Recognition of Prior Learning in Scotland

A national approach

SCQF Partnership
Donnie Wood: Head of Pathways Policy

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What is the SCQF and what does it do?

The SCQF is Scotland's national qualifications framework and it:

- helps people understand qualifications
- helps people plan their learning
- provides recognition for learning
- promotes equality between vocational and academic qualifications
- is a lifelong learning framework by design
- is funded by Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council
- provides resources and guidance around skills, qualifications and pathways
- works with employers, schools, colleges and universities

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The SCQF – How does it work?

Brings together the main Scottish academic and vocational qualification systems into a single 12 level framework with credit points

Provides a common national language for describing all kind of learning

A framework that can be used to recognise and value all learning

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THE SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

The Framework diagram shows the mainstream Scottish Qualifications credit rated by Qualifications Scotland and higher education institutions. However, there are a diverse number of learning programmes on the Framework. To view the full interactive version of the Framework or search the SCQF Register of qualifications, please visit the SCQF website at www.scqf.org.uk

scqf scottish credit and qualifications framework

SCQF Levels	Qualifications of Qualifications Scotland (formerly SQA)				Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions	Apprenticeships & SVQs
12			Professional Development Award		Doctoral Degree	Professional Apprenticeship
11					Masters Degree, Integrated Masters Degree, Post Graduate Diploma, Post Graduate Certificate	Graduate Apprenticeship Professional Apprenticeship SVQ
10					Honours Degree, Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate	Graduate Apprenticeship Professional Apprenticeship
9					Bachelors / Ordinary Degree, Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate	Graduate Apprenticeship Technical Apprenticeship SVQ
8		Higher National Diploma			Diploma Of Higher Education	Higher Apprenticeship Technical Apprenticeship SVQ
7	Advanced Higher, Awards, Scottish Baccalaureate	Higher National Certificate			Certificate Of Higher Education	Modern Apprenticeship SVQ
6	Higher, Awards, Skills for Work Higher	National Certificate		National Progression Award		Modern Apprenticeship Foundation Apprenticeship SVQ
5	National 5, Awards, Skills for Work National 5					Modern Apprenticeship SVQ
4	National 4, Awards, Skills for Work National 4					SVQ
3	National 3, Awards, Skills for Work National 3					
2	National 2, Awards					
1	National 1, Awards					

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Key achievements

- Scotland previously considered a world leader in RPL
- RPL principles linked to the SCQF have been in place for 25 years
- There is excellent work taking place around widening access and articulation
- A range of resources already in place for learners, educators and employers
- Some employers and professional bodies are engaging with RPL processes

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Challenges

- Pockets of good practice but variable and no joined up approach
- Funding for RPL has been for specific projects rather than a national approach
- Scotland has fallen behind the rest of Europe in relation to RPL and implementation
- The wider benefits of RPL are not fully utilised or understood
- There is little information on the use of RPL across sectors in Scotland
- RPL is not mandatory in Scotland

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Scotland context

Skills gaps and misalignments reported across multiple key sectors

Transition to new industries, and the need to reskill and upskill

- **Engineering**
- **Built environment**
- **Health and social care**

A need for flexible, sustained pathways from school to FE/HE onto employment

Demographic trends; reduced school leavers, more adult learners

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Scotland's workforce and qualifications strategies will need to address:



Reduce inequality and economic inactivity



Attract and retain international talent

Skilled labour supply



Skills optimisation for areas of economic opportunities

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RPL in engineering 2026

- Initial scoping work with Babcock International and West College
- Funding to create a new micro credential to upskill at SCQF level 7
- Endorsed by unions and sector bodies
- RPL built into the process to ensure no learning is repeated (informal, formal and non formal all identified)
- Potential to be replicated across the sector and beyond

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RPL in social care 2026/27

- Successful application to Scottish Funding Council (SFC) for funding to enhance the use of RPL in health and social care sector
- Research and focus groups with training providers and colleges to shape the project direction
- Tender for consultancy services launched on website and socials
- Creation of toolkits, guidance and support to better utilise RPL within the delivery of SVQs at SCQF level 6&7
- Additional support for assessors / verifiers as well as employers and learners
- Potential to be replicated across sectors and beyond into phase 2 with the development of a 'road map' on creating an RPL system

