Practice Learning Qualifications Social Services (PLQ(SS))

Guidelines for Credit Transfer and Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL)

Final Draft
30 August 2007

CONTENTS

	Page
1. Introduction: purpose of the guidelines	4
2. What do we mean by Credit Transfer?	5
3. What is Prior Informal Learning?	5
4. What do we mean by the Recognition of Prior Informal Learning?	5
• RPL for personal/Career Development, formative recognition	6
• RPL for credit, summative recognition	6
5. The use of Credit Transfer and RPL within the Practice Learning Qualification (Social Services):	6
• Use of credit transfer and RPL within the PLQ(SS)/PLQ	6
• General and specific credits	6
• Incorporating Credit Transfer and RPL within the planning and assessment process for the PLQ(SS)/PLQ	7
• Flowchart of learner pathways to PLQ(SS)/PLQ	9
• Credit limits for prior learning	10
• Clear procedural guidelines	10
6. The process of gaining credit for prior learning within the PLQ(SS)/PLQ	10
7. Stage 1: Initial advice and guidance	10
• Learner pathways to the PLQ(SS)/PLQ	
8. Stage 2: Supporting students	11
Credit Transfer:	11
• What does credit transfer involve?	11
• Use of the mapping exercise	11
• Credit rating learning within the SCQF	11
• Determining the level of credit for Credit Transfer Claims	12
• Determining the volume of credit for Credit Transfer Claims	12

Page

Recognition of Prior informal Learning (RPL): 12
- What does RPL involve? 12
- Key premise of RPL 13
- SCQF Core Principles of RPL 13
- Supporting learners 14
  - Support for RPL process 14
  - Subject-specific support 15
  - Who provides support? 15
  - Support mechanisms 16
- Gathering and presenting evidence of learning 16
  - Direct evidence 17
  - Reflective evidence 17
  - Selection of evidence 17

9. Stage 3: Recognition 18
Credit Transfer: 18
  - Evaluating evidence of credit 18
Recognition of Prior informal Learning (RPL): 19
  - Assessing RPL evidence 19
  - Avoidance of double counting of credit 19
  - External verification/assessment 20

10. Monitoring and reviewing the Credit transfer and RPL process 20

11. Support for staff engaged in the process 20

12. Integration of Credit Transfer and RPL provision within quality assurance systems 21

Appendix 1: Flowchart of Credit Transfer and RPL process 22
Appendix 2: Mapping Exercise: summary 23
Appendix 3: Planning activity 30
Appendix 4: Collection of Evidence cross referencing 31
Appendix 5: Glossary of terms 32
Appendix 6: Further reading 35

1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose of the guidelines is to assist programme providers in developing and operating processes of recognising prior learning within the Practice Learning Qualifications (Social Services) (PLQ(SS)). The guidelines are applicable to the Practice Learning Qualifications (Social Services) (PLQ(SS)) and the Practice Learning Qualifications (PLQ). The abbreviation PLQ(SS)/PLQ is used in the guidelines to denote both qualifications.

1.2 The guidelines aim to support staff with responsibility for the PLQ(SS)/PLQ in relation to:

- Programme Development
- Guidance
- Delivery
- Support
- Assessment
- Credit-rating of learning
- Quality management
- External verification/assessment

.

1.3 The guidelines will firstly define what we mean by credit transfer and the recognition of prior informal learning (RPL) and will explain the way in which these processes can be used within the PLQ(SS)/PLQ. The guidelines will then provide guidance on the process of awarding credit for prior learning. In order to ensure quality, consistency and transparency, all programme providers should follow the same process. The guidelines are consistent with the **Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Guidelines for Credit Transfer and RPL** respectively. Where appropriate, extracts from the SCQF guidelines are used within these guidelines. The SCQF Guidelines are available on the SCQF website: www.scqf.org.uk.

1.4 Incorporating clear and effective policies and mechanisms for Credit Transfer and RPL within the delivery and assessment process for the PLQ(SS)/PLQ is essential in terms of ensuring its flexibility, accessibility and inclusiveness. These guidelines are therefore designed to support the objectives of the qualification to:

- Provide a framework which is accessible and flexible in order to reflect the individual's involvement in the learning process and own learning needs
- Recognise the prior learning achievements of those providing support to individuals, both accredited and informal.[1]

[1] PLQ(SS) Submission to SSSC, Dec 05 (revised Aug 06) SIESWE

2. What do we mean by Credit Transfer?

2.1 **Credit Transfer** is a process that gives learners credit for their **prior certificated learning.** This means learning they have undertaken which has been assessed and for which they have been awarded qualifications or certificates, for example an SVQ; university module, higher national unit or higher national certificate or diploma or other credit-rated professional award, such as the Practice Teaching Award. It can enable a learner to transfer credit gained through one qualification to another qualification or programme of study. Credit can be used from a previously uncompleted or completed award.

2.2 Credit which can be transferred into the PLQ(SS)/PLQ must be at the appropriate SCQF level for the PLQ(SS)/PLQ Stage (Stage1 to Stage 4) being undertaken i.e. SCQF levels 7 – 11 .

2.3 A Credit Transfer claim can be based on:

- Scottish academic, vocational and professional qualifications which are referenced in the SCQF
- Other UK academic, vocational and professional qualifications
- International academic, vocational and professional qualifications

3. What is prior informal learning?

3.1 The term **prior informal learning** can also be described as **prior experiential learning**. It covers all prior learning which has not previously been assessed or credit-rated. This includes prior learning achieved through life and work experiences (paid and voluntary), as well as prior learning gained in non-formal contexts through community-based learning; workplace learning and training; continuing professional development and independent learning.

3.2 The types of experiences through which prior informal learning can be gained include:

- A particular piece of work, task or project undertaken at work, or through community or voluntary work, or through independent learning
- The experience of doing a particular job (paid or voluntary), or performing a particular role, over a period a time
- 'On-the -job' training, or being mentored
- A non-credit rated educational or training course, undertaken in a community or workplace setting
- The experience of training, teaching, supporting or mentoring others, either formally or informally.

4. What do we mean by Recognition of Prior informal Learning (RPL)?

4.1 **RPL** is a process that gives a learner credit for their **prior informal learning.** Through RPL we can recognise and, if appropriate, assess and then credit-rate learning which has its source in some experience which occurred prior to the point of a learner embarking on a qualification or programme.

4.2 The SCQF guidelines make a distinction between two forms of recognition

- **RPL for personal/career development or formative recognition**
- **RPL for credit, or summative recognition**

4.3 **RPL for personal/career development or formative recognition** can be carried out within the context of personal/career development and educational guidance. Its purpose is to build learner confidence; recognise skills and knowledge gained through experience; and identify ways in which these skills and knowledge can be further developed through further learning opportunities. The outcome of this process can be an action plan, or personal development plan.

Formative recognition may be a preparatory stage to summative recognition, or RPL for credit.

4.4 **RPL for credit** is the process of **summative recognition**. It involves assessing and then credit-rating learning gained through some experience which occurred prior to the point of a learner entering a formal programme of study or commencing a qualification. The outcome of a claim for RPL for credit may be the award of specific credit within a qualification or within a programme of learning, or entry to a programme of study as an alternative to normal entry requirements.

