the work of others
- take responsibility for a significant range of resources
- demonstrate leadership and/or initiative and make an identifiable contribution to change and development
- practise in ways which draw on critical reflection on your own and others' roles and responsibilities
- deal with complex ethical and professional issues and make informed judgements on issues not addressed by current professional and/or ethical codes or practices.

Preparing a claim for APEL through portfolio preparation

Assessment is based on a portfolio, which should comprise three main elements:

- **a set of statements of learning**
- **a written account of learning**
- **a collection of appropriate and valid evidence in support of the claim.**

There will also be a presentation plus an oral examination for claims exceeding 30 credit points. The aim is to prove to the University that learning has been derived from experience. Each claim should demonstrate a conceptual and practical grasp of the subject area for which the claim is being made. It should be borne in mind that a

claim is for academic credit, and therefore knowledge and understanding as well as skills should be evident from the portfolio.

Portfolio preparation is an educational experience requiring students to relate past learning experiences to present educational goals. It tests their powers of self-evaluation and ability to present evidence in a clear, concise manner. Remember, credit is awarded for prior learning, not prior experience. It is important to avoid duplication. In the course of their career, people often duplicate experiences. Students should clearly demonstrate increased learning, for example 10 years' experience, not one year of experience repeated 10 times.

Sometimes people worry that they will not be able to provide enough evidence. This is not usually a problem, but remember that the quality rather than the quantity of evidence is important. Students should be encouraged to be selective and to avoid including everything that they have done in their portfolio. Too much evidence can make a portfolio confusing and therefore difficult to assess. The portfolio may contain supporting evidence which can be direct or indirect.

Direct evidence is something individuals have produced or for which they had main responsibility. Examples of direct evidence are:

- procedures designed by the individual
- project or research reports
- written articles
- training plans
- budgets or financial forecasts.

Indirect evidence is information about the individual gathered from others. Examples of indirect evidence are:

- statements from employers
- certificates/syllabus details from non-credit-rated courses
- letters of support from managers.

If evidence includes work produced within a team setting, the role played by the individual claiming credit should be clearly defined. This can be outlined within the written account. The material contained within a portfolio may not initially have been produced with assessment in mind. The written account should be used to set this evidence in the context of learning claimed. The written account should be approximately 3,000 to 5,000 words for each block of credit claimed. The minimum amount of credit that can be claimed is 15 points. The maximum is 300 points, although a claim of this magnitude would most likely include a large element of APL or certificated learning.

The **written account** complements the portfolio of evidence. It should be a focused piece of writing which places the learning achieved into context. It should draw all the supporting evidence produced into an academic framework, properly referenced and clearly demonstrating how learning has progressed.

The written account should provide a clear guide through the supplementary evidence contained within the portfolio. The written account should:

- refer to the statements of learning and the evidence
- describe how the learning has developed over time
- demonstrate the ability to reflect on learning

- clearly demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant academic theory.

Students should use the following pro forma to construct a proposal for the accreditation of prior experiential learning. Students considering making a claim for APL/APEL should be issued with a copy of the student guidelines for recognition of prior learning. These guidelines are available from the APL coordinator or from the Centre for Lifelong Learning. If you would like to discuss any aspect of the APL/APEL process, please contact me on 0141 848 3838.

Lea McKay

APL Coordinator

Room L113

Paisley Campus

APL/APEL proposal

You are now ready to start planning your portfolio. You will be assigned a supervisor from the appropriate academic department/s. Before meeting with your supervisor, prepare a brief outline of the areas for which you may wish to claim credit and an indication of the type of evidence you intend to produce.

Name

Subject area

Certificated learning

Statements of learning

Written account

Supplementary evidence

Points claimed

Level

Assessor 1

Assessor 2

Approved by:

Admissions officer

Programme leader

Module coordinator Lea McKay, APL Coordinator, University of Paisley, PAISLEY PA1 2BE, Tel: 0141 848 3838

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University of Paisley
APEL Working Group

**Recognition of prior learning –
student guidelines**

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- Credit awarded should be recorded on the student's academic transcript wherever possible.

Can both APL and APEL be claimed?

It may well be that a claim for credit includes both certificated and experiential learning. This is not a problem, so long as appropriate evidence can be provided to support the claim.

Can an award be gained through APL or APEL alone?

The short answer to this is NO. Individuals are expected to build on prior learning through study at the University. If, for example, a student had gained 120 points at SCQF level 7 (SHE level 1) and 15 points at SCQF level 8 (SHE level 2) through a combination of APL and APEL, s/he would not be eligible for a Certificate of Higher Education even though s/he had more than the required number of points, namely 120 at SCQF level 7 (SHE level 1). However, the award of a Diploma of Higher Education could be gained by accumulating a further 105 credit points (seven modules) at SCQF level 8 (SHE level 3) through study at the University.

As a general rule of thumb, students can be awarded through APL/APEL a maximum of 50 per cent of the credit points at the level at which they wish to exit with an award. Hence the maximum prior credit which can be given towards an award is as follows:

Certificate of Higher Education	60 points at SCQF level 7 (SHE level 1)
Diploma of Higher Education	120 points at SCQF level 7+ (SHE level 1) 60 points at SCQF level 8 (SHE level 2)

Degree	120 points at SCQF level 7+ (SHE level 1)
	120 points at SCQF level 8+ (SHE level 2)
	60 points at SCQF level 9 (SHE level 3)
Postgraduate Diploma	60 points at SCQF level 11 (SHE level M)
Master's	90 points at SCQF level 11 (SHE level M)

Identification of experiential learning

This is not an easy task and guidance is needed. Where a group of students are considering APEL claims, workshops are held to explain and discuss the procedure for making a claim. These are facilitated by the APL coordinator. If this is not possible, students are invited to attend an information session with the APL coordinator. Where schools have developed expertise in APEL, this function may be carried out by the appropriate admissions officer or programme leader.

As indicated, making a claim for APEL relies on the ability to identify significant learning which has its source in experience. The following exercise is designed for use in a group setting to facilitate the exchange of ideas among group members and to identify factors which may make an experience significant. If you are working through this manual on your own, proceed to the **Reflecting on experience** section. All exercises are to help you to identify significant learning. They are not assessed and do not form part of a claim for learning.

Exercise 1 (I Marshall, 1991)

One of the many things you have in common with everyone else in this room is that you learn from experience. You are also unique in that you can never be sure that what you learn, and how well you remember it, will be at all like other people in the group. In order that you might learn something about the ways in which you and other people in your group are similar and different, will you please:

Stage I (5 mins)

Think about an experience from which you have learned something that was, or still is, very important to you, and you are willing to tell other people about. Can you also say why the memory is so strong, and anything about your feelings.

What I am thinking of is.....

The memory is so strong because.....

Stage II (5 mins)

Work in pairs. Include the staff tutor if necessary. Take turns telling (2 mins) then listening. Briefly describe your memory and why your recall is so vivid.

Stage III (10 mins)

Join up with another pair. Describe to the other couple your partner's experience and the feelings surrounding it.

Stage IV (10 mins)

In your foursome, discuss any common strands that run through your shared experiences, or indeed any great differences. Write down some main points.

Stage V

Rejoin the large group for review.

Reflecting on experience

This involves looking back on a particular learning situation to identify what you have actually learned and to become aware of the theories or abstract concepts you have applied in this and subsequent learning situations. The following learning cycle and exercise 2, below, are designed to help you to identify from your wealth of experience where significant learning may have occurred.

Learning cycle

Stage 1: Learning begins with a concrete experience – any experience or ‘event’. This may be a specific experience, or a series of related tasks/experiences (such as a job you have done).

Stage 2: The experience or event may ‘make us think’. If we do, we move into stage 2 of the cycle.

Stage 3: Thinking about the experience may result in a realisation that ‘there is more to it than meets the eye’, and that the experience is simply an isolated example of a pattern of things. We may begin to ‘make connections’, to form ideas or theories about what that pattern is. We make generalisations about the experience. In academic terms, we ‘conceptualise’. We may, of course, then reinforce those ideas by repeating similar experiences and, maybe, observing similar results.

Stage 4: However, we may go on to apply those ideas to novel or different situations in order to test them out. If our ideas are borne out in practice, then the ‘lesson has been truly learnt’ and is likely to be applied in future situations/experiences, and so the cycle may be repeated.

(Source: Learning from Experience Trust)

Personal chronology

The next step is to draw up a personal chronology linked to your academic goals or the areas against which you wish to claim credit. This differs from a typical CV, which describes what you did rather than what you learned. To draw up a personal chronology, identify experiences and detail what you did, what you learned and how that learning was achieved. This is a preliminary exercise and you should be as brief as possible. Indicate sources of supplementary evidence which will help to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and personal qualities you possess. If possible, link this to learning outcomes from the area(s) for which you wish to claim APEL. You should be selective and focus on the knowledge, skills and qualities that have been developed.

Now that you have catalogued your experience in the relevant area(s), you will probably have noticed that it is difficult to separate learning from doing. The following exercise is designed to help you to focus on areas where significant learning has taken place.

Exercise 2

Stage 1: Think of an experience which was significant for you. Relate this to the area for which you wish to claim APEL.

Stage 2: Ask yourself questions about the learning experience.

- What happened and why?
- Who else was involved?

- What outcomes were experienced?
- What were your thoughts and feelings?

Stage 3: Discuss with a partner (if in a group). Write down the key features of your experience.

Stage 4: Describe how the experience changed you.

- What lessons did it teach you?
- How did your attitudes, judgements and feelings change?
- How did your thoughts/feelings affect your behaviour?
- What connections/patterns of behaviour did you recognise?
- What knowledge/skills did you gain?

Stage 5: Describe any subsequent situations where

- you used the lessons learned, skills acquired and/or knowledge gained
- your handling of a situation was better as a result of the previous experience
- it changed the way you did things.

Writing statements of learning

Statements of learning should be relevant to the award you are working towards and should be at the appropriate level. Credit can be awarded at SCQF levels 7, 8 and 9 (SHE levels 1, 2 and 3) at undergraduate level, and at SCQF level 11 (SHE level M) for postgraduate awards. For more information on identifying levels please refer to the sections on academic levels, below. You will be allocated an APEL supervisor. Your supervisor will have expertise in the subject area of your claim for credit, and will provide you with support and advice on writing statements of learning and on gathering evidence for your portfolio.

Each statement of learning should reflect the following:

- the situation(s) in which your learning was achieved
- the level of supervision you had
- the complexity of the situation in which your learning was achieved.

Statements of learning should clearly specify how prior learning may contribute to your programme of study. They should reflect ways in which you have changed as a result of your going through a learning process. This may include the following:

Subject-based statements reflecting knowledge and comprehension. You should demonstrate that you are able to apply this knowledge in different situations.

Personal statements, including interpersonal skills such as teamwork and negotiation and interpersonal qualities like motivation, initiative and critical self-reflection. Where you are claiming credit against a particular module (ie you are matching the aims and objectives or learning outcomes of a taught module), the credit level will normally be the level awarded to a student taking the taught course. If your prior experiential learning does not fit with the aims and objectives or learning outcomes of a module, you will have to consider the issue of what level of learning is to be claimed and how best to transfer that learning into statements which can be effectively assessed. The credit you receive for prior learning is directly related to the complexity of your knowledge and the difficulty of the subject matter. It is useful to consider learning as having six facets, namely:

KNOWLEDGE, COMPREHENSION, APPLICATION, ANALYSIS, SYNTHESIS and EVALUATION.

From memorising simple facts, you progress to more complicated skills like analysis, comparison and evaluation. Statements of learning should specify the cognitive skills that have been achieved, the complexity of the situation in which the learning has taken place, and whether the learning has been achieved independently or under supervision.

Your statements of learning should make use of the following format:

'As a result of prior and current learning I am able to show that I have.....'

The verb used should indicate the level of the credit claimed, for example:

- 'understand' reflects credit at SCQF level 7 (SHE level 1)
- 'analyse' reflects credit at SCQF level 8 (SHE level 2)
- 'synthesise/evaluate' reflects credit at SCQF level 9 (SHE level 3)

Reference should be made to the following level descriptors when constructing statements of learning. This will give you some idea of the terminology associated with each level.

Academic level

Now that you have some idea of the areas where significant learning may have occurred, you need to think about whether you can provide evidence that your learning is at the appropriate academic level. The following descriptors set out generic outcomes characteristic of each level; they mirror the SCQF level descriptors. They are intended to provide a general understanding of each level and to allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning acquired informally or through courses or training programmes which have not been credit rated. They are intended to assist in determining levels of learning and the construction of statements of learning. It is not expected that all of the characteristics need be met.

SCQF level 7 (SHE level 1)

Knowledge and understanding

You should be able to demonstrate and/or work with:

- a broad knowledge of the subject/discipline in general
- knowledge that is imbedded in the main theories, concepts and principles
- an awareness of the evolving/changing nature of knowledge and understanding
- an understanding of the difference between explanations based in evidence and/or research and other forms of explanation and of the importance of this difference.

Practice: applied knowledge and understanding

You should be able to use some of the basic and routine professional skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with the subject/discipline in both routine and non-routine situations.

Generic cognitive skills

You should be able to:

- present and evaluate arguments, information and ideas which are routine to the subject/discipline
- use a range of approaches to address defined and/or routine problems and issues within familiar contexts.

Communication, ICT and numeracy skills

You should be able to use a wide range of routine skills and some advanced skills associated with the subject discipline. For example:

- convey complex ideas in a well-structured and coherent form
- use a range of forms of communication effectively in both familiar and new contexts
- use standard applications to process and obtain a variety of information and data
- use a range of numerical and graphical skills in combination
- use numerical and graphical data to measure progress and achieve goals/targets.

Autonomy, accountability and working with others

You should be able to:

- show some initiative and independence in carrying out defined activities at a professional level
- take supervision in less familiar areas of work
- take some managerial responsibility for the work of others within a defined and supervised structure
- manage limited resources within defined areas of work
- take the lead in implementing agreed plans in familiar or defined contexts
- take account of your own and others' roles and responsibilities in carrying out and evaluating tasks
- work with others in support of current professional practice under guidance.

SCQF level 8 (SHE level 2)

Knowledge and understanding

You should be able to demonstrate and/or work with:

- a broad knowledge of the scope, defining features and main areas of a subject discipline
- detailed knowledge in some areas
- understanding of a limited range of core theories, principles and contexts
- limited knowledge and understanding of some major current issues and specialisms

- an outline knowledge and understanding of research and equivalent academic processes.

Practice: applied knowledge and understanding

You should be able to:

- use a range of routine skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with a subject/discipline, a few of which are advanced or complex
- carry out routine lines of enquiry, development or investigation into professional-level problems and issues
- adapt routine practices within accepted standards.

Generic cognitive skills

You should be able to:

- undertake critical analysis, evaluation and/or synthesis of ideas, concepts, information and issues which are within the common understandings of the subject/discipline
- use a range of approaches to formulate evidence-based solutions/responses to defined and/or routine problems/issues
- critically evaluate evidence-based solutions/responses to defined and/or routine problems/issues.

Communication, ICT and numeracy skills

You should be able to use a range of routine skills and some advanced and specialised skills associated with the subject/discipline. For example:

- convey complex information to a range of audiences and for a range of purposes
- use a range of standard applications to process and obtain data
- use and evaluate numerical and graphical data to measure progress and achieve goals/targets.

Autonomy, accountability and working with others

You should be able to:

- exercise autonomy and initiative in some activities at a professional level
- take significant managerial and supervisory responsibility for the work of others in defined areas of work
- manage resources within defined areas of work
- take the lead on planning in familiar or defined contexts
- take continuing account of own and others' roles, responsibilities and contributions in carrying out and evaluating tasks
- work in support of current professional practice under guidance
- deal with ethical and professional issues in accordance with current professional and/or ethical codes or practices under guidance.

SCQF level 9 (SHE level 3)

Knowledge and understanding

You should be able to demonstrate and/or work with:

- a broad and integrated knowledge and understanding of the scope, main areas and boundaries of a subject/discipline
- a critical understanding of a selection of the main theories, principles, concepts and terminology
- knowledge that is detailed in some areas and/or knowledge of one or more specialisms that are informed by forefront developments.

Practice: applied knowledge and understanding

You should be able to:

- use a selection of the principal skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with the subject/discipline
- use a few skills, techniques, practices and/or materials that are specialised or advanced
- practice routine methods of enquiry and/or research
- practice in a range of professional-level contexts which include a degree of unpredictability.

Generic cognitive skills

You should be able to:

- undertake critical analysis, evaluation and/or synthesis of ideas, concepts, information and issues
- identify and analyse routine professional problems and issues
- draw on a range of sources in making judgements.

Communication, ICT and numeracy skills

You should be able to use a range of routine skills and some advanced and specialised skills in support of established practices in a subject/discipline. For example:

- make formal and informal presentations on standard/mainstream topics in the subject/discipline to a range of audiences
- use a range of IT applications to support and enhance work
- interpret, use and evaluate numerical and graphical data to achieve goals/targets.

Autonomy, accountability and working with others

You should be able to:

- exercise autonomy and initiative in some activities at a professional level
- take some responsibility for the work of others and for a range of resources
- practise in ways which take account of your own and others' roles and responsibilities

- work under guidance with qualified practitioners
- deal with ethical and professional issues in accordance with current professional and/or ethical codes or practices, seeking guidance where appropriate.

SCQF level 10 (SHE level 4)

As APEL claims are not graded, credit cannot be awarded at honours level.

SCQF level 11 (SHE level M)

Knowledge and understanding

You should be able to demonstrate and/or work with:

- knowledge that covers and integrates most, if not all, of the main areas of a subject/discipline, including their features, boundaries, terminology and conventions
- a critical understanding of the main theories, principles and concepts
- a critical understanding of a range of specialised theories, principles and concepts
- extensive, detailed, critical knowledge and understanding in one or more specialisms, much of which is at or informed by developments at the forefront of a subject/discipline
- critical awareness of current issues in a subject/discipline and one or more specialisms.

Practice: applied knowledge and understanding

You should be able to:

- use a significant range of the principal skills, techniques, practices and/or materials that are associated with a subject/discipline
- use a range of specialised skills, techniques, practices and/or materials which are at the forefront or are informed by forefront developments
- apply a range of standard and specialised research or equivalent instruments of enquiry
- plan and execute a significant project of research, investigation or development
- demonstrate originality or creativity in the application of knowledge, understanding and/or practices
- practise in a wide and often unpredictable variety of professional-level contexts.

Generic cognitive skills

You should be able to:

- apply critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis to issues which are at the forefront or informed by developments at the forefront of a subject/discipline
- identify, conceptualise and define new and abstract problems and issues
- develop original and creative responses to problems and issues

- critically review, consolidate and extend knowledge, skills, practices and thinking in a subject/discipline
- deal with complex issues and make informed judgements in situations in the absence of complete or consistent data/information.

Communication, ICT and numeracy skills

You should be able to use a range of advanced and specialised skills as appropriate to a subject/discipline. For example:

- communicate, using appropriate methods, to a range of audiences with different levels of knowledge/expertise
- communicate with peers, more senior colleagues and specialists
- use a wide range of software to support and enhance work at this level and specify new software or refinements/improvements to existing software to increase effectiveness
- undertake critical evaluations of a wide range of numerical and graphical data.

Autonomy, accountability and working with others

You should be able to:

- exercise substantial autonomy and initiative in professional and equivalent activities
- take responsibility for your own work and/or significant responsibility for the work of others
- take responsibility for a significant range of resources
- demonstrate leadership and/or initiative and make an identifiable contribution to change and development
- practise in ways which draw on critical reflection on your own and others' roles and responsibilities
- deal with complex ethical and professional issues and make informed judgements on issues not addressed by current professional and/or ethical codes or practices.

Preparing a claim for APEL through portfolio preparation

Assessment is based on a portfolio, which should comprise three main elements:

- **your set of statements of learning**
- **a written account of your learning**
- **a collection of appropriate and valid evidence in support of your claim.**

There will also be a presentation plus an oral examination for claims exceeding 30 credit points. The aim is to prove to the University that you have derived learning from your experience. Your claim should demonstrate a conceptual and practical grasp of the subject area for which the claim is being made. You should bear in mind that your claim is for academic credit, and therefore your knowledge and understanding as well as your skills should be evident from the portfolio.

Remember also that it is your current level of knowledge and skill which is being assessed rather than something you could do in the past. While this does not mean

that learning achieved some time ago is not valid, it means that you need to be able to show recent application of the knowledge and skills for which the claim is being made. For example, a certificate showing that you completed a management course 10 years ago should be supported by evidence that you are currently applying the skills you learned and that they have been kept up to date.

Portfolio preparation is an educational experience requiring you to relate your past learning experiences to your present educational goals. It tests your powers of self-evaluation and your ability to present evidence in a clear, concise manner. Remember, credit is awarded for prior learning, not prior experience. Continuously check as you develop your portfolio that you are describing what you learned, not simply what you did. It is important to avoid duplication. In the course of their career, people often duplicate experiences. You should clearly demonstrate increased learning. It is important to show that you have had, for example, 10 years' experience, not one year of experience repeated 10 times.

Sometimes people worry that they will not be able to provide enough evidence. This is not usually a problem, but remember that the quality rather than the quantity of evidence is important. You must be selective: do not include everything you have done in your portfolio, as too much evidence can make your portfolio confusing and therefore difficult to assess. Your portfolio may contain supporting evidence which can be direct or indirect.

Direct evidence is something you have either produced yourself or for which you were mainly responsible. Examples of direct evidence are:

- procedures you have designed
- project or research reports
- articles you have written
- a training plan designed by you
- budgets or financial forecasts.

Indirect evidence is information gathered from others about you. It is about you, but has not been produced by you. Examples of indirect evidence are:

- statements from employers
- certificates/syllabus details from non-credit-rated courses
- letters of support from managers.

If you are including evidence produced within a team setting, you must 'tease out' your work. For example, with joint reports and projects you need to clearly identify the role you played. This can be outlined within your written account. The material contained within your portfolio may not initially have been produced with assessment in mind. Your written account should be used to set this evidence in the context of your learning. The written account should be approximately 3,000 to 5,000 words for each block of credit claimed. The minimum amount of credit that can be claimed is 15 points. The maximum is 300 points, although a claim of this magnitude would most likely include a large element of APL or certificated learning.

The **written account** complements your portfolio of evidence. It should be a focused piece of writing which places the learning you have achieved into context. It should draw all the supporting evidence produced into an academic framework, properly referenced and clearly demonstrating how your learning has progressed. In order to do this, you must reflect on your experience to identify where significant learning has occurred. Learning involves more than just doing. It is not enough to know that a particular procedure is important – you must show that you understand why.

The written account should provide a clear guide through the supplementary evidence contained within the portfolio. The written account should:

- refer to the statements of learning and the evidence
- describe how the learning has developed over time
- demonstrate the ability to reflect on learning
- clearly demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant academic theory.

Referencing

It is standard academic practice to use a recognised referencing system with all written work. Individual APEL supervisors may request a particular referencing format, so students should check with them in the first instance. Perhaps the most straightforward system is Harvard. The following notes should provide you with a few pointers on this system.

In the Harvard scheme, the author and date appear in text citations, and the reference list at the end of your essay is arranged in alphabetical order of the author's surnames.