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RPL in employability 2026/27

- Partnership with Dumfries and Galloway College
- Supporting employability advisors and development workers
- Using RPL as a confidence builder
- Connecting and mapping with formal training (welding programme) and local employment opportunities

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Grant objectives from Scottish Government

To contribute to the Scottish Government's aim of addressing skills gaps in key industries, SCQFP will establish a National Recognition of Prior Learning system on the behalf of SG by May 2026

This will build on existing successful pathways utilising RPL and the scoping work already undertaken for the LLL and Skills Directorate in FY 2024/25.

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Background to our work

- SCQFP has been calling for a national RPL system for some time
- Proposal submitted by SCQFP in February 2025, with go ahead given for phase one in May 2025
- Phase 1 completed in March 2026
- Next steps not clear.....yet!

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Key priorities and actions

Assemble a **national steering group** of employers, education providers (universities, colleges, training), and agencies, with international best practice input and focusing on leveraging existing resources and partnerships to agree a coherent, cost-effective approach to delivering a national approach.

Develop a plan to **streamline summative RPL** for college and vocational students entering universities, using existing forums, including the Joint Articulation Group, as the key vehicle for consultation and delivery.

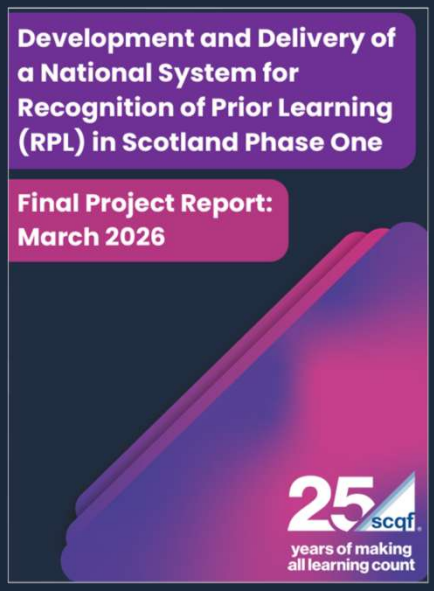
Focus on existing RPL and micro-credentials pathways and processes and create a pilot programme for employers to utilise existing micro-credentials and benchmarking of skills using the SCQF through efficient informal RPL processes. Focus on priority industries with identified skills shortages.

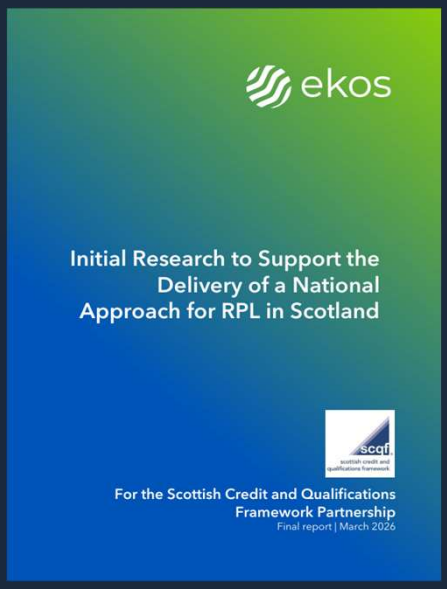
Identify additional early **research and data analysis** activity necessary to direct the focus of the development plan, for which additional funding will be made available.