4.5 It is important to stress that **credit is not given for the experience itself**. It is what someone has **learned** from that experience that counts.

5. The use of Credit Transfer and RPL within the Practice Learning Qualifications (Social Services)

5.1 **Use of RPL and Credit Transfer within the PLQ(SS)/PLQ**
Credit Transfer and RPL can allow a learner, or potential learner, to make a claim, which will allow him/her to gain credit towards the PLQ(SS)/PLQ. This enables learners to gain recognition for the learning they have already undertaken in order to accelerate the process of achieving the qualification.

5.2 Claims for **credit within the PLQ(SS)/PLQ** through credit transfer or RPL must be:

i) at the appropriate SCQF level (i.e. SCQF levels 7-11) depending on the stage of the qualification (i.e. Stage 1 to 4);
ii) directly relevant to the qualification sought;
iii) supported by evidence.

5.3 **Credit Transfer and RPL**
A learner may combine an RPL claim with a credit transfer claim in seeking credit within a PLQ(SS)/PLQ programme.

5.4 **General and Specific Credits**
Credit points reflect the level and volume of credit attached to a particular qualification, unit or set of learning outcomes. When awarding credit for prior learning it is important to understand the distinction between general and specific credit.

5.5 ***General credit*** confirms the educational achievements of an individual but does not necessarily indicate a progression route to a higher award. It therefore is awarded for prior learning *without any reference to a specific programme of study or qualification.*

Specific credit is that amount of prior credit which is recognised as contributing to a new programme of study. This is a matter of judgement based on comparing the outcomes of the prior learning with the requirements of the new programme. If a learner successfully demonstrates that he or she has acquired from prior certificated and/or informal learning, the knowledge and skills which a programme unit or module, or level and area of study, is designed to develop, credit can be awarded for this learning. This can result in the learner gaining credit within a qualification or programme of study.

5.6 **Incorporating Credit Transfer and RPL within the planning and assessment process for the PLQ(SS)/PLQ**

5.6.1 The most effective and resource efficient way of undertaking the credit rating of prior learning within the PLQ(SS)/PLQ is to incorporate this within the overall planning and assessment process for achievement of the qualification, rather than to undertake it as a separate, discrete process. See the flowchart in Appendix 1.

5.6.2 A learner, with appropriate support and guidance, will consider the standards and learning outcomes of the PLQ(SS)/PLQ programme at the appropriate level (Stage1 to 4) and determine the extent to which they have already achieved these through their prior learning.

5.6.3 The standards of the PLQ(SS)/PLQ are common across all stages of the qualifications. The learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and learning requirements) associated with these standards progress according to the qualification's SCQF level.

Qualification Title	**SCQF Level**
PLQ(SS)/PLQ Stage 1	7
PLQ(SS)/PLQ Stage 2	9
PLQ(SS)/PLQ Stage 3	10
PLQ(SS)/PLQ Stage 4	11

5.6.4 Determining the relevance and comparability of **prior certificated learning** (existing qualifications) to the PLQ(SS)/PLQ programme is assisted by the **mapping exercise** which has been undertaken for the PLQ(SS)/PLQ. This enables learners to identify which elements of particular programmes map onto the standards /unit titles within the PLQ(SS)/PLQ at Stages 1-4. (See Appendix 2 Mapping Exercise)

5.6.5 Determining the relevance and comparability of the outcomes of **prior informal learning** to the PLQ(SS)/PLQ standards and outcomes can be undertaken through a reflective process guided by the learner's Tutor or Mentor. This can be undertaken through discussion in an individual meeting or tutorial or through a group session with other learners. **The SCQF Social Services RPL**

Resource Pack contains activities that can be undertaken with learners to support this process. A learner will identify which of the standards and learning outcomes they consider they have already achieved through their work, and other relevant experiences and how they could demonstrate this i.e. what evidence can they gather or produce which can be included in their Collection of Evidence for the PLQ(SS)/PLQ submission.

5.6.6 By identifying existing knowledge and skills gained through their prior certificated and/ or prior informal learning, learners can then plan how to build on their existing learning through further learning and development activities in order to fully achieve the PLQ(SS)/PLQ standards and learning outcomes. A consideration of the extent to which an individual has achieved the PLQ(SS)/PLQ requirements through their prior learning will form part of the initial evaluation of learning needs which might be undertaken on an individual or group basis. The evidence contained within a learner's Collection of Evidence for assessment can therefore be based on:

- Prior qualifications (mapped against PLQ(SS)/PLQ standards/)
- Prior informal learning
- Learning undertaken as part of a planned programme for the PLQ(SS)/PLQ.

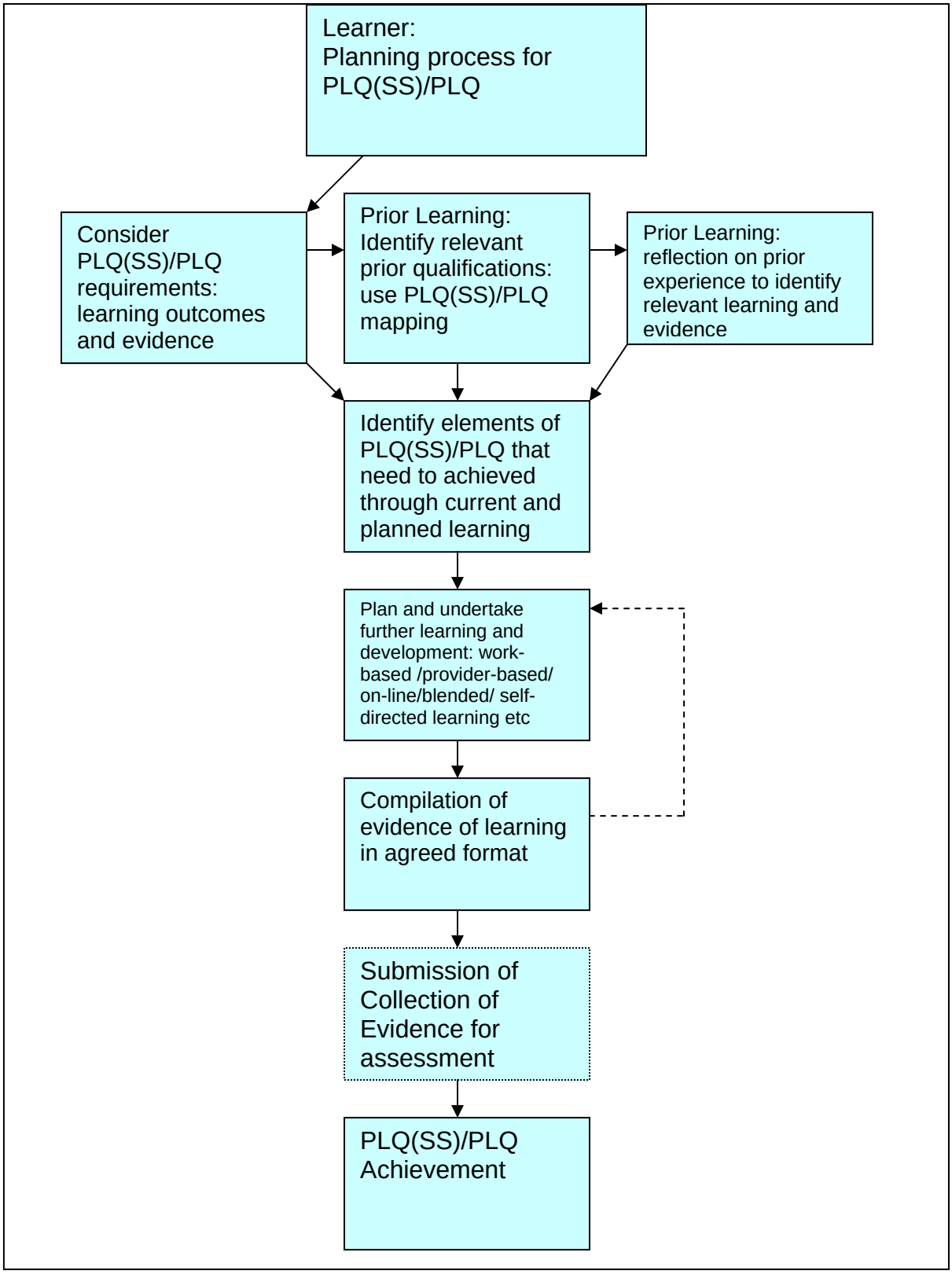
5.6.7 The recognition and credit-rating of prior learning is therefore incorporated into the assessment process for the qualification as a whole.