Bibliography

In the bibliography/list of references, the title of the book or journal is underlined or in italics. The order of presentation of information is as follows:

Surname, initial(s), date, title, place of publication, publisher(s). For example:

Giddens A (1993) *Sociology* (2nd edn), Oxford, Polity Press

For two authors:

Cochrane A and Clarke J (eds) (1993) *Comparing Welfare States*, London, Sage

More than two authors:

Abercrombie P et al (1994) *Contemporary British Society* (2nd edn), Oxford, Polity Press

Books produced by organisations:

Central Statistical Office (1992) *Social Trends 22*, London, HMSO.

Parts of books; where a book is an edited set of readings, the following format is used:

Gallagher T (1991) 'Justice and law in Northern Ireland', in Jowell R et al (eds) *British Social Attitudes: the 8th Report*, Aldershot, Gower

Journal articles:

Surname, initial, year of publication, title of article, title of journal, volume number, part number (or day/month of publication), page number(s). For example:

Whitehouse G (1992) 'Legislation and labour-market gender inequality', *Work, Employment and Society* 6, 1, March, pp65-86

How to cite references in your essay

Using the Harvard system you can put the author's name directly into your sentence: '...as Whitehouse (1992) pointed out...'. Alternatively, you can bracket the surname and date, for example: '...in a recent study of first-year university students (Brown, 1992) it was found that...'.

When citing more than one work by an author published in the same year, use an (a), (b) etc suffix and list alphabetically by title, for example:

Smith J (1994a) *Health Studies*, Paisley, Storie Street Press

Smith J (1994b) *What is Health?*, Paisley, Lady Lane Inc

Quotations

When using a quote, treat it in the following way:

1. Indent the quote
2. Use single quotation marks
3. Cite author, year, page(s) at the end.

For example:

Oakley has argued persuasively that:

'It becomes clear that, in most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his/her own personal identity in the relationship.' (Oakley, 1981, p41)

If in doubt please ask, but get into the habit of adhering to these academic conventions.

Finally, you must be consistent and stick to one system of referencing.

APL/APEL proposal

You are now ready to start planning your portfolio. You will be assigned a supervisor from the appropriate academic department/s. Before meeting with your supervisor, prepare a brief outline of the areas for which you may wish to claim credit and an indication of the type of evidence you intend to produce.

Name

Subject area

Certificated learning

Statements of learning

Written account

Supplementary evidence

Points claimed

Level

Assessor 1

Assessor 2

Approved by:

Admissions officer

Programme leader

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University of Paisley

AEDL in the School of Health, Nursing and Midwifery – an example of RPL in action

Introduction

Accreditation of experience-derived learning (AEDL) is part of the conversion programme currently offered to second-level nurses (enrolled nurses) at the University of Paisley and is a prime example of RPL in action.

The process was specifically developed to provide an opportunity for second-level nurses to have experience attained since qualifying accredited within the practice component of a conversion programme leading to a professional qualification as a first-level registered nurse (Stillie and McQueeney 1990).

Traditionally, enrolled nurse training took two years as opposed to the three years normally required for first-level registration. In addition, the two-year course was generally regarded as being more practical and less academic than the three-year one. Second-level nurse education was discontinued in the early 1990s with the move towards one level of registration. However, recent figures show that there are about 144,700 enrolled nurses on the professional register, which constitutes about 20 per cent of all registered nurses (NMC, 2004a).

The majority of enrolled nurses have been qualified for more than 20 years and are experienced practitioners. However, most are employed at the level of a newly qualified staff nurse, and remain at this grade (D Grade) for the duration of their career. Many find that they are not eligible for promotion and are often denied opportunities for personal and professional development (Seccombe et al, 1997). This leaves enrolled nurses feeling frustrated and demoralised, especially as they are overtaken by younger, less experienced staff nurses who quickly progress to E Grade and beyond. An RPL mechanism such as AEDL, which acknowledges experience and promotes positive self-esteem, has potential benefits for this group of students.

The AEDL instrument and process

The AEDL instrument comprises 56 key elements of competence that can be linked to the Nursing and Midwifery Council standards of proficiency for entry to Part 1, sub-level 1, of the Professional Register (NMC, 2004b). These key elements were derived from research involving over 200 first and second-level nurses, who were asked to identify what they believed the essential attributes of a registered nurse to be (Foong, 1993). They are classified in three sections:

Section 1 – communication skills (verbal, non-verbal, written).

Section 2 – management skills (leadership, decision-making, problem-solving).

Section 3 – care and health promotion.

Key elements are presented in the form of statements of competence, for example:

‘1.7 Reviews information/instructions given to patients/clients/relatives.’

Successful accreditation of key elements during the AEDL process is indicative of competences achieved by experienced second-level nurses. Each key element comprises three levels or categories of attainment, representing knowledge and skills derived from an individual’s initial professional training and subsequent experience as a qualified nurse.

Mechanism for gathering and presenting evidence of learning

Evidence of current practice is provided by means of critical incidents, which are everyday occurrences in practice that students record and analyse. The critical incidents are gathered over a three-month period. Prior learning is identified through student's systematic reflection on their own actions within the context of a situation and clarification of what they might do should a similar situation occur in future. A statement clearly demonstrating the relevance of a key element to a specific action within a critical incident is written for each key element claimed. To ensure that a broad range of skills is demonstrated, a maximum of four key elements can be claimed for each critical incident. This means that in order to support all 56 key elements, a student is required to document about 20 critical incidents. A practice supervisor who is a first-level registered nurse employed within the same area of practice as the student verifies the authenticity of the critical incidents.

Demonstration of competence is facilitated by tutor counsellors, who assist students to consider the evidence required to satisfy three categories of attainment or levels of learning from experience related to each key element. Students provide further written evidence to demonstrate the level of knowledge and skill acquired in relation to each key element claimed. Using a schedule of questions as a guide, the student and tutor counsellor determine the validity of the evidence provided. Each key element can attract a maximum score of three points according to the level of competence attained:

- Know** For a score of 1, students must demonstrate knowledge from their previous second-level training related to a key element.
- Can do** For a score of 2, students must demonstrate that they are able to apply that knowledge to their practice at a level of proficiency of a qualified second-level nurse.
- Can do plus** For a score of 3, students must demonstrate that they are able to practice at the level of a competent first-level nurse. All three categories of attainment must be demonstrated to achieve a score of 3.

Category of attainment statements indicate the information required to make a satisfactory claim. For example:

'Categories of attainments for key element 1.7

Score 1 – Recognises the need to give clear explanations/instruction.

Score 2 – Demonstrates the ability to give clear explanations/instruction.

Score 3 – Monitors the effectiveness of explanations/instructions and modifies them if required.'

Accreditation process

On completion of the process, the sum of the scores achieved for each key element claimed is converted into credit points. It is possible to achieve up to four credit points, each one of which is equivalent to 15 weeks of unsupervised practice in students' own area of employment during the conversion programme. This credit enables students to retain their contract of employment throughout the programme. However, NMC and European Commission regulations governing the theoretical and practical elements of programmes leading to first-level professional registration must be met regardless of the credit awarded.

The review process also provides an opportunity to identify potential learning goals relating to the 56 key elements that could be achieved during the conversion programme, enabling planned practice experiences to be clearly focused.

Following review of the evidence by the student and tutor counsellor, the student submits a completed profile of competence for summative assessment in week 14 of the programme. This means that students' efforts in preparing their claim are also accredited.

Initial guidance for learners

Immediately prior to starting the AEDL process, which is undertaken during the first 14 weeks of the programme, students and practice supervisors attend a two-day preparatory workshop. Each student receives a profile folder containing guidance notes and a guide to the key elements. Summary sheets are provided for each workshop activity undertaken during the two days. The process is presented in logical steps, to enable students to undertake the process and prepare their profile for submission. The steps are as follows:

Step 1 – logging the critical incident

Step 2 – analysing the critical incident

Step 3 – verification of the critical incident by the practice supervisor

Step 4 – linking critical incidents to key elements

Step 5 – writing a summary statement to support a claim for a key element

Step 6 – reviewing the evidence supporting a claim with the tutor counsellor

Step 7 – the accreditation process

Step 8 – identification of learning goals

Step 9 – submitting the profile of competences and learning goals for assessment.

Support mechanisms for learners

During the AEDL process, students should receive support from the following:

- **Practice supervisors** – responsible for verifying the authenticity of the evidence provided by students, namely the critical incidents and supporting statements for each of the key elements claimed. Practice supervisors can also provide support by discussing with students the critical incidents and the relevance of the key elements selected. Demonstration of interest by a practice supervisor can positively influence a student's motivation.
- **Tutor counsellors** – provide feedback and guidance to students on descriptions and analyses of critical incidents, the relevance of key element claims and the supporting evidence. During review of the evidence, tutor counsellors consider with students the evidence required to satisfy the categories of attainment of each key element claimed. Review meetings are spread throughout the three-month period, normally fortnightly.
- **Managers** – application to the conversion programme must be accompanied by a signed statement of support from a student's manager. Managers need to support students by allowing them to attend the two-day workshop with a practice supervisor; ensuring the allocation of sufficient study time to gather, analyse and record critical incidents and prepare statements supporting their claims; and allowing attendance at tutorials and reviews with the tutor counsellor.

Recognition/assessment process

The cost of the AEDL process is included in the fees for the conversion programme. The accredited number of weeks of unsupervised practice is calculated as follows:

Total score for key elements	Credit points	Accreditation of weeks of unsupervised practice
104 and below	0	0 weeks
105-120	1	15 weeks
121-136	2	30 weeks
137-152	3	45 weeks
153-168	4	60 weeks

Students are advised that the maximum accreditation possible depends on NMC and EC requirements being met. This is determined from a transcript of any previous training leading to professional registration that has been undertaken.

Monitoring and review

As part of the conversion programme, the AEDL process is monitored and reviewed annually as follows:

- evaluation forms for students, practice supervisors and tutor counsellors, which are included in each student's AEDL profile and are completed before submission of the folder for assessment
- annual conversion programme evaluations by students
- the University of Paisley's annual monitoring process, including evaluation of the student experience
- external examiners' reports
- NHS Education Scotland statutory annual monitoring.

Support for staff

Tutor counsellors are supported in the following ways:

- a two-day AEDL workshop which includes debate and discussion on the facilitation, review and accreditation of evidence
- monthly support meetings for tutor counsellors, where concerns can be raised and issues relating to the process addressed
- staff-student liaison meetings three times a year, which provide a forum for tutor counsellors to receive feedback from students on the process
- a relationship with practice supervisors enabling tutor counsellors to be informed of, or to raise, any concerns about students.

Quality assurance

The AEDL process firmly adheres to Evans's (1992) principles of accreditation, and the internal validity of the process depends on the objectivity of the practice supervisor and tutor counsellor. To ensure that practice supervisors are fully aware of the importance of verifying evidence, it is imperative that they attend the two-day workshop with the students.

The wide geographical location of students, and the number of tutor counsellors involved, means that it is imperative to have robust quality assurance mechanisms. Several mechanisms within the process promote a high degree of inter-assessor reliability:

- The guide to the key elements clearly indicates the evidence sought in relation to sufficiency and relevance.
- There is a rigorous process of internal and external assessment and moderation.
- The NMC requirements for demonstrating competence in practice are scrutinised by NHS Education Scotland.
- Verification of the authenticity of the evidence provided by candidates is confirmed by the verifier, who signs each critical incident to indicate that they have read it and that it is a true representation of events and actions taken.
- The process meets the University of Paisley's quality enhancement processes.

Perceived benefits of AEDL

Since its launch in 1995, the AEDL process has been a successful part of the conversion course, initially at Argyll and Clyde College of Nursing and Midwifery and, since the transfer of the College in 1996, at the University of Paisley. Recent evaluation of the process has shown that the perceived benefits of AEDL include improvement in critical thinking and increased confidence and self-esteem. In addition, managers report that staff who have undergone the process are more likely to be receptive and responsive to change. The following extracts from student evaluations illustrate the strengths of AEDL as an example of RPL:

• Increased reflection on practice

'It made me aware of my nursing practice. I found that I would analyse everything that I did.'

'It heightened my awareness of current nursing issues and legislation.'

'It made me very aware of my accountability and prepared me for the course.'

'It has encouraged me to look at situations more positively and with an open mind.'

'It encouraged me to ask questions and to identify more easily the changes that I need to make to improve my practice.'

• Increased confidence and assertiveness

'I am much more self-confident than before. I feel more rounded and able to share experience, knowledge and skills with others.'

'I feel I have developed more confidence in myself as a person. I am not afraid to question or speak out as an equal.'

'It helped me to take more responsibility for nursing issues in the surgery where I work. We now have regular nurse/doctor meetings as a result.'

- **Facilitated return to study**

'It eased me into academic work.'

'It helped me to focus and prepared me for some serious nursing study after such a long gap.'

'It made me focus on study and time management.'

- **Recognition of the value of own knowledge and skills**

'I thoroughly enjoyed the process. I feel that my confidence has been boosted by appreciating just how much I have learned about nursing over the years as an enrolled nurse.'

'It allows you to acknowledge strengths and weaknesses not previously recognised.'

'I now believe that I am an important part of the team.'

'It showed me that although I was only an enrolled nurse, I had a wealth of knowledge and experience that I used all the time.'

- **Recognition of the need for professional development**

'It gave me the encouragement to continue to study as it made me aware that I was good at what I did, but it also made me aware that I needed to learn more.'

'It helped me to identify areas of practice that required more understanding in order to enhance my personal knowledge.'

'It gave me confidence as I didn't realise the extent of my knowledge. It also made me realise there was a lot more to learn.'

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Valuing learning from experience (VaLEx)
Glasgow Caledonian University and University of Stirling

VaLEx learner's guide

VaLEx tutors' pack part 1: a practical guide

VaLEx tutors' pack part 2: the theoretical/pedagogical approach

VaLEx tutors' pack part 3: support materials

Valuing your Learning from Experience (VaLEx)

A learner's guide

A guide for learners on the recognition of prior informal learning

December 2005

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Introduction

What is this guide about?

All of us learn from our experience, but it is only recently that this form of learning has been recognised as just as significant as formal qualifications. We call this experiential or informal learning.

The recognition of prior informal learning (RPL) can enable people to value their learning from experience. It can assist adult learners to return to learn in educational institutions, particularly those who have been out of education for a long time or who may not have formal qualifications.

RPL recognises the value of life experiences that we gain in the family and through voluntary and paid work, caring roles, community participation and leisure activities.

This guide is about promoting an understanding of the recognition of prior informal or experiential learning among adult learners in a variety of educational settings across Europe.

Is this guide aimed at you?

Are you thinking about returning to learn? Or are you taking a learning programme that offers the possibility of undertaking RPL to get credit or exemption from part of the programme?

If so, this guide is aimed at you.

Many learners initially find the RPL process confusing and unclear. The aim of this guide is to help you as learners to:

- understand what RPL is and how it is used
- prepare you for the RPL process
- find out about other learners' experiences
- know, as learners, what you can do to address any issues
- encourage more learners to use RPL.

RPL coordinators, tutors and guidance and support staff will also find the guide useful, as it will help them to:

- understand the RPL process from the learner's perspective
- reflect on the RPL process in their institution
- identify strategies to improve the RPL process in their institution
- access further literature on RPL.

How to use this guide

This guide is divided into several sections.

The first section explains what RPL means, what RPL can do for you, and what kind of people can undertake RPL.

The second section describes what RPL involves.

In the third section, adult learners describe their experiences and feelings about undertaking RPL. This includes the positive experiences as well as problems and issues they have experienced, to help you to be more prepared.

Section four offers practical advice, based on the experiences of RPL learners, to help you to get the best out of the RPL process and avoid possible problems.

The final section provides you with ideas for further reading and obtaining more information about RPL.

The guide will be of use primarily to:

- adult learners and adults considering returning to learn

but also to:

- RPL/access coordinators in adult, community, further and higher education
- admissions tutors
- adult education tutors
- policy-makers.

Section 1: What is RPL?

The term RPL stands for the Recognition of Prior informal or experiential Learning and is based on the principle that people can and do learn throughout their lives in a variety of settings.

People can gain a range of strengths and skills through:

- family life (home-making, caring, domestic organisation)
- work (paid or unpaid)
- community, voluntary or leisure activities
- key experiences and events in life.

We call this informal or experiential learning, or learning from experience.

Often, the skills, knowledge and abilities that are gained through this type of learning can be equal to those gained by students following traditional routes through formal education.

Learning from experience is different from 'formal learning': it is largely unstructured; it is more personal, more individualised and is often unconsciously gained. It is, however, just as real as learning which is gained in a formal academic setting. What is more, it is usually more permanent – it is not readily forgotten or lost.

The idea of recognising and valuing people's learning from experience can be found in many European countries. The way in which it is implemented varies from country to country, but the general principle is the same.

RPL is a process that can give people of all ages and backgrounds the opportunity to obtain recognition for achievements they have gained outside the 'classroom'. This learning can result from a variety of different experiences in life.

What can RPL do for you?

RPL is the process that enables your learning from experience to be counted. If, as a result of RPL, your experiential learning is formally recognised by a college, vocational institute or university, it can be used to:

- gain entry to a programme of study offered by that institution (if you do not have the normal entry qualifications)

- gain credit towards a programme of study and so allow you to join at a later level.

If you can demonstrate that through your experience you have already gained particular skills and knowledge which are required by particular parts of a programme of study, you can claim credit for it through RPL. This reduces the amount of time needed to complete the programme. (In education, 'credit' is the currency used to indicate how much learning has been achieved at a given level).

The experience of undertaking RPL can have other advantages too:

- You will think about what you have achieved so far through your experiences in terms of strengths and skills.
- You will think about your goals and what you need to do in order to achieve them, for example do a training course; join an educational programme at college, vocational institute or university; apply for or change jobs.
- RPL can help you to consider your options and make decisions about the direction you want to take.
- It also helps to build your confidence – it enables both you and others to value your achievements and recognise the importance of your learning through experience.

RPL is about transforming your personal experience into 'learning'. Through RPL you can gain recognition for the skills and knowledge your personal experiences have taught you. This recognition can allow you to go on to do more academic study if you want to. It will also help you if you are looking for a job, or if you simply want to take a more active part in your community.

RPL can help you because it shows other people (and yourself) that you have learned significant things from your experiences and that you are capable of learning more from future experiences.

Here is what some of the learners who have undertaken the RPL process say about it:

'It was straightforward, but it made you look closely at yourself and what you'd done. But it wasn't very complicated or anything.'

'I think the reflective side of it was quite good once I had got into it and could see what they were trying to get from that. It was trying to get you to see that...for you to prove that throughout the whole time you were not just doing tasks, but learning each day. You were learning something new.'

'It just gives you a little bit more confidence at the start because it was quite a thought coming onto a course like that.'

In sum then, RPL can be useful to you in the following ways:

- access to further learning at all levels
- confidence building
- gaining credit within academic programmes
- personal/self-development
- improving your learning skills
- career development
- valuing life experiences.

Who can undertake RPL?

RPL can be undertaken by a wide range of adult learners. In particular, the following groups of learners often choose RPL to help them to either re-enter learning or as a contribution towards a programme of study:

- women returning to education
- unemployed people seeking recognition for skills gained through informal learning
- people wanting to improve on existing qualifications
- those wanting to retrain or change careers
- people who left courses before achieving the formal qualifications
- undergraduate and postgraduate students
- people who have been out of the education system for a long time and who may lack formal qualifications
- people who have disabilities of some kind
- minority ethnic groups and asylum seekers.

The following are examples of learners who have undertaken RPL:

- One woman worked as an unqualified social worker. She realised that she would not get any further promotion without a social work qualification, so she decided to study for a degree and use her work experience to undertake RPL to gain exemption from some of the modules.
- Another woman had enjoyed school and, after leaving school, participated in adult education courses. After a divorce and becoming a single parent she decided to go to university to train as a teacher, not only to support her family financially but also because she enjoyed learning.
- One man had also undertaken various types of courses since leaving school. His experiences of school were negative as he had disliked the culture and ethos of the school he attended. Opting for a degree in social work in his thirties was a way of achieving a learning ambition which he felt schooling had denied him. He used RPL to gain exemption from some modules.
- A man who had worked in the coal industry for many years started studying an engineering programme when he became unemployed. He was given exemption from parts of the course through RPL because of what he had learned through his previous work experience.

So in summary, all kinds of people can undertake RPL – young and older people, men and women, people of all ethnic backgrounds, employed or unemployed people, people with some qualifications and people with no qualifications.

You don't need to have a good academic education, but you do need to be keen to learn from and about your own experiences and about yourself.

Section 2: What does RPL involve?

Before you go through the process of RPL, there is an important guiding principle you should know about:

It is what you have learned that is being assessed not what you have done.

So, for example, two people might have the same experience through doing identical jobs, but one might have learned much more from the task(s) involved than the other. You may have said about someone, 'They never learned any lessons from...'. People who have learned something are able to use that learning to help them in other related situations. Again, you will have heard it said, 'They used all their experience to overcome the problem'. So you need to demonstrate what you have learned from your experiences, not just describe what you have done.

The process of undertaking RPL involves a study of your past experiences. No one but you can reflect on your experiences to discover what they have taught you. It is for you to discover, through reflection, your significant learning experiences and then express what you have learnt. Of course, college or university staff will help you to do this.

You will be encouraged to value your personal experience as a way of helping you to make choices and prepare for moving on to further opportunities in education or work.

How do you learn from experience?

Most people like yourself learn a great deal from:

- doing something (or seeing someone else do something)
- experiencing (or seeing) the consequences of that action
- 'learning a lesson' from it.

People may often learn more by 'trial and error' than from reading books or from listening to a teacher or lecturer. Learning can be an individual or a shared experience, as part of a group.

Various attempts have been made to describe the process of learning, but it is often described as a learning cycle,¹ which can be represented as follows.

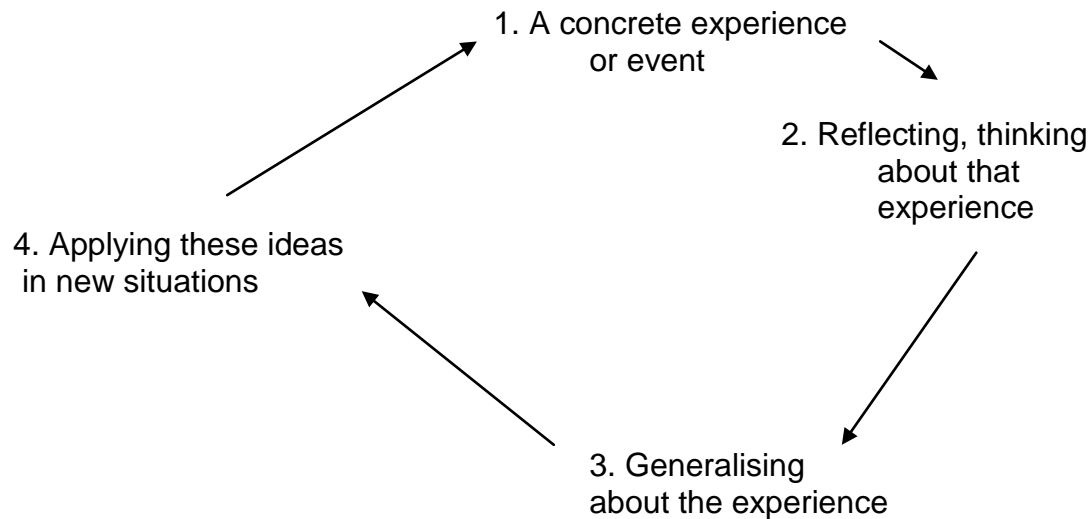
- Stage 1

Learning begins with a real experience – this can be any experience or 'event'. It may be a specific experience, or a series of related tasks/experiences (such as a job we have done, bringing up a child, learning to drive, the experience of being unemployed or homeless, or some type of event that we observe).

