There is no agreed legal national position on recognising non formal and informal learning in Scotland.

However, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) provides a standard currency for assessing learning in the form of a framework of levels. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) brings together all mainstream Scottish Qualifications, including many of those available to adult learners.

The SCQF is managed by the SCQF partnership. This is the organisation formed to oversee all aspects of the SCQF and to ensure that the integrity of the Framework is maintained at all times. The SCQF partnership comprises four partner organisations: the College Development Network (CDN); the Qualities Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA); the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA); and Universities Scotland.

SCQF is designed to make the Scottish qualifications system easier to understand for everyone, including employers, learners, and those involved in the provision of learning. It demonstrates the relationships between qualifications, and allows learners to plan progress towards their learning and career goals. Further information can be found in Chapter 2.5: National Qualifications Framework [1] and on the SCQF website [2].

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the process for recognising learning that has come from experience and/or previous formal, non-formal and informal learning. The SCQF Guidelines state that:

“RPL for the award of SCQF Credit Points must involve formal assessment or acceptance of evidence which is quality assured”.

RPL can be used for the award of credits towards qualifications or in the admissions process (to assess applicants to education and training courses and also to grant exemptions from course units). RPL can be used for the assessment of Units in the following types of qualification:

- Higher National Certificate and Diplomas (except Graded Units)
- Professional Development Awards
- Scottish Vocational Qualifications
- National Progression Awards
- National Certificates
- Awards

An RPL claim for credit (whether that be for a qualification or a unit within a qualification) involves the comparison of the individual's learning to the aims and/or learning outcomes of the qualification for which the credit is being sought. The RPL process will determine the SCQF level and the number of SCQF credit points that can be awarded. Similarly, a comparison with the learning outcomes will be carried out where credit is not sought but RPL is requested for entry into a programme.
Guidance and principles on RPL, most notably in the form of the SCQF Handbook and an "online [3] toolkit on the SCQF website, can be applied across all education and training sectors. Aside from the guidance and principles however, there are no formal regulations or requirements for the provision of RPL and thus implementation varies across sectors and providers.

A small piece of work was undertaken by Learning Link Scotland in 2011 to look at the potential use of the SCQF RPL toolkit in the voluntary adult learning sector. This project found that providers in the voluntary adult learning sector use RPL as part of the engagement process, to give adults access/entry to a learning programme i.e. recognising the validity of their existing experiences to encourage and give confidence.

They also use RPL as part of the learning experience with learners; using it as a model to teach reflective practice. However, as the learning offered by these providers is often strongly rooted in action learning or group work; they preferred not to use RPL as a means of ‘bypassing’ parts of the course. Finally, the providers were willing to use RPL to link their learning programmes to SCQF level descriptors.

At the time of writing the SCQF Partnership is involved in two RPL projects; the first for veterans of the armed forces; and the second for refugees and asylum seekers.

For more information on the validation of non-formal and informal learning in Scotland see the European Commission, Cedefop and ICF International (2014). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2016 update: country report UK-Scotland [4].