5.6.8 A learner embarking on the PLQ(SS)/PLQ will therefore be able to select the most appropriate learning pathway depending on their prior experience and qualifications through this planning process. This reflects the principle underlying the PLQ(SS)/PLQ that flexible, individual approaches to learning should be utilised which focus on the needs of the learner and facilitate the inclusiveness of the qualifications.[2]

5.6.9 The following flowchart indicates how RPL and Credit Transfer can be incorporated into the planning, learning and assessment process.

[2] SIESWE (2006) PLQ(SS) Submission to SSSC

5.6.10 **Flowchart of learning pathways to PLQ(SS)/PLQ:**



5.7 Credit limits for prior learning

5.7.1 The underlying principles in terms of credit limits are that:

- programme providers should allow as much credit as possible to be gained within the PLQ(SS)/PLQ programmes through both credit transfer and RPL.
- there should be equality of access across programme providers

5.7.2 It is recognised, however, that there may be programme limits on the amount of credit that can be awarded through RPL and credit transfer depending on the regulations of the programme provider. For example, a Higher Education Institution may require learners presenting claims for prior learning to achieve 50% of the credit required at the final level of their award through accredited university modules. However, this can include *planned* experiential or work-based learning, as well as campus-based study and on-line/blended learning.

5.8 **Clear procedural guidelines**

5.8.1 Programme providers need to provide clear documentation of their Credit Transfer and RPL procedures which should be approved through their quality assurance systems. This documentation should include details of

- the support/guidance system for Credit Transfer and RPL
- the evidence mechanisms for Credit transfer and RPL
- the recognition and assessment process
- the programme limits on credit gained through Credit Transfer and RPL
- any costs associated with undertaking the programme
- external verification/assessment arrangements
- the monitoring process for Credit Transfer and RPL procedures

6. The process of gaining credit for prior learning within the PLQ(SS)/PLQ

6.1 There are 3 stages to the process of awarding credit for prior learning:

1. **Initial advice and guidance**
2. **Support**
3. **Recognition (assessment**)

7. Stage 1 Initial advice and guidance

7.1 Learning pathways to the PLQ(SS)/PLQ

Learners, or potential learners, should be given preliminary information about the process through a discussion of the different learning pathways for the PLQ(SS)/PLQ (see flowchart above). This advice will be provided by a Tutor, a Mentor, or an Assessor. He or she will give initial advice on the nature of the credit transfer and /or RPL process, and its use within the context of the

PLQ(SS)/PLQ. This guidance should form part of the overall initial guidance a learner should be given by programme providers before commencing the programme. This guidance will cover the requirements of the award, including the need to gather evidence, analyse and report on their experiences and will also include information on the type of evidence learners will need to provide in order to successfully complete the award.

8. **Stage 2 Supporting students & Planning RPL/Credit Transfer**

8.1 The flowchart in Appendix 1 describes the steps a learner will undertake in identifying and providing evidence of his/her prior learning as part of the planning, learning and assessment process for the PLQ(SS)/PLQ. The learner will require support from the Tutor or Mentor or Assessor during each step.

8.2 Support may be provided by a Tutor, Mentor or Assessor or a combination of these depending on the programme provider's delivery arrangements.

8.3 The planning activity in Appendix 3 illustrates how the consideration of prior learning and evidence forms part of the planning process.

8.4 The following sections provide guidance on the key features of the Credit Transfer and RPL processes which form part of these steps; the type of support a learner will need and the support mechanisms which can be used.

8.5 **Credit Transfer**

8.5.1 **What does Credit Transfer involve?**

Credit Transfer is the process of recognising existing credit within a student's programme of study. This credit is based on previously attained and assessed groups of outcomes (a qualification, a unit, a module or other programme element).

8.5.2 **Use of the mapping exercise**

The Tutor/Mentor/Assessor will guide the learner in determining the elements of their prior certificated learning or prior qualifications which are comparable to the PLQ(SS)/PLQ standards. The **mapping exercise** should be used to support this process (a summary is provided in Appendix 2). This mapping exercise indicates where there is a full or partial match between the elements of a number of qualifications and the PLQ(SS)/PLQ standards for Stages 1 and 2. There are a limited number of matches for Stage 3. Having identified the elements of prior qualifications which match the PLQ(SS)/PLQ standards, learners then need to provide the original evidence of this credit and relate the outcomes of their prior qualification to those of the PLQ(SS)/PLQ for which they are seeking credit. This is likely to take the form of a unit to standard mapping.

8.5.3 **Credit rating learning within the SCQF**

All mainstream qualifications awarded under the auspices of Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), the higher education institutions (HEIs) in Scotland, colleges and a range of statutory and professional bodies are embraced within the SCQF. In addition, learning provided by a wide range of

private and public sector education and training agencies can be credit rated by Scottish HEIs and by the SQA. Guidelines on the procedures to follow are available on the SCQF website: www.scqf.org.uk

8.5.4 **Determining the level of credit for credit transfer claims**

The level of a prior qualification or programme element is determined by reference to the SCQF.

If the prior qualification or programme element being claimed by the learner is not already leveled within the SCQF, a determination of level can be made by reference to SCQF level descriptors. This would apply in cases where the student's credit transfer claim is not based on one of the main Scottish Qualifications, (qualifications of HEIs and colleges in Scotland and those awarded and accredited by the SQA). Alternative forms of prior certificated learning might include qualifications, or programme elements gained elsewhere in the UK or internationally; professional body awards; or individual short courses.

SCQF level descriptors 'set out the characteristic generic outcomes of each level'. They are intended to provide a general shared understanding of each level and to allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning at different levels. They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements, and there is no expectation that every qualification or programme should have all the characteristics' (SCQF). SCQF level descriptors are contained within the publication 'An Introduction to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework' (SCQF, 2003) which is available on the SCQF website www.scqf.org.uk.