- Stage 2

The experience or event may 'make us think'. If so, we move into Stage 2 of the cycle.

¹ Kolb D (1984) *Experiential Learning*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall



- Stage 3

Thinking about the experience may make us realise that ‘there is more to it than meets the eye’, that the experience is simply one example of a pattern of things. We may begin to make connections to form ideas or theories about what that pattern is. We may make generalisations about the experience. We may, of course, then confirm those ideas by repeating similar experiences and maybe observing similar results.

- Stage 4

However, we may go on to apply those ideas to new or different situations in order to test them out. If our ideas are borne out in practice, then the ‘lesson has been truly learnt’ and is likely to be applied in future situations/experiences, and so the cycle may be repeated.

Of course, we may never learn from an experience because we may never get beyond the experience itself. It is at Stage 3 that we make the connections. Without these, the experience remains something to be talked about, but from which we may not have learnt anything.

It is important to realise that we are not all equally effective in each stage of the cycle. Some individuals are stronger at generalising, expressing themselves in theory, while others are more effective at putting into practice what they have actually learned. Different individuals have different learning styles.

In summary then, you can learn as an individual or as part of group. You can identify what you have learned from an experience by thinking carefully about it (reflecting on it), making generalisations about what happened, and testing out these ideas in new situations. As this is a continuous process, it is often described as a learning cycle.

What types of experience can you learn from?

You can learn from any experience you have had or some event you have observed which was significant for you in some way. Any experience/event will do: it could be from your work, home, leisure – anything at all, so long as you feel it was significant.

It might be significant because:

- it was enjoyable

- it affected you deeply (eg the death of a relative, personal injury, some incident you observed but were not directly involved in)
- it changed your outlook on life
- you feel that it taught you a great deal
- it had successful outcomes, or
- it was an experience you never want to repeat
- it gave you a sense of achievement
- it earned you respect and recognition from others
- it involved a major investment of time, energy or effort
- it changed the way you did things.

Examples of types of learning experience you could consider include:

- a particular piece of work, task or project that you undertook at work, or through community or voluntary work, or through independent study
- the experience of doing a particular job (paid or unpaid) over a period of time
- an educational or training course you attended which may have been assessed, but not credit-rated by an academic institution
- the experience of training or teaching others, either formally or informally
- going through a life-changing event such as divorce, homelessness, unemployment, substance misuse, etc.

To sum up: you can learn from any experience or event which was significant to you in some way.

How do you identify what you have learned from experience?

In putting together your RPL claim, the emphasis is on identifying what you have learned from your experiences up to the present: that is, your prior learning. The key to identifying what you have learned through experience is reflection.

Reflection involves you making a detailed study of your past experiences. No one but you can reflect on your experiences to discover what they have taught you. It is for you to discover, through reflection, your significant learning experiences and then express what you have learnt. Of course, you will be helped to do this.

One way of describing what reflection on experience involves is to think about it in terms of the four stages of the learning cycle described previously.

Try to reflect on one of your experiences now:

- 1 Think of any experience you have had or some event you have observed which was significant for you in some way.
- 2 Now think carefully about your experience. You may find this difficult if you have not done this sort of thing before. It may help you to ask yourself questions about the experience, such as:
 - What happened?
 - When did it happen?
 - Where did it happen?

- Why did it happen?
- Who else was involved and what part did they play?
- Was the outcome expected or unexpected?
- What were your thoughts? (ideas, assumptions, etc)
 - immediately before?
 - during?
 - immediately after?
 - some time after?
- What were your feelings?
 - immediately before?
 - during?
 - immediately after?
 - some time after?
- What were your actions and why?

It often helps to discuss your experience or the event with someone else. This will always be done in a confidential way. Discussion helps you to activate your thoughts and makes you more aware of what the experience/event meant for you.

3 The next stage is to think about how the experience changed you. What do you think you learnt? You should be as specific as you can and try to identify:

- ideas
- principles
- connections
- patterns of relationships or behaviour which you came to recognise.

Ask yourself such questions as:

- What lesson/s has it taught me?
- How did my thoughts, feelings, attitudes, judgements change?
- In what way/s did my thoughts and feelings affect my behaviour?
- What new concepts have I developed?
- What knowledge did I gain?
- What skill/s did I acquire? What can I do now that I could not do before?

4 Finally, to complete the cycle think about any subsequent situations in which:

- you used the lessons learned
 - the skill/s acquired
 - the knowledge gained
- your handling of the situation was better as a result of the previous experience.

Or:

Think about a situation or problem which you yourself have not yet encountered, in which what you have learnt from your previous experience could be applied/might be useful.

It is often helpful to discuss your experiences, and your reflection on those experiences, with other learners. As well as helping each other with the reflective process, other people may point out areas of learning that you hadn't even considered. Sometimes it's easier to identify what others have learned through listening to them discuss their experiences than it is to identify what you have learned from your own experiences. Collective, as well as individual, reflection can be a valuable learning process.

In summary, reflection is the key to identifying your learning from experience. The best way to understand how to reflect on experience is to try it out. You can reflect on your experiences on your own or as part of a group.

How do you write about your learning?

When you have identified what you have learnt from your experience, it is important to express your learning in a way that indicates as precisely as possible its nature and level. You need to give both yourself and others as clear an indication as possible of what you can do and how well you can do it.

By this stage, you will have identified various skills and areas of learning gained from your past experiences. It is important that these are expressed in terms that might be more generally applicable to future situations. In other words, you must try to indicate the extent to which the learning you have gained is transferable to another context, eg another course or job.

- Example 1

Asha was involved in organising a large-scale fundraising event. Her particular role was to publicise the event as widely as possible. This is how she went about writing learning statements:

1 Activity	Publicity work for fundraising event
2 What I did	Wrote press release
3 Skills used	Keyboard skills; literacy
4 What I learnt	I can write and type a short press release giving relevant details of future events to meet a deadline
5 Transferable learning	I can identify and use information relevant to an intended purpose; I can plan work to meet deadlines; I can write in the form relevant to a particular purpose.

- Example 2

John is a man in his fifties who became unemployed when the factory he worked in closed down. He found out about RPL through his local community centre. He used his experience of trying to find a job to make the following statements about his learning:

1 Activity	Applying for jobs
2 What I did	Wrote letters of application
3 Skills used	Literacy; information gathering; word-processing
4 What I learnt	I can produce letters of application; I can present myself in a positive way

5 Transferable learning I can identify information and use it for a specific purpose; I can write in a format appropriate to a specific context; I can meet deadlines.

Note that what both Asha and John identified as what they had learned from the experience (stage 4) was quite specific to the experience. The learning statements (stage 5) broaden out their learning to indicate that they can use these skills again in a variety of different situations, not just in writing a press release or applying for a job.

You will be guided by the college, institute or university tutor who is helping you with your RPL claim in how to express your learning in a way that meets the requirements of the programme, university, vocational institute or college.

To summarise, when writing up what you have learned from an experience, you need to show that you can use this learning (skills and knowledge) in a variety of different situations, not just in the context in which you first gained the learning.

How do you provide evidence of this learning?

So how do you prove to other people that you have really learned what you say you have?

There are several different ways of making an RPL claim. The type of claim you make will be determined by the nature of your learning and the requirements of your particular programme, college, vocational institute or university. You will discuss and agree the type of claim you should make with the tutor who is supporting you.

Possible types of claim include the following:

- A project

Such a project might resemble those undertaken by conventional students, but would contain direct reference to your experiences and current working practices.

- A portfolio

This term refers to a claim for learning based on a collection of suitable pieces of evidence of that learning.

A portfolio is a collection of materials, usually compiled in a folder, which demonstrates a person's strengths, skills and experience. In other words, it contains evidence of what a person has learnt. It describes the learning that has been gained through experience. It matches the person's learning with the skills or 'learning outcomes' they are required to demonstrate for entry onto a programme, or for credit within that programme. It also contains evidence that can be evaluated by others. Evidence can be something you have produced (eg letters, accounts of relevant key learning experiences, reports, leaflets) or something someone else says about you and your strengths and skills (eg written testimonials from employers, colleagues, fellow team/committee members; feedback by others on a presentation or talk you have given or a task you have carried out).

If it is agreed that a portfolio is the most appropriate way for you to make an RPL claim, you will be provided with detailed guidance. A portfolio is the most flexible form of assessment. It can be a very rewarding process, but is often the most time-consuming.

A portfolio allows you to make very clear connections between your experiences and the learning that has resulted.

If you have used a portfolio to make your RPL claim you can also use it, or just the parts that are relevant, to support such items as applications for jobs or other

courses. You can use it to remind yourself of what you have done and what you are capable of doing, and of your experience, strengths and skills. You can use it to help you to see which skills you still want to develop and to plan what to do next. Most important of all, a portfolio belongs to you. You look after it and decide when and how to use it.

- A personal development plan (PDP)

This is the basis for RPL claims in Finland. The personal development plan is a scheme where students form an individual plan and objectives for their study programme based on the curriculum. The personal study scheme is usually produced at the beginning of students' studies in collaboration with a teacher or a tutor. The scheme is flexible and students come back to it to evaluate their studies. Previous studies, experiential learning and know-how in the respective field are taken into account when students are forming the plan. Individual study schemes are widely in use, especially in vocational education, new universities and adult education. The idea behind the personal study planning process is to support self-directed learning.

In the UK, systems for personal development planning for students in further and higher education are currently being developed. The reflective element of PDP could well incorporate RPL processes.

- An interview

You might be asked to undertake an oral assessment or an interview as part of the process of making an RPL claim.

Interviews can enable you to express the full extent of your prior achievements during the discussion. You are not held back by the requirements of a written task.

Discussing an experience can often prompt you to explore more deeply what you learned from it. Interviews can be carried out on either a group or individual basis.

- Assessment on demand

You may be asked to undertake the existing assessment for the particular course or element of the programme for which you are seeking credit, such as a written examination or assignment, or you may undertake one that has been specially devised.

- Direct observation of practice/simulation

You may be asked to demonstrate certain techniques or skills in a particular setting, such as the workplace, so that direct observation of them can take place. This approach may be particularly suitable where mastery of special skills is required, such as laboratory work, or where interpersonal skills are highlighted, such as social work.

The observation can also reveal the depth of your understanding of key areas in relation to your claim. Where direct observation of a particular situation is not possible (for example because of the disturbance this would cause), a simulation or role play may be used.

- Europass curriculum vitae (CV)

The Europass CV is the backbone of the Europass framework. In its electronic form it can be linked to other Europass documents such as the Europass Language Passport and the Diploma or Certificate Supplement, for higher education and vocational education respectively. Europass is a new way of helping people to:

- make their skills and qualifications clearly and easily understood in Europe – European Union (EU), European Free Trade Association/European Economic Area and candidate countries
- move anywhere in Europe.

The Europass CV includes categories for presenting information on language proficiency, work experience and education and training achievements as well as additional competences you hold in relation to technical, organisational, artistic and social skills. The Europass CV can be used as evidence of prior informal learning as part of a portfolio or to underpin a structured interview/oral assessment. To find out more about Europass and to complete a Europass CV or Europass Language Passport, go to the Europass website (<http://europass.cedefop.eu.int/>).

One of these approaches, or a combination of them, can be used as part of the RPL process.

To sum up, there are a variety of different ways in which you can make your RPL claim:

- a project
- a portfolio
- a personal development plan
- an interview
- assessment on demand
- direct observation of practice/simulation
- Europass CV and Europass Language Passport
- or a combination of these.

How will the learning be recognised?

The process of recognising informal or experiential learning varies between country, sector, institution and department.

If you are seeking formal recognition of your learning, your RPL claim will be assessed by an expert(s) at the college, vocational institute or university to confirm the learning claims made.

If the assessor is satisfied that you already have the knowledge and skills to gain entry to a programme, or the knowledge and skills that would be gained from successfully completing a formally taught course or module, you will be awarded entry or credit accordingly by that institution.

RPL can help you to make connections between the type of learning you have achieved informally, through your experiences, and the more formal learning you would undertake at a college, vocational institute or university. This is described as a 'transformative process', as you recognise that the skills you have developed in everyday life can be translated into the skills you need to become an effective learner, such as communication and problem-solving skills.

The learning you have gained through your experience is a rich and useful resource to draw on as you embark on further learning, employment or more active participation in your community.

The process of preparing and putting together an RPL claim is a form of learning about yourself. You will come to appreciate where your own strengths and

weaknesses lie. You will also become more aware of how you learn, and therefore of how to become a more effective learner.

In summary, your learning from experience can be recognised in the form of entry to a course or credit within a course at college or university. RPL can also help you to recognise that the skills and knowledge you have learned from experience can be used in other learning situations, whether in the home, at work, in your community or at college or university.

What kind of support can you expect to get?

The process of making an RPL claim does not happen overnight. It develops stage by stage and you will be supported by the college, vocational institute or university as you go through each stage. Tutors who are experts in providing RPL support will work with you individually, in a group, or both.

The range of support for RPL learners varies among and within colleges and universities. You will be advised by the college, vocational institute or university of the type of support you might receive.

- Group and tutorial support

Many institutions now provide group support to RPL learners. The use of group sessions, either on their own or in combination with individual tutorial support, can often be an effective form of RPL support. Group approaches at stages where guidance of a more general nature can be given to a number of students also have the advantage of enabling you to draw on the support of your fellow learners as well as the tutor. The exchange of ideas and experiences among learners is a valuable learning process. Group sessions can take the form of a formal 'course' such as a 'Make Experience Count' type of programme, and more informal meetings of learners. RPL claims are by their very nature highly individual, so individual support – either within the context of a group session or through tutorials – is normally also provided.

- Written and on-line materials

Written materials in the form of learner's handbooks or guides to RPL are often used to supplement the learning support provided by group sessions or individual tutorials. It is likely that these written materials will increasingly be available electronically.

- Employer

If your employing organisation is supporting you in your RPL claim – if it is connected directly with your career or professional development – then your employer can also provide you with support. This can be by providing you with access to relevant resources, materials or learning opportunities to assist you with your claim, or through a work-based mentor.

To sum up, you can get support for putting together your RPL claim through:

- individual tutorials
- group sessions
- written material
- on-line material
- your employer
- a combination of these.

You will be advised which forms of support you will receive.

Costs of the RPL process

The cost of undertaking an RPL claim will depend on the college or university and the type of claim being made. The cost will reflect the amount of time spent by college or university staff in supporting you in putting together your claim and assessing it.

Section 3: Other learners' experiences of RPL

In the UK, Finland and France, RPL seems to be more commonly used in higher education than in further education (post-compulsory education institutions); in the UK a few years ago, it was the other way round.

Writing a portfolio is the most common form of RPL claim among our sample of learners in the UK. Some learners produced a portfolio prior to starting a degree course in a professional area of study as a means of gaining exemption from one or more of the degree modules. RPL allowed them to complete their part-time degree in a shorter time.

For others, RPL was offered as a module within a part-time degree with the aim of enabling students to obtain academic credit for learning gained prior to starting the degree programme.

Finding out about RPL

RPL is a different process to other forms of learning as it focuses on the learner's life experiences and takes these as a starting point rather than academic knowledge. It is also a relatively new process. As a result, the majority of learners we talked to had not heard about RPL before they made contact with an educational institution.

One woman, for example, explained that she heard about RPL through the Director of Part-time Degrees. She decided to opt for RPL even though she felt that she had limited knowledge about it:

'I think he put it to us as well as reading the literature. He actually put it to us that we would be eligible to take part in it.'

Getting started and making sense of RPL

All the learners we talked to viewed APEL positively for a number of reasons:

- They could use it to gain access to further learning opportunities, such as courses at college or university.
- For part-time students in employment it means that they do not have to attend all seminars and lectures.
- The learning is focused on their life experiences.
- Their life experiences are viewed as being worthwhile and valuable.

However, at the beginning of the RPL process they felt confused and unsure about what RPL was and what was required of them. RPL is different to previous learning experiences, which are generally based on traditional approaches as used in schools. For many, the idea of RPL was too abstract and unstructured.

'A portfolio was very difficult to get your head round in terms of how this is going to fit in with what is required in an academic sense. Then I thought – no, this is about your learning experience.'

Several were initially confused about how to combine academic knowledge with their prior learning experiences. One woman asked:

'How do you then put that together in a portfolio that is going to get you credit in terms of RPL? They gave us some understanding of that, but I have to say that even then it was very mystifying.'

The learners were introduced to RPL through an individual tutorial or a group workshop of two or three days.

'From March through to May we had three full days of explaining what RPL was and suggestions on how to put it together. We were also given a portfolio of another candidate who had put one together. Some of the students found this really useful and others said it just threw them off track altogether. We were given the course descriptors and what it was you claim for.'

Some people would have liked to have looked at a number of different past portfolios to help them to understand what type of structure and content were required.

Understanding the RPL process

Many of the learners would have liked tutors to have given more guidance and structure at the start of the RPL process. They felt that the information given to them needed to be more prescriptive.

'I think it needs to be a more structured framework. I am not sure how people would need their fears allayed really. That's what has to happen right from the start. I think there has to be very clear guidelines saying this is what is required. This is what it really is. Yes of course your claim has to meet academic standards, but you have also got to recognise that it is about your past experiences and what you have got to do is link them very closely to the module descriptors. I think it could be made more simple.'

'I think perhaps a little bit more in the workshop about actually structuring your portfolio and perhaps letting people have a look at what's expected. I mean not one particular one because I am sure everybody approaches their work in a completely different way. So it might be an idea to have a range of portfolios available for people to see which way is best going to suit their background.'

Support

Writing an RPL portfolio means that you are largely working on your own in your own time.

After an initial tutorial or workshop, tutors generally offer further tutorials for those students who would like support. Many of the learners we talked to did not feel the need to attend tutorials. One man preferred to meet regularly with other students doing APEL rather than a tutor. This made the learners feel less isolated as they shared problems, even though he claimed 'we were all clueless'. Supporting each other as learners was viewed as very important:

'We have very tight bonds with each other and support each other and we all achieve by it.'

One person would have liked group tutorials, as: 'to see what other people were doing and to hear their difficulties would have made it less isolating'.

Another woman decided to go and see her tutor towards the end of writing her portfolio:

'...because I needed some sort of reassurance really about what I had done and I was getting a bit panicky. I needed somebody to look through and say yes, you are on the right track.'

One or two people felt that tutorials did not help in clarifying the RPL process for them. Instead, just getting started on writing the portfolio helped:

'I think we would benefit by hindsight. I think we would all seek more open discussions at the outset really to make sure that what we were covering was right. As it worked out I think I have covered the right topic. Once I started the work I don't think I needed any guidance – it came out all right and I am pleased with it. But the not really knowing what the examiners were looking for was a bit disconcerting.'

Writing about experience

Many of the learners explained that they felt confident about writing about their life experiences, but less confident about the type of structure and approach required.

'I didn't find it difficult to write from my experience. The problem I had was one of format. I didn't know how to – I didn't know what was going to catch the reader's eye to actually enable them to give me credit for something I have already done. So it was style and content. We did have quite clear guidelines about what RPL was about. The bit I wasn't particularly clear about was actually writing my own portfolio for RPL accreditation. That was all a bit confusing for me.'

RPL is different to being given a subject essay.

'Yes, there was feedback. Then he offered to see us individually if we wanted to. But I knew which direction I wanted to go in and it was just a case of making myself start. I think it is quite difficult when you are used to being given a title. It was that that I found difficult – just going and doing it independently. I did find that hard.'

Another person declared that:

'Yes, I think once I knew what I was writing about I actually enjoyed it.'

Linking experience to theory and practice

Learners who were taking a professional qualification found the RPL process extremely helpful in enabling them to reflect on their work practices and link their experiences to theory and practice.

'It is very valuable in terms of the depth and where you are at, and what you might consider is that you are contributing to the environment in which you work. So it did help in terms of the reflection aspect and then obviously we needed some guidance saying well, you know, you perhaps need to recognise the theory behind some of these practices and need to recognise how you bridge the gap between theory and practice. That is not always easy to recognise and I think that's probably the biggest thing with RPL. It's not just the fact that I've done this, this and this – you have got to identify what it is that you are actually doing.'

Assessing prior informal or experiential learning

In some cases, the learners were asked to give an oral presentation of their portfolio as part of the assessment procedure. One woman explained that she was nervous about having an interview:

'That surprised me because I am normally nervous about written exams, but I am not normally nervous at talking to people.'

However, on reflection she felt that the interview was conducted more like a conversation than an exam. She went on to explain that the assessor was:

'Very openly critical and I suppose openly giving praise for what he saw in the project. I would like to have seen him before I started writing it actually. But no, I felt he was very open and I was very aware that the interview was my opportunity to make my point. If it was a borderline case my interview would have made a difference.'

Several learners mentioned that they would have liked to have been given a copy of the assessment criteria, as they felt that this would have helped them to identify the type of content required for a portfolio.

Recommending RPL to others

Despite the confusion at the start about what RPL is and how you write about your experiences, all the learners stated that they would recommend the RPL process to others.

'I would, yes, definitely. It's hard initially to get going and you have to be very motivated because you have got an open-ended model of learning and it is down to you – but that in itself is no bad thing because it is about your own life.'

Others recommended RPL for more instrumental reasons.

'I would recommend it if people were saying, right I need some CATS points [credit points towards a qualification]. I would say do the RPL thing. It is a great way to do it.'

'Yes – for us it allowed us to go on to this level of work without having to spend more time at university. We just wanted to get our degree, so for that reason I think I would recommend it just to complete the module quite quickly without having to attend lectures.'

Section 4: What can learners do to get the best out of RPL?

As a learner undertaking RPL, there are several things you can do to make the RPL process work better and avoid some of the problems that previous learners have encountered:

- You should request detailed guidance from the tutor at your college, vocational institute or university on the RPL process at the outset, so that you have realistic expectations of what it involves, what will be required of you and what the possible outcomes are.
- Think about how making an RPL claim would be useful to you in terms of your personal, academic or professional development and discuss this with the tutor.
- If there is any aspect of the RPL process that you are unclear about, at any stage, ask the tutor to explain it again until you understand it fully. Tutors will not mind – they are there to help.
- Find out what types of support will be available to you (eg tutorials, group sessions), and at what stages in the process.

