



European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2014

Country report UK, Wales

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1 Introduction

In Wales, validation is understood as the formal certification of learning in some form or way e.g. a full qualification, credit. The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) provides a means of recognition of non-formal learning through its Quality Assured Lifelong Learning (QALL) pillar.

Alongside this, learners in Wales can also make use of the other validation routes available in the UK:

- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) (relating to VET and CVET qualifications),
- RPL in the Higher Education (HE) Sector,
- Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement in Non-Accredited Learning (RARPA), and,
- Access to HE courses.

However, although there are opportunities to have non-formal and informal learning recognised in Wales, there is no national strategy relating specifically to validation of non-formal and informal learning. Validation is developed from both a national and sectoral perspective, with the CQFW providing an overarching means of recognising learning, and sectoral initiatives focusing on providing guidance and frameworks for validation.

It cannot be said that certain sectors are given priority, however the CQFW implementation plan does indicate that for QALL, the aim is to work with *“significant employment sectors and key priority areas of the Welsh economy such as health, care, public sector, engineering and social justice, hard-to-reach learners and communities for the recognition of learning and with professional and sector bodies accrediting their provision into the CQFW”*.

In terms of progress since 2010, with specific reference to the QALL pillar of the CQFW, there seems to have been positive take-up of this opportunity to have non-formal learning recognised, as there are now over 1,000 QALL units on the CQFW.

With regard to the other opportunities for validation, although there have been positive developments at national ‘strategic’ level, such as the new Quality Code for HE, and the introduction of Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data collection activities relating to RPL modules, actual take-up by both individuals and providers remains very low.

According to stakeholders interviewed for this report, some potential obstacles to further development include a lack of awareness amongst learners of RPL opportunities, a certain lack of expertise among providers, or a lack of confidence to carry out RPL. It is also possible that the lack of dedicated funding for RPL (except in the HE sector) is a disincentive to what can be perceived as a process that is difficult to administer and time-consuming (for both the individual applicants and the providers).

The new RPL qualifications aimed at practitioners which have been developed may help to address some of these issues, although these are voluntary so their impact will depend on take-up.

2 National perspective on validation

The Welsh Government is part of devolved system of governance in the UK for education, lifelong learning and many aspects of the skills agenda. Each of the devolved administrations has its own strategy for skills and lifelong learning.

The CQFW provides a mechanism for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Wales - this brief additional report for Wales has been prepared for the 2014 edition of the Inventory to acknowledge this distinction.

2.1 National legal framework, system or policy on validation

The CQFW was adopted in 2002. It encompasses all types of learning and qualifications and is intended to facilitate *“parity in the recognition of achievement for learners of all ages,*

whether they are learning in the workplace, community, at school, college or university". The framework comprises three pillars, including frameworks for regulated general and vocational learning (the England, Wales and Northern Ireland National Qualifications Framework and the Qualifications and Credit Framework, (QCF), the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), and Quality Assured Lifelong Learning (QALL).

It is QALL which encompasses learning which falls outside of the regulated qualifications frameworks and Higher Education qualifications. The QALL pillar of the framework offers a mechanism to recognise (certificate) knowledge and/or skills gained through non-formal and informal learning, including for example adult and community learning, training undertaken in the workplace, informal, specialist, interest- or hobby-based learning.

The recognition process for QALL is described in the box below.

The QALL recognition process¹

QALL is a process which enables non-formal learning to be recognised as a unit within the National Qualification Framework in Wales.

Through the QALL mechanism of the CQFW, non-formal and informal learning such as for example in-house company training, adult and community learning or informal, specialist, interest or hobby based learning can be recognised and awarded credit. The learning must be identified in recognised units, which can only be awarded by a 'Recognised Body'. Recognised Bodies include all Welsh Higher Education Institutions, Awarding Organisations and Sector Skills Councils.

