Main Findings

- In the context of *Curriculum for Excellence*, which covers the learning of young people between ages 3 and 18, both recognition and achievement can be defined in different ways, depending on the particular needs of young people at different ages/stages. Any approach developed to improve or increase recognition must be flexible enough to suit the different purposes of learners at these stages.

- In addition to formally recognised attainments, achievement can include any knowledge, skills, or wider competences gained as a direct or indirect result of a range of activities.

- The learning which can be gained from an activity may be explicitly planned, may be at least partly implicit, or may be a by-product of another kind of achievement; in all cases effective learning requires reflection, which may have to be supported, to make it explicit.

- Although recognition of achievement by others is important in fostering children's and young people's self-esteem and confidence, understanding of achievements by learners themselves is crucial if the achievements are to be built on or used, eg to support further learning, secure a position, or gain access to a course of further or higher education.

- Recognition by others can take two forms: the first is a tangible record of achievement, issued by some competent body – this is recorded recognition, the second is recognition given by those who have to select individuals for a role or situation – this is functional recognition.

- Although using some form of accreditation to give recognition for achievement can be valuable, it has significant limitations and can have unintended negative effects. To maximise its benefits, any initiative to increase recorded recognition should have a clear, probably limited, aim and the extent of assessment or other forms of standardisation or quality assurance should be tailored to meet that aim.

- The various purposes and forms of recognition noted above can be brought into a single model, described on page 4 of these research findings, for managing the recognition processes across the scope of *Curriculum for Excellence*.

- The model is capable of orientation towards the needs of learners at all ages and stages as required by *Curriculum for Excellence*.
Background

How to encourage, recognise and capitalise on learning which goes beyond the outcomes of the formal curriculum is an issue in countries around the world. It has been the subject of initiatives in Scotland and the rest of the UK for at least 30 years. Initially work was mainly focused on young people in their final years of schooling and their initial post-school years. Now the issue is seen as having relevance to individuals of all ages.

The means by which more and better recognition can be given to this kind of learning is a theme within Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and is being explored in relation to all ages and stages from 3-18.

In 2007, the Scottish Government held a series of stakeholder events on assessment across Scotland at which recognition of achievement was one of the topics. In the same year, Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) commissioned two reports on aspects of the topic. In 2008 the Scottish Government, working with 12 local authorities, established a series of collaborative projects to identify effective approaches to recognising different kinds of achievement and to explore how barriers to recognition could be overcome.

In January 2009, the Centre for Educational Sociology (CES), University of Edinburgh, was commissioned to carry out the national evaluation of the collaborative projects. The first part of this was a review of literature about the recognition of achievement and development work on approaches to inform the next stages of the evaluation. The evaluation and the review are the subjects of separate reports and research findings.1

What does recognition of achievement mean?

Before embarking on the literature review, the research team interviewed individuals involved in this area of CfE. A number of issues emerged, in particular around interpretations of key terms. This focused the review on establishing clear definitions of recognition that would be relevant to children and young people from 3-18.

The starting point of the literature review was the two LTS commissions of 2007: A Curriculum for Excellence: A Review of Approaches to Recognising Wider Achievement, from The Quality in Education Centre (QIE), University of Strathclyde, and a report on e-portfolios from the AlphaPlus Consultancy. These papers (unpublished) furnished important concepts for analysing achievement and recognition.

In order not to restrict the scope of ideas and approaches to be taken into account, the sources used for the research were drawn not only from the school sector, but also from a range of education and training sectors, including adult education (lifelong learning) and higher education. Scottish and international work on the recognition of prior learning provided particularly useful sources.

These sources confirmed that achievement should be defined in terms of learning gained through a range of activities, at any age or stage. Although learning is always a form of achievement in itself, sometimes what is learned is a by-product of another kind of achievement (eg an enterprise activity), and sometimes it is implicit in another achievement (eg a sporting achievement) but requires reflection to make it explicit. The learning may take the form of knowledge, skills or wider competences, such as personal or social skills.

What is important in all cases is that individuals should value their achievements and understand the contribution these achievements make to their personal development.

One important issue which emerged is whether it is necessary or appropriate to subject young learners’ achievements to the quality assurance processes associated with qualifications. Young learners, particularly those approaching the end of their schooling, will wish to enhance the utility value of their learning but assessment or other forms of standardisation or quality assurance often associated with recognition may diminish the value of the achievement to the young people themselves – its intrinsic value. The research suggested, however, that if learners can be helped to understand and explain what they have achieved, there may be no need for their achievements to go through the quality assurance processes associated with qualifications to give them utility value.

Types of recognition

The literature review also pointed to two kinds of recognition which could be relevant in the context of CfE. These are not mutually exclusive. The first is recognition which results in a tangible record issued by some authoritative body; and the second is recognition given as part of a process leading to the selection of an individual for a role or appointment. The terms recorded recognition and functional recognition were introduced to distinguish between them.