- Find out what options are available to you regarding the types of RPL claim you can make (eg portfolio, project, personal development plan, assessment on demand). Ask whether these are negotiable or prescribed by the institution.
- Ask to see examples of RPL claims, so that you have a clear grasp of what will be expected of you.
- Before you start putting your claim together, make sure that you have details of the assessment criteria that will be used in assessing your claim. Clarify what the balance between the 'academic' and 'personal' content of your claim should be.
- Once you have agreed to undertake an RPL claim, discuss with the tutor what your commitments will be in terms of time and effort. Break down the process of putting together your claim into a series of tasks or stages. Agree a work schedule or action plan with the tutor, including target dates for completing each stage and the times when you will meet with the tutor and/or other learners to discuss progress.
- Once you have embarked on the process, be proactive in establishing and participating in supportive peer groups or networks of learners. You can do this even if there are no formal group sessions relating to RPL. Meeting regularly with other learners face to face or keeping in contact by telephone or email to discuss progress and share experiences can be invaluable. It is more than likely that the uncertainties, problems and questions that you might have are shared by others.
- You should try to engage in networks of solidarity among learners to ensure that the processes of accrediting prior experiential learning can provide a positive experience for all participants.

In sum, you should aim for as much control over the process as possible. Your relationship with the institution should be an equal one. By ensuring that you fully understand the RPL process, the roles and responsibilities of yourself and your tutor, and the desired outcomes in terms of your personal, academic and professional development, you will become a more empowered learner.

Section 5: How can you find out more about RPL?

England and Scotland

- PlanIt is a website providing information on careers, learning and work in Scotland. It provides information on learning opportunities in schools, colleges, universities and the community. It provides links to institutions as well as other organisations. It also includes brief guidance on RPL/APL/APEL opportunities in colleges and universities (see <http://www.ceg.org.uk/>).
- Information on RPL/APEL procedures in educational institutions, particularly higher education, are available on the web by doing a search using a search engine such as Google and typing in accreditation of prior experiential learning.
- A large number of institutions outline their RPL/APEL policies and procedures on their websites and in written guidance material for students. Contact details for universities and further education colleges can be found on their websites.
- The Learning from Experience Trust (LET) has been working since 1986 to promote learning from experience. Details of its work can be found on the LET website (<http://www.learningexperience.org.uk/>).
- *Mapping APEL. Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning in English Higher Education* (LET, March 2000; see

<http://www.learningexperience.org.uk/stuff/Effective%20practice%20in%20APEL.pdf>) – funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), this is a report of a national survey.

- **learnirect** is a learning-through-work scheme that recognises and rewards learning that you gain through your work. RPL can be included in the design of your individual programme with one of the partner universities (see <http://www.learnirect-ltw.co.uk>).

Finland

- The key person for RPL/APEL claims in Finland is the institution's student counsellor. The counsellor can give institution-specific information about RPL. Most educational institutions have their own guidebooks for students where RPL information can be also be found.
- More general information can be found in educational guides (koulutusoppaat) published by the National Board of Education. The guides are also available on the internet (<http://www.oph.fi> (opiskelijapalvelut)). At this site students can also find a lot of information about the personal study planning process (Voimassa olevat opetussuunnitelman ja näyttötutkinnon perusteet Ammatilliset perustutkinnot).
- Another useful link is the National Union of Polytechnic Students website (<http://www.samok.fi>) as well as <http://www.nextstep.fi> which is also a student union website.

France

- Information on APEL in France – validation des acquis professionnel (VAP) or validation des acquis de l'expérience (VAE)– can be found on the following websites:

<http://www.education.gouv.fr/sup/vaep/default.htm>

http://www.travail.gouv.fr/dossiers/156.html?id_mot=307

<http://www.ac-besancon.fr/> (click 'Examens' and search under VAP).

Spain

- In Spain, initiatives are being taken to implement a system of accreditation of prior experience. The current centres for acquiring information are the schools or adult education associations that provide accreditation.
- From the website of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (<http://www.mtas.es/>) you can access the Institute of National Qualifications (INCUAL). In addition to information about objectives, functions and the structure of INCUAL and the General Council of Vocational Training, from this website you can access information about professional qualifications and training, legislation and so forth.
- For more information, you can access the website of the Basque Institute of Vocational Training and Qualifications (http://www.euskadi.net/lanbidez/sincp/indice_c.htm). This contains information about the institute and the Catalogue of Professional Qualifications.

Valuing Learning from Experience (VaLEx)

Tutors' pack

Part 1: a practical guide

December 2005

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Valuing Learning from Experience

Tutors' pack part 1: a practical guide

1 Introduction

A flexible framework for RPL

Valuing Learning from Experience (VaLEx) provides an adaptable framework for the recognition of prior informal learning.

The VaLEx support materials are designed to be used flexibly with learners as they work through each stage of the process. The VaLEx process can support RPL provision to all learners and at all stages.

The VaLEx support materials have been developed as part of the EU-funded Socrates-Grundtvig project, Valuing Learning from Experience (VaLEx) (see Appendix 1)

The tutor's pack

The tutor's pack which has been developed to support the VaLEx process has three parts:

- a practical guide
- the theoretical/pedagogical approach
- VaLEx support materials.

The **practical guide** provides a summary of the VaLEx approach, appropriate contexts for RPL and who can undertake RPL, critical success factors for RPL provision, and the impact of RPL. It introduces the biographical model and flexible approaches to recognition and assessment. It also summarises possible outcomes of the process for learners.

The **theoretical/pedagogical section** explores the pedagogical approach that underpins the VaLEx process, describes the VaLEx model and provides references for further reading.

The **VaLEx support materials** provide a range of activities and resources that tutors can use to support learners in the RPL process. The materials are linked to each stage of the VaLEx process, but can be used flexibly by tutors to meet the needs of their particular learner group(s).

2 Summary of the VaLEx approach

The VaLEx process is based on a biographical model. The pedagogical approach underpinning VaLEx is contained in part 2 of the tutors' guide. VaLEx enables the use of RPL for both formative and summative recognition.

Formative recognition can be carried out within the context of personal/career development and educational guidance. Its purpose is to build learners' confidence, recognise skills and knowledge gained through experience, and identify ways in which these skills and knowledge can be further developed through additional learning opportunities. The outcome of this process can be an action plan or a personal development plan. Formative recognition may be a preparatory stage to summative recognition, or RPL for credit.

RPL for credit, or APEL, is the process of **summative recognition**. It involves assessing and then credit-rating learning which has its source in some experience

that occurred prior to the point of a candidate entering a formal programme of study, but where that experience was not previously formally assessed and credit-rated. The outcome of a claim for RPL for credit, or APEL, may be the award of specific credit within the student's programme of learning, or entry to a programme of study as an alternative to normal entry requirements. A diagram illustrating the VaLEx process is provided in Appendix 2.

A more resource-efficient means of providing support to learners engaged in the process of making an RPL claim can be to use a group approach. Generic support on a group basis to students undertaking RPL claims can be designed, for example, to complement the subject-specific support provided by a programme or institution RPL adviser, or admissions staff. The VaLEx support materials can be used with learners on a group or individual basis.

3 Who can undertake RPL?

RPL can be undertaken by a wide range of adult learners. In particular, the following groups of learners often choose RPL to help them to re-enter learning or as a contribution towards a programme of study:

- women returning to education
- unemployed people seeking recognition for skills gained through informal learning
- people wanting to improve on existing qualifications
- those wanting to retrain or change careers
- people who left courses before achieving the formal qualifications
- undergraduate and postgraduate students
- people who have been out of the education system for a long time and who may lack formal qualifications
- people who have disabilities of some kind
- minority ethnic groups and asylum seekers.

4 Appropriate contexts for RPL

RPL may be an appropriate route for learners in a range of different contexts. These can include:

- social care and social work
- nursing
- early education and childcare
- teacher training
- management
- Foundation Degrees
- programmes or activities to support the transition from informal to formal learning, for example as part of the bridging process or return-to-learn type provision
- community-based learning programmes
- personal development planning

- careers guidance
- pre-entry guidance
- continuing professional development.

In France, learners have a legal right to make RPL claims in all fields except medicine and national defence.

5 Critical success factors

The factors determining the success, development and implementation of RPL processes include:

- institutional support
 - senior management support
 - institutional framework/procedures
 - support of teaching staff
 - training and support
 - time
 - incentive
 - link to flexible delivery developments
- community/regional/national university working groups
- publicity and market demand
- systems to provide information and guidance
- external partnerships with trade unions, employers, (un)employment agencies
- development of national credit and qualifications frameworks
- funding support – community/national funding bodies, for example Scottish Funding Council
- coordination support, for example Universities Scotland, Universities UK
- bridges between HE and vocational educational systems.

6 Impact of RPL²

Benefits for learners

- **Increased self-confidence**

The process of reflection that the recognition of prior informal learning involves, as well as the promotion of the valuing of learning by self and others, often leads to increased self-confidence as a learner. This can enhance the motivation to continue learning.

- **Preparation/planning for further learning and personal/career development**

The process of RPL for personal/career development, or formative recognition, helps learners to:

² Extract from *SCQF RPL Guidelines* (2005), www.scqf.org.uk

- think about what they have achieved so far through their experiences in terms of strengths and skills
- think about their goals and what they need to do to achieve them (for example, join a vocational or academic programme at a college or university; do a training course; apply for, or change, jobs)
- consider their options and make decisions about the direction they wish to take in terms of further learning opportunities or career development
- ease the transition from informal to formal learning by enabling both them and others to value their achievements and to recognise the importance of their learning through experience
- develop their analytical and learning skills through the process of undertaking RPL itself
- prepare them to make an RPL claim for credit to gain entry to, or credit within, a programme of study at a college or university.
- **Gaining credit for prior informal learning**

The process of RPL for credit, or summative recognition, can help learners to:

- gain general credit which is not related to a particular formal learning programme
- gain entry to a programme of study at a college or university (if they do not have the normal entry qualifications)
- gain credit towards a programme of study and so allow them to join at a later level, shortening the period of study
- gain credit within a programme of study they have already commenced.

Benefits for colleges and universities

- **Increase access and widen participation for non-traditional learners:**
 - RPL can address the needs of mature learners and part-time students, by recognising alternative forms of entry requirements and shortening the period of study.
 - Learners who have been guided in the identification of their skills and knowledge through an RPL process within the context of voluntary sector learning provision, work-based learning, trade union learning and community learning and development would be able to provide a record of that process to admissions staff in colleges and universities to support their application. This would assist admissions staff in reaching decisions about an applicant's potential ability to successfully undertake the programme.
 - By using a consistent, and recorded, approach to RPL for entry to, or credit within a programme, decisions regarding entry and credit are more transparent.
 - RPL can support strategies of retention, guidance and learner support by identifying the needs of learners before entry.
- **Support development of learning partnerships:**
 - RPL processes linked to formative and summative recognition may require collaboration between learning providers across the different sectors in order to ensure that the needs of the learner are most effectively met. The provision

of RPL to learners across the different sectors may require the development of learning partnerships between colleges, universities, employers, professional and statutory bodies, community learning and voluntary sector learning providers, and educational/career guidance providers.

- **Links to personal development planning:**
 - RPL can be embedded within PDP processes and can help to make explicit the links between life, work and learning.
- **Support developments in the area of learning and teaching:**
 - The development of RPL processes can contribute to curriculum development in relation to the nature of learning, knowledge and assessment.
 - RPL is integral to the development and operation of work-based learning programmes.
 - RPL claims for credit are usually based on recent or current workplace practice which can provide a useful source of discussion material for learners within the context of a formal learning programme and can enhance their understanding of the connection between theory and practice.

Benefits for employers

RPL can support training and staff development strategies of employers and voluntary organisations by:

- increasing motivation and interest in workplace practice on the part of the employee/learner
- reducing the amount of time needed to complete a qualification and therefore requiring less time away from the workplace
- generating new ideas and developments in the workplace as a result of processes of reflection on practice by employee/learner
- improving employee retention and reduce recruitment and training costs.

7 Biographical model

Central to the VaLEx process is a guidance approach enabling individuals to:

- identify learning from personal and professional experience through a personal biography route
- recognise personal and professional skills and attributes – the ‘capacities’
- carry out written analysis of learning in terms of knowledge and competences through supported tutoring
- map out a personal and educational/career plan.

The RPL model, using a learner-centred, biographical (life history) approach:

- encourages independent active learning, personal development planning and a portfolio of documented evidence which reflects the learner(s) skills and ‘capabilities’
- provides a structure for uncertificated experiential learning to help to form an educational/career plan or summarise prior knowledge for credit/entry towards more formal learning programmes

- helps to bridge the divide between non-formal and formal learning, enabling learning from experience to be recognised and valued academically/professionally.

There are two steps to the RPL model:

- **Step 1 – recognition of skills and competences, personal development and structured evidence**

Using active teaching and learning, the model must help learner(s) to recognise that their individual skills and competences used in everyday living are capabilities. Learner(s) are supported in developing a reflective learning approach which enables them to identify, articulate and evaluate their life experiences. Furthermore, by employing a personal development plan and structured portfolio of evidence, the model helps learner(s) to develop transformative learning skills. Learners are guided in analysing and adapting what they have learnt so that they can use these skills and capabilities in a different context.

- **Step 2 – community and institutional recognition**

The model recognises that personal development is a continuing process, and must ensure that structured evidence such as a 'life history portfolio' formally demonstrates non-formal, uncertificated, experiential learning. This portfolio of learning can be recognised both socially within the community and institutionally by universities and colleges.

Hence, the model uses a learner-centred, biographical (life history) approach that encourages:

- independent, active learning
- personal development planning
- a life history portfolio, structuring documented evidence which reflect the learner(s) skills and capabilities.

The RPL model follows a four-stage process.

Stage 1

The model recommends that tutors (facilitators) must release control, sharing the VaLEx objectives, VaLEx model, pilot and use of an alternate curriculum with learners and co-workers, using the following:

- introduction to VaLEx and description of the VaLEx model
- *Valuing your Learning from Experience – A learner's guide*
- the 12-step programme (see Appendix 2: the VaLEx process)
- study sessions
- VaLEx support materials, electronic and paper-based.

Be honest – if tutors stop being teachers and openly share information while acknowledging that they do not have all the answers, trust develops. As a result, communication between tutor and learner becomes far more open and constructive. Furthermore, the greater the trust, the more willing learners are to share their life experiences and tell the tutor how they feel about a subject, which gives more meaning to the learning experience. Thus, when tutors release control, learners'

confidence and competence to share learning experiences and acquire knowledge increase.

Stage 2

The model advocates that tutors (facilitators) must employ directed learning, involving an active teaching and learning approach as outlined below:

- Initial contact is an important factor as to whether a learner decides to join and stay on a course. It is important that tutors are informal, friendly and welcoming, and encourage nervous potential learners.
- Whenever possible, allocate someone (a personal tutor) to act as a mentor and guide to help learner(s) – for example, advising on their learning progress (PDP), finding the correct room/s, helping them to become accustomed to institutional policy and procedure.
- Learning sessions are neither tutor nor student led, though to some degree they are tutor-assisted and guided.
- Create a sense of community and community provision to provide a comfortable, non-threatening learning environment for people who lack confidence in their learning ability, as is the case with many adult learners.
- Be clear, concise and supportive when teaching adult learners, to avoid learners leaving.
- Avoid or be prepared to explain academic jargon.
- Allow learners to discuss and take part in the decision-making about their own learning methods and support materials, either individually or as part of a group. Learners' experiences involve a range of emotions – joy, anger, trauma, abuse, conflict and so forth, and they more often than not want to learn about themselves and their community.
- Suggested cultural topics for one-to-one or group discussion (National ESOL training and development project, 2003, p65):
 - culture – customs and traditions
 - leisure and recreation
 - family and friends
 - health
 - local area/community
 - housing and budgeting
 - educational opportunities
 - work
 - social issues – equal opportunities/asylum seekers/racism.
- Allow learners to plan the order in which they will tackle tasks.
- Ensure that any support materials used are relevant to the individual's/group's daily lives, thereby prompting thought, reflection and/or discussion regarding personal/group experiences.

- Remember that learning is inter-subjective. Mature students are looking for more than just accreditation – they want to effect change and provide a better place for themselves and their loved ones within their community.
- Use this community approach to education to promote three things:
 - a) a learning partnership between tutor and learner
 - b) learners who are actively involved in structuring and participating in their own learning programme
 - c) learners, through self-evaluation and group discussion about life experiences, helping themselves and each other to promote change; individual experiences become collective experiences within the community.

This community approach towards education often breaks down traditional relationships both inside and outside institutions, blurring set boundaries between communities and institutions.

- Encourage learners not to be afraid or embarrassed about making mistakes, and to learn from their mistakes.

Stage 3

The model identifies that tutors (facilitators) must help learners to implement a personal development plan. Therefore, tutors should:

- appoint a personal tutor for each learner, to support and guide the self-evaluation necessary for learners to construct a PDP
- agree a flexible PDP or scheme of study with learners. Such a plan must map out learners' personal and achievable development objectives, in order to strike a balance between the formal/academic aims of learners' courses and their informal home life and extracurricular activities such as community, voluntary and paid work
- arrange private meetings between learner and personal tutor to allow informal, open discussions. Personal tutors help learners to develop their confidence and, through self-evaluation, identify their current level of learning and transferable skills
- organise group activities based on the VaLEx model and 12-step programme, involving teamwork, problem-solving, creativity and a holistic approach to personal development, helping learners to consider the needs of others when developing and planning their personal objectives.

Stage 4

The model outlines the need for a 'life history portfolio'. On the one hand, whether written, oral or pictorial, this personal biography provides a structured framework which enables learners to record their life experiences, personal development and transferable skills. On the other hand, the portfolio can also link personal experience with the wider social context of collective community experiences, going so far as to document how such collective experiences can often challenge institutions and public policy.

Thus, the model identifies the requirements for a life history portfolio:

- A life history portfolio is a record of lived experience, without a fixed format, although learners usually elect to write their portfolio. However, people for whom English is not their first language or people who have learning disabilities can use

personal pictures, videos, music, poems/limericks, films, magazine and newspaper articles, on-line 'web logs' (individual websites) and so forth, as long as the information is reflective of the learners' lived experiences and socio-cultural environment.

- One of the functions of a life history portfolio, like biographical interviews, is to bring together the past, present and future. The portfolio should demonstrate that learners understand how the past shapes the present and the present affects the future, for both individuals and their society.
- Likewise, the portfolio is not set in stone – it can be changed and adapted as learners select, summarise or re-sequence events and their meaning, highlighting the complex way in which learners move between the past, present and future.
- Through discussions with their personal tutor, peer group, family and community, learners should be able to understand and explain the contents of their life history portfolio, explaining the meaning of their experiences as they relate to the learner, their community and the global community, when placed within a wider social context.
- Tutors must assist learners to remember lived experiences in two ways:

Firstly –

1 While gathering and compiling materials, use the past as the issue. Draw from old diaries, documents, video or pictorial evidence, oral accounts etc.

2 Help learners to identify and discuss an emerging pattern of similar actions/reactions to different events over time.

Secondly –

1 While making the past a topic of concern, help to identify certain memories that will allow learners to start to formulate their life story for their portfolio.

2 Help learners to possess the past – that is, own these memories – while developing their ability to interpret, reflect on and learn from such memories. This will empower them as individuals and as learners.

Finally, underpinning the model is the use of 'guiding circles' (see http://www.ahrdcc.com/resource/gc_home.htm).

The model endorses a holistic approach to career/academic development, considering activities that relate to learners' physical, mental, spiritual and emotional well-being. In addition, as individual learners are integral members of their community, the model encourages objective, group activities yet remains flexible enough to accommodate subjective, individual learning.

Positive activities involve learners and encourage active learning, while reflecting and remaining sensitive to the socio-cultural environment of learners. Furthermore, such activities identify learners' true potential, and help to develop a meaningful action plan (PDP).

The circle metaphor relates to the fluidity of an individual's biographical journey, which has no set beginning or end, and is unique to the learner. However, such biographies are interconnected with the community and multi-connected to a much wider global community.

The circles portfolio goes through the following process:

- 1 reflection/interests – aptitudes – gifts – skills

- 2 telling your story – personal style, values and meaning – the beginning of a new journey
- 3 asking questions – interacting, recognising the other
- 4 writing your story – the significant/formative events – a new story, new skills
- 5 retelling/rewriting your story – creativity
- 6 prior learning – skills, interests, competences – work-life roles
- 7 appropriation of one's own story
- 8 recognition – the circles portfolio?
- 9 accreditation/validation.

8 Flexible approach to recognition and assessment

There are a variety of different ways in which a learner can make an RPL claim. The approach used is determined by the purpose for which the RPL claim is being made, that is, for formative recognition (confidence-building, personal learning or development plan, return to learn) or for summative recognition (entry to and/or credit within formal programmes of study, or towards a qualification). Summative recognition, or RPL for credit, requires a formal assessment of the learning. Mechanisms for gathering evidence include:

- a reflective account
- a project
- a portfolio
- Europass CV
- a personal development plan
- an interview
- assessment on demand
- direct observation of practice/simulation
- or a combination of these.

Reflective account

Learners can produce a reflective account, with appropriate support, to demonstrate the process and outcomes of reflection on their experience. This approach enables learners to make clear connections between their experiences and the learning that has resulted.

Project

Such a project might resemble those undertaken by conventional students, but would contain direct reference to learners' experiences and current working practices.

Portfolio

This term refers to a collection of materials compiled by someone to demonstrate what they have learnt.

The portfolio route for an RPL claim enables learners to decide which learning experiences to draw on and the particular pieces of evidence they will compile to demonstrate the learning outcomes or competences. Evidence can include direct evidence, which is material produced by the learner 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 often resource-intensive. Learners need detailed guidance on how to put together a portfolio, and in particular on the nature, range and volume of evidence required to demonstrate the learning.

Learners should be encouraged to reduce the volume of evidence by being selective in their choice of material and to cross-reference evidence to more than one learning outcome or competence, so that the process of compiling a portfolio becomes a more manageable exercise.

Europass CV³

The Europass CV is the backbone of the Europass framework. In its electronic form it can be linked to other Europass documents such as the Europass Language Passport and the Diploma or Certificate Supplement, for higher education and vocational education respectively. The Europass CV includes categories for presenting information on language proficiency, work experience and education and training achievements, as well as additional competences held by the learner in relation to technical, organisational, artistic and social skills. The Europass CV, and other extended CV formats, can be used as evidence of prior informal learning as part of a portfolio or to underpin a structured interview/oral assessment.

Personal development plan

This is the basis for RPL claims in Finland. The personal development plan is a scheme where students form an individual plan and objectives for their study programme based on the curriculum. The personal study scheme is usually produced at the beginning of students' studies in collaboration with a teacher or a tutor. The scheme is flexible and students come back to it to evaluate their studies. Previous studies, experiential learning and know-how in the respective field are taken into account when students are forming the plan. Individual study schemes are widely in use, especially in vocational education, new universities and adult education. The idea behind the personal study planning process is to support self-directed learning.

In the UK, the reflective element of personal development planning for students in further and higher education could well incorporate RPL processes.

Interview

An oral assessment or interview as the primary or secondary form of evidence can enable learners to express the full extent of their prior achievements during the discussion. Learners are not held back by the requirements of a written task.

³ The development of Europass (a single framework for transparency of qualifications) will 'link separate documents aimed at the transparency of qualifications and competences into a single framework in the form of a structured portfolio of documents known as "Europass"', Commission of European Communities (December 2003) *Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a single framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass)*. Details of the Europass CV and Europass Language Passport can be found on the Europass website: <http://europass.cedefop.eu.int>

Discussing an experience can often prompt learners to explore more deeply what they learned from it. Interviews can be carried out on either a group or individual basis.

Assessment on demand

The existing assessment for the particular course or element of the programme for which learners are seeking credit, such as a written examination or assignment or one that has been specially devised, can be used as evidence.