Organisations applying to become a Recognised Body must show that they have the relevant expertise, a thorough knowledge and understanding of the principles of assigning credit, and appropriate quality assurance processes. To date, Recognised Bodies for QALL are mainly existing Awarding Organisations (AO) – Agored Cymru being the main one.

There is a clear process for developing and drafting units, and training is available from some Recognised Awarding Bodies on how to write units. Draft units submitted to a Recognised Body are subject to a process of scrutiny including experienced experts review. Following this peer review process, there may then be revisions before the unit is submitted for approval and recognition. Once approved it is available for use by any Recognised Awarding body.

Approved QALL units can only be delivered by a provider that is an approved centre of the Recognised Body. Organisations with limited experience of delivering units or qualifications will often work together with an experienced recognised provider. There is normally a formal partnership agreement between a third-party provider and the centre, which details the arrangements for quality assurance on which the reputation and value of the award of credit relies.

NIACE Dysgu Cymru has published a Quality Assured Lifelong Learning Toolkit which is aimed at managers and practitioners who provide adult learning or training. The toolkit is intended to provide advice in structuring and gaining recognition for the learning or training they deliver. It is available online: <http://www.niacedc.org.uk/news/quality-assured-lifelong-learning-toolkit>

Alongside the opportunity offered by QALL, to recognise non-formal learning, learners in Wales can also make use of the other validation routes available in the UK:

- **RPL (relating to Regulated IVET and CVET qualifications):** The 2008 Regulatory Arrangements for the vocational qualifications introduced an obligation on Awarding Organisations and centres (i.e. learning providers) to establish systems and procedures to support the recognition of prior learning. See the country report for England and Northern Ireland for more detail. The CQFW Implementation Plan 2009-2014 refers to plans to explore a policy and funding model for Recognition of Prior Learning and the European Union guidelines for recognition of Non Formal Learning (NFL) by 2012².

¹ Information based on a note (unpublished) prepared by Adrian Sheehan, Colleges Wales, 'Recognising Non-formal Learning in Wales', 11 July 2013

² CQFW Implementation Plan and Handbook 2009-2014. Internet: <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/090619handbook20092014en.pdf>

- **RPL in the HE Sector:** The responsibility for the implementation of RPL lies with the individual Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), in line with the autonomous nature of this sector, where HEIs are responsible for admissions and assessment, as well as the quality and standards of their awards. Although there is no legislation that regulates RPL, there is a long tradition of recognition of prior learning and encouraging mature students to participate in higher education. The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) issued a circular in 2010 outlining the circumstances in which funding can be provided for RPL in HE in Wales, and providing good practice guidelines for institutions to consider in implementing and promoting APEL – this remains the most recent RPL document relating specifically to HE in Wales. Furthermore, the recently introduced [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#), which sets out the ‘expectations’ that all providers of UK HE are required to meet, includes explicit references to RPL and its implementation in relation to both admissions and assessment. Again, see the country report for England and Northern Ireland for more detail.
- **Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement in Non-Accredited Learning (RARPA):** The RARPA system relates to non-accredited provision in a range of settings for adult learners. It is seen as a method of quality assuring learning provision and also as a way of supporting learners to make the transition from non-formal to formal learning. Again, see the country report for England and Northern Ireland for more detail.
- **Access to HE courses:** These prepare adult learners without traditional qualifications for study at university. Applicants to Access courses come from a variety of backgrounds, and the colleges concerned will assess their potential to enter the access course taking into account their prior learning and experience. The Access to HE Diploma is a regulated qualification, the only difference is that it is regulated by QAA. Up to 50% of the qualification can be gained by RPL.

2.2 Skills audits

The UK Government’s new Work Programme³ launched in June 2011 is being delivered through a range of private, public and voluntary sector organisations, which are supporting people who are at risk of becoming long-term unemployed to find work. As part of the current review of welfare-to-work outcomes and services⁴ a number of measures are being looked at to improve programme implementation going forward – one of these includes the proposal to include a robust initial, diagnostic assessment for individuals on the Work Programme to support the learning and skills needs of each participant⁵.