8.5.5 **Determining the volume of credit for Credit Transfer claims**

The volume of credit is determined by reference to the SCQF.

- The amount of time required by the 'average' learner, at a particular level, to achieve the outcomes claimed. One credit point represents the outcomes of learning achieved through 10 notional hours of learning time.
- The extent to which the learner's 'general' credit can be used as 'specific' credit within their programme. How much specific credit can be given is matter of judgement by the Assessor based on comparing the outcomes of the previous learning with the requirements of the PLQ(SS)/PLQ programme.

8.6 **Recognition of Prior informal Learning (RPL)**

8.6.1 **What does RPL involve?**

The Tutor/Mentor/Assessor will guide the learner in identifying and providing evidence of the learning they have gained through their experience which is comparable to the PLQ(SS)/PLQ standards and learning outcomes. This will involve supporting learners to:

- Reflect on their experiences
- Identify the learning within these experiences

- Provide evidence of the learning claimed

The types of experience which may form the basis of an RPL claim for the PLQ(SS)/PLQ include buddying, supervising, mentoring, training and teaching. The candidate profile for the qualifications at each stage indicates the types of experience which can be used to achieve and demonstrate the learning required for the qualification. For example, for the Stage 3 qualification, relevant types of experience which could form the basis of an RPL claim include:[3]

- Identifying practice learning opportunities
- Designing and managing learners' practice learning experience
- Working with a range of other contributors to the practice learning experience
- Using an innovative range of models of supervision, for example group supervision
- Teaching knowledge, skills and values relevant to practice
- Formative and summative assessment
- Quality assurance of practice learning provision
- Mentoring learners on training and development programmes
- Designing learning programmes

8.6.2 **The key premise** of RPL is that:

- **recognition is given for learning,** not for experience alone
- **the learning that is recognised should be transferable** and not just context-specific
- **credit awarded as a result of RPL is of the same value** as credit gained through formal learning
- **the learner is responsible for identifying and demonstrating their prior learning** with appropriate guidance and support from staff.

8.6.3 **SCQF Core Principles of RPL**[4]

All RPL provision should be underpinned by the following core principles. The aim of the core principles is to ensure effective, quality-assured practice that will enable learners, learning providers and employers to have confidence in the outcomes of RPL. By identifying core principles as the parameters within which all RPL provision within the context of the SCQF should operate consistency will be more feasibly achieved.

The core principles contained within the SCQF RPL guidelines are:

- **Learner-focused**
  RPL should be a gateway, and not a barrier, to learning. RPL should promote the positive aspects of an individual's learning experience (as opposed to its deficiency). RPL should be a voluntary activity on the part

[3] SIESWE (2006) PLQ(SS) Submission to SSSC
[4] SCQF RPL Guidelines (2005) www.scqf.org.uk

of the learner. The learner's needs and reasons for recognition should be paramount.

- **Accessibility**
  RPL should be an accessible and inclusive process, applicable to all learners at all levels. Accessibility can be facilitated through:
  - Initial information and advice (awareness raising);
  - Manageable systems in terms of time and money from the perspective of both learner and learning provider;
  - Easy to understand and easy to implement processes;
  - Embedding of RPL in the programme design stage in order to become an integral part of provision, rather than an 'add-on', marginal activity.

- **Flexibility**
  A range of different approaches to RPL in terms of both support and assessment should be encouraged to address the diversity of learner needs, goals and experiences across the different programmes.

- **Reliability, transparency & consistency**
  In managing RPL, processes are necessary to ensure confidence in the outcomes.

- **Clarity of role definition**
  The roles and responsibilities of learner and programme provider staff should be clearly defined. Staff involved in managing and supporting the RPL process should be provided with appropriate training and support.

- **Quality**
  RPL should be underpinned by Quality Assurance mechanisms. Moderation of RPL for credit should be integrated within existing quality assurance processes and should be available for scrutiny for appropriate external quality assurance, for example by an external auditing body.

8.6.4 **Supporting Learners**

Each stage of the RPL process should be clearly defined and appropriate support provided for each stage.

Two complementary areas of support can be identified:

- support for the process of RPL
- subject specific support

8.6.5 **Support for the RPL process:**

This involves:

- encouraging reflection
- helping to identify sources of learning
- helping with the selection of learning outcomes against which the RPL claim is being made
- advising on the type of evidence that can used to demonstrate learning
- supporting the development of reflective and analytical writing skills

- providing feedback on the production and presentation of the evidence.

8.6.6 **Subject specific support**

In addition to general RPL support the learner will require advice which focuses directly on the subject matter of their learning.

Subject specific support involves:

- advising if the learning from experience is likely to be at the appropriate level for the PLQ(SS)/PLQ programme
- clarifying programme standards and learning outcomes
- advising on which types of evidence are appropriate to the learning outcomes and the criteria for assessment
- advising on how to relate the learning from experience to current theory
- advising on the level of analysis required in the submission
- (where appropriate) providing feedback on draft evidence.

8.6.7 **Who provides support?**

Support can be provided by a Tutor, a Mentor, and/or an Assessor. This depends upon the delivery arrangements for the programme and may vary across programme providers. Support may therefore be provided by a number of individuals or by one individual carrying out the different roles of Tutor/Mentor and Assessor.

If an individual is carrying out both a support and assessment role it is clearly important that there is a clear understanding by the individual and the learner, he or she is working with, of the differences between each role.

The different roles of Mentor, Tutor and Assessor can be defined as follows:[5]

Mentor:
The role of the mentor is to:

- support the learner throughout their work towards achieving the qualification
- help the learner to navigate and understand the programme processes and expectations
- provide a forum for the learner to discuss and reflect on learning
- where group/combined mentoring is in use, to facilitate shared learning between learners
- seek, reflect on and respond to feedback from learners
- provide advice and support to the learner in production of the Collection of Evidence

Tutor:
The role of the tutor is to provide guidance in relation to:

- credit claims

[5] SIESWE (2006) PLQ(SS) Submission to SSSC

- evidencing learning outcomes
    - linking underpinning knowledge to practice

Assessor:
The role of the assessor is to:

- assess the learner's collection of evidence against required learning outcomes and reach a view as to whether the learner has achieved or not yet achieved the learning outcomes for the qualification
- make a recommendation to the awarding body that the learner has either achieved or not yet achieved the learning outcomes necessary for the qualification
- where a learner is deemed not to have achieved the learning outcome(s) to give clear feedback and guidance to the learner on how to address the areas for development
- where a learner is deemed to have achieved the learning outcomes to inform the learner that this recommendation has been made to the awarding body.

It is important that the **Assessor is involved in the planning stage** of a Credit Transfer and/or RPL claim, as well as the assessment stage.

