'If you can't count it, it doesn't count': Fostering recognition culture through the development of RPL data collection processes in Irish higher education

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www.priorlearning.ie
1. About the Project
2. The Perennial Problem of Data
3. Defining RPL
4. From Theory to Practice
   • How & Who
   • Impact
5. Where to next?
National RPL in Higher Education Project

14 HEIs

- Universities
- Technological Universities
- Institutes of Technology

3 Operating Systems

- Banner (10 of 14)
- ITS (2 of 14)
- SITS (2 of 14)
Purpose of the National RPL in Higher Education Project

1. Embed & streamline RPL policies & processes
2. Enhance sector’s capacity to deliver RPL
3. Partner & promote RPL with employers
Project Structure
Value

- Increased learner access
- A fair and consistent evaluation of prior learning as a route into higher education
- Addressing lifelong learning, talent development and retention, upskilling/reskilling (the value to enterprise)

Vision

- Cross-sector commitment to increase the numbers of learners benefitting from RPL
- Building partnership and collaboration to create an RPL approach that is effective, efficient and consistent across the sector.
The Perennial Problem of Data
BE MINDFUL OF THINGS BELOW THE ORGANIZATIONS SURFACE

“The Way we say we get things done.”

We have always done it that way

That’s the way we do things around here

Doesn’t matter what we say. Nothing will change anyway

Don’t poll the ocean

“we’re different.”

It’s not my job

We tried that ages ago... it didn’t work

That won’t work here

That’s not the way we do things around here

Institutional Culture

Senior-management leadership

Institutional structures to support RPL

Internal & external promotion of RPL

Enterprise partnerships

RPL for Enterprise (access & progression)

Institutional Procedures

Enhancement of RPL procedures

Recording RPL data

Institutional Policy

Policy consistent with Pilot RPL in HE framework

Targeted initiatives

Enhancing staff capacity (professional development & training)

Other targeted initiatives

Torben Rick - www.torbenrick.eu
Defining RPL in Policy & Data

SUMMARY

Purpose of Framework: The framework's main aim is to support higher education institutions in Ireland to develop a shared understanding of RPL and to achieve coherence and consistency in policy and practice.

Definition of RPL:

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a process by which prior learning is formally valued. It is a means by which prior learning is identified, assessed, and recognized by an educational institution as part of the programme, course, or module(s) of Ireland’s National Framework of Qualifications. This makes it possible for an individual to build on learning achieved and to be rewarded for it.

RPL acknowledges the varied means by which learning happens and provides additional pathways to and through higher education. It is a key component of lifelong learning and makes higher education more accessible and flexible.

The Framework shows that RPL is underpinned by two core values:

1. Learner-centredness: The learner is central to the RPL process. A wide range of learners may wish to apply for RPL. RPL is for everyone.

2. Quality assurance: The RPL process is embedded in the quality assurance procedures of each higher education institution and is aligned with the National Framework of Qualifications.

The RPL process typically includes five stages. These are:

A. Information
B. Identification
C. Documentation
D. Assessment
E. Certification

- The learner receives information about what is involved in the RPL process.
- The learner identifies their prior learning with the help of an assessor.
- The learner undertakes a range of assessment methods, including interviews, observations, presentations, and so on.
- The learner’s application is assessed. The assessment process may be subjective or objective, depending on the following outcomes:
### Appendix 4: Data-collection template

**Higher Education Institution (HEI):** [Insert HEI name]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional RPL activity: Headcount</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Row identifier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Combination</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Row A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit/Exemptions</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Row B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced entry</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Row C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Awards*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Row D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Complete Row D only if full awards are available through RPL in the relevant HEI.

**Supplementary Information:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Credit/Exemptions</th>
<th>Row identifier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of modules</td>
<td>Row B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum of ECTS</td>
<td>Row B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of applications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Summary description of example**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data to be included in HEIs' RPL reporting?</th>
<th>Where to enter data in the data-collection template?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rationale in practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Learners who are granted credit or exemption, advanced entry, or award based on RPL</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Entry requirements assessed via RPL, including cohorts or groups of learners</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Learners who gain programme entry and credits/exemptions through RPL</td>
<td>Yes – activity is recorded twice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some examples to support application of the technical definition in practice:

- a. Learners who enter via the mature-student entry route | No | Not applicable |
- b. Learners who enter via the mature Applicant entry route and gain credits or exemptions, advanced entry, or award via RPL | Yes | Rows B, C |
- c. Learners who enter from Further Education and Training (FET) | No | Not applicable |
- d. Learners who enter from Further Education and Training (FET) and gain credits or exemptions, advanced entry, or award via RPL | Yes | Rows B, C |
- e. Learners who transfer internally between programmes via RPL | Polite (in most cases) | Rows B, C |
- f. Learners who transfer between institutions (nationally or internationally) via RPL | Yes | Rows B, C |
- g. Learners who undertake a module on a standalone basis and later undertake a full award within the same HEI | Yes | Not applicable |
- h. Learners who gain an exemption from undertaking planned placements or work-based learning via RPL | Yes | Row B |
- i. Learners who re-register after availing of an exit award & go through an RPL process | Yes | Row B, C |
- j. Learners who achieve re-admission through an RPL process | Yes | Row A, B, C |
- k. Learners who achieve credit achieved via Erasmus or Junior Year Abroad (JYA) & go through an RPL process | Yes | Row B |
- l. Learners who undertake joint, dual, or collaborative programmes & go through an RPL process | Yes | Row B |
RPL TESTER Pilot at ATU
RPL TESTER Pilot at ATU

Atlantic Technological University
• Academic Affairs (User Acceptance Testing, Business Process Mapping, Pilot Implementation)
  • Assistant Registrar
  • RPL Coordinator
  • Quality Team
  • Systems Integration Manager

• Head of Department (Implementation, Data Collection)
• Senior Administrators (Implementation, Data Entry)
  • Admissions
  • Faculty Office
  • Examinations

External Partners
• National Project Director (Technical Definition, User Requirements Specification)
• EduCampus (Software Patch Development, Business Process Analysis)
Define
Align Business Process with Documented Procedures

Identify
Data Collection Points
Data Collection Instruments

Test
Data Collection Instruments
Business Process

Evaluate
Monitor and Refine

Disseminate
Information Sessions

RPL TESTER Pilot at ATU
• **System User Requirements** defined by Technical Definition & Data Collection Template

• **Software Patch** applied to Development Site

• **Testing** completed for all test scenarios

• **Software deployed** to live system
RPL TESTER Pilot at ATU

Define Business Process with Documented Procedures
**RPL TESTER Pilot at ATU**

Identify Data Collection Points & Data Collection Instruments
Factors for Success

RPL TESTER Pilot at ATU

Systematic Process for Pilot
- Test & Evaluation
- Phased Implementation

Communication & Consultation
- Agreement in Principle
- Collaborative Approach
- Mindful of Change Management

Factors for Success
Impact of RPL TESTER Project at ATU

**Coherent & Consistent** approach for all RPL Activity across Multi-Campus University.

**Embedding** RPL in the Culture of ATU.

Establish **Business Intelligence Processes** to Analyse RPL Activity across ATU, to Identify & Address gaps in RPL Activity.

Process for **Quantifying RPL** Activity to inform Policy and Resourcing.

**Increased RPL** Activity.

Seven other **HEIs** now embarking on the **Process for Data Collection**
RPL Success at ATU
Questions?