Within the field of recorded recognition there is a continuum from the kind of informal reward scheme which may be operated in a classroom or school, through the kind of commemorative award or certificate which may be given by a school, a club, a local authority, or a national youth organisation, to the highly systematised qualifications of the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). Each of these is based on a different level of standardisation and employs

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1 The National Evaluation of the Recognition Achievement Collaborative Enquiry can be found at [http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/research findings 55/2010](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/research findings 55/2010)
quality assurance processes to ensure fairness, validity and/or reliability appropriate to the nature of the achievement and the purpose(s) of the record.

Functional recognition occurs when an individual or an organisation takes consistent account of achievement in making a selection of some kind. This might be in the context of a selection process for further or higher education, employment, involvement in voluntary activities, or a position of responsibility within a school, a club, or a youth organisation.

In some of these contexts, the link between recorded recognition and functional recognition seems relatively straightforward, e.g. the use of SQA qualifications as the basis for selection by universities and employers. However, functional recognition is not given to every national qualification, while other forms of achievement, such as the awards made by well known and highly regarded youth organisations or schools, are likely to gain a high level of local or national functional recognition.

In other words, achievements which gain recorded recognition may not always gain functional recognition, and functional recognition may be given to achievements for which there is no tangible record.

Recorded recognition

Much of the work on the recognition of achievement in previous decades has focused on ways of extending or enhancing existing forms of accreditation, especially by those of SQA or its predecessor bodies, to encompass a wider range of skills or different forms of evidence of achievement. Reports on, and evaluations of, a number of these initiatives were examined to see whether general lessons about this approach could be drawn.

Most of the initiatives examined had been successful in some respects, but unsuccessful in others. The National Record of Achievement (NRA), for example, was successful in motivating learners but did not meet the needs of selectors. Provision which succeeded in capturing skills beyond the traditional curriculum could become associated with less successful pupils as in the case of Social and Vocational Skills courses and the opportunity to capture and record skills across the curriculum could turn into a bureaucratic exercise, rather than the intended developmental process, as was sometimes the case with the recognition of core skills.

The overall conclusion of the literature review was that giving recognition for achievement through some form of accreditation could be valuable and should be part of the approach to recognising achievement. However, this approach must be understood to have significant limitations and could have unintended negative effects. To maximise its benefits, any initiative to increase recorded recognition should have a clear, probably limited, aim and the extent to which it is standardised or subject to quality assurance should be tailored to meet that aim.

The CfE context

Throughout the literature reviewed, there was an emphasis on the importance of learners understanding their achievements and the value they have or might come to have. There was also agreement that improvements in self-esteem and self-confidence are an important outcome of processes leading to personal recognition or understanding. This kind of recognition and these outcomes are appropriate at all ages and stages. Other outcomes will only be appropriate in certain contexts.

This consideration signals the fact that any approach to improving or increasing recognition in the context of CfE must be both inclusive enough and flexible enough to ensure that it allows different learners to select suitable methods of identifying, understanding and exploiting their learning to suit their needs or purposes. However, it was found that all the purposes and forms of recognition identified through the literature review could be brought into a single model for managing recognition processes across the scope of 3-18 education and training which meets these requirements.

The model

The model for conceptualising and managing the recognition of achievement was developed on the basis of the findings of the literature review. It identifies three possible ways in which achievement can be recognised and three kinds of value which can be added to learning.

Using this model, individuals can be supported to become reflective learners who can gather materials associated with all kinds of achievement and learning in a personal store, and can use this material in three ways, described in everyday terms as understanding, explaining, and proving achievement. These can be linked or treated separately; while understanding is likely to be valuable to all young people throughout their education, proving is likely to be useful in particular circumstances.
Built on the work of AlphaPlus, the model has at its centre a personal portfolio – a store of materials associated with the outcomes of activities of all kinds. The model also proposes the creation of selective portfolios of evidence which can be developed and refined for different purposes. These portfolios are tools, rather than ends in themselves.

The first approach to recognition in the model is where learners themselves come to recognise the outcomes of their achievements by understanding what they have learned and applying or transferring their new knowledge, skills and/or wider competences to planning and/or undertaking further learning or personal development. This should bring out the intrinsic, developmental, value of the achievement. For many young people this will be the most common form of recognition.

The second approach is where learners select from among the outcomes of their achievements and transform them into forms of information which are suited to a particular audience – likely to be recruiters and selectors for education and training courses, employment or voluntary activities. Learners should also become better at explaining their achievements to this audience. This approach is aimed at securing functional recognition of the achievements and giving them utility value. Gaining this kind of recognition will have more value in the later stages of school.

And the third is where the outcomes of achievement are turned into evidence of learning which can be assessed or evaluated against specified criteria, proving the achievement of learning outcomes for the purpose of being awarded credit towards a qualification, or being awarded a qualification, such as a unit awarded by SQA. This is aimed at securing a form of recorded recognition which will give the achievement an exchange value and is likely to be of limited application.

The three approaches can each be thought of as involving the learner in working through a number of similar stages or processes. The level of explicitness and formality of these processes will vary according to the age of the learners, the contexts of the learning and the individual aims and needs of the learner. The overall process will be spiral or iterative, rather than straightforwardly sequential and is capable of orientation towards the needs of learners at all ages and stages.