Direct observation of practice/simulation

Learners may be asked to demonstrate certain techniques or skills in a particular setting, such as the workplace, so that direct observation of them can take place. This approach may be particularly suitable where mastery of special skills is required, such as laboratory work, or where interpersonal skills are highlighted, such as social work.

The observation can also reveal the depth of learners' understanding of key areas in relation to their claim. Where direct observation of a particular situation is not possible (for example because of the disturbance this would cause), a simulation or role play may be used.

One of these approaches, or a combination of them, can be used as part of the RPL process.

How will the learning be recognised?

The process of recognising informal or experiential learning varies between country, sector, institution and department.

If learners are seeking formal recognition of their learning, their RPL claim will be assessed by an expert(s) at the college, vocational institute or university to confirm the learning claims made.

If the assessor is satisfied that the learner already has the knowledge and skills to gain entry to a programme, or the knowledge and skills that would be gained from successfully completing a formally taught course or module, the learner is awarded entry or credit accordingly by that institution.

RPL can help learners to make connections between the type of learning they have achieved informally, through their experiences, and the more formal learning they would undertake at a college, vocational institute or university. This is described as a transformative process, as learners recognise that the skills they have developed in everyday life can be translated into the skills needed to become an effective learner, such as communication and problem-solving skills.

The learning gained through experience is a rich and useful resource to draw on as learners embark on further learning, employment or more active participation in the community.

9 Possible outcomes of VaLEx

- Recognition by self, and by others (peers, colleagues, employer, community), of the value of strengths and skills gained through prior informal learning to increase learner's self-confidence and motivation.

- A more supported transition from an informal to a formal learning context in a college or university as part of a bridging process.
- Planning of an individual learning pathway, personal/career development plan or personal learning plan which will build on this learning in order to achieve goals.
- Preparation of RPL claims to gain entry to, or credit within, a formal programme of study or qualification.

10 Introduction to the support materials

The support materials that make up part 3 of the VaLEx tutors' pack have been developed and piloted by the European partners of the VaLEx project.

The materials comprise structured activities for learners and handouts, and are divided into the 12 key stages of the VaLEx process – see diagram in Appendix 2.

The way in which learners undertake these stages should be determined by the learning provider, for example through weekly group sessions; or in an intensive block; or through a longer, more intermittent process, perhaps as part of a wider programme of study.

The materials can also be used to support the provision of RPL modules or as part of a PDP process. Appendix 3 provides an example of VaLEx modules.

Appendix 1: Background to VaLEx

The project has piloted an RPL model in seven European countries. The model targets hard-to-reach learners from traditionally socially excluded groups who lack successful experience of formal learning and self-confidence as learners, or are excluded for reasons of ethnicity, migration, disability or some other social or economic factors.

The Socrates project Valuing Learning from Experience (VaLEx) builds on the work of our previous Socrates-Grundtvig project, 'Social Inclusion through APEL: the Learners' Perspective', which enabled an investigation of the extent of APEL activity in a number of different settings across Europe, and an exploration of the response of learners to that experience. The earlier project raised issues regarding the need for change if APEL were to have a more inclusive and valued role, as it revealed limited APEL activity generally within the UK and across Europe. One of its main findings was that most learners benefiting from APEL opportunities were 'traditional' learners, leading to the conclusion that the potential of APEL to support processes of social inclusion within the lifelong learning agenda was not being realised. The project recommended giving more emphasis to the 'transformative' dimension of APEL, in order to widen participation in lifelong learning by non-traditional groups of learners, enabling them to develop new 'learners' identities'.

The VaLEx project, therefore, aimed to develop APEL's potential as a reflective and analytical tool, to make explicit the connections between non-formal learning situations and formal learning opportunities. The collaborative product that emerged from the previous project, the learners' guide *Making Experience Count*, served as a starting point for VaLEx, to be further developed into a pedagogical tool. This tool was field-tested and evaluated with learners from hard-to-reach groups in each of the eight partner countries.

The VaLEx project's aims were carried out over two years through the following objectives, to:

- 1 review and carry out a theoretical analysis of existing practices concerning the learning and teaching strategies underpinning the implementation of APEL in the partner countries, with reference to the findings of the EU project 'TRANSFINE'
- 2 develop an RPL model supported by pedagogical and guidance tools for adult learners, including professional guidelines for academic and frontline staff, adapted to diverse learning and cultural/national contexts, and building on existing expertise and examples of good practice. This pedagogical model will be designed to support adult learners in a process of self-evaluation and written analysis of their personal and professional capacities in the context of an emerging personal or professional development plan
- 3 develop further the learner's guide (as part of the guidance tools) as a multimedia learning product, adaptable to diverse learning contexts
- 4 target specific hard-to-reach groups, using existing and new local partnerships with formal and non-formal educational providers
- 5 pilot the pedagogical and guidance tools developed collectively by partners with these targeted groups in each partner country
- 6 evaluate the tools' effectiveness in responding to learners' needs in diverse contexts, and their ability to fit in with diverse national contexts and constraints
- 7 disseminate the model and supporting learning products to appropriate national and European networks engaged in developing resources for adult learning.

Pedagogical approach

Through the comparative analysis of RPL/APEL practices and partner institutions' learning and teaching approaches, the project sought to build a working framework which reflects the transformative potential of the RPL process. By transformative we refer to the potential within RPL to help learners to recognise not just the learning they have already achieved, but their potential as learners, thus revealing 'human capital' (their capacities as individuals, learners, workers and citizens) in a way not possible if only using traditional methods of assessment.

The reflective process underpinning RPL can enable the recognition and valuing of skills, knowledge and understanding which can be gained through informal learning experiences. Through reflection, the discourses of the everyday can be translated into the discourses of learning. Learners are encouraged to challenge their often narrow perception of what constitutes 'learning'.

Project partners

Glasgow Caledonian University, Scotland, UK (project coordinator)

University of Stirling, Scotland, UK

University of South Brittany, France

Free University of Brussels, Belgium

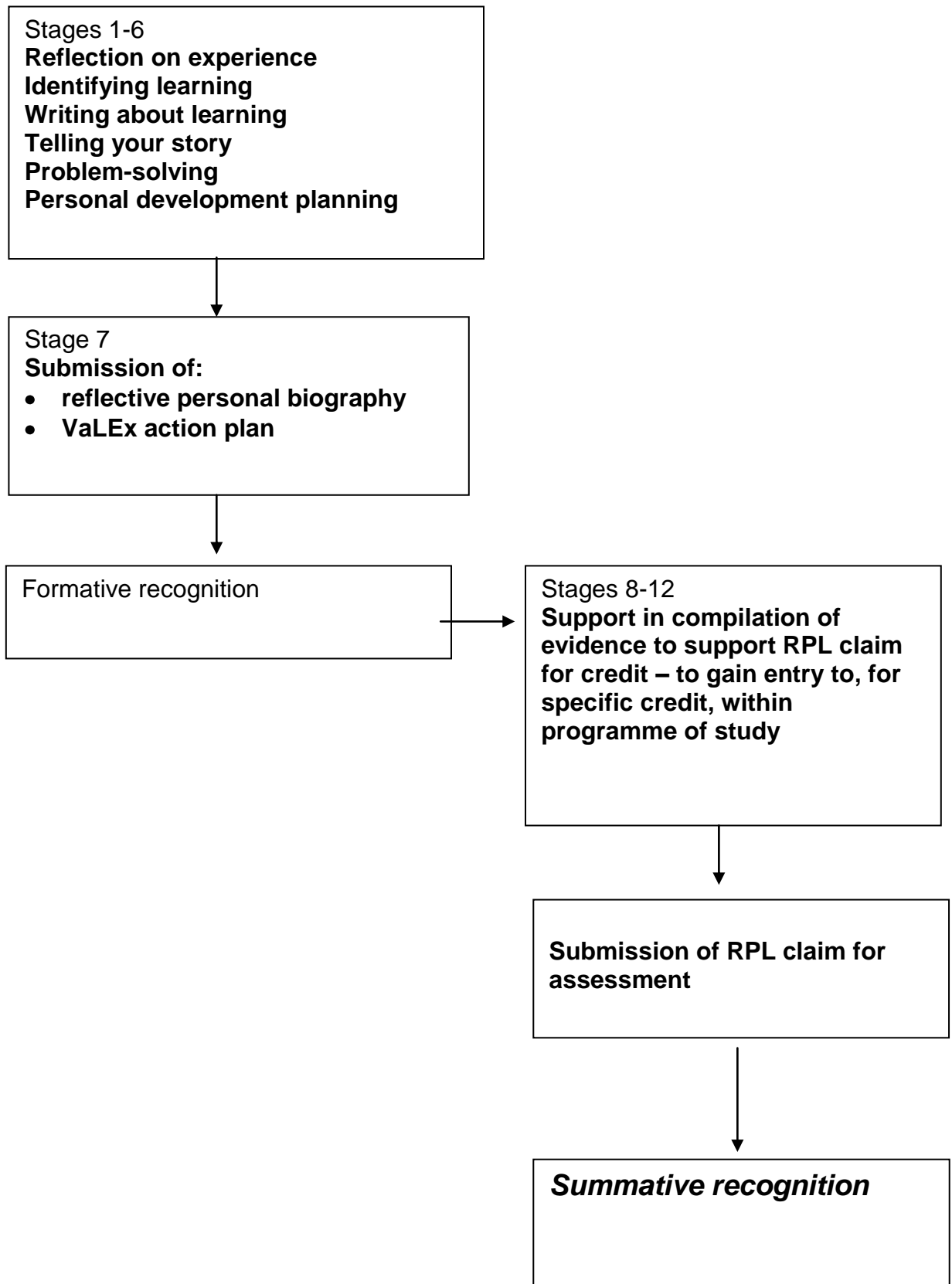
Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland

University of Turku, Finland

University of Tartu, Estonia

University of Warwick, England, UK

Appendix 2: Diagram of the VaLEx Process



Appendix 3: VaLEx modules

Glasgow Caledonian University has approved two VaLEx modules to provide the generic support for students undertaking RPL. The two modules represent a two-stage approach to RPL.

VaLEx I: this module focuses on enabling learners to recognise the knowledge and skills gained through their prior informal or experiential learning, in order to:

- increase their self-confidence as learners
- enable them to make an explicit connection between informal learning situations and formal learning opportunities, to support their transition into formal learning
- identify educational/career opportunities in a wider sense.

VaLEx II: this module can be a vehicle for achieving credit for prior informal or experiential learning within the university. The module:

- supports learners in the process of making an RPL claim for credit
- recognises the learning undertaken in the process of compiling an RPL claim for credit
- increases opportunities for learners to gain access to HE at the appropriate level

The first module (VaLEx I) provides the basis for the first stage of RPL, that of formative recognition; the second module (VaLEx II) supports the second stage, summative recognition.

By providing RPL guidance within the context of credit-bearing modules, the staff resources required for this process can be provided. The modules also enable learners not already registered on a GCU programme to register as associate students, thus increasing their familiarity with the University. Students registered on the modules also have access to fee waivers on the same basis as part-time students, thereby increasing access for low-income groups.

Both modules have been approved within the context of the Caledonian Degree within GAPS (General Academic and Professional Studies). It is available to Caledonian degree students, to students on other programmes across the university, and to learners outside the institution, on an associate student basis. VaLEx 1 was recently piloted as part of the VaLEx project with a group of women who are asylum seekers.

Students undertaking VaLEx I have the option of continuing directly to VaLEx II. The use of two half-modules enables some students to complete the process at the formative recognition stage while still gaining credit for completion.

The VaLEx modules aim to:

- provide a vehicle to support students, to prepare an RPL claim for credit within their programme of study
- complement PDP approaches
- contribute to the widening access and participation agenda by opening new routes into programmes for new learners who would not otherwise consider HE as an option
- contribute to developmental practices relating to the nature of assessment, learning and knowledge
- highlight the role of educational guidance and PDP for all learners

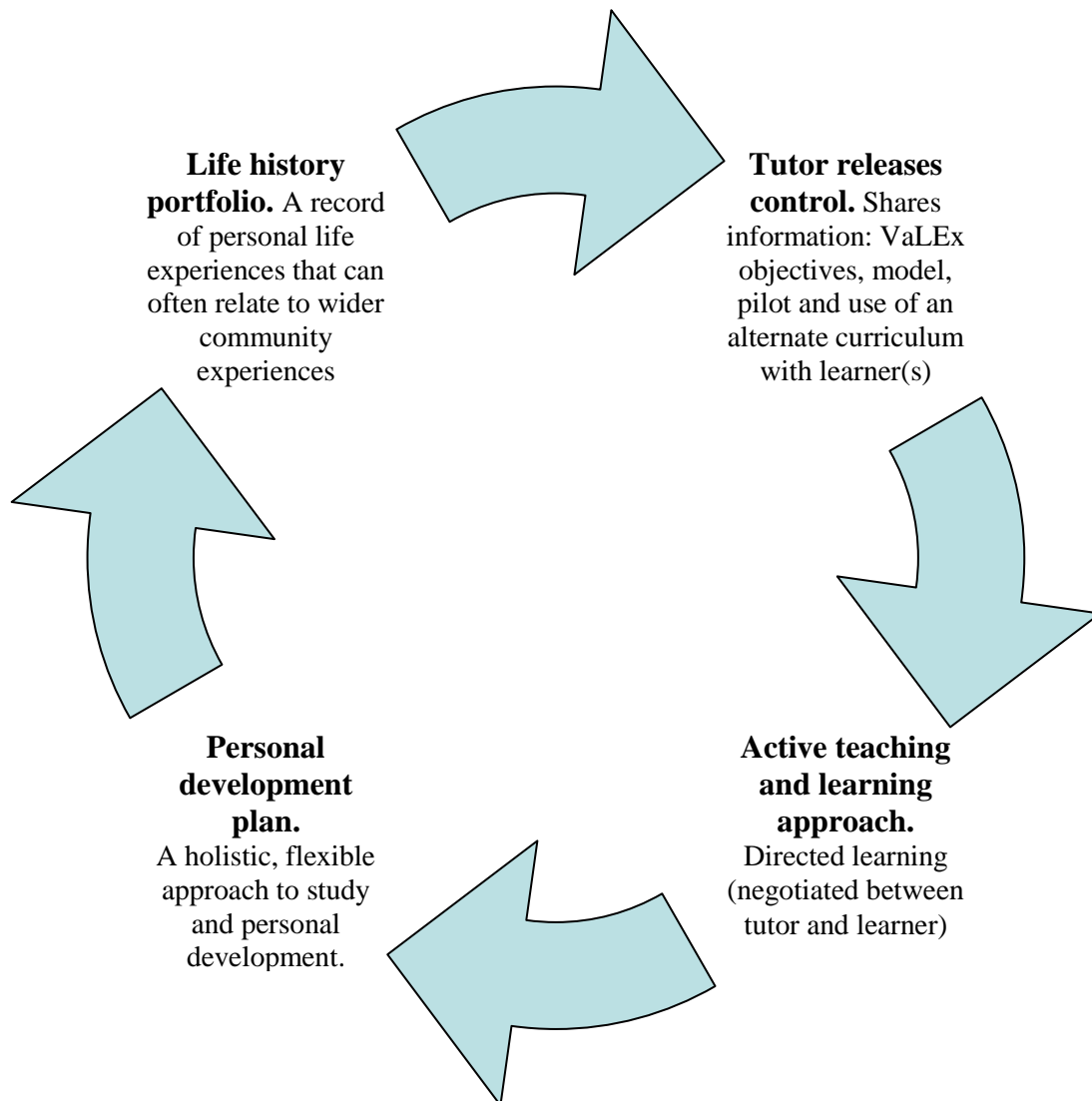
- give transparency to the implementation of RPL measures throughout the University.

Valuing Learning from Experience (VaLEx)

Tutors' pack

Part 2: The theoretical/pedagogical approach

December 2005



Underpinning the VaLEx model is the use of 'guiding circles'. The model embraces a holistic approach to career/academic development, promoting activities that relate to the physical, mental, spiritual and emotional well-being of learners (Cando, 2003). Thus, the model is both flexible and like a circle interconnected to learners, their community and the wider global community.

(For more on guiding circles see
http://www.ahrdcc.com/resource/gc_home.htm)

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1 Introduction

The Valuing Learning from Experience (VaLEx) project is working to develop a generic VaLEx model to promote the recognition of prior informal learning, a process that enables learning from experience to be recognised and valued. The project pilot targets hard-to-reach groups using biographical research methods and generic pedagogical support materials. Sponsored by EU Socrates-Grundtvig, the project is led by Glasgow Caledonian University and involves project members from seven European countries working in partnership.

VaLEx builds on the findings of a previous Socrates-Grundtvig project, 'Social Inclusion through APEL'. This project identified the learning experiences and needs of non-traditional groups of learners. Thus the objectives of the VaLEx project are twofold: firstly, to undertake a theoretical analysis of existing practices and principles underpinning APEL/RPL; secondly, to develop a pedagogical model for non-traditional learners who are likely to suffer from social exclusion, such as people with disabilities, those who are unemployed, refugees/asylum seekers and people with no formal qualifications.

Hence the aim of this theoretical guide for tutors is to outline the theories and issues that culminate in a reflective learning approach – assisting non-traditional learners to identify with, articulate and evaluate their learning experiences. VaLEx aims to promote transformative learning: guiding learners so that they can adapt what they have learnt and use these skills within a different context. Approaches like negotiated learning and drawing on biographical (life history) methodology are used to encourage independent active learning, personal development planning and a portfolio of documented evidence reflecting learners' skills and capabilities. Such learning approaches bridge the divide between non-formal and formal learning, enabling learning from experience to be recognised and valued academically, professionally and individually.

2 Learning approach

In order to adopt pedagogical support materials, or more importantly pedagogical communication skills, tutors need to understand and adopt a Freirean learning approach, which is based on two key ideas. Firstly, **dialogue** that is an equal relationship in which tutor and learner engage with one another as knowledgeable equals. Secondly, **problem posing**: the delivery of and/or guidance with cultural themes in the form of open-ended problems, which can be incorporated into materials such as pictures, comics, short stories, songs, video-dramas and visits, and then used to generate discussion and assist the knowledge/demonstration of transformative learning (Freire, 1970, 1993).

The teacher's thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of students' thinking. Teachers cannot think for their students, nor can they impose their thought on them. Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned with reality, does not take place in ivory-tower isolation, but only in communication. If it is true that thought has meaning only when generated by action upon the world, the subordination of students to the teacher becomes impossible (Freire 1970, 1993, p57).

Thus, learning must begin with a solution to the tutor-learner contradiction, and by reconciling this contradiction so that both are simultaneously tutors and learners. Learning involves a critical dialogue between 'I' (tutor) and 'thou' (learner), and therefore the tutor/learner relationship must exist on an equal footing. Each and every one of us is influenced by and influences others. If we forget that, if we think we are superior to others, we become unteachable and dictatorial. Thus we stop communicating effectively and in turn stop learning and evolving as human beings.

Freire stressed this point, arguing that conversation between 'thou and I' cannot involve effective communication skills and derive **meaning** unless the parties involved listen, are open and are willing to learn from one another: 'dialogue cannot exist without humility' (Freire 1970, 1993, p71). Subjects must meet in cooperation in order to understand, otherwise 'anti-dialogical action' takes place, where the dominating 'I' (tutor) transforms the dominated and submissive 'thou' (learner) into a mere 'it'. We all have to learn from our own and other people's experiences (ibid, p71).

Freire appeared to advocate 'problem posing' within education, where all become 'cognitive actors'. Learning is about the dialogue that exists between tutors and learners, who become 'co-investigators' towards 'the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality', in order to progress (ibid, pp60-2). Freire adopted a humanistic ideology whereby learners are recipients of cultural information and experiences through a lifelong process of socialisation. Education could offer freedom, provided that learners are afforded the opportunity to reflect on their own experiences. Through such reflection and by taking action, learners have the ability to create their own roles and challenge their environment, rather than blindly performing roles taught by others. Freire referred to this as the 'praxis'. He also maintained that education could not be neutral as it was designed to facilitate either freedom or conformity and submission. Education was a social institution controlled through social and political pressure designed to teach the cultural perspectives allowed by the elite. In contrast, Freire's pedagogical approach starts with the experiences that learners bring with them to the learning situation.

3 Equal partnership

3.1 Student-centred/tutor-assisted learning

Studies have shown that very few adults plan out a learning career. Often it is the result of 'a turning-point moment' or critical incident, for example divorce or unemployment, that makes them consider returning to learn (see for example Glaser and Strauss, 1971; Merrill, 1999). Education is often perceived as a possibility and even a solution to personal problems and complex private issues. In this situation, whether the reason for learning is self-development, career development or cultural development, many adults want to **participate** in learning, seeing it as a way of moving out of their private world and into the public one.

Research by Thomas emphasised that further education courses were often designed to address the low aspirations and motivation of non-traditional learners 'to change attitudes and cultures (towards learning) rather than to acknowledge difference' (Thomas, 2001, p131). Therefore learning should not be tutor led or student led; it should be a relationship between tutor and learners that to some degree is tutor guided, and where both parties relate to each other as knowledgeable equals. Thus tutors should ensure that they place greater emphasis on participation and relevance, rather than on assessment. It is more important to make the learning experience both shared and **meaningful** as opposed to conducting tests and assessments to measure learning outcomes.

Bernstein (2000) takes this further as he identifies a relationship between the inside and outside of an institution in the learning process. If the boundaries between the inside of an institution (where staff are part of a strong social network) and the outside of an institution (community) are permeable, there is shared pedagogic knowledge. Such knowledge is concerned with the integration of difference, and departmental staff work with each other and with the community to provide a new social basis which involves working with collective opinion and collective interest.

3.2 Negotiated as opposed to traditional learning

The education system is characterised by a theoretical and ideological paradox, as education has the potential to both change and reproduce social relations. This debate centres around macro-micro sociological issues. Education at the macro level acts as a means of social reproduction, reproducing class, gender and race relations and inequality within a capitalist society. Schooling is not about equality of opportunity, rather it functions to grade people as required for social division of labour within a capitalist society. Education at the micro level, however, has the potential to liberate individuals and groups from oppression, empowering them to take control and change their lives and hence break out of the class and gendered roles as outlined by theories of reproduction. This perspective is entrenched within certain traditions of adult education, community education and feminism. Both theories are valid. Rather than separating the two theoretical approaches, they need to be synthesised to understand how education both reproduces the status quo and empowers for change (Merrill, 1999).

Education is a dialectical process of interaction between the micro and macro levels. For education to empower, particular sets of social, ideological and structural relationships are required – for example, a democratic rather than a hierarchical structure, a student-centred approach to teaching as opposed to a didactic one. Within our fragmented culture, learning needs to provide a ‘dialogic democracy’ promoting critical reflexivity of our everyday activities within a wider social context. Tutors and learners, as narrators of their own story, have to make sense of themselves, their family and their community within society (Giddens, 1994, p115; Charney, 2002).

In taking appropriation of our own story, we undermine established structures and show a new political agenda. As opposed to nationalism we are looking for standardisation and ‘communalism in life politics’ (Charney 2002, p137). Thus the main way forward is to renegotiate the boundaries between the public and the private, to find an ‘intermediate zone’ that will straddle the divide. Institutions have not disappeared or lost significance, they are just considered in a different context with new priorities being given to ‘life politics...a politics of identity as well as choice’ (Giddens, 1994, p91) Therefore, social relationships together with institutions (the two are intertwined) form meaningful lifestyles.