The National Careers Service in England⁶, Wales⁷ and Northern Ireland⁸ also provides voluntary Skills Health Checks, which can be undertaken using online tools or face-to-face with a Careers Advisor. The Careers Wales website has an online tool called a ‘Learning Pathway Plan’ which can be used to record amongst others an individual’s existing skills and experience, goals and aspirations to help put together a plan for the future. The Learning Pathway Plan includes a section on informal achievements and experiences.

In addition, work-based Skills Passports have been developed which aim to provide employees with a transferable record of their qualifications and experience, and which can

³ Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/49884/the-work-programme.pdf

⁴ Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/225753/dwp-commissioning-strategy-2013.pdf

⁵ Please see:

http://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/dwp_commissioning_strategy_consultation_sept_2013.pdf

⁶ Please see: <https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/Pages/Home.aspx>

⁷ Please see: <http://www.careerswales.com/en/>

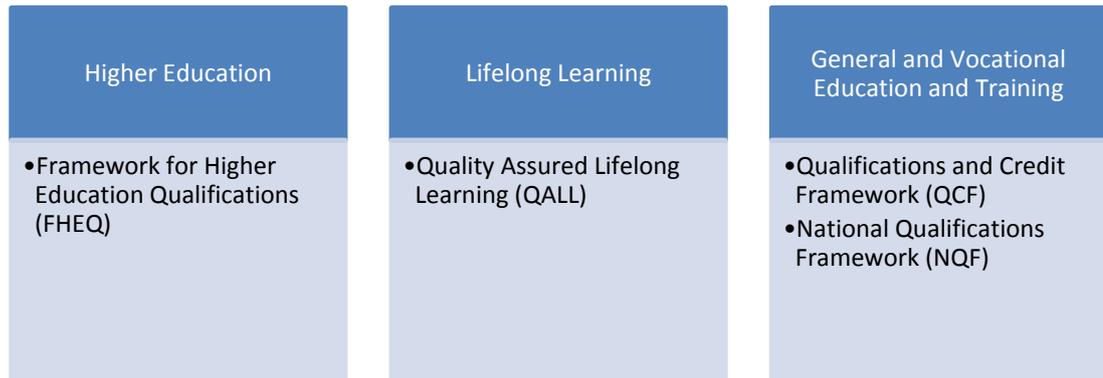
⁸ Please see: <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/information-and-services/education-and-learning/careers.htm>

be easily assessed by future employers. Skills Passports operate at sector level⁹ although take-up has been mixed in the sectors which have developed them.

2.3 Relationship with qualifications framework and credit systems, and information on standards used for validation

Qualifications and qualifications frameworks

As outlined above, the CQFW has been in place since 2002. The Framework is made up of three pillars, which represent learning in Higher Education, Regulated General and Vocational Qualifications, and Quality Assured Lifelong Learning, as shown in the diagram below.



Source: ICF International, derived from the Welsh Government Pillars diagram of the CQFW. <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/qualificationsinwales/creditqualificationsframework/publications/handbook/?lang=en>

As the diagram shows, the pillars for HE and general and vocational education and training refer to the other qualifications frameworks which are in place in the UK. These frameworks and the opportunities they provide for validation are described briefly below (more detail can be found in the separate report for England and Northern Ireland):

- The [Framework for Higher Education Qualifications \(FHEQ\)](#) for England, Wales and Northern Ireland is based on the premise that qualifications should be awarded for the achievement of outcomes and attainment, rather than years of study. Qualification descriptors are therefore used to describe the outcomes and attributes expected for the award of individual qualifications.
- The [Qualifications and Credit Framework \(QCF\)](#) covers mainly vocational and pre-vocational education and training areas. The Regulatory Arrangements for the QCF indicate that it is intended to be inclusive and should recognise the achievements of all learners at any level and in any area of learning.
- Academic Qualifications such as GCSE ,A levels and others such BTEC Qualifications fit into the [National Qualifications Framework \(NQF\)](#). All qualifications are defined in terms of level descriptors and are based on the standards of knowledge, skill and competence needed for each qualification. The NQF does not include any reference to RPL.