8.6.8 **Support mechanisms**

Support can be provided through

- **Written or e-learning materials**, such as student handbooks or self-assessment packs
- **Individual meetings or tutorials**, where the Tutor, Assessor, or Mentor can provide focused guidance to a person about their individual RPL claim
- **Group sessions**, which can be informal opportunities for peer group support or can be highly structured, task-based and tutor or mentor-led, possibly as part of a wider programme of learning
- **Electronic communication** such as email, on-line discussion fora, audio and video conferencing. This communication can be between the learners and Tutor/Mentor/Assessor or between learners themselves

8.6.9 **A Learning Agreement** should be discussed and signed by both the individual providing support (Tutor/Mentor/Assessor) and the learner. This Learning Agreement should specify the roles and responsibilities of both parties as well as the frequency of meetings and other support processes.

8.6.10 **Gathering and presenting evidence of learning**

Streamlined approaches should be used in the gathering and presenting of evidence of prior informal learning to make the process manageable for both the learner, Tutor/Mentor and Assessor.

8.6.11 A **Collection of Evidence** should include an appropriate balance of direct and reflective evidence.

8.6.12 **Direct Evidence** [6]

Direct evidence demonstrates a learner's practice. It is something they have produced while carrying out their practice role or it can be 'third party evidence' which is something written about their practice by someone else eg their line manager/ supervisor/mentor/colleague/learners they have worked with.

Examples of this type of evidence include:

- Existing written accounts of relevant key work/practice experiences e.g. buddying, supervising, mentoring, training, teaching
- Workplace projects or reports of developments the learner has led or contributed to
- records of meetings/support sessions with learners
- reports produced as part of an evaluation, monitoring or quality assurance process
- learning, training, support, feedback and assessment materials and study packs

It is clearly important to ensure that where such evidence includes reference to individuals, it is anonymised to ensure confidentiality and data protection.

Third party evidence which is based on something someone else says about the learner and their strengths and skills might include:

- written testimony from mentors, supervisors, line managers
- performance appraisal reports/records
- feedback by others on the role or a task or project the learner has carried out (from peers, colleagues, service users, learners)

Evidence can also be provided by an assessor directly observing practice or assigning a written or practical task.

8.6.13 **Reflective evidence**

Reflective evidence demonstrates the learner's understanding of their role and of the principles, practice and the purpose of practice learning; how they have dealt with particular issues, or incidents; an evaluation of particular approaches they have used; a consideration of the application of appropriate theories and knowledge to their practice.

Reflective evidence can be provided in the form of a written account, or case study e.g. reflective account; critical incident analysis; reflective diary/learning log extracts or through a 'professional discussion' or structured interview with an assessor.

8.6.14 **Selection of Evidence**

The recommended assessment mechanism for the PLQ(SS)/PLQ is a **Collection of Evidence.** A Collection of Evidence refers to a set of materials which has been compiled by a learner to demonstrate what he or she has learnt. When gathering evidence as part of an RPL process, the learner needs to decide which learning experiences to draw upon and the particular pieces of evidence he or she will compile to demonstrate the standards and learning outcomes. As indicated above, evidence can include direct evidence, which is material the learner produced at the time of the experience; reflective evidence, such as

[6] Adapted from SSSC/SCQF (2007) RPL Resource Pack

reflective accounts; and 'third party' evidence, such as references or feedback from managers; supervisors; colleagues; service users and the learners they have worked with. Observation of practice provided by managers, colleagues, service users, learners themselves, and practitioners in other related disciplines provides comment on the practice they have witnessed or experienced, but not an assessment of this practice.

As far as possible learners should be encouraged to include evidence which has 'naturally occurred' as part of their normal activity.

The learner requires detailed guidance on how to put together a Collection of Evidence, 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 highly selective in their choice of evidence and to cross reference evidence to more than one standard or learning outcome so that the process of compiling a Collection of Evidence becomes a more manageable exercise. See the cross referencing exercise in Appendix 4. This cross referencing process should be used when making decisions about which evidence to use and in presenting the selected evidence.

9. Stage 3 Recognition

9.1 The role of the Assessor is to assess the material presented and determine whether or not it provides evidence that the learning outcomes have been achieved[7]. The Assessor is the final arbiter of a Credit Transfer and/or RPL claim. The Collection of Evidence may include evidence based on Credit Transfer (a record of prior certificated learning mapped to PLQ(SS)/PLQ standards/outcomes); RPL (direct and reflective evidence of prior informal learning); planned learning (direct and reflective evidence of learning undertaken through the programme through distance; on-line; work based; provider-based; directed and/or self-directed learning.

9.2 **Credit Transfer**

9.2.1 **Evaluating evidence of prior credit**

The learner needs to provide original evidence of their prior credit, (certificate or transcript). If it is unclear to the Tutor, Mentor or Assessor whether or not this constitutes an acceptable match to the PLQ(SS)/PLQ standards, further information can be requested from the student i.e. module / unit descriptors. If the credit was gained more than 5 years ago, the student would need to demonstrate the currency of their learning. The Tutor/Mentor/Assessor should decide the most appropriate means of doing this, for example a statement by the student describing how they have kept their knowledge, skills and understanding up to date through their work experience; verification by mentor or line manager.

[7] SIESWE (2006) PLQ/PLQ(SS) Submission to SSSC

On submission of the learner's evidence of their prior certificated learning, the Tutor/Mentor/Assessor records that they have seen the original evidence of the prior credit which is mapped against the relevant standards/outcomes. This record is then included in the Collection of Evidence. This is considered by the Assessor as part of the overall assessment process.

Guidance on determining volume and level of credit for non-SCQF-referenced qualifications is provided in section 6.2 of these guidelines and also in the SCQF Credit-rating guidelines www.scqf.org.uk

9.3 **Recognition of Prior informal Learning (RPL)**

9.3.1 **Assessing the RPL evidence** [8]

Learners must present RPL evidence in a form that:

i) **makes clear written statements about what was actually learned** i.e. provides a set of learning outcomes which accurately describes their knowledge, skills and understanding;

ii) **clearly indicates the PLQ(SS)/PLQ standards and learning outcomes which it demonstrates**

ii) **provides supportive evidence that the learning claimed has occurred.**

The following widely applied **assessment criteria** can be used by assessors to assist them in determining whether the evidence presented is satisfactory and appropriate:

- **Acceptability**: is there an appropriate match between the evidence presented and the learning outcomes being demonstrated; is the evidence reliable and valid?
- **Sufficiency:** is there a sufficient breadth and depth of evidence, including evidence of reflection, to demonstrate the achievement of the learning outcomes claimed?
- **Authenticity**: is the evidence clearly the outcome of the learner's own effort?
- **Currency:** is what is being assessed current learning? Does the learner need to provide evidence of having kept the learning up-to-date, if the learning experience occurred longer than 5 years ago?

9.3.2 **Avoidance of double counting of credit**

Double counting of credit should be avoided.

In some cases, claims for prior informal learning may, in effect, be for learning which has already been credited through the credit transfer process. For example a learner gaining credit within a PLQ(SS)/PLQ programme based on an existing qualification may seek additional credit for learning resulting from work-based or practice-based experience which forms part of this previous programme. If the learning outcomes based on this experience are equivalent to

[8] Adapted from SCQF RPL Guidelines (2005) www.scqf.org.uk

those already recognized through the credit transfer claim, then this would represent double-counting of the same learning.

9.3.3 **External Verification/Assessment**
Arrangements for the external verification or assessment of RPL claims must be incorporated into the normal external verification or assessment processes for the programme and clearly stated in the procedural documentation.