Recently, attention has focused on the gendered nature of citizenship and the effect of social policy on women. Citizenship is often conceptualised as part of the public world of politics but, as we have already indicated, the public and the private overlap – what happens in one area affects the other. Using the term ‘**citizen**’ or ‘**women**’ or ‘**men**’ to indicate some monolithic group obscures the way in which various identities of any particular person cross-cut each other.

The value of adult education is not solely to be measured by direct increases in earning power, or productivity capacity, or by any other materialistic yardstick, but by the quality of life it inspires in the individual and generates for the community at large. It is an agent for changing and improving our society, but for each individual the means of change may differ and each must develop in their own way, at their own level and through their own talents (Russell, 1973, p xi).

Outreach centres appear to be more effective at welcoming and encouraging nervous potential students, as they are more informal and friendly (Crossan et al, 2003). They create a sense of community and community provision to provide a comfortable, non-threatening, shared learning environment for people who lack confidence in their learning ability, as is the case with many adult learners. Furthermore, any support materials used are relevant to the individual’s or group’s

daily lives, thereby prompting thought, reflection and/or discussion regarding personal/group experiences.

To illustrate, the Workers Educational Association viewed working-class adult education as sharing and learning from the social and economic problems faced by working-class people within their communities. Hence a curriculum that originates from the lived experiences of individuals and groups within their communities – one that looks beyond the academic needs of the institution and focuses on the educational needs of people within their local community. Thus social relationships together with institutions (the two are intertwined) form meaningful relationships. Such practice has been developed through the adult education residential movement, for example Ruskin and Northern College, alongside Jane Thompson's work with women (eg 1997, 2000). Thus the learning partnership between tutors and learners results in the following:

'It breaks down the "us" and "them" situation produced by traditional methods, replacing them with more egalitarian and participatory relationships between tutors and students.' (Hyland and Merrill, 2003, p121)

Lovett (1975), in *Adult Education, Community Development and the Working Class*, argues for a community development approach for working with non-traditional student groups. For Lovett, the roles of the adult educator are multiple. First, that of network agent to establish contact and relationships with groups of local people and identify the type of action, support and provision required. Secondly, to act as resources agent, identifying existing local educational resources and collaborating with these agencies and organisations. Thirdly, to be an educational guide through making the access of support and educational guidance in existing institutions available to learners. And lastly, to assume the role of teacher (Hyland and Merrill 2003, pp121-2).

To summarise, the main principles underpinning active approaches to teaching and learning that reinforce negotiated learning are:

- active, as opposed to passive, learning that involves a participatory approach; it is the involvement that is itself the learning experience
- achieving certain learning outcomes by taking direct action, presuming that the outcomes have already been identified, are desirable and can be achieved
- a stimulating environment in which learning takes place, so that learners become more articulate, socially competent and confident about themselves while being ready, willing and able to help one another
- the centrality of evaluation – the tutor's role is to guide learners so that they become independent learners who can recognise their own development and are able to take responsibility for their own learning
- the methods being the medium for learning – exercises and activities that follow the '**learning cycle**', beginning with 'a real experience' and 'that make us think', are the process tutors must follow to develop learning objectives (Kolb, 1984; *Valuing your Learning from Experience – A learner's guide*, 2005)
- everyone having a contribution to make, which should be valued, respected and accepted, whatever the learning level.

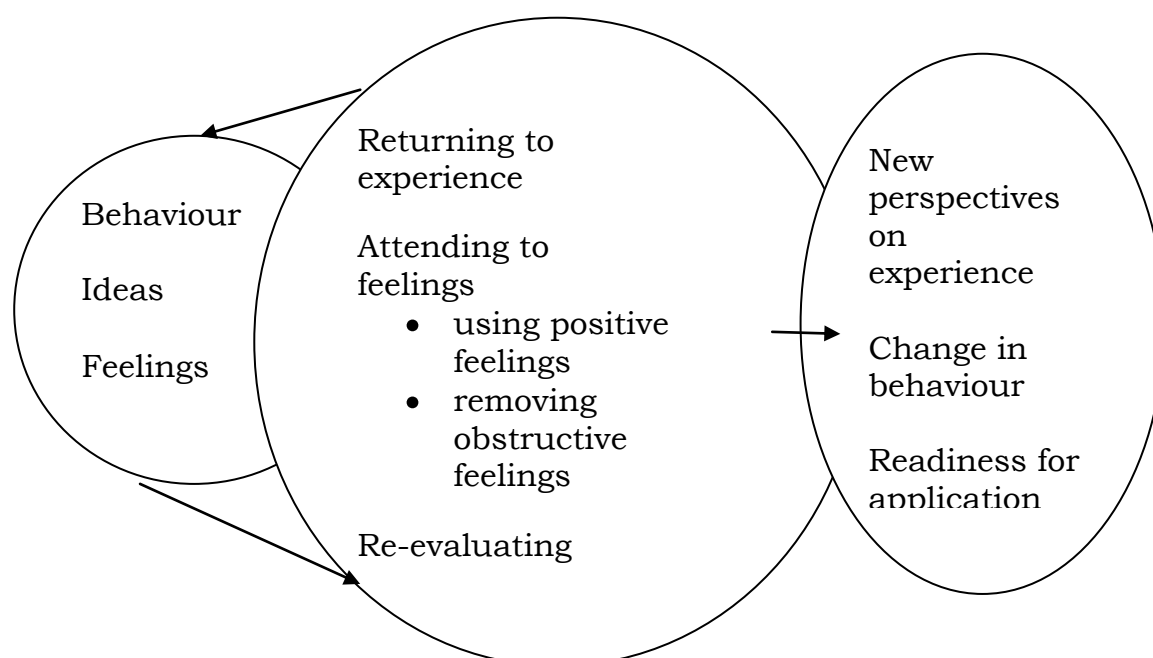
4 Recognition and guidance for transferable skills/reflective learning

Theory

Reflection in the context of learning is exploring and re-evaluating an experience, leading to a new understanding and appreciation. In most cases, the initial experience is quite complex and constitutes a number of events taking place within it. After the experience there occurs a processing phase; this is the area of reflection:

'Reflection is an important human activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it. It is the working with experience that is important to learning.' (Boud et al, 1985, p33)

Such reflection may occur in isolation or in association with others, can be done well or badly, and the outcome may lead to an effective or ineffective learning experience. However, learners and teachers need to be aware that reflection on the part of the adult learner can be prompted by positive or negative states (events). Boud goes on to stress that: 'the more teachers and learners understand the reflective aspect of learning and organise activities which are consistent with it, the more effective learning can be'.



Reflection process in context

Despite all that has been written about reflection, it is difficult to be precise about the nature of the process so integral to every aspect of learning and involving almost all mental processes. Dewey assumed it was highly rational and controlled, defining reflective thought as:

'Active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and further conclusions to which it leads...it includes conscious and voluntary effort to establish belief upon a firm basis of evidence and rationality.' (Dewey, 1998, chapter 1)

Tutors must organise learning activities that help learners to:

- **return to the experience** – recollect what has taken place, replay the experience mentally and verbally, and commit this description to paper/audio

- describe such events, which can **attend to feelings** – through an awareness of the feelings that were present at the time of the experience
- **re-evaluate the experience** – through attention to description and feelings, gaining enough insight to fully comprehend and learn from their reflective process
- **place this re-evaluation process in context** to assist the process of reflection, considering four aspects (Boud et al, 1985, p33):
 - 1 association – that is, relating new data to existing data
 - 2 integration – in seeking relationships among the data
 - 3 validation – sharing information to determine the authenticity of the ideas, thoughts and feelings which resulted
 - 4 appropriation – thus making such knowledge one's own.
- develop their reflective experience into a **transferable skill** – while reflection in itself is an experience, it is not the end result. The outcomes of reflection are a new experience, namely, clarification of an issue, developing a new skill or resolving a problem. If such outcomes prove affective, they often promote changes in our psychological, physical and even moral and social outlook. Thus, if learning is beneficial it may promote greater confidence, assertiveness or a changed set of priorities. However, such benefits of reflection may be lost if they are not linked to action.

5 Where to start

5.1 Personal development planning

Personal development planning enables learners to determine their own aims and objectives, which contributes to their learning performance and personal growth. Firstly, with the help and support of their personal tutor (mentor), learners reflect inwardly and through self-appraisal identify their current level of learning and skills. Secondly, learners agree a flexible personal development plan or scheme of study with their tutors. Such a PDP produces personal and achievable development objectives, striking a balance between the formal/academic aims of their course and their informal home life and extracurricular activities such as community, voluntary and paid work.

To support and guide learners in their personal development planning, tutors need to appoint themselves or assign a third party as a personal tutor for individual learners. Furthermore, tutors need to promote:

- friendly, informal discussions between personal tutor (mentor) and learner, to allow learners to reflect inwardly and identify their strengths and weaknesses
- group activities, based on the VaLEx model, involving teamwork, problem-solving, creativity and a holistic approach to personal development, helping learners to reflect outwardly (taking into consideration the needs of others) when developing and planning their personal objectives
- a framework that enables learners to monitor, build and reflect on their personal development, such as a diary, journals or weblogs (individual websites).

QAA defines PDP as:

‘A structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect on their own learning and performance.’

'...a means by which students can monitor, build and reflect upon their personal and academic development (Dearing recommendation 20).'

5.2 Understanding key skills

5.2.1 Biographical methods, the context and theory

If we cannot make sense and give meaning to our learning, disillusionment occurs and students/learners leave. According to Denzin and Lincoln, there is 'a seventh movement concerned with moral discourse' alongside the 'development of sacred textualities' which calls on the social sciences and humanities to be established as 'sites for critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation, freedom and community' (Denzin and Lincoln cited by Roberts, 2002, p168).

Biographies locate individual and group actions within the context of structure, illustrating the constraints of structure on people's lives:

'The intent of the biographical project is to uncover the social, economic, cultural, structural and historical forces that shape, distort and otherwise alter problematic lived experiences.' (Bertaux, 1981, p4)

Likewise, the relationship between private and public worlds is revealed whereby people experience 'an inner world of thought and experience and an outer world of events and experiences' (Denzin, 1989, p66). For Denzin, 'the joining and recording of these two structures of experience in a personal document' (p28) is the hallmark of the biographical method.

In attempting to make a connection between personal memories that structure one as an individual and the individual as part of a wider social audience:

'Narrative is the representation of process, of a self in conversation with itself and with its world over time. Narratives are not records of facts, of how things actually were, but of a meaning-making system that makes sense out of the chaotic mass of perceptions and experiences of a life.' (Josselson, 1995, p33)

Hence individuals move between the past, present and future in a complex way, as they select, summarise or resequence events and their meaning:

'Thus a biographical narrative is not simply linear, a chronology, but a complex interlinking of perceptions of the past and future within the experience of the present and its shifting contexts.' (Roberts, 2002, p84).

The 'biographical turn' as opposed to being subjective or objective, interpretative or positivist, private or public, moved across the disciplines (Roberts 2002, p169; Chamberlayne et al, 2000). Postmodernists in conjunction with third-wave feminists identify biographical research as being **intersubjective**. This involves an equal working partnership between tutor and learner, which begins with individual experiences and seeks to understand them through conversation. The term biography, often multidisciplinary in design, focuses on 'writing' and 'speaking' the life history alongside the complexity of 'reading' and 'hearing' it (Stanley, 1995). This struggle for understanding places knowledge and politics within a working process rather than presenting a form of hierarchical achievement. In other words, to understand and derive meaning from individual experience when placed within a wider social context provides a joint blueprint for future social change for all those involved (Stanley, 1995; Bornat, 1994).

5.2.2 Language

Do learners understand the language of their tutors?

How much does learners' comprehension depend on social background?

A survey of French university students carried out by Bourdieu et al in the 1962-63 academic year highlighted two fundamental facts:

- **the importance of linguistic misunderstanding within education**

Students acknowledged that they had a very limited understanding of academic and even everyday language used by university tutors. However, tutors often assumed that by using a word/phrase frequently, its meaning was understood, or at least should be understood.

- **the role of linguistic inheritance in determining academic success**

Success in literary studies was often linked to learners' ability to understand and manipulate academic language, an elaborate language that is usually the mother tongue of children born into middle classes.

'Teaching is at its most effective not when it succeeds in transmitting the greatest quantity of information in the shortest time (and at the least cost), but rather when most of the information conveyed by the teacher is actually received.' (Bourdieu et al, 1996, p5)

Pedagogical communication reduces misunderstanding between tutor and learner by adopting the same code, or a shared understanding/cultural view/language. McCarthy and Carter (1994, pp150-2) identified three main meanings of culture that tutors must be aware of to understand and implement pedagogical communication. In adopting this cultural view of language, tutors are exploring ways in which the beliefs and values held by the language user (learners) are encoded:

1. **Formal language:** 'culture with a capital C' – high art within a society, its art, music, theatre and especially literature; an academic grammar-translation approach to language that enables the learner to read and translate literary passages; a language valued for intellectual discipline.

2. **Non-formal/shared language:** 'culture with a small c' – communication that relates to community (habits, customs, social behaviour and collective assumptions of a group of people); cultural forms within this definition include sociological text involving sub-groups, advertisements, television soaps, magazine stories, jokes, newspaper articles and feature stories.

3. **Non-verbal communication:** 'culture as social discourse' – social knowledge and interactive skills required in addition to understanding and using the appropriate language. There may be marked differences between tutors' and learners' cultural norms that must be understood, accepted, accommodated and sometimes adopted by tutors. Similarly, tutors' communicative competence must include cultural awareness and sensitivity to use of eye contact, intonation, gesture and interpersonal distance.

5.2.3 Interacting

Feminists advocate that employing biographical methods equalises the power relationship between tutor and learner. Negotiated learning should be informal in style – more like a conversation. Participants are informed of the purpose of the study, and ultimately the intention is for their voices to be heard, often by policy-makers, so that the barriers for people in similar socio-economic or cultural situations can be broken down. Such learning offers an egalitarian approach acknowledging the subjectivity of both tutor and learner, and draws on the principles and practice of

feminism and adult education. As cited earlier, feminists use research to engage in action for social, economic and political change. Similarly, adult education often focuses on education for social purpose and social change as 'it attempts wherever possible to forge a direct link between education and social action' (Martin et al, 2000).

Individuals participating in studies using biographical methods often remark that they found reflecting on their life and telling their story helpful in terms of self-identity and self-development, perhaps even therapeutic. However, for some it can throw up disturbing memories and awareness of their helplessness against the structural constraints of society. Dominicé (2000) argues that biographies benefit tutors as well as the people sharing their story, given that tutors learn to share not deliver the learning experience – often referred to as a learning journey – with learners.

Life history reflection can foster dialectic between the personal and the social aspects of learning. The rationale for educational biography pays attention to both the learner empowerment and inquiry process (an instance of the personal) and learners' collaboration with educators and peers to produce, share and interpret educational biographies (an instance of the situational) (Dominicé 2000, p xvi).

5.2.4 Sharing your story

In a life history, different parts of culture unite with the life of an individual. Three elements often recur:

- 1 Biographies portray the narrator's socio-cultural environment.
- 2 Biographies portray the individual's perspective.
- 3 Biographies include a time dimension concerning both the individual and their society (Antikainen et al, 1996, p17).

The starting point for a life story is the individual and his/her views, closely connected with the larger context of his/her society. By starting with the 'really useful knowledge' of learners' life experiences, teachers within a framework of radical adult education can work with collectivities of learners to transform lives and communities. This approach combines biographical methods portraying the individual perspective with collective participatory approaches to active learning.

'...Adult education's main future research agenda will be concerned with the linkages between learning, power and organisational change.' (Finger and Asun, 2001, p179)

Furthermore, locating tutors as central to the learning process in a subjective and meaningful way makes it impossible to divorce the biography of the tutor as well as the learner from the learning process.

5.2.5 Self-evaluation

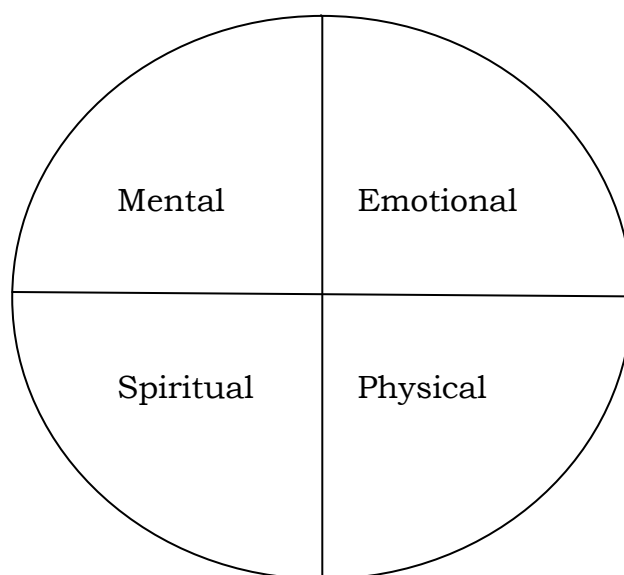
'As a tutor, can I be myself?'

Tutors, given their professional training and experience, have been conditioned to view themselves as the experts, the information givers, the controllers, organisers, assessors and ultimate educators of learners. To remove the mask and genuinely interact with students would involve risk. It would let the students get to know the tutor as a person, making the tutor vulnerable, open to criticism – not only from the students but also from their peer group – for poor teaching practice. To allow the tutor-student relationship to become subjective instead of objective would displace tutors from their 'higher level role' and students from their 'lower level role' (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994, p42).

In effect, however, by ceasing to be a teacher, through having the courage to be oneself, communication between tutor and learner becomes far more open and constructive. Students stop telling the tutor what they think the tutor wants to hear and tell the tutor how they **feel** about a subject. This in turn leads to greater interaction and – through shared knowledge – issues are raised and questions are asked which make both student and tutor evaluate their own ideology and actions, thus increasing self-insight and giving **meaning** to learning. Called '**the personality theory**' (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994, p44), it allows tutors to develop schemes of work that can be built around very general learning guidelines, with just enough requirements to provide structure for learners.

6 Guiding (concentric) circles: active engagement

Guiding circles were developed by renowned authors and career development practitioners, Dr Norm Amundson, Dr Rod McCormick and Gray Poehnell. They use a holistic approach to assist individuals to embark on a journey of self-discovery through a series of positive activities which offer key insights into their true capacities and help to develop a meaningful and accurate action plan. These learning opportunities, developed in conjunction with the 'medicine wheel' framework shown below, provide activities connected to the physical, mental, spiritual and emotional quadrants, while community feedback ensures that individuals are given an objective view of their talents. This process helps to develop the true sense of oneself. It can be used by a wide range of individuals from teenagers to adults, and the delivery is very flexible. It can be used in one-on-one sessions, in classroom delivery or incorporated into an existing client programme (Kosa, 2003).



This medicine wheel symbol, common among North American Aboriginal people, is a lens through which life is viewed and understood. The circle also proves symbolic in that it is often associated with wholeness, connection, repeating cycles and equality. The suggestion is that these four aspects – mental, physical, emotional and spiritual – must be in balance.

Good health and good life depend on the strength and wellness of each part. They must be nurtured, expressed, respected and incorporated in all parts of life: personal, family, work and community (Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (CANDO), 2003, p1).

According to Glennon (2004), there appear to be **six pedagogical principles** that involve a balanced, active engagement:

First, all education is value-laden and political. Therefore an active approach is required as the teacher/researcher encourages participants to think and act along similar lines. Liberal educational values of neutrality, objectivity and to all intents and purposes passivity are no less politically laden than advocating social action.

Education has the potential to orient students towards questioning the status quo, to develop their historical imagination of alternatives and their social activism in favour of changing the system currently in place.

Second, learning about society and the self must begin with the student's prior learning experiences and challenge more traditional approaches to education.

Students engage the teaching-learning process more fully whenever prior learning or past experiences are related to the subject. If they write about their own experience regarding inequality, they relate better to the unfair treatment of others and the wider social situation of inequality. Kolb develops this notion further – 'all learning is relearning' – therefore everyone enters a situation with existing experiences and knowledge:

'Thus one's job as an educator is not only to implant new ideas but also to dispose of or modify old ones. If the education process begins by bringing out the learner's beliefs and theories, examining and testing them, and then integrating the new, more refined ideas into the person's belief systems, the learning process will be facilitated.' (Kolb, 1984, p28)

Third, active learning is better than passive learning. Dewey (1966) contends that the best learning takes place when students are given something to do, not something to learn. This is affirmed by Shor (1992, p85), who argues that people should 'experience education as something they do rather than as something done to them'. Furthermore, Shor notes that those without such active involvement and experience had less developed understandings, although research, action and reflection served to deepen their understandings.

Fourth, the quality of the experience is critical to the learning that takes place.

While all education provides experiences, not all experiences are educational: 'Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience'. Hence there is tremendous pressure on the researcher/teacher to, 'based upon experience...select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences' (Dewey, 1997, pp27-8). However, recent research illustrates a strong connection between learning and the settings where students have a good quality of experiences, demonstrating that the responsibility placed on the researcher/teacher is well worth it (Eyler and Giles, 1999).

Fifth, learners should be actively involved in shaping the purpose and direction of the learning that takes place.

Setting up conditions that stimulate certain visible and tangible ways of acting is the first step. Making individuals sharers or partners in the associated activity so that they feel its success as their success, its failure as their failure, is the completing step (Dewey, 1966, p14).

In an attempt to construct a democratic and participatory teaching-learning environment, students' learning is more meaningful if they can make connections with their own goals and interests. As partners they are free to determine how that learning will take place and which actions are appropriate in light of their values and commitments.

Sixth, an action-reflection model provides a more qualitative experience for learning. 'When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically

suffers as well and the word is changed into idle chatter, into verbalism, into an alienated and alienating “blah”. It becomes an empty word, one which cannot denounce the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action.’ (Freire, 1970, p75).

Without action, students can regurgitate words for an essay or test, but they hold little meaning and make very little claim on their and others’ lives.

Tutors could help learners to embark on a journey of self-discovery using the ‘guiding circles tool’:

- **Gifts, aptitudes, skills** – exploration of the things learners are able to do well, and talents they have yet to discover.
- **Interests** – learners focus on likes and dislikes, and may discover that non-work-related issues have career relevance.
- **Personal style, spirit** – how learners go about doing things, personal characteristics.
- **Values, meaning** – learners’ beliefs and feelings, and how they impact on actions.
- **Balance** – a look at how learners have developed the four aspects of their being (spiritual, emotional, mental and physical).
- **Learning** – learners examine what they have learned in life, what they still want to learn, and how they learn the best.
- **Work/life roles** – explore the roles that learners have had at work, in their family and in their community.
- **Work connections** – examine what learners know about the world of work and who is able to help them to learn more.

The tutor should always:

- start with ‘concrete’ activities and then move on to more abstract activities
- try popular activities with learners that address these issues of self-discovery, taking control, involving peers and inter-relationships; these are:
 - patterns
 - favourite things (allows learners to explore the idea of work in a non-threatening way)
 - stepping stones (breaks down action plans into realistic steps)
 - values
 - telling your story
 - career circle.