As explained above, the QALL pillar, which sits alongside these, is intended to recognise learning that takes place outside of HE and general and vocational education and training. The QALL pillar means that the CQFW can encompass all types of learning, regardless of wherever and whenever it takes place.

⁹ Examples include: Construction, Financial Services, Food and Drink, Manufacturing, Creative and Cultural, Hospitality, Nuclear, Process Industries, IT, Retail, Health, Sport and Active Leisure.

Credit Systems

The definition of credit used for the [CQFW](#) is “a means of recognising learning wherever, whenever and however it is achieved”. Credit is expressed in terms of value and credit level: one credit is equal in value to a notional 10 hours of learning and the credit level reflects the level of achievement (from Entry to Level 8). Learners aged 14 and above can earn credit for learning, regardless of where it takes place (in the workplace, in the community, at school, college or university). Credit is awarded “for the achievement of learning outcomes that have been verified through reliable and valid assessment in line with current rules and regulations. This is done through the achievement of units”¹⁰. Units are “a coherent combination of learning outcomes, plus assessment criteria that have been given a level and Credit Value”.

Within the CQFW the Higher education has a modular credit based structure, vocational qualifications can be combined together to create a qualification (using the rules of combination appropriate to that qualification framework) or a coherent learning pathway/programme that meets an individual’s needs or the training requirements associated with a particular job or role. The NQF does have a modular or credit based system.

The QALL pillar of the CQFW is made up of learning or training units that can be combined into courses or programmes.

Agored Cymru (a Welsh regulated Awarding Organisation) states that “RPL may be used to claim one or more units of a qualification but cannot be used against part of a unit. If a learner partially meets the assessment criteria of a unit, s/he must provide evidence to fulfill the remaining assessment criteria”¹¹. This is in line with the regulatory arrangements, which state that RPL claims must be made in relation to a whole unit or a number of units within a qualification (i.e. credit cannot be awarded for the partial completion of a unit). Please see the Inventory 2014 England and Northern Ireland report for more details of the QCF regulatory arrangements.

The Agored Cymru policy also states that in some circumstances there may be a limit to the proportion of a qualification that can be achieved by either credit transfer or RPL. For example, it is only possible to achieve up to 50 % of an Access to Higher Education Diploma through credit transfer or RPL. Credits/units achieved through RPL are to be recorded on the claims for credit towards a full qualification, and certificates and/or credit transcripts awarded by Agored Cymru identify RPL credits specifically.

In Higher Education, the credit system is integrated into the qualifications framework. The CQFW Implementation Plan 2009-2014 includes the Higher Education in Wales credit specification and guidance which complement the FHEQ England, Wales and Northern Ireland guidelines published by the QAA, August 2008. The FHEQ specification and guidance document states that the amount of credit allocated to any particular achievement must be independent of the mode of the learning but focuses on level and volume and that credit can be awarded through a process of accreditation of prior learning (APL) or experiential learning (APEL) – i.e. RPL. Again there may be limits to the proportion of the award that can be achieved through RPL.

Standards

RPL is conducted in relation to formal learning curricula/standards.

¹⁰ CQFW Common Accord, in the CQFW Implementation Plan and Handbook 2009-2014.
<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/090619handbook20092014en.pdf>

¹¹ Agored Cymru Centre Handbook.
<http://www.agored.org.uk/CentreHandbook/CentreHandbook.aspx?id=46&lang> – see link to RPL policy and procedure

2.4 National institutional framework

The Welsh Government leads on the implementation of the CQFW. Partners involved in the CQFW implementation include HEFCW and external social partners located in Government departments, agencies, Awarding Organisations, higher education and training providers¹².