9.3.4 In sum, the **assessment procedures for Credit Transfer and RPL for the PLQ(SS)/PLQ should be incorporated into the normal assessment, and general quality assurance, procedures** for the programme. This includes the provision of an appeals process in order to protect the rights of the learner.

10. Monitoring and reviewing the Credit Transfer and RPL process

10.1 The process for monitoring and reviewing the operation of the Credit Transfer and RPL procedures should be clearly described and should be in line with the requirements of the monitoring and review process for the PLQ(SS)/PLQ programme.

10.2 Factors considered when monitoring and reviewing the Credit Transfer and RPL procedures may include:

- the number of learners using Credit Transfer and RPL processes
- an evaluation of the learner experience, including time spent in producing or gathering evidence
- an evaluation of the staff experience, including the time spent by staff in supporting the reflective and evidence- gathering process
- a tracking of the progression of learners who have gained credit through Credit Transfer and RPL;
- an evaluation of the effectiveness of any collaborative arrangements with other learning providers and learning partnerships
- reports from external verifiers/assessors.

11. Support for staff engaged in support and assessment of RPL

11.1 Staff involved in the planning, development and operation of RPL processes need to be provided with training, and continuing support for this role. This will require adequate resources.

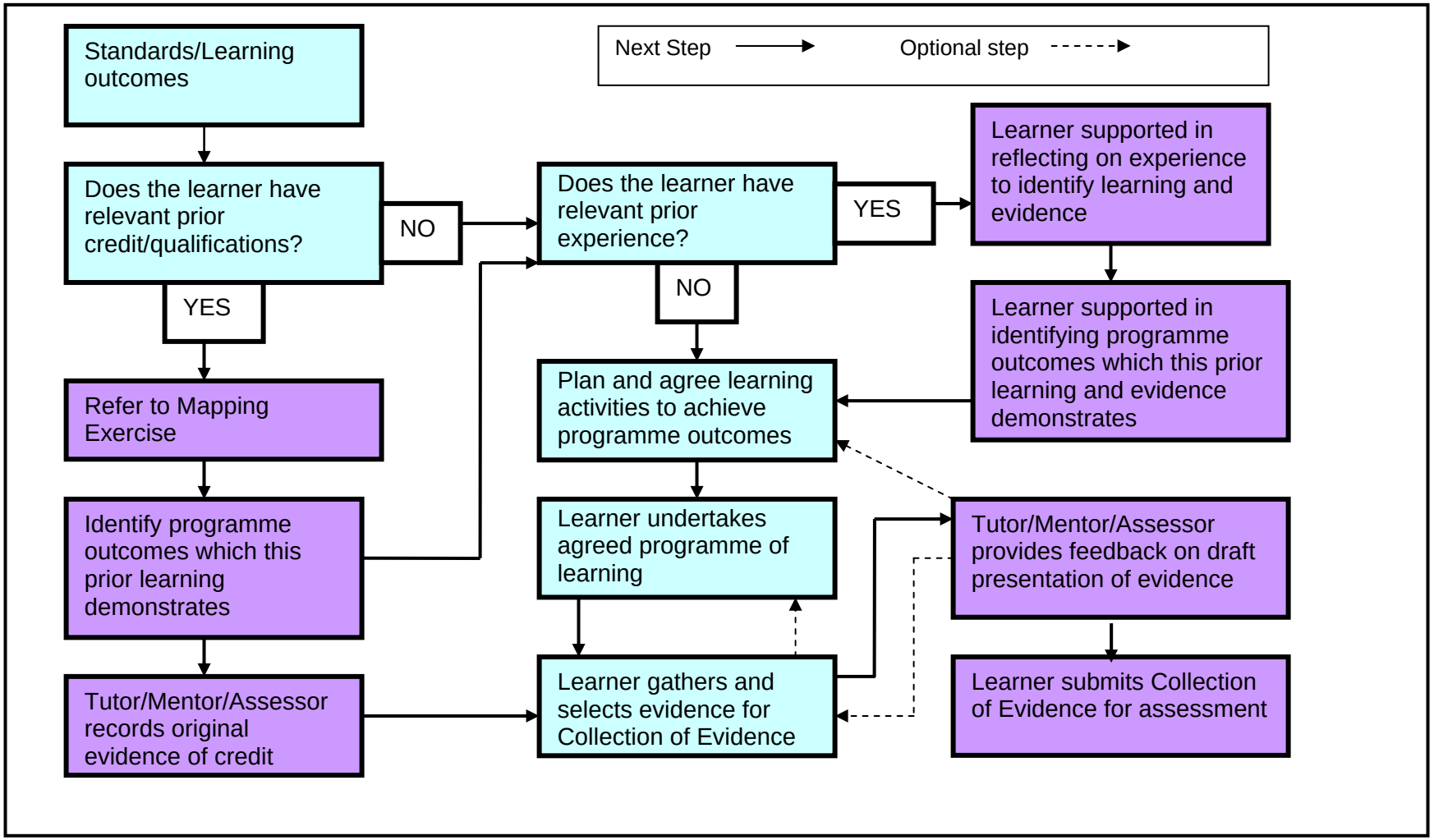
11.2 The roles and responsibilities of both staff and learners in the RPL process need to be clearly defined and agreed through, for example, a **Learning Agreement.**

11.3 It is desirable that the role played by staff in supporting and in assessing RPL claims for credit should be clearly separated. One individual may carry out both roles, but needs to ensure objectivity in the assessment process.

12. Integration of Credit Transfer and RPL provision within quality assurance systems

12.1 Credit Transfer and RPL processes need to be fully integrated within the programme provider's quality assurance systems to ensure transparency, consistency and reliability. Credit Transfer and RPL processes should be available for scrutiny by appropriate external quality assurance, for example by an external auditing body.

Appendix 1: Flowchart of Credit Transfer and RPL process



Appendix 2: Mapping Exercise: summary

Below you will find a summary mapping of Credit Transfer and RPL opportunities that exist in a wide range of awards that PLQ(SS) candidates may posses. For the full mapping see the document entitled **Mapping of Common Social Service Awards against the Practice Learning Qualification (SS) - PLQ(SS).**[9] This guidance document essentially aims to provide PLQ(SS) candidates and their mentors/assessors with some guidance when they are considering previous certificated or informal learning for the purpose of **credit transfer** and/or **RPL (recognition of prior learning)** within the PLQ(SS). Though there are a wide range of awards candidates may bring with them to the Practice Learning Qualification, this document maps only those that were most frequently cited by training managers in a scoping exercise undertaken as part of this project. These awards are:

- Learning and Development HNC
- SVQ Level 3 and 4
- D Units and the A and V Units
- SVQ 3 Health and Social Care (Adults) and (C&YP) SCQF Level 7
- SVQ 3 Early Years Care and Education (not SCQF levelled)
- SVQ 3 Children's Care Learning and Development SCQF Level 7
- HNC Social Care SCQF Level 7
- HNC Childcare SCQF Level 7
- HNC Health Care SCQF Level 7
- Training of Trainers (not SCQF levelled)
- PDA: Care Services Management SCQF Level 8
- PDA: Early Years Child Care and Education SCQF Level 8
- SVQ 4 Health and Social Care (Adults) and (C&YP) SCQF Level 9
- SVQ 4 Early Years Care and Education (not SCQF levelled)
- SVQ 4 Children's Care Learning and Development 4 (not SCQF levelled)
- SVQ 4 Registered Managers Award (RMA) (not SCQF levelled)COSCA Certificate in Counselling Skills (40 SCQF credits at Level 7)
- COSCA Counselling Supervision Skills Certificate (Part 1) (10 SCQF credits at SCQF level 8)
- COSCA Counselling Supervision Certificate (Part 2) (15 SCQF credits at SCQF level 8 TQFE Teaching Qualification in Further Education (SCQF Level 9)
- TQFE Teaching Qualification in Further Education New Standards August 2007 (SCQF Level 9)
- Practice Teaching Award (PTA)
- Honours Degree in Social Work (SCQF Level 10)

Heavy Shading = Credit transfer option exist from source award

Self-explanatory, credit transfer is a strong possibility by virtue of the candidate having achieved the requisite mandatory units of the source award.

