An Irish perspective on RPL in Higher Education

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What would you like to gain from this session?
National Context

- **National**
  - Significant unemployment rates, economic challenges
  - Higher Education role in developing economic and social value – employment, skills needs, enterprise development, cultural interactions

- **Institutional**
  - Academic – relevancy and currency of learning
  - Knowledge creation and application
  - Diversity of missions

- **National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 calls for:**
  ..higher education institutions to
  
  *build a modular system of learning outcomes including a focus on the competences required for the workforce of the future*

*We have no national RPL strategy or policy for higher education in Ireland*
Irish NFQ

Qualifications Frameworks - Going Global
Enhancing the transparency, quality and mobility of qualifications, nationally and internationally.

- **NFQ**  Irish National Framework of Qualifications
- **EQF**  European Qualifications Framework
- **QF-EHEA** Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area

For further information consult:  www.nfq.ie  www.QQI.ie

@QQI 2015
## Research sample by Institution type

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>University</th>
<th>IOT</th>
<th>Constituent college of university with Compact*</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total research sample</strong></td>
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*In the context of institutional compacts, constituent colleges of universities are those who are linked in the governance structures of a university but have established their own institutional compact agreement with the HEA.*
Some Common Features:

- Explicit procedures and scope for the incorporation of RPL into programmes, modules, assessment within a higher education institution
- Explicitly stated policy requirements on mechanisms by which RPL fits within the general operations of the institution and how it is to be managed within such a system
- The use of transferable standards including learning and programme outcomes and national framework level descriptors
- Role division, responsibilities of the institution, staff members, and the learner
- Academic rigour through quality assurance procedures which are clear and transparent to all stakeholders

- Integration of RPL within existing structures including student supports

- Linkages with national and local policy and procedures through references to published position papers

- Limitation and exceptions of the system within the individual institutions or sub-sections of the institutions
Main conclusions of the study

- Some notable organic developments of practice already exist which can provide benchmarks and guidance for others with less developed processes.

- Development of RPL nationally is not limited to higher education as was evident within the professional bodies and employer representative organisations.

- There is a general understanding of what constitutes RPL however there is an absence of clarity and a commonly agreed definition of RPL in higher education in Ireland.

- Records are maintained by some providers but comparable data and measurable indicators of activity are not currently available across the sector.
There are positive developments at a national and institution level, however alignment between national level and individual institution efforts is not clear.

Institutions have invested time in developing systems to support RPL internally. In some cases there is a variation between stated policies and actual implementation.

In maintaining the quality assurance and robust systems of assessment, staff development for the implementation of RPL is not as proactively supported as it could be.
Recognition for what someone knows prior to registering on a course in CIT

Began in 1996 as an EU project

In 1999 it was integrated into the main functions of the institute with one dedicated resource.

Started slowly, 50 cases in 2000 → 600 + cases in 2014.

In 2003 another resource was added to the area of RPL

Involved in a number of EU projects in areas related to RPL (eportfolios), National projects (Strategic Innovation Fund) throughout the years, NFTLHE, QQI, Erasmus +
RPL in CIT

- Centrally located and managed
- Applicable to all courses, at all levels and in all disciplines
- Recognition is given to informal, non formal and formal learning (evidence of learning and not experience per se)
- Can be used for advanced entry beyond year 1, individual module exemptions or a full award (experiential learning)
How CIT built a sustainable RPL model

Staff/ CIT

Learner

Industry/ external stakeholders
Who is the student? – mature student, ex drop out, asylum seeker

- CIT has adopted a learner-centred approach so RPL is available at all levels in all disciplines across the institute.
- Central policy
- Central support
- Considered in module development – Learning outcomes and programme outcomes
- Assessment methodologies – learning portfolio
- Resources

Student information

- Information and guidance
- Website
- Prospectus
- Mature Student evenings
- CPD evenings in September for each faculty
- Learning Clinics with industry
- Conferences and information sessions with those in the further education sector
- Access office for the mature students and those disadvantaged
- One dedicated resource to assist in portfolio development
  - Student workshops
  - Individual appointments

www.cit.ie/rpl

http://courses.cit.ie
CIT / Staff

- RPL working group from across the institute
- RPL resources on intranet (assessment, guidelines)
- Training and Development – Assessment of prior learning and RPL generally
- RPL part of the Masters in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education
- Own CPD
- Precedence Database
- Good links across the institute and up and down the institutional hierarchy – open communication
- Bi-annual review and revision of information, processes and procedures if required
- Engage within and outside the institution
- Reusable resources
Industry / external stakeholders

• Learning clinic service
• Customised course development including RPL / WBL
• Customer Relationship Management System (CRM) recording interactions
• CIT Extended Campus (RPL unit located within this office)
• Cohort approach
Benefits of having RPL

Student
- Value their learning
- Empowerment
- Moving forward in their learning journey
- Marketing of the institution

Institution
- Challenges the institution on where learning happens and how it can be gained
- Learning and Programme outcomes
- Assessment
- Encourages reflection on our systems, processes, programmes

Society
- Fostering a learning society
- Building relationships and mutual understanding with employers
- Mature learners, ex drop outs, asylum seekers, refugees
Hinder RPL Success

* Allow a fragmented system to develop – within and between faculties
* Unwarranted fear that RPL diminishes or threatens Quality Assurance
* Creating a system which runs outside the central system(s) so it is seen as inferior as it is being treated differently
* Culture – Value, Belief and Assumptions
* Commitment of the institution
* Structures & Support
* Feedback and Evaluation

Foster RPL Success

* One consistent policy
* Communication
* Involve those who will be implementing the system in developing it
* Training and Development
* Integrate it into your current systems and policies
* Supports - Clear processes, templates, personnel
* Reflect and revise
Thank you

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