The Welsh Government, on behalf of Welsh Ministers, is the regulator of qualifications (other than degrees) examinations and assessments in Wales. However at the time of writing, a consultation had taken place on proposals to develop a new qualifications body for Wales, called 'Qualifications Wales'. It is proposed that this new body will initially undertake quality assurance functions which are comparable with the regulatory functions currently carried out by Welsh Minister, then in the longer-term will also take responsibility for awarding qualifications such as GCSEs, A-levels and the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification in Wales.

The National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE), as mentioned above, has prepared a toolkit which provides advice for providers in structuring and gaining recognition for the learning or training they deliver.

With regard to HE, as outlined above the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) has issued guidelines for institutions to consider in implementing and promoting accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL)¹³. As mentioned above, and in more detail in the report for England and Northern Ireland, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education (across the UK) issued and will monitor the recently introduced [Quality Code for HE](#).

2.5 Governance and allocation of responsibilities

2.5.1 Please describe the allocation of responsibilities (at national, regional, local, social partner, provider level) according to the different aspects of validation

As is the case in the rest of the UK, responsibility for the implementation of all stages of validation (from the design of the approach through to its evaluation and review) lies with the learning providers and awarding bodies. National-level organisations provide guidance and principles, as outlined above.

2.5.2 Explain more specifically the role of different stakeholders

Education and training providers:

Organisations can apply to become a 'Recognised Body' to offer QALL. To become a Recognised Body, the organisation must have systems in place for RPL. Learning providers – mainly voluntary and community organisations - can then apply to a Recognised Body for the informal learning they offer to be recognised. As mentioned above, to date, Recognised Bodies for QALL are all regulated awarding organisations, for example Agored Cymru, City and Guilds, OCR Pearson and the Institute of Leadership and Management.

Private sector actors (including social partners)

Private sector training providers and employers can use the QALL facility of the CQFW to have training they provide recognised in the form of a CQFW unit.

An example of RPL offered by a Welsh employer is described below:

- **Prospects Care** provides residential care to young and disadvantaged people in Wales. It provides training to its employees for their induction and training programme. Evidence gathered during the course of this training can then be used to acquire units which can be put towards a CQFW Level 3 Diploma, which is a requirement of the role with

¹² CQFW Implementation Plan and Handbook 2009-2014.
<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/090619handbook20092014en.pdf>

¹³ HEFCW (2010). *Circular: Funding the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL)*.
http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars_2010/W10%2042HE%20Funding%20the%20accreditation%20of%20prior%20experimental%20learning%20APEL.pdf

Prospects Care. In this way, individuals are given a route by which they can ‘fast track’ towards the full qualification they need¹⁴.

Third sector organisations

As mentioned above, Agored Cymru - a charitable trust and social enterprise .

2.5.3 Coordination between stakeholders

The implementation of the CQFW has been carried out with the Welsh Government in the lead but supported by various other stakeholders. For instance, the CQFW Common Accord (CCA), which sets out the states the agreed terminology, common principles and quality assurance arrangements for the CQFW *“was developed with the involvement of the regulatory authorities, Awarding Organisations, national and regional credit bodies and other organisations with an interest and expertise in credit matters throughout the UK so that credits would be recognised and valued by learners, providers, employers, Awarding Organisations and others”*.

Moreover, the purpose of QALL is to recognise learning which is taking place outside of the formal sector, therefore it is a means of bringing in third sector and private sector partners into the education arena.

