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
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.
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.
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
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
## Learning Outcomes

### Description:
This introductory module is concerned with the development of student problem solving skills. In particular it introduces algorithmic 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcomes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>On successful completion of this module the learner will be able to</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Identify the types of problems that can be solved by computers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Explain basic algorithmic problem-solving concepts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Express algorithmic solutions using a graphical notation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Test algorithmic solutions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.
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
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
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
**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
Current RPL Activity in Education in Employment Partner Institutions

- 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
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
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
Mentor Roles in the RPL Process

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
Assessor Roles in the RPL Process

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
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
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
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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Number of Portfolios*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01/02</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02/03</td>
<td>85</td>
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<td>03/04</td>
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<td>08/09</td>
<td>531</td>
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<tr>
<td>09/10</td>
<td>502</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/11</td>
<td>589</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 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**
- Careers Fairs
- Part-time courses
- Graduate Recruitment

**Involvement**
- Co-op Placement
- Course Advisors
- Company visits
- Short research projects

**Active Participation**
- Guest Speakers
- Extern Examiner
- Customised In-house courses
- Undergraduate projects

**Strategic Partnership**
- Forward planning and shared risks
- Long term mutual commitment
- Research and innovation collaboration
- Sponsorship
- Training and Development planning
- RPL and WBL mentoring and support

**Partnership Continuum**

Institiúid Teicneolaíochta Chorcaí
Cork Institute of Technology
REAP Work Packages

- Work Placement
- Specialist Targeted Course Developments
- Professional Postgraduate Pathways
- Academic <-> Enterprise Interactions
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
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
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