Conference Papers

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Recognition of Prior Learning and the Irish National Framework of Qualifications: A Practical Approach

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Recognition of Prior Learning and the Irish National Framework of Qualifications -
a practical approach

Irish National Framework of Qualifications

- Established in 1999
- 10 levels
  - FETAC levels 1- 6
  - HETAC levels 6- 10
- Level of the award relates to nationally agreed standards of knowledge, skill and competence
- The knowledge, skill and competence are specified in the level indicators of awards

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AWARDS IN THE FRAMEWORK

KEY

- FETAC - Further Education and Training Awards Council
- SEC - State Examinations Commission *(Department of Education & Science)*
- HETAC - Higher Education and Training Awards Council
- DIT - Dublin Institute of Technology
- Universities

■ new Framework awards

Irish NFQ

- Means of comparing national, European and international awards. www.qualrec.ie
- Evident to the learner that their knowledge, skill and competence must increase and develop as they move up through the framework.
- Ensures consistency amongst all education providers in the level of awards they are promoting.
- These practices underpin the purpose of having a National Framework of Qualifications.

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Irish NFQ and RPL

- Principles and operational guidelines – June 2005

- Recognize all learning achievements

- Alternative pathways to qualifications

- Recognition of Prior Learning is a significant factor in this process

- The NQAI seeks to promote the co-ordination of RPL processes nationally of education providers and awarding bodies.

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RPL and the National Framework of Qualifications

The National Framework supports:

- **Access**: learners can commence a programme through received recognition for knowledge, skill, and required competence

- **Transfer**: learners can transfer from one programme to another through their acquired knowledge, skill, and competence

- **Progression**: learners can transfer from one programme to a higher level programme

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How we describe and assess learning

- Programmes – Modules

- Learning Outcomes – Credits

- Programme and module level outcomes

- Formative and summative assessment

- Assessment of learning – separated from acquisition of learning – independent of where and how the learning happened

- Our capacity to assess multiplicity of learning

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Learning Outcomes

Description:	This introductory module is concerned with the development of student problem solving skills. In particular it introduces alorithmic concepts that can be used to model and solve particular problems and puzzles. It also serves as a basis for an introduction to elementary algorithms and algorithm design in which the focus is on the workings of the algorithm rather than their implementation details in an imperative language.

Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of this module the learner will be able to

1. Identify the types of problems that can be solved by computers.
2. Explain basic algorithmic problem-solving concepts.
3. Express algorithmic solutions using a graphical notation.
4. Test algorithmic solutions.

The Learning Outcomes are a statement of what the learner will achieve on successful completion of the module.

A combination of all of the learning outcomes for all of the modules of a course will lead to the programme outcomes.

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Practice of RPL Overview

- Within the Irish Third Level System – Learning is usually recognised in the context of a destination award – (Summative vs Formative RPL) REVOW project

- Learning which took place 'prior' to entry on the award programme is considered

- The learning can be formal, non-formal or informal

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What is RPL?

- **Formal Learning:** leading to awards
- **Non-formal learning:** training in the workplace or courses which are not formally recognised
- **Informal learning:** experiential learning, unplanned learning , voluntary or community work

Two main categories:
- **Certified learning**
- **Experiential learning**

RPL Within Higher Education Providers in Ireland

- No uniform approach to recognising prior learning

- No one RPL model is suitable for all qualifications and all situations

- RPL is already challenging current structures of third-level institutions, requiring new flexibility in mode of delivery and accrediting prior experiential learning

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Strategic Innovation Fund

- Administered by the Higher Education Authority in Ireland – competitively driven

- Aims to support innovation, and to foster collaboration between third-level institutions

- To promote access, transfer, and progression and to incentivise stronger inter-institutional collaboration in the development and delivery of programmes

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Education in Employment project

- Consortium of seven Institutes of Technology and two universities

- Focus is on the learning needs of persons already in the workforce

- Aims to standardise RPL policies and procedures in line with international best practice

Key Outcomes of *Education in Employment* project – RPL Strand

- Training and developing - 205 staff
- Training mentor networks in organisations
- Production of agreed guidelines and documentation for students, mentors, and RPL assessors
- Marketing of RPL to approximately 2,000 potential applicants
- Integrating RPL to admissions, accreditation and examination procedures

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- RPL practice, capacity, and capability varies significantly between institutions

- Practice not only varies in scale, but also in relation to levels of requirements for advanced entry or for awarding exemptions

- Organisations focusing on accreditation of only prior *certified* learning tend to view the RPL process as merely administrative

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RPL: Learner Information and Quality Assurance

Information for learners and for prospective employers should include:

- RPL application procedures, contact details, etc.