Light shading = RPL options exist in award. Credit transfer options may exist from source award

Light shading means that further investigation of the optional units undertaken by the candidate from the source award is required to establish further credit transfer or RPL potential.

Left blank = RPL opportunities from the source award are minimal or non-existent and therefore other RPL evidence or assessment would be required.

[9] Available on the websites of the Scottish Practice Learning Project and the Learning Exchange

Summary of Credit Transfer and RPL opportunities for PLQ(SS) Stage 1

Heavy shading = Credit transfer option exists from source award
Light shading = RPL options exist from source award
Left blank = RPL opportunities from the source award are minimal or non-existent and therefore other RPL evidence or assessment would be required.

Stage 1 Standard	D32/D33	A1	SVQ Level 3	SVQ Level 4	HNC	D34	V1	D35/V2
Establish effective working relationships								
Facilitate learning								
Assessment and accountability								
Evaluate learning								
Create an environment for learning								
Context of practice								
Evidenced Based Practice								
Leadership								

Heavy shading = Credit transfer option exists from source award
Light shading = RPL options exist from source award
Left blank = RPL opportunities from the source award are minimal or non-existant and therefore other RPL evidence or assessment would be required.

Stage 1 Standard (Level 7)	SVQ 3 H&SC (Adults) (7)	SVQ 3 H&SC (C&YP) (7)	SVQ 3 Early Years	SVQ 3 CCLD (7)	HNC Social Care (7)	HNC Early Ed & Childcare (7)	HNC Health Care (7)	Training of Trainers
Establish effective working relationships								
Facilitate learning								
Assessment and accountability								
Evaluate learning								
Create an environment for learning								
Context of practice								
Evidenced Based Practice								
Leadership								

Heavy shading = Credit transfer option exists from source award
Light shading = RPL options exist from source award
Left blank = RPL opportunities from the source award are minimal or non-existant and therefore other RPL evidence or assessment would be required.

Stage 1 Standard (Level 7)	PDA Care Services M'ment (8)	PDA Certificate in Early Education and childcare (8)	COSCA Certificate in Counselling Skill (40 SCQF credits at Level 7)	COSCA Counselling Supervision Skills Certificate (Part 1) (10 SCQF Credits at Level 8)	COSCA Counselling Supervision Certificate (Part 2) (15 SCQF Credits at Level 8 incorporating Part 1)
Establish effective working relationships					
Facilitate learning					
Assessment and accountability					
Evaluate learning					
Create an environment for learning					
Context of practice					
Evidenced Based Practice					
Leadership					

Summary of Credit Transfer and RPL opportunities for PLQ(SS) Stage 2

Heavy shading = Credit transfer option exists from source award
Light shading = RPL options exist from source award
Left blank = RPL opportunities from the source award are minimal or non-existant and therefore other RPL evidence or assessment would be required.

Stage 2 Standard	D32/D33	A1	SVQ Level 3	SVQ Level 4	HNC	D34	V1	D35/V2
Establish effective working relationships			**Not matched**		**Not matched**			
Facilitate learning			"		"			
Assessment and accountability			"		"			
Evaluate learning			"		"			
Create an environment for learning			"		"			
Context of practice			"		"			
Evidenced Based Practice			"		"			
Leadership			"		"			

Heavy shading = Credit transfer option exists from source award
Light shading = RPL options exist from source award
Left blank = RPL opportunities from the source award are minimal or non-existant and therefore other RPL evidence or assessment would be required.

Stage 2 Standard (Level 9)	SVQ 4 H&SC (Adults) (9)	SVQ 4 H&SC (C&YP) (9)	SVQ 4 Early Education and childcare	SVQ 4 CCLD	SVQ 4 RMA	TQFE (SCQF Level 9)	TQFE New August '07 (SCQF Level 9)
Establish effective working relationships							
Facilitate learning							
Assessment and accountability							
Evaluate learning							
Create an environment for learning							
Context of practice							
Evidenced Based Practice							
Leadership							

Summary of Credit Transfer and RPL opportunities for PLQ(SS) Stage 3

Heavy shading = Credit transfer option exists from source award
Light shading = RPL options exist from source award
Left blank = RPL opportunities from the source award are minimal or non-existant and therefore other RPL evidence or assessment would be required.

Stage 3 Standard (Level 10)	Practice Teaching Award	Honours Degree in SW (SCQF Level 10)
Establish effective working relationships	*	
Facilitate learning	*	
Assessment and accountability	*	
Evaluate learning	*	
Create an environment for learning	*	
Context of practice	*	
Evidenced Based Practice	*	
Leadership	*	

* Summative assessment for the Practice Teacher Award (PTA) comprises of a portfolio incorporating a range of evidence. Credit transfer / RPL opportunities within this Award, is dependent on the supporting evidence the candidate can produce.

Appendix 3
Planning a learning pathway to the PLQ

Standard/ Learning Outcomes	Prior Credit/ Qualifications	Relevant prior experience	Existing Evidence	Planned learning activity	Planned evidence	Target Date

Appendix 4
Collection of Evidence: cross referencing

Abbreviation of PLQ standards

FL=Facilitate Learning **CP= context of Practice** **EBP=Evidence-based practice**
AA=Assessment and accountability **EL=Evaluate Learning** **L=Leadership**
CEL= Create an environment for learning **EEWR=Establish effective working relationships**

Experience (formal/informal learning)	Evidence	FL	AA	CEL	CP	EL	EEWR	EBP	L

Appendix 5: Glossary of terms

Assessment: The process of collecting and interpreting evidence of a learner's performance

Assessor: The person who applies the assessment process to learners for their achievement of a qualification.

Claim: The presentation of the outcomes and evidence of prior learning for the purpose of gaining entry to a programme, or credit within a programme or towards a qualification.

Collection of Evidence: a set of materials which has been compiled by a learner to demonstrate what he or she has learnt.

Colleges: Scotland's forty-three colleges (of further and higher education) offer a range of programmes to meet the needs of individuals, communities and employers. Provision includes SQA qualifications, other vocational and academic qualifications and non formal learning and training.

Credit: this is the currency used in education and training and within the SCQF which indicates how much learning has been achieved at a given level.