2.6 Examples of national regional, local or EU funded initiatives

- The National Leadership and Innovation Agency for Healthcare (NILAH) in Wales uses QALL to recognise learning activities, including previously informal, work place activities, and to make sure these learning activities are quality assured and transferable. Its Accredited Learning Panel provides a mechanism for quality assuring work place training activities. The panel is made up of members from the Sector Skills Council, Allied Health Professions, Sciences, Nursing, and Healthcare Inspectorate Wales. Its main function is to quality check all non-regulated, credit rated and accredited learning. Units are submitted by awarding bodies and are endorsed by the panel for inclusion on the CQFW register of awards.
- One of the Key Actions of the CQFW Implementation Plan is to enable “Quality Assured Lifelong Learning (QALL) into the framework to facilitate learning and recognise achievement across a far broader spectrum”. The Plan refers to working with “significant employment sectors and key priority areas of the Welsh economy such as health, care, public sector, engineering and social justice (...) hard to reach learners group and communities for the recognition of learning (...) professional and sector bodies accrediting their provision into the CQFW”.
- In 2013, the UK was the ninth country in the list of the top 20 countries which visited the Europass portal (specific data for Wales is not available). In terms of downloads of Europass CV/ Language Passport documents, English was the sixth highest language (however it is worth bearing in mind these figures will include users from other countries, including of course Ireland)¹⁵.
- The number of organisations that have issued Youthpass certificates in the UK (specific data for Wales is not available) has ranged from 104 in 2010 to 147 in 2012 (dropping slightly to 131 in 2013). Youthpass certificates had been issued for 246 projects in 2013, again a slight drop from 257 in 2012 but an overall increase since 2010 (from 201). There was a significant increase in the total number of Youthpass certificates issued in the UK between 2010 and 2013, from 1740 to 3406 in 2013¹⁶.

¹⁴ Recognition of Prior Learning and how sectors are using it in the UK and Europe (unpublished)

¹⁵ Cedefop (2013). *Europass website 2013 activity report*.
http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/Statistics/3_Annual_activity/2013/Europass_Statistic_Reports_Year_Visits_Downloads_2013.PDF

¹⁶ Data supplied by SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre, extracted 10 September 2013

2.7 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

2.7.1 Funding

Outside of the HE sector, it is not currently possible to draw down funding to carry out RPL, unless it is done 'within' the provision of a qualification via formal learning (i.e. for access/exemptions).

With regard to HE, HEFCW provides credit-based funding for part-time and postgraduate provision, which could include RPL modules. If an RPL module is provided within a full-time undergraduate course, it is funded as part of the student place, mainly through the tuition fees paid by students (although it is possible that fees may be discounted for RPL modules). Tuition grants are also available. Funding is not provided for the use of RPL for entry or admissions purposes, for experiential learning which has previously been accredited elsewhere, or for credits from which students are exempted¹⁷.

2.7.2 Distribution of costs

There are a number of costs associated with the creation of QALL units, as listed below. Recognised Bodies' charges for these different aspects vary considerably as follows:

- Developing a unit: Costs can vary across Recognised Bodies from GBP 30 to GBP 100 to develop a unit;
- Meeting the required quality standards to become a 'recognised centre' (i.e. able to deliver units): Costs vary from GBP 400 to GBP 1, 500;
- Registration and certification for recognised centres: Costs vary from free to GBP 20 for registration, and certification varies both between Recognised Bodies and also dependent on whether it is for a unit or qualification (from GBP 3 per credit to GBP 100 per qualification);
- Ongoing costs of maintaining quality and necessary staff training: Some free training is offered by some Recognised Bodies but training can cost about GBP 100 per person per full day event (GBP 50 per half day) or about GBP 500 for a bespoke session;
- Partnership agreements: the potential costs of a partnership agreement with a recognised centre, together with the necessary processes and paperwork to receive award of credit, vary; and,
- Staff costs: there will be staff costs for participation in quality assurance, meetings and training etc¹⁸.

With regard to RPL, the Agored Cymru RPL policy states that its centres may charge learners a fee for RPL services but does not give any guidance on how much that fee might be.

2.7.3 Data on flows of beneficiaries

National data on RPL is not available. However it is thought that in practice, validation is very small-scale in Wales. Although Awarding Organisations have RPL policies in place, there is little motivation amongst learning providers to take forward actual implementation¹⁹.