The ‘my patterns’ section is of particular value, especially for clients with little or no work experience. They can easily come to see how their life patterns reflect who they are, their values, what they most enjoy, and how that can be translated into marketable skills.

7 Boundaries/confidentiality

The tutor must be aware of four main objectives:

- Firstly, while unable to provide complete confidentiality, the tutor can promise anonymity by changing the names of the learners mentioned in the VaLEx pilot programme.
- Secondly, during and on completion the life-history text should be available for others who are involved to read, discuss and critique, in order to increase validation of the text.
- Thirdly, the tutor must avoid any form of bias and through the joint discovery by tutor and learner ensure an accurate and honest interpretation of personal experiences. This involves the ability to **listen** and **hear** the life history of the participant as well as offering 'biographical coaching' on the shape and structure of the story (Alheit, 1995, p.68).
- Both tutor and learner should view the text as the **other**.
- Fourthly, recounting certain experiences, especially involving a department or institution, could be perceived as an invasion of privacy. However, since there is no formal agreement between the department and the learner, it is often warranted to involve the department because of 'their own "**ethnocentrism**" – the application of the norms of one's own culture to that of others' (Brown, 1965, p183).

8 Support groups

Working with learners from diverse backgrounds, tutors may need to offer a support system for learners who have experienced/are experiencing a number of difficulties in their lives. Therefore it is important that tutors are prepared for this and have a list of support agencies to refer learners on to. This could include Women's Aid, Citizens Advice, Welfare Rights, Open Secret or drugs and alcohol support – basically, agencies that work with people who have experienced abuse, debt, health issues or alcohol/drug abuse, and also benefit advisers and agencies that deal with housing support, single parents, bereavement, mental health issues and counselling. If the VaLEx programme targets non-traditional learners, tutors need to consider the barriers they have experienced which have stopped them participating.

This will be different for different countries and may be something that group leaders will have knowledge of, since they will be identifying to some extent the learners taking part.

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Valuing Learning from Experience (VaLEx)

Tutors' pack

Part 3: Support materials

VaLEx support materials

VaLEx I: Recognising your strengths, skills and talents

Programme aims

- 1 To introduce the participants to each other
- 2 To clarify the content of the VaLEx programme
- 3 To raise participants' confidence
- 4 To investigate prior experiences of learning
- 5 To develop personal recognition of participants' current skills
- 6 To develop participants' understanding of experiential learning
- 7 To develop presentation skills
- 8 To address literacy issues
- 9 To identify and overcome personal barriers
- 10 To develop action planning skills
- 11 To gain participants' feedback on the programme.

A range of exercises and handouts have been developed to achieve these aims. All support materials are detailed under each session.

SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION

Time: approx 2 hours

Aims:

- to introduce the participants to each other
- to clarify the content of the VaLEx programme.

Group-work exercises:

To introduce the participants to each other

1.1 Title: Getting to know the participants

Time: Allow 20 minutes, but be prepared to run over.

Aims:

- to introduce the participants to each other and the group facilitator/s
- to find out about participants' backgrounds
- to help participants to find their voices/speak out from the beginning.

Method

This exercise is done in pairs.

Ask everyone to work with their neighbour and spend five minutes finding out from each other who they are, where they come from, who's in their family, any particular hobbies/interests they have, and where they see themselves in 10 years' time (in relation to home life, study, work – paid and voluntary – and new hobbies they want to develop).

Ask participants to introduce their neighbour to the bigger group.

Resources

Flipchart/overhead projector/PowerPoint displaying what you want participants to find out about their neighbour.

Additional notes

Facilitator/s can take part as need be to make up the numbers. If working with two facilitators, take part in the exercise and share this information with the participants.

Participants may already know their neighbour, but in terms of confidence to participate it might be worthwhile their working together for the first week, or you could mix up the group.

The information asked for can be adapted to suit the group.

Recording/evaluation

Keep notes of participants' backgrounds and their 10-year plan for the overall evaluation.

1.2 Title: Getting to know the participants

Time: 15 minutes

Aims

Warm-up exercise reminding participants who everyone is and getting people speaking:

- to begin to generate a group cohesiveness
- to share common interests.

Method

Hand a piece of paper to each participant. Ask them to write their name in the middle of the sheet, and then write a statement about themselves in each of the corners. These can be statements about their personal or professional lives, but one of the statements should be false. Allow a few minutes to complete the task, then ask the participants to stand up, walk around and introduce themselves to another participant and attempt to guess which of the statements is untrue, and vice versa. Ask them to meet up with as many people as possible during the time.

Resources

Flipchart/overhead projector/PowerPoint displaying what you want participants to do.
Paper and pens for participants.

Additional notes

Could choose what you want participants to write about, for example favourite things.

Recording/evaluation

Ask participants to feed back something new they've learned about each other.

1.3 Title: Valuing learning from experience

Complete this form: spend about 15 minutes on it.

All about you

Name

What five words best describe you?

Who's in your immediate family?

Which of the following apply to you? (Please circle those relevant to you)

Carer	Responsible for running home	Local volunteer
Working part-time	Student	Unemployed Retired
On a low income	Single parent	Married/living with partner
Have children	Undertaking training	Unable to work because of ill health

What would you like to achieve by the end of this year, in the next two years and the next five years?

This year _____

In two years _____

In five years _____

Right now, what if anything makes it difficult for you to achieve your goals?

Previous learning experience

What age were you when you left school? _____

What learning have you taken part in since leaving school?

What do you enjoy about learning?

What do you not like about learning?

How did you find out about this programme?

What made you decide to take part in this programme?

How would you rate yourself in terms of the following?

	Low	Average			High
Finding time for you	1	2	3	4	5
Confidence to voice own opinion	1	2	3	4	5
Setting goals	1	2	3	4	5
Achieving goals	1	2	3	4	5
Finding solutions	1	2	3	4	5
Finding information you need	1	2	3	4	5
Recording information	1	2	3	4	5
Using facts to get your message across	1	2	3	4	5
Organisational skills	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to learn	1	2	3	4	5
Written skills	1	2	3	4	5
Opinion of yourself	1	2	3	4	5
Confidence	1	2	3	4	5

To clarify the content of the VaLEx programme

1.4 Title: Participants' thoughts on the course

Time: 10 minutes

Aims:

- to find out why participants are interested in this programme and what they expect to get out of it
- to ensure that everyone is clear about the programme, its aims, and what involvement will mean to them
- to keep participants speaking out and contributing to discussion.

Method

Round-the-table exercise asking participants to say why they wanted to come along and what they hope to get out of taking part. Everyone has a turn, working round the table.

Resources

Flipchart to record reasons for participation.

Additional notes

Working round the table means that everyone has an opportunity to voice their opinion and take their turn. Getting people to speak out from an early point in the programme means that they are more likely to continue speaking out and will gain confidence.

Recording/evaluation

Keep notes of reasons and refer back to these when giving more detail about the programme, to ensure that all points are covered.

1.5 Title: Participants' thoughts on the course

Time: 10 minutes

Aims:

- to give participants an opportunity to raise any concerns they have about participating in the programme
- to ensure that everyone is clear about the programme, its aims and what involvement will mean to them
- to keep participants speaking out and contributing to discussion.

Method

Round-the-table exercise asking participants if they have any concerns about taking part. Everyone has a turn, working round the table.

Resources

Flipchart to record concerns about the programme.

Additional notes

Working round the table means that everyone has an opportunity to voice their opinion and take their turn. Getting people to speak out from an early point in the programme means that they are more likely to continue speaking out and will gain confidence.

Recording/evaluation

Keep notes of concerns and refer back to these when giving more detail about the programme. Try to ensure that all points are covered.

1.6 VaLEx I: Recognising your strengths, skills and talents

Programme outline

The programme aims to help you find out more about yourself and all the things you've learned about throughout your life. It will help you to identify your skills and knowledge areas, think about how you can use your particular strengths in a range of situations, and plan how you can use them in the future. It is about building confidence in yourself, your abilities and what you can achieve. The programme focuses on learning. We learn all the time in different situations and in different ways. The VaLEx programme will help you to identify the best way of learning for you.

The programme will use a variety of methods, including group and individual exercises, discussion groups, sharing experiences, thinking about yourself and your life experiences and role playing, as well as more traditional handouts and short homework exercises. These are all designed to help you to think about the talents, skills and knowledge areas you have already developed throughout your life from the situations you have experienced.

VaLEx I consists of six two-hour sessions.

The sessions will focus on the following activities:

1 Introduction

Finding out about the programme, getting to know each other, finding out about your previous experiences of learning, how we learn.

2 Focusing on your strengths

What are the skills, talents and abilities that we all have already? How have we developed these and how can we use them in other situations? How we learn from our everyday experiences throughout our lives. What are your particular strengths? What type of learning best suits your personality?

3 Telling your story

What are the main influences in your life? How did you end up doing what you're doing? What have you learned through this?

4 Sharing your story

How we can use the skills we already have in a range of situations. Sharing your story and learning from the experiences of others.

5 Overcoming the barriers

What has made it difficult for you to achieve your goals in the past? Working out solutions together to aid you on your journey.

6 Planning for the future

What do you want to achieve? How will you get there? Using your particular strengths, interests and abilities identified from previous exercises to help you to plan your future.

1.7 VaLEx II: Getting credit for your strengths, skills and talents

Programme outline

This programme aims to support you to show others what you've learned from your everyday experiences and how valuable this type of learning is. The programme builds on VaLEx I. It focuses on written and presentation skills and will help you to prepare and present a portfolio of your learning to your peers. We will also discuss how you can use this to gain recognition for your achievements.

VaLEx II consists of six two-hour sessions.

The sessions will support you as follows:

Sessions 1-4

Written skills

What puts people off from putting pen to paper? Structuring and presenting arguments.

Action planning and portfolios

Using your interests and strengths to plan for the future. What do you need to overcome? How will you do this? How can you present your information to others to gain recognition for your strengths?

Preparing your portfolio

Structuring portfolios to evidence the extent of your skills, talents and strengths and what you have learned through your experiences.

Building your portfolio to evidence the extent of your skills, talents and strengths.

Session 5

Presenting your portfolio

Presenting your experiences and what you've learned from them to your peers.

Session 6

Celebrating your success

Celebrating the achievements of the group. Programme evaluation.

SESSION 2: FOCUSING ON YOUR STRENGTHS

Time: approx 2 hours

Aims:

- to raise participants' confidence
- to investigate prior experiences of learning
- to develop personal recognition of participants' current skills.

To investigate prior experiences of learning

2.1 Title: Experiences of learning

Time: 20 minutes

Aims:

- to begin discussing learning and introduce reflection
- to enable participants to get to know other members of the group
- to introduce participants to group work
- to find out about participants' previous experiences of learning.

Method

Ask people to work in groups of four. Ask some to focus on positive experiences of learning, others negative. Ask them to record the following:

- Positive – What was the situation like, what was it they learned, what made the learning enjoyable, who else was there, describe the people who were around and the difference they made to them, was it easy or hard to learn.
- Negative – What was the situation like, what was it they learned, what didn't they like about the learning, who else was there, describe the people who were around and the difference they made to them, was it easy or hard to learn.

Ask the groups to spend 10 minutes on this and to be ready to share their thoughts with the other group/s.

Ask each group to feed back their thoughts to the whole group.

Record their points on a flipchart. Ask participants from opposite groups to add any points they want to make.

Compare positive experiences of learning with negative.

Resources

Flipchart paper for participants to record their discussion points.

Flipchart/PowerPoint/overhead with exercise outline displayed.

Flipchart to record positive and negative experiences of learning.

Additional notes

Use the information gathered in the next presentation (highlighting different situations and ways we learn).

Recording/evaluation

Keep notes of experiences of learning – what contributes to positive/negative experiences.

2.2 Learning styles inventory

Time: 10 minutes

Aims:

- to enable learners to find out more about themselves as learners and to think about what type of learning suits them.

Method

Distribute the questionnaire and give participants 5-10 minutes to complete it. Ask participants which type of learner they are. Describe the characteristics of this to them. Distribute a handout on the types of learning.

Resources

Learning styles inventory questionnaire and handout [Honey and Mumford, copyright protected so cannot be included here].

Flipchart to record types of learners.

Recording/evaluation

Keep notes of types of learners in the group. Could add this to the information collected in 1.1 about everyone.

2.3 BBC website – what kind of thinker are you?

What kind of thinker are you?

http://www.bbc.co.uk/learning/returning/betterlearner/learningstyle/thinker_quiz/index.shtml

The different thinking styles

http://www.bbc.co.uk/science/leonardo/thinker_quiz/allresults.shtml

To develop personal recognition of participants' current skills

2.4 Title: Skills and talents exercise

Time: Allow 40 minutes

Aims

To raise awareness of the skills, talents and abilities that participants have (personal recognition), in order to:

- recognise each others' skills
- gain feedback from others on your skills (group verification)
- contribute to group cohesion.

Method

Ask participants to pick something they do (eg family responsibilities, interests hobbies, paid or voluntary work) and list all the things they have to do to be able to do this activity well. Allow participants 10 minutes to prepare their list. Ask the group to work in twos to compare their answers. Each partner can contribute to the lists prepared and add skills they identify as being necessary for the activity outlined. Compare the lists again in groups of four to further build up the skills and talents identified within each other's activity, giving members verification of their skills from the group.

Feedback

Ask participants to feed back examples of what was chosen and the skills and knowledge areas required for these activities.

Ask participants if more skills were added during the discussions with partners and in small groups, and how it felt to have other people add in further skills they identified as necessary to undertake the activity involved.

Resources

Flipchart/overhead/PowerPoint displaying what you want participants to do.

Paper and pens for participants.

Additional notes

It would be useful to have an example prepared. Be ready to contribute to the discussion and help participants to discuss and agree any additional skills recognised as needing to be added.

Recording/evaluation

Keep notes of skills identified, thoughts/feelings about having other people add to your list of talents.

SESSION 3: TELLING YOUR STORY

Time: approx 2 hours

Aim:

- to develop participants' understanding of experiential learning.

3.1 Title: Identifying learning

Time: 10 minutes

Aims:

- to introduce reflection
- to enable participants to identify what they learned through their activities (building on previous exercise)
- to prepare examples to be used in later exercises identifying transferable learning.

Method

Pick one of the examples produced in the previous exercise (2.4) listing all the things you have to do in an activity and the skills required to be able to undertake the activity highlighted. Ask group members to identify what has been learned through this. Record all the learning identified through the brainstorm.

Resources

Flipchart to record responses.

Additional notes

It would be useful to have an example prepared. Be ready to contribute to the discussion and help participants to identify the learning involved.

Have handouts ready for participants to complete at home.

Recording/evaluation

Keep notes of learning identified and any comments on the process.

3.2 Title: Transferable learning

Time: 40 minutes

Aims:

- to introduce transferable learning
- to reflect on participants' experiences, what they've learned and how this can be used elsewhere
- personal recognition of learning and group verification of skills, talents, knowledge
- to contribute to group cohesion
- to practise presenting information in a supportive environment.

Method

After the input on transferable learning (previous exercise), ask participants to work in pairs to identify first the transferable learning in their own activity and then that of their partners. Allow around 20 minutes for this.

Feedback

Ask each pair to present one of the activities, what has been learned through doing this activity, and the learning that is transferable to the rest of the group. Allow 20 minutes for this.

Resources

Flipchart/PowerPoint/overhead detailing what is expected of learners.

Additional notes

It would be useful to have an example prepared. Be ready to contribute to the discussion and help participants to identify the transferable learning.

Try to get different pairs working together.

Recording/evaluation

Keep notes of the transferable learning identified and any comments on the process.

3.3 Title: Life history/storyboard

Time: 25 minutes

Aims:

- to facilitate reflection on experiences
- to consolidate exercises so far and look in detail at what participants have learned in their lives – focusing on four key areas/roles
- to contribute to personal recognition of abilities.

Method

Following programme recap with facilitator – pulling together information about experiential learning, learning styles, positive and negative experiences of learning, transferable learning – introduce storyboard and the importance of particular events or roles that participants have.

As participants to note the skills, knowledge, abilities these roles/events demonstrate within them, and the transferable learning. Mindmap in four chosen areas and prepare a storyboard to share this information with the group.

Explain to participants that they will be sharing their stories with the others next week – issues of confidentiality – and will be expected to complete their storyboard in their own time.

Resources

Flipchart/PowerPoint/overhead detailing the exercise.

Resources for storyboard – pens, paper, newspapers, magazines, materials for collages.

Recording/evaluation

Any comments on the process.

Any questions and concerns about the activity.

SESSION 4: SHARING YOUR STORY

Time: approx 2 hours

Aim:

- to present your learning.

4.1 Title: Presenting your life history

Time: 10 minutes per learner

Aims:

- to provide learners with an opportunity to practise presenting in a supportive environment
- to gain group verification of personal skills, talents and abilities
- to increase learners' self-confidence.

Method

Ask each learner to present their storyboard/life history to the group, focusing on four key moments/highlights/transforming events in their lives and describing how these influenced them, what they've learned from this, and how it affected direction taken in life. Allow 10 minutes for each participant with a short gap between presentations.

Facilitator to recap sessions showing learning through experience, variety of skills, talents everyone has, how these can be used in other situations and the influence key events/roles have had on our chosen direction.

Focus so far has been on the past; we will now begin to look forward and plan what we're going to do with our skills.

Resources

Flipchart, PowerPoint, overhead.

Recording/evaluation

Keep notes of key points made by learners (use in evaluation contributing to information about target learners and their backgrounds), any comments made by participants about this task.

4.2 Title: Europass CV

Participants to complete the Europass CV. Guidance is available on the Europass website: <http://europass.cedefop.eu.int>

This may take about 30 minutes to an hour, and may be undertaken during the session or in participants' own time.

EUROPASS

CURRICULUM VITAE

FORMAT



PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name [SURNAME, other name(s)]

Address [House number, street name, postcode, city, country]

Telephone

Fax

Email

Nationality

Date of birth [Day, month, year]

WORK EXPERIENCE

- Dates (from – to) [Add separate entries for each relevant post occupied, starting with the most recent.]
- Name and address of employer
- Type of business or sector
- Occupation or position held
- Main activities and responsibilities

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- Dates (from – to) [Add separate entries for each relevant course you have completed, starting with the most recent.]
- Name and type of organisation providing education and training
- Principal subjects/ occupational skills covered
- Title of qualification awarded
- Level in national classification (if appropriate)

PERSONAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCES

Acquired in the course of life and career, but not necessarily covered by formal certificates and diplomas.

MOTHER TONGUE [Specify mother tongue]

OTHER LANGUAGES [Specify language]

- Reading skills [Indicate level: excellent, good, basic.]
- Writing skills [Indicate level: excellent, good, basic.]
- Verbal skills [Indicate level: excellent, good, basic.]

SOCIAL SKILLS AND
COMPETENCES

[Describe these competences and indicate where they were
acquired.]

Living and working with
other people, in
multicultural environments,
in positions where
communication is important
and situations where
teamwork is essential (for
example culture and
sports), etc.

ORGANISATIONAL SKILLS AND
COMPETENCES

[Describe these competences and indicate where they were
acquired.]

Coordination and
administration of people,
projects and budgets; at
work, in voluntary work (for
example culture and sports)
and at home, etc.

TECHNICAL SKILLS AND
COMPETENCES

[Describe these competences and indicate where they were
acquired.]

With computers, specific
kinds of equipment,
machinery, etc.

ARTISTIC SKILLS AND
COMPETENCES

[Describe these competences and indicate where they were
acquired.]

Music, writing, design, etc.

OTHER SKILLS AND
COMPETENCES

[Describe these competences and indicate where they were
acquired.]

Competences not
mentioned above.

DRIVING LICENCE(S)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

[Include here any other information that may be relevant, for example contact persons, references, etc.]

ANNEXES

[List any attached annexes.]

SESSION 5: OVERCOMING THE BARRIERS

Time: approx 2 hours

Aims:

- to identify and overcome personal barriers
- to address literary issues
- to introduce problem-solving.

To identify and overcome personal barriers

5.1 Title: Barriers to writing

Time: 15 minutes

Aims:

- to enable participants to identify the difficulties they may have in writing
- to gauge the level of written skills.

Method

This exercise is a group brainstorm asking learners to identify what factors put people off writing and what difficulties some people have with writing. It is an impersonal exercise not focusing on individual skill levels unless members want to share this with the group, but to gain a flavour of people's thoughts.

Resources

Flipchart to record feedback on the exercise.

Additional notes

Remind people that when we are not using particular skills we need to practise them to develop them again. Explain that if written work is important in work and study, it will be needed to complete a portfolio and that we can provide support tutorials for this if required.

Recording/evaluation

Keep notes of participants' responses to the exercise and any concerns they have about their writing skills.

To address literacy issues

5.2 Title: Homework exercise

Time: 5 minutes to introduce.

Aims:

- to enable learners to focus on a particular aspect of their life history/storyboard and reflect on this in more detail
- to enable learners to practise writing and gain constructive feedback
- to assess the level of literacy.

Method

Ask participants to focus on one area within their life history/storyboard and write two sides of A4 about it, including what the situation was, how they felt, what they've learned, how they would deal with this situation in the future, and any influence it has had on where they are in their life now.

Resources

Flipchart/overhead/PowerPoint displaying what the exercise is.

Handout with the exercise heading on it.

Paper.

Additional notes

Spend time discussing learners' concerns about this exercise.

Use participants' work to gauge the level of literacy and to plan session 6 content.

Recording/evaluation

Keep notes of participants' thoughts about the exercise.

To introduce problem-solving

5.3 Title: Introduction to problem-solving

Time: 10 minutes introduction

30 minutes exercise

Aims:

- to introduce learners to problem-solving
- to raise awareness of this as a transferable skill
- to focus on individuals' own barriers and begin finding support arrangements and solutions to these barriers.

Method

Introduce problem-solving and the importance of this as a transferable skill.

Ask participants to sit in a circle and pull situations out of a hat one by one. Each learner reads out the situation they have picked and starts a discussion on how they would overcome the difficulty listed. Others in the group can then add their own thoughts. The examples given should relate to the group, but could include for example: finding time to study, high dependency partners/carer responsibilities, confidence levels, limited knowledge of what's available, low-level study skills, finances.

Resources

Flipchart to outline exercise and record responses.

Hat and situation slips.

Additional notes

Working round the table means that everyone has an opportunity to voice their opinion and take their turn.

Recording/evaluation

Keep notes of solutions found.

5.4 Title: Developing problem-solving skills

Time: 25 minutes exercise

10 minutes feedback

Aims:

- to introduce learners to problem-solving
- to raise awareness of this as a transferable skill
- to focus on individuals' own barriers and begin finding support arrangements and solutions to these barriers.

Method

Ask participants to work in pairs. Each learner is to think about their own personal situation and the barriers they have to overcome. Allow five minutes for everyone to prepare their scenario. One person then presents their obstacle to their partner, and their partner suggests possible solutions. The pair then switch roles. Allow 10 minutes' presentation and discussion of each scenario in the pairs.

Ask if anyone is willing to share their obstacle and/or solutions with the group and what some of the solutions are.

Resources

Flipchart to outline exercise.

Paper for recording solutions.

Additional notes

Explain to the learners that this is a pairs exercise and they need not share this information with the whole group unless they want to.