- An outline of the learning competency outcomes, against which learners will be assessed

- Different assessment processes that may be used

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Learner Roles in the RPL Process

The Learner should be

- Fully informed of the application process

- Supported in understanding learning outcomes against which prior learning will be assessed and clear on the evidence required

- Given clear guidance on timelines

- Informed in relation to costs and registration

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The RPL Mentor should

- Provide initial guidance on RPL process to the applicant

- Provide unbiased constructive guidance and feedback

- Provide guidance on gathering and presenting of evidence of learning

- Encourage applicants to make links between learning and their work practice

The RPL Assessor should

- Be a subject specialist

- Assess only learning outcomes which they are competent to assess

- Be competent in the assessment of prior experiential learning

Barriers to RPL

- Rigidity of Student Record Systems
- Difficulty in recording students who are granted exemptions
- Time involved in portfolio preparation
- Delays in portfolio assessment
- Lack of clear quality assurance processes
- Costs
- Obtuse Academic language and jargon

Enablers of RPL

- Clear framework of qualifications
- Learning outcomes and modular approach
- Approved RPL policy and processes
- Point of contact for learner and employer
- Institutional capacity and capability – administrative, mentoring, and assessment functions
- Robust quality-assurance systems
- Compilation of RPL data – availability of a precedence database

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Challenges for RPL

- Variety of terms: **APL, APCL, RNFIL, RAL, PLAR**

- Measuring and maintaining academic standards – fear that RPL is contributing to a more general lowering of standards

- Championing RPL to ensure that *all* staff recognise that learning occurs outside the higher education institution

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Recommendations for Implementing RPL

- Recognise that a learner already has certain insights, experiences, and knowledge

- Encourage collaboration between different institutions

- RPL has to be underpinned by robust quality assurance mechanisms

- Design user-friendly approaches for RPL and continuous professional development

Recommendations for Implementing RPL

- Clearly define roles of learner, RPL mentor, and RPL assessor

- Provide guidance on portfolio preparation

- Recognise that RPL is an integral component of work-based learning programmes

- Provide effective, timely, and appropriate feedback to learners

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Costs associated with RPL

○ Resource intensive – administrative, mentoring, assessment roles

○ Learner is usually a part-time student – subject to fees in Irish System

○ Employers - can assist in the mentoring and support structures and possibly alleviate some of the resource requirements

Numbers of Applications Assessed
(One institute - CIT only)

Academic Year	Number of Portfolios*
01/02	82
02/03	85
03/04	87
04/05	142
05/06	284
06/07	308
07/08	330
08/09	531
09/10	502
10/11	589

* Mainly applications for exemptions – recording of applications for entry not complete

Costs of RPL Provision
for Third-Level Institutions

- Many costs associated with the process are hidden or absorbed into other cost centres

- Most institutions gather only data on *processed* applications, and do not record the number of enquiries that fail to result in completed applications

- No exact measure of administration processing, guidance, mentoring, and assessment
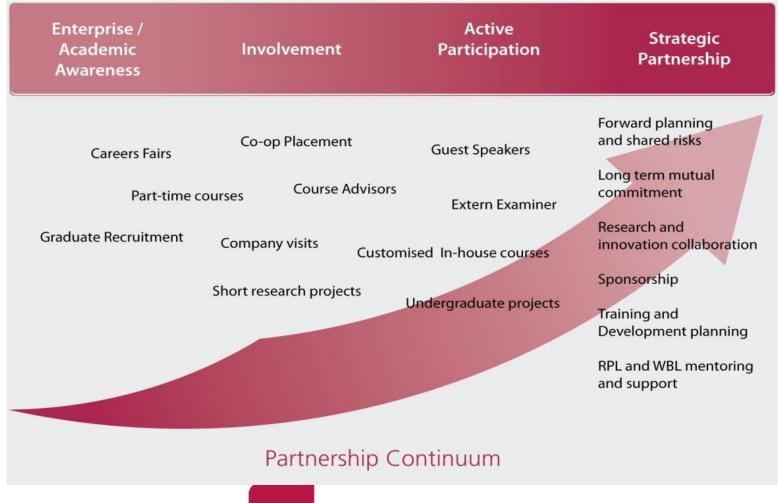
REAP – roadmap for Employer Academic Partnership

Enterprise / Academic Awareness	Involvement	Active Participation	Strategic Partnership

Careers Fairs

Co-op Placement

Guest Speakers

Forward planning and shared risks

Part-time courses

Course Advisors

Long term mutual commitment

Graduate Recruitment

Extern Examiner

Company visits

Customised In-house courses

Research and innovation collaboration

Short research projects

Undergraduate projects

Sponsorship

Training and Development planning

RPL and WBL mentoring and support

Partnership Continuum

Roadmap for Employment – Academic Partnerships

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REAP Work Packages

Work Placement

Specialist Targeted Course Developments

Professional Postgraduate Pathways

Academic <-> Enterprise Interactions

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Extended Campus

- CIT's outward facing engagement with employers and the community

- Partnership development

- Central point of contact

- Explore opportunities for future engagement

- Facilitate Specialized Targeted course development integrating work based learning and recognition of prior learning

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Various Stakeholders

- Government and NQAI, Awards Councils etc.
  - Policy, funding mechanisms
- Higher Education Providers
  - Support for learners, assessment capability, robust quality assurance methods
- Employers
  - Support and understanding of the process
- Learners
  - Personal / Professional advancement

Concluding remarks (i)

- The economic and employment climate in Ireland has deteriorated significantly since 2007

- Enhancing people's skills gives future competitive advantage to a workforce

- RPL is now accepted as an essential element in education reform

- RPL processes should play a significant part in career development for those who are unemployed or whose job functions are under threat

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Concluding remarks (ii)

- Increasing pressure on higher education institutes to work more closely with employers

- Higher education institutions are expected to be increasingly flexible in their modes of delivery for lifelong learning agendas

- Higher education institutions are in a transition period as they move to place more emphasis on recognising *all* prior learning

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