Following a request from HEFCW, t HESA has begun to collect data on whether modules are taken through RPL or known as Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) in Wales in order to monitor the amount of provision taken by this means Institutions are required to state whether a module: has been assessed through APEL, is only available through APEL, or has not been assessed or is not available through APEL. This data has

¹⁷ Based on information provided by a representative of HEFCW and the HEFCW Circular: Funding the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL), published in December 2010. Internet: http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars_2010/W10%2042HE%20Funding%20the%20accreditation%20of%20prior%20experiential%20learning%20APEL.pdf

¹⁸ Burns, Katy and Richard Spear (2011). *Quality Assured Lifelong Learning Toolkit*. <http://www.niacecd.org.uk/sites/default/files/NDC%20Quality%20Assured%20English%20LR.pdf>

¹⁹ Stakeholder interview

been collected for the first time in the academic year 2012/13²⁰ and the results are presented in Tables 2.1 and 2.2 below. As can be seen from the data, APEL in the HE sector is still very small in scale (although this is may be due in part to 2012/13 being the first year that data about APEL have been collected – therefore some caution should be exercised when reviewing the data).

Table 2.1 Number of students with some element of their course taken through APEL, by mode and level of study, 2012/13

Mode of study	Level of study	Number of students	Number with at least one module taken through APEL/APEL module	Proportion with at least one module taken through APEL/APEL module
Full-time and sandwich	Postgraduate	15,821	75	0.5%
	Undergraduate	76,986	713	0.9%
Part-time	Postgraduate	12,032	108	0.9%
	Undergraduate	29,978	245	0.8%
Total		134,817	1,141	0.8%

Data provided by HEFCW

Table 2.2 Number of modules taken through APEL, by mode and level of study, 2012/13

Mode of study	Level of study	Module taken through APEL*	APEL module*	Module not taken/available through APEL*	Total*	Proportion taken through APEL /APEL module
Full-time and sandwich	Postgraduate	124	29	71,199	71,352	0.2%
	Undergraduate	4,372	312	486,650	491,334	1.0%
Part-time	Postgraduate	149	63	28,498	28,710	0.7%
	Undergraduate	945	88	69,473	70,506	1.5%
Total		5,590	492	655,820	661,902	0.9%

**Number of students on modules*

Data provided by HEFCW

2.7.4 Evidence of benefits to individuals

No data to evidence the benefits to individuals of validation could be identified in the research for this report.

3 Information, advice and guidance

3.1 Awareness-raising and recruitment

The provision of information, advice and guidance in relation to the various methods of validation in place in Wales is delivered by the individual learning providers which offer validation opportunities. For example, the Agored Cymru RPL policy states that within its

²⁰

http://www.hesa.ac.uk/component?option=com_studrec/task/show_file/Itemid,233/mnl,12051/href,a%5e_%5eAPEL.html/

centres, staff with appropriate expertise should be available to give advice on the RPL process. It also states that Agored Cymru and its centres must make learners aware of the purpose and availability of RPL, and suggests that prospectuses, web-based marketing and advice and guidance sessions could be used to do this.

3.2 Role of information, advice and guidance networks/institutions

There is no specific information provider for the various types of validation in place in the UK. Individual learning providers will offer information and advice to individuals taking part in the RPL processes they offer.

3.3 Measures to enhance the awareness of validation initiatives and practices amongst guidance practitioners

No measures to improve awareness of validation amongst guidance practitioners in Wales were identified during the research for this report.

4 Quality assurance and evaluation

4.1 Quality Assurance Framework

The Credit Common Accord is the *“foundation document of the Framework”*. It formalises agreement on a range of important aspects, including the principles and systems required to ensure that the currency of assigned and awarded credit is fully quality assured²¹. Standards have been developed for the QALL pillar of the CQFW which ensure that the quality assurance processes for QALL are comparable with the other learning pillars.

There are no separate quality assurance processes for RPL - an RPL process should be subject to the same quality criteria as other assessment methods.