Recording/evaluation

Keep notes of situations shared (if any) and solutions found.

5.5 Title: Home exercise – developing problem-solving

Time: 5 minutes to introduce

Aims:

- to focus on individuals' own barriers and begin finding support arrangements and solutions to these barriers
- to develop problem-solving skills
- to reflect on personal experiences
- to build confidence in undertaking and submitting own work.

Method

Ask learners to think about the obstacles they face in their lives, what makes it difficult for them to achieve their goals. Ask them to identify two barriers, work out solutions to them, and explain what difference this would make to their lives. Each example to be written up on one side of A4 paper.

Resources

Paper.

Exercise outline.

Recording/evaluation

Keep notes of questions/concerns about the exercise.

5.6 Title: Home exercise – structuring arguments, presenting facts

Time: 5 minutes to introduce

Aims:

- to develop report-writing skills
- to build confidence in undertaking and submitting own work.

Method

Ask learners to think about a particular belief they have and to explain why they believe it, based on experience, knowledge, information they have read. Participants are to write about this belief and construct their argument in an essay on two sides of A4 for the following session.

Resources

Paper.

Exercise outline.

Additional notes

This exercise could be amended depending on where learners' particular literacy weaknesses lie.

Recording/evaluation

Keep notes of questions/concerns about the exercise.

SESSION 6: PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Time: approx 2 hours

Aims:

- feedback on previous session
- to develop action planning skills.

6.1 Title: Feedback on homework

Time: 10 minutes on problem-solving

5 minutes on written work

6.2 Title: Personal development planning;

Time: 30 minutes to complete

15 minutes feedback

Aims:

- to focus on individuals' own barriers and begin finding support arrangements and solutions to these barriers
- to share experiences and solutions.

Method

This is an individual exercise.

Ask participants to share some of the obstacles they experience, the solutions they have identified and the difference this could make to their lives.

Ask if there are any other difficulties experienced where they haven't found solutions yet.

General group discussion, but let participants know when you can be contacted for further discussion if necessary.

Discuss the written work in general terms and offer follow-up one-to-one feedback.

Resources

Homework from previous session.

Additional notes

Explain that the homework exercise has been used to plan the session, and what the focus will be.

Recording/evaluation

Keep notes on solutions found, and any outstanding difficulties.

6.3 Title: Action planning

Time: 20 minutes

Aims:

- to introduce action planning
- to identify the steps (including identifying solutions to obstacles faced) required to attain overall goal
- to consolidate prior learning about problem-solving and action planning.

Method

Individual exercise – could use mind mapping.

Ask participants to list the steps they need to undertake to attain their overall goal. This should include the difficulties they face and solutions to overcome them. They should also include any further information they will need to research, learning they will need to undertake, and family support they will need.

Resources

Flipchart to outline exercise.

Paper for recording action plans.

Additional notes

Let the learners know they will be presenting their plans to the other group members.

Recording/evaluation

Keep notes of questions and concerns.

6.4 Title: Presenting action plans

Time: 30 minutes

Aims:

- to practise presenting information
- to have an opportunity to construct an argument based on fact
- to gain social recognition for skills and talents.

Method

Ask everyone to present their action plan to the group, beginning with a summary of their skills, values, interests – ie the factors influencing their choice of goal. Include what their goal is and the steps they will take to attain it.

Resources

Flipchart to outline exercise.

Recording/evaluation

Keep notes of plans and participants' feedback on the exercise.

EVALUATION

Aim:

- to gain participants' feedback on the programme.

The following activities can be used to gain participants' feedback at the end of the sessions.

Evaluation activity 1

Time: 10 minutes

Aim:

- to gain feedback on the session.

Method

Hand out an evaluation form asking participants to indicate something they enjoyed about the session and something they didn't.

Resources

Evaluation 1 form.

Additional notes

This evaluation will provide limited feedback at this stage, but participants may not yet feel confident enough to give much more information.

Recording/evaluation

Keep evaluation forms and collate.

Evaluation activity 2

Time: 5 minutes

Aim:

- to gain participants' feedback on the session.

Method

Hand out some post-it notes. Ask everyone to write one thing they have learned about themselves during the session. Each answer goes on a separate post-it. Ask members to add their responses to flipchart sheets.

Resources

Post-it notes and pens.

Flipchart to record responses, with headings for 'something you've learned about yourself', 'something you've learned about the group', 'something you'd like to have spent more time on' and 'something you'd like to have spent less time on'.

Recording/evaluation

Keep notes of participants' responses and any comments on the process.

Evaluation activity 3

Time: 10 minutes

Aims:

- to gain feedback from learners
- to encourage participants to think about how they learn and what methods work best for them
- to involve participants in the development and improvement of the VaLEx model.

Method

Ask participants to tell you one thing they enjoyed about the session, one thing they didn't, and something they feel could be improved on and how this could be done.

Resources

Flipchart to record responses.

Additional notes

If you feel that participants are uncomfortable sharing this information with others, use post-its again. Learners may not have suggestions of how to improve particular aspects, but can still identify areas for development.

Recording/evaluation

Keep notes of what was enjoyed and not enjoyed about the session, and what can be improved and how.

Evaluation activity 4

Telling your story: presentation evaluation

Please answer the following questions about the presentation exercise you have just completed.

1 Do you feel that you were given enough time to prepare for your presentation?

Yes No

2 Did you feel mentally prepared and ready to present your story to the group?

Yes No

3 How did you feel while you were making your presentation? Please describe how you felt.

4 How easy did you find it to make your presentation?

Easy Difficult

5 Do you feel more confident now about making presentations than you did before you made this one?

Yes No

6 Do you think you will find it easier to make another presentation in the future now that you have the experience of making a presentation?

Yes No

7 What did you like best about telling your story?

8 What did you like least about telling your story?

9 Do you have any other comments to make about telling your story?

VaLEx support materials

VaLEx II: Social and institutional recognition for learning

Programme aims

- 1 To develop a portfolio of learning, skills and talents
- 2 To develop presentation skills
- 3 To gain social and institutional recognition for learning gained through experience.

A range of exercises and handouts have been developed to achieve these aims. All support materials are detailed under session outlines. Much of this programme involves students working individually preparing their materials and presentations. Many of the exercises completed in VaLEx should be put into portfolios – eg action plan, CV, transferable learning exercises.

SESSIONS 1-4

Time: approx 2 hours for each session

Aim:

- to develop a portfolio of learning, skills and talents.

The following exercises and information handouts can be used to support participants in developing their portfolios, and may be undertaken over a number of sessions.

1.1 Title: Preparing and working on a portfolio

Time: Allow 60-80 minutes for this exercise.

Aim:

- to get participants to prepare and work on their portfolios.

Method

This exercise should be done on an individual basis, but participants can be encouraged to talk with each other and exchange ideas about the work they are doing.

Participants can be encouraged to refer to the handout on portfolios so that they are clear what a portfolio is and what is involved in preparing one. A major part of the portfolio is work on the biographical written account. This involves reflection on personal experiences and writing down those reflections.

Tutors should be prepared to work individually with learners during this exercise and to go round the class making sure that learners are clear about what they are doing and are working steadily on their portfolio.

If need be, the work can be interrupted for tutors to make general points to the class about the written biographical account or about portfolio work.

Resources

A flipchart might be useful for recording any general points arising from ongoing work on the portfolios.

Recording/evaluation

At the end of the exercise, work on portfolios should be well progressed. Participants should be encouraged to work on their portfolio outside of class time as homework between classes.

1.2 VaLEx programme

Building the picture

To be filled out by a friend, family member, community group member for _____

Name: _____

Relationship to above: _____

Date: _____

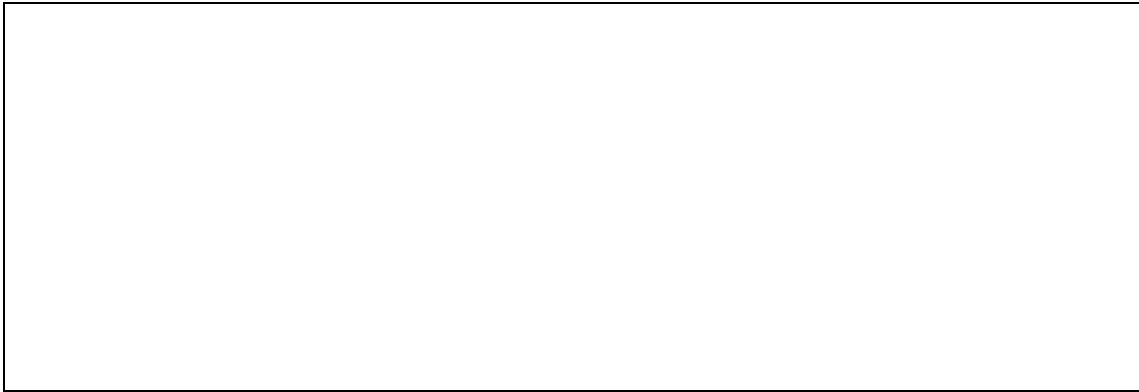
Please answer the following questions briefly and return to me when completed. I am taking part in a programme aiming to help me to identify my strengths and skills and use this to plan my future. Your input is important in getting a complete look at myself from different perspectives. Your honesty is greatly appreciated. Thanks for your time.

In your opinion, what do you think are my interests?

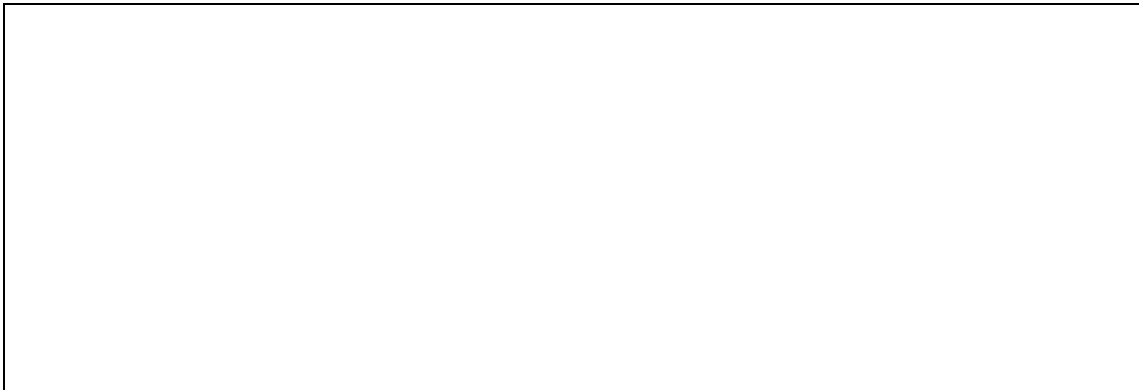
What do you see as my particular strengths?

What do you see as my needs?

How have I changed over time and what changes would you anticipate in the future?



What specific study/career suggestions do you have for me?



1.3 VaLEx: portfolio presentation structure

Who am I?

- introduce self
- life story (*background information*)
- values/interests
- CV
- photographs/illustrations (*used to explain who you are; could include a poem or piece of writing if you want*).

My achievements: skill audit

- transferable learning exercises
- mind map (*an example of how you can plan and structure your work*)
- action plan (*forward-planning skills, using what you know you can do to help you reach your goals in the future; use exercises you completed*)
- learning style.

The future

- What you'd still like to achieve
- How you would use the above skills, talents, knowledge to help you achieve this.

The portfolio is all about you and your achievements. The presentation is your opportunity to talk through it and to be proud of what you can do. This part of the programme is about gaining external recognition for all your capabilities, knowledge, skills and talents which you have developed through your life experiences.

Think about what you've learned throughout your life and your experiences and how you can use this learning and the skills developed in other situations.

An example of what I've learned through this experience is

I can do I have developed these skills of through my experience of

I would use these skills in the future to

An example of when I used these skills is

I learned how to through my experience of

I learned to through my experience of being a mother/carer/community group member/employed as a/

These are just examples. Use what works for you and the structure that flows. Don't take your skills for granted. I know from what you've told me that you hadn't put your achievements down on paper and you're reluctant to talk about your abilities.

Think about some of these core skills and highlight them in your talk and the examples you use:

- good interpersonal skills
- communication

- information-gathering
- caring
- problem-solving
- organisational skills
- budgeting
- time management
- numeracy
- IT
- teamworking.

1.4 Portfolios

What is a portfolio?

A portfolio is simply a collection of a student's work that tells something about what they have achieved and the standard of their work. It might be a folder containing pieces of best work and evaluations of personal strengths and weaknesses. It can also contain work in progress – things you are still working on, but have not yet completed. It can also include essays, written accounts, your CV, letters of recommendation or reference, etc. It is a collection of evidence showing what you have done, what you are currently doing and what you might be able to do in the future.

What is a portfolio for?

The main purpose of a portfolio is to let other people see what you have achieved and how you have achieved it. For example, a portfolio can be shown to teachers to let them see what work you have done in the past. Or it can be shown to an employer to show them what you have done and what you might be capable of doing in the future.

The VaLEx portfolio

If you were to put together a VaLEx portfolio, what could you include?

- your personal biographical written account
- your plan for the oral presentation
- your CV
- your action plan.

Don't worry if any of these things are not yet complete or you haven't done them yet – you will as the course goes on. All these items can be included in your portfolio. You might also want to include examples of work you have done on the course which you are proud of and which you feel show off your skills well.

As well as these items, you might be able to collect letters of reference from tutors or from former employers to include in your portfolio.

You can keep adding to your portfolio each time you do something new. It is designed to be flexible so that it can stay with you for a long time.

1.5 Core learning skills

What are core learning skills?

These are the essential skills that underpin effective learning. They are relevant to all forms of study and to work. They are necessary to every subject area – and are therefore necessary to succeed at university and in your future career.

For the purposes of VaLEx, they are:

- communication skills – the ability to respond and produce complex written and oral communication
- information-gathering skills – the ability to locate information sources, evaluate sources and data and extract the relevant information
- personal and interpersonal skills – the ability to work independently and cooperatively with others, and to analyse, plan and complete a complex task
- problem-solving skills – the ability to analyse a complex situation or issue, devise a plan for addressing it, carry out the plan and evaluate what has been done and achieved. Evaluation includes drawing conclusions and making recommendations.

Other core learning skills are:

- numeracy – the ability to work with numbers and carry out basic arithmetic
- IT skills – the ability to use a computer, email and the Internet, and to use more complex skills such as writing basic computer programmes
- teamworking skills – the ability to work with others in a team, set joint targets and goals and work together in harmony to achieve those goals.

SESSION 5

Aim:

- to develop presentation skills.

5.1 Title: Presenting portfolios

Time: Allow 15 minutes for each learner.

Aims:

- to get participants to present their portfolio in a structured and presentable manner
- to allow other participants to ask questions and generate discussion around the portfolios presented.

Method

This exercise should be done on an individual basis using appropriate presentation techniques and aids as appropriate.

Participants can be encouraged to refer to the handout on portfolios so that they are clear what a portfolio is and what is involved in presenting one to others. The handouts on making an oral presentation may also be useful.

Resources

Handouts on oral presentations.

Flipchart/overhead/PowerPoint can be used to make presentations if participants choose to use these aids

Flipchart to record the key points and examples from all contributors.

Additional notes

While the individual presentations are being made, the tutor can draw up points on a flipchart so that at the end of the exercise a list of points from all presentations will be collated.

Recording/evaluation

At the end of the exercise, there should be a list of points recorded (eg on a flipchart) so everyone can see them.

5.2 Preparing for an oral presentation

What is an oral presentation?

An oral presentation simply means giving a talk or speech in front of other people (or one other person if you feel more comfortable with just one person) about your life experiences.

For the purposes of the VaLEx programme, we ask you to make a short presentation of approximately 10 minutes.

Preparing for an oral presentation

Some people are quite nervous at first about making an oral presentation, but if you take time to prepare for it in advance there is every chance that you will make a good presentation even if you are nervous.

First of all, it is important that you work out in advance what you want to say. For example, many of us could talk for hours about ourselves and our life experiences, but when you are making a presentation you have to learn to keep to a few main ideas or key points that you think are the most interesting ones for other people to hear.

The first task then is to jot down some ideas about what you want to say in your presentation. For example, you might want to talk about your experience of being a student. Some of the key points you might want to convey can be phrased as questions: Why did I want to become a student? What do I hope to achieve from being a student? What am I currently doing as a student? These questions will help you to focus on some key points – for example, your main motivation for being a student, the main aims and objectives you want to achieve at the end of your study, and a few points about what you are currently studying. (NB: student is just one example – you could talk about being a parent/worker/asylum seeker, or you could choose to talk about a particular event in your life, either positive or negative). As a general guide, in a presentation of about 10 minutes you might find that you only have time to talk about five key points (two minutes on each – it's not long).

The next most important thing is to judge how much time you are taking to say what you want. If possible you should try to time yourself using a watch, or ask someone else to time you. That way, you will be able to judge approximately how long your speech/talk is taking before you make your presentation. Timing your talk in advance allows you to make changes, either to add to your talk if it seems too short or to take bits out if you are taking much longer than you should.

Finally, it is always a good idea to practise making your speech – ie to pretend that you are doing it for real. You can do this in a quiet setting somewhere either on your own or with someone else to give you some feedback.

5.3 Making an oral presentation

Some people are quite nervous about making an oral presentation, but if you take time to prepare beforehand there is a good chance that you will make a good presentation even if you are nervous.

There are a number of tips for making a good oral presentation. First of all, make sure you prepare your talk beforehand (See previous handout – *Preparing for an oral presentation*). Second, if it makes you feel more confident, write your speech out in full or try writing down just the main points that you want to convey – seeing things in writing sometimes helps you to remember them. If you write the main points down on a piece of paper or a piece of card, you can hold this while you talk and refer to it if you need to. It is best NOT to read out a speech directly from a piece of written work – it sounds unnatural. However, if this is the only way you think you can make an oral presentation, just do it that way.

Making an oral presentation requires a bit of personal confidence, but on the VaLEx programme we will only ask you to make the presentation in front of people you know and trust. Remember, it doesn't matter if you make a mistake – even the most expert speakers make mistakes sometimes.

Another little tip: when you make your presentation, try to look at your audience if possible – this makes you look confident, even if you don't feel it.

When making your presentation, remember to speak loudly enough so that everyone can hear you, and try to speak quite slowly. When people are nervous, it is often very tempting to speak more quickly than normal. But if you talk too fast, it is easy for people to miss what you are saying and they will easily become bored. Force yourself to speak more slowly and you'll be fine.

Another thing to avoid is moving around too much – sometimes when people are nervous they find their arms waving about or their feet shuffling from one to the other. Try not to do this because it is a bit distracting for your audience and detracts from the content of your talk.

Finally, if you can, try to enjoy giving your presentation. Smile to yourself and try smiling at your audience. It makes everyone more relaxed, and if you are relaxed, you are likely to be more confident.

SESSION 6

Time: approx 2 hours

Aim:

- to gain social and institutional recognition for learning gained through experience.

6.1 Title: Evaluating the VaLEx course

Time: Allow 30-40 minutes for this exercise, or longer if appropriate.

Aims:

- to get participants to present their views on the VaLEx course in a structured and reasonable manner
- to allow participants to ask questions and generate discussion around the evaluation of the VaLEx course.

Method

This exercise should be done on a group basis using appropriate recording techniques and aids as appropriate.

Participants can be encouraged to generate discussion and give their views about how the programme has gone, how it may have changed them, what they think they have learned, how easy or difficult they think it was, and what they found most enjoyable or least enjoyable.

Resources

Flipchart/overhead/PowerPoint can be used to record the key points and examples from all contributors. It may be useful to show participants' views on a flipchart so that everyone can see them and they are shared openly. This exercise can be done in addition to any individual forms that are completed as part of the VaLEx evaluation.

Recording/evaluation

At the end of the exercise, there should be a list of points recorded (eg on a flipchart) so everyone can see them.

6.2 Valuing learning from experience

Preparing your portfolio

How have you felt about preparing your portfolio?

How easy/difficult did you find this part of the programme and why?

Has preparing your portfolio changed your plans for what you'd like to achieve in the future?

What are your thoughts about presenting your portfolio to others?

Is there any other information/support you could have been given to help you with this task?

Do you have any other comments you'd like to make about this part of the programme?

Thank you

6.3 VaLEx – Valuing Learning from Experience

EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS

NAME:

DATE:

Dear student

Thank you for your contribution to the project VaLEx – Valuing Learning from Experience. We would be very grateful to hear your final comments on the programme and its learning tools and methods. We hope that you will find time to answer the following questions. By answering these questions we will be able to make the final evaluation of the process for future purposes.

QUESTION 1

How clear were the common goals of this course to you?

1 Very clear

2 Clear enough

3 Somewhat unclear

4 Unclear

If somewhat unclear or unclear, why?

QUESTION 2

How would you describe the guidance given to you by your tutor during the programme? Please explain your answer below.

1 Excellent

2 Good

3 Satisfactory

4 Weak

Explanation:

QUESTION 3

How would you describe the following statements?

	Very true	Quite true	Not quite true	Not at all true
My learning abilities became stronger during the course.				
I gained more confidence through the course.				
I learnt more about myself during the course.				
I believe I can now use my skills better, eg in working life.				

QUESTION 4

Can you identify any other changes in yourself since the course started?

QUESTION 5

Were the time, venue, day and length of the course suitable?

1 Yes

2 No

If not, are there any alternatives you would have preferred?

QUESTION 6

Did the course answer your expectations?

1 Yes

2 No

If yes, what was achieved, wholly or partly?

--

If not, what was different?

--

QUESTION 7

How would you describe the following aspects of the learner's guide?

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Weak
Appearance/presentation				
Content				
Format				
Usefulness				
User-friendliness				

QUESTION 8

Would you like to make changes to the learner's guide?

1 Yes

2 No

If yes, what?

QUESTION 9

One of the main learning tools in this course was telling your life story (the biographical approach).

How would you describe the biographical approach as a learning tool?

1 Very useful

2 Quite useful

3 Not very useful

4 Not at all useful

QUESTION 10

What was good/not so good about the biographical approach?

QUESTION 11

Please tell us about 2-3 parts of the course that were particularly helpful to you.

QUESTION 12

Are there any parts of the course you would rather we left out?

QUESTION 13

How could we improve the content of the course?

QUESTION 14

Any other comments?

6.4 VaLEx Programme

Evaluation

1 What made you decide to take part in this course?

2 Was it what you expected?

3 If not, what was different?

4 How did you feel about joining in discussions at the start of the course?

5 Were the time, venue, day and length of the course suitable?

6 Are there any alternatives you would have preferred?

7 Please tell us about any parts of the course that were particularly helpful to you?

8 Are there any parts you would rather we left out?

9 How could we improve the content of the course?

10 How would you describe your tutor?

Knowledgeable Interesting Clear Dull
Enthusiastic Not sure of subject Boring
Other

11 How would you describe the course materials?

Clear	Complicated	Too much information
Not enough information	Too high level	Disjointed
Too simple	Related well to overall programme	Boring
Interesting	Well laid out	
Other.....		

12 Think about what you said you were hoping to get out of the course. What was achieved, wholly or partly, and what wasn't?

13 Can you identify any changes in yourself since the course started?

14 Do you have any other comments you would like to make about this programme?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this evaluation. Your comments will be used to help in developing this programme in the future.