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Final reports

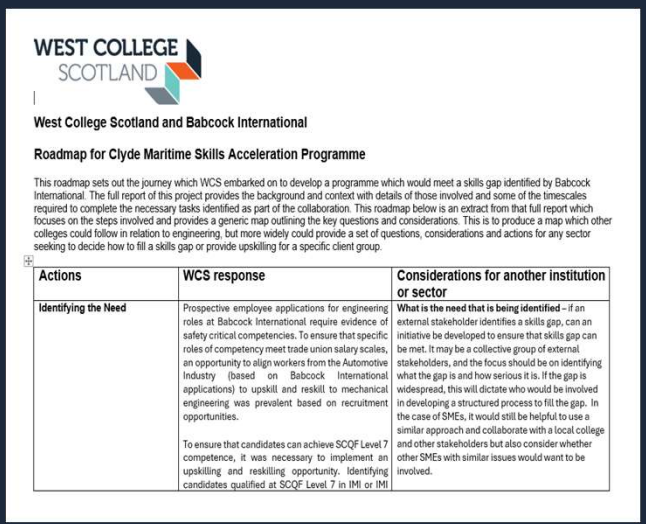






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Final reports



WEST COLLEGE SCOTLAND

West College Scotland and Babcock International

Roadmap for Clyde Maritime Skills Acceleration Programme

This roadmap sets out the journey which WCS embarked on to develop a programme which would meet a skills gap identified by Babcock International. The full report of this project provides the background and context with details of those involved and some of the timescales required to complete the necessary tasks identified as part of the collaboration. This roadmap below is an extract from that full report which focuses on the steps involved and provides a generic map outlining the key questions and considerations. This is to produce a map which other colleges could follow in relation to engineering, but more widely could provide a set of questions, considerations and actions for any sector seeking to decide how to fill a skills gap or provide upskilling for a specific client group.

Actions	WCS response	Considerations for another institution or sector
Identifying the Need	Prospective employee applications for engineering roles at Babcock International require evidence of safety critical competencies. To ensure that specific roles of competency meet trade union salary scales, an opportunity to align workers from the Automotive Industry (based on Babcock International applications) to upskill and reskill to mechanical engineering was prevalent based on recruitment opportunities. To ensure that candidates can achieve SCQF Level 7 competence, it was necessary to implement an upskilling and reskilling opportunity. Identifying candidates qualified at SCQF Level 7 in IMI or IMI	**What is the need that is being identified** – if an external stakeholder identifies a skills gap, can an initiative be developed to ensure that skills gap can be met. It may be a collective group of external stakeholders, and the focus should be on identifying what the gap is and how serious it is. If the gap is widespread, this will dictate who would be involved in developing a structured process to fill the gap. In the case of SMEs, it would still be helpful to use a similar approach and collaborate with a local college and other stakeholders but also consider whether other SMEs with similar issues would want to be involved.



WEST COLLEGE SCOTLAND

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SCQF Partnership, West College Scotland and Babcock International

Action Research Project Report

Clyde Maritime Skills Acceleration Programme

Final Report

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Conclusions from phase 1

- A comprehensive RPL system is central to a learner centred education and training offer at all levels and in all sectors
- RPL as a concept is completely complementary to many other current or planned Government policies or initiatives
- Experience, expertise and structures exist but are not joined up
- RPL is the golden thread combining strategy, coherence and accessibility
- Successful implementation would support a wide range of beneficiaries
- Requires a co-ordinated, collegiate approach with Government leadership
- Requires rebranding with a strong narrative
- Linkage to the SCQF is essential

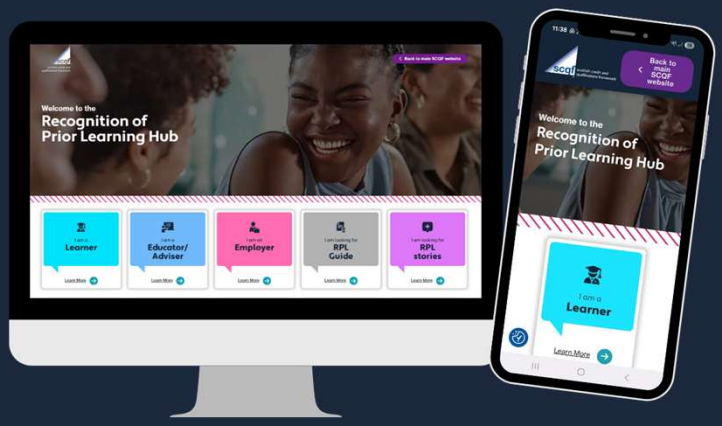
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Resources for learners and employers



bitly

scqf.org.uk/rpl-hub

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Questions

Sign up for our newsletter and keep in touch with us via

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All Learning Counts

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