In HE the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) oversees how well individual universities and colleges meet their responsibilities. With the introduction of the new QAA Quality Code, RPL will be taken into account from August 2014 (when the Quality Code will become a reference point for the purposes of reviews carried out by QAA) in the reviews of HE institutions which are carried out by the QAA on a four to six yearly basis.

4.2 Quality assurance systems/procedures

As mentioned above, organisations applying to become a Recognised Body to offer QALL must show that they have appropriate quality assurance processes. They must apply the CQFW principles and recognition standards to maintain:

- clarity, consistency and comparability in requirements for assigning; and,
- consistency and comparability in requirements for award²².

The CQFW is responsible for overseeing the quality assurance of QALL. Recognised Bodies are subject to CQFW audit and standardisation activity to monitor consistency of all credit assigned and/or awarded.

Quality assurance of RPL in the UK is based on existing quality assurance measures for formal learning – because RPL is conducted in relation to formal learning curricula/standards, etc. As an example, the Agored Cymru RPL policy states that internal and external verifiers must confirm the process of RPL and the proposed award of credit. It also requires that data on the use of RPL must be made available as part of the annual quality review process.

²¹ CQFW Implementation Plan and Handbook 2009-2014.
<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/090619handbook20092014en.pdf>

²² *ibid*

The QAA conducts regular (at least every six years) audits/reviews of Higher Education Institutions in the UK.

4.3 Evaluation framework

A framework for evaluation has not been identified during the research for this report.

5 Validation methods

5.1 Methods used and the validation process

Assessments should be both clearly linked to the aim of the programme and the learners, and also appropriate to the learner, the learning and the level. The methods used should be able to determine the validity, authenticity and sufficiency of the evidence provided, and should be both fit-for-purpose and inclusive²³.

The specification for a QALL unit may set out the assessment method to be used, or offer a choice. Examples of assessment methods, provided in the NIACE QALL toolkit, include: case study; learning journal; observation; photographs; written question and answer/test/exam; oral question and answer; written assignment; role play/simulation; and group discussion. The toolkit suggests that *“the assessment method chosen by the tutor will be the one(s) that fits best with the learners and delivery of the unit”*. This means that the same unit could be assessed differently depending on the learning context, however the regulatory requirements demand that the assessment ensures a robust judgement can be made of whether the learners have met the assessment criteria.

The Agored Cymru RPL policy states that learners wishing to achieve a unit via RPL can choose from two options. The first is to undertake the same assessments as those followed in the formal course of learning, although they do not have to attend taught sessions. If the learner does not attend taught sessions, an authenticity statement, *“signed and dated by the learner and signed by a witness (usually the tutor) must be obtained or the tutor may observe the learner undertaking the assessment”*. The second option is to submit a portfolio of evidence based on previous learning, skills and/or competence, which must be cross-referenced to the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of the relevant unit(s), together with an authenticity statement, signed and dated by the learner and signed by a witness (usually the tutor).

It has not been possible to identify what are the most commonly used methods through the course of the research for this report.

6 Validation practitioners

6.1 Profile of validation practitioners

RPL ‘practitioners’ are existing staff working in education and training providers.

6.2 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

A recent development in this area is the introduction of a continuing professional development (CPD) qualification in RPL. The [Agored Cymru Level 3 Award in Recognition of Prior Learning \(RPL\)](#) is intended for practitioners working at any level in the education and training sector (i.e. general, vocational, higher education and adult education) across the UK. The qualification, which is currently being introduced into the QCF, is made up of three units: the theory of RPL; formative RPL and summative RPL. The qualification is not mandatory,

²³ CQFW Handbook: Explanation, guidance and information for Application for Recognition to Award Credit - Section 3c. <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/090720recognitionawardcredit3cen.pdf>

however it is hoped that the introduction of the qualification should lead to a greater degree of consistency in the application of RPL²⁴.

6.3 Qualifications requirements

There are currently no formal qualification requirements for staff involved in delivering validation in Wales.

²⁴ Information provided by Agored Cymru

7 References

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