Credit Transfer a process, through which previously assessed and certificated learning is considered and, as appropriate recognised for academic or vocational purposes. This was previously known as the **Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL).** A learner may combine an RPL claim with a Credit Transfer claim, in seeking entry to, or credit within, a formal programme of study.

Credit-rating: a process of professional judgement leading to a statement on the level and volume of outcomes of learning.

HEIs, Higher Education Institutions: Scotland has fourteen universities, the Open University in Scotland, one college of higher education, two art schools, one conservatoire, and the Scottish Agricultural College.

Learner: any individual who is engaged in any form of learning or training, whether non-formal or formal, or who is considering returning to learning.

Learning Agreement: This is a document which specifies the roles and responsibilities of the person(s) providing support (Tutor/Mentor/Assessor) and the learner, as well as the frequency of meetings and other support processes. The Learning Agreement should be discussed and signed by both parties.

Learning Providers: all organisations across all education and training sectors which provide formal or non-formal learning and training.

Learning Outcomes: a statement of competences, including knowledge, skills and values, capable of being demonstrated at the end of a process of learning.

Mentor: a person supporting the learner through the RPL and Credit Transfer process as part of a wider role of support within the programme

Professional judgement: a decision reached by those best qualified through experience and knowledge of the discipline, field of study, profession, trade or area of skill.

SCQF credit-rating organisations: currently only SQA, HEIs and colleges can award SCQF credit. These organisations can award both **general and specific credit** for learning. SQA awards SCQF credit to learning through the delivery and assessment of its qualifications by SQA-approved centres. General credit relates to the agreed determination of level and volume of learning within the SCQF. Specific credit is that which is recognised as being relevant for entry to, or credit within a particular programme.

SCQF Level Descriptors: these define the characteristic generic outcomes for each of the twelve levels of the SCQF. They are intended to be indicative rather than prescriptive and any defined SCQF credit is not required to encompass all five areas of competence. The five broad headings, under which the generic outcomes at each level are defined, are knowledge and understanding; practice (applied knowledge and understanding); generic cognitive skills, such as evaluation and critical analysis; communication, numeracy and IT skills; and autonomy, accountability and working with others.

SQA, Scottish Qualifications Authority: the national body for Scotland with responsibility for the development, accreditation, assessment and certification of qualifications other than degrees. SQA approve centres to deliver and assess qualifications, such as Standard Grades, Highers and Advanced Highers; National qualifications; Higher National Qualifications; SVQs; and Professional Development Awards (PDAs)

SQA Approved Centres: organisations approved as SQA centres to offer specific qualifications. Centres can be private training providers whose sole purpose is the delivery of training and the assessment of candidates; private and public sector companies who offer training to their employees, as well as schools and colleges**.**

SVQs, Scottish Vocational Qualifications: SVQs are competence-based qualifications assessed in the workplace. They are made up of national occupational standards relevant to the particular job or function. SVQs give the opportunity to recognise an individual's achievement, skills and development in the workplace. They are nationally recognised qualifications at levels 2,3,4 and 5 including SVQs in Health and Social Care and reflect the complexity and responsibility of different workers' roles. SVQs are among the recognised occupational qualifications for the social service workforce in Scotland.

Tutor: a person supporting the learner through the RPL and Credit Transfer process as part of a wider role of support within the programme.

Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL): a process which acknowledges, and values publicly, learning which has been achieved outside formal education or training systems.

RPL for Personal/Career Development or formative assessment: a process of recognising learning achieved outside formal education or training systems within the context of further learning and development. This process can be linked to confidence-building; identifying individual learning pathways; a notional leveling of learning within the context of the SCQF; supporting the transition between informal, non-formal and formal learning; and preparation for the process of RPL for credit.

RPL for Credit, or **summative assessment:** a process of assessing learning achieved outside of formal education or training systems which is recognised, if appropriate, for academic or vocational purposes. This process can also be known as **APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning)**. This process can enable a learner to gain entry to a programme of formal learning if the outcomes of their prior informal learning are judged as equivalent to the entry requirements to the programme; to gain credit within a programme of formal learning if the outcomes of his/her prior informal learning are judged as equivalent to the outcomes of the programme to which he/she is seeking credit. Credit can be awarded for elements of the programme, i.e. units or modules, or parts of a level, or for an entire level. Most programmes have limits in the amount of credit that can be awarded through RPL.

Appendix 6: Further reading

Guidelines and reference documents

SCQF, Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework (2006) SCQF Handbook Volume 1 (contains credit –rating and credit transfer guidelines) www.scqf.org.uk

SCQF, Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework (2006) SCQF Handbook Volume 2 (contains guidelines for the Recognition of Prior informal Learning (RPL). www.scqf.org.uk

SSSC (2007), SCQF Social Services RPL Resource Pack

SIESWE, Scottish Institute for Excellence in Social Work Education (2005, revised 2006) Practice Learning Qualifications and Practice Learning Qualifications (Social Services) Submission to SSSC

RPL process and reflective practice

Boud, D., Keogh, R. and Walker, D. (1985) Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning, London, Kogan Page (Chapter 1).

Boud, D., Cohen, R. and Walker, D. (Eds.) (1993) Using Experience for Learning, Buckingham, SRHE and OU Press.

Brown, A. (1992), Valuing Skills: Recognition of Prior Learning, North Melbourne, Australia, Victorian Education Foundation (2nd Edition

Brown M, Fry, H, & Marshall, S Reflective Practice in Fry, H., Ketteridge, S. and Marshall, S (eds). (2003) *A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education,* Enhancing Academic Practice, London, Kogan Page, 2nd Edition.).

Eraut, M, (1994) Developing Professional Knowledge and Competence. London, Falmer Press.

Gibbs, G (1988) Learning by Doing – a Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods, Further Education Unit, Oxford

Kolb, D. (1984) Experiential Learning, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall.

Moon, J. (2000) Reflection in Learning and Professional Development. London, Kogan Page (Chapter 3).

Schön, D. (1987) Educating the Reflective Practitioner: towards a new design for teaching and learning in the professions. San Francisco, Jossey Bass Inc. (Chapter 2).

SCQF, Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework (2006) Recognition of Prior informal Learning (RPL) Resource Pack

Wailey. T., and Simpson, R. (2000) Juggling between Learning and Work: AP (E) L in the UK, Lifelong Learning in Europe, 5 (2), 83-89.

Warner Weil, S and McGill, I (Eds.) (1989) Making Sense of Experiential Learning. Diversity in Theory and Practice, Buckingham, SRHE and OU Press.

Mentoring and Tutoring

Benbow, W.Jordan, G., Cooper, K, Petra Jonckheer 'Developing New supervisors and Assessors of Practice Learning: a profiling tool for registered practitioners www.practicebasedlearning.org

Morton, A (2003) *Continuing Professional Development series No 2 .Mentoring* (Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) Generic Centre

Morton-Cooper A and Palmer A (2000) *Mentoring, Preceptorship and Clinical Supervision: A guide to professional roles in clinical practice* 2nd Ed Oxford: Blackwell Science

QMUC (2002) HEC in Person Centred Approaches for Social Care Workers. Mentoring General