

# Recognition of Informal and Non-Formal Learning

Exploring Synergies between Quality Assurance and Qualifications Recognition

Deirdre Goggin

Recognition of Prior Learning / Work Based Learning

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- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) or the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL) is a process whereby evidence of learning that has taken place prior to enrolment on a programme of study is explored, recognised and given value in the context of a destination award.
- Non-Formal Learning and Informal Learning are acquired through on the job training and daily activities
- It is this practice which is examined with a particular focus on quality assurance (QA) systems.
- Exploration of current assessment policies and practices to identify how aligned the assessment of prior learning is with the more conventional formal systems of assessment

- Quality Assurance in Higher Education ‘exists to assure society that higher education standards are adequate .. There is an increasing demand for accountability ... and the introduction of quality assurance systems is a measure of accountability’ Massaro 2010
- European Standards and Guidelines for QA in the European Higher Education area (2005)
  - Need for policy and procedures – Clear and transparent and protect the integrity
  - QA should be linked to strategy for the enhancement of quality within the institution
  - Emphasis on who has the responsibility for ensuring QA within the institution
  - Outcomes of programmes should be explicit and clear
  - Assessment should be conducted in a professional manner and methods used should be capable of measuring the achievement of particular learning outcomes and programme objectives.
  - Importance of the availability of supports for student learning – Enhancement of student experience
  - Information on the institution and what they offer

- Assessment of Students

  - Standard**

    - ‘Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently’.

- Transparency

- Competence of Staff

# EU Council recommendation 2012 on the Validation of Informal and Non Formal Learning



HAS ADOPTED THIS RECOMMENDATION:

1. THE MEMBER STATES SHOULD, WITH A VIEW TO OFFERING INDIVIDUALS THE OPPORTUNITY TO DEMONSTRATE WHAT THEY HAVE LEARNED OUTSIDE FORMAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING — INCLUDING THROUGH MOBILITY EXPERIENCES — AND TO MAKE USE OF THAT LEARNING FOR THEIR CAREERS AND FURTHER LEARNING, AND WITH DUE REGARD FOR THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY:

1. have in place, no later than 2018, in accordance with national circumstances and specificities, and as they deem appropriate, arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning which enable individuals to:

(a) have knowledge, skills and competences which have been acquired through non-formal and informal learning validated, including, where applicable, through open educational resources;

(b) obtain a full qualification, or, where applicable, part qualification, on the basis of validated non-formal and informal learning experiences, without prejudice to other applicable Union law, in particular Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications ( 2 ).

Member States may prioritise certain areas and/or sectors within their validation arrangements in accordance with their needs;

2. include, as appropriate, the following elements in arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, whilst allowing each individual to take advantage of any of these, either separately or in combination, in accordance with his/her needs:

(a) IDENTIFICATION of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;

(b) DOCUMENTATION of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;

(c) ASSESSMENT of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;

(d) CERTIFICATION of the results of the assessment of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning in the form of a qualification, or credits leading to a qualification, or in another form, as appropriate;

3. apply, as appropriate, the following principles in arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, whilst taking into consideration national, regional and/or local, as well as sectoral needs and characteristics:

(f) transparent quality assurance measures in line with existing quality assurance frameworks are in place that support reliable, valid and credible assessment methodologies and tools;

(g) provision is made for the development of the professional competences of staff involved in the validation process across all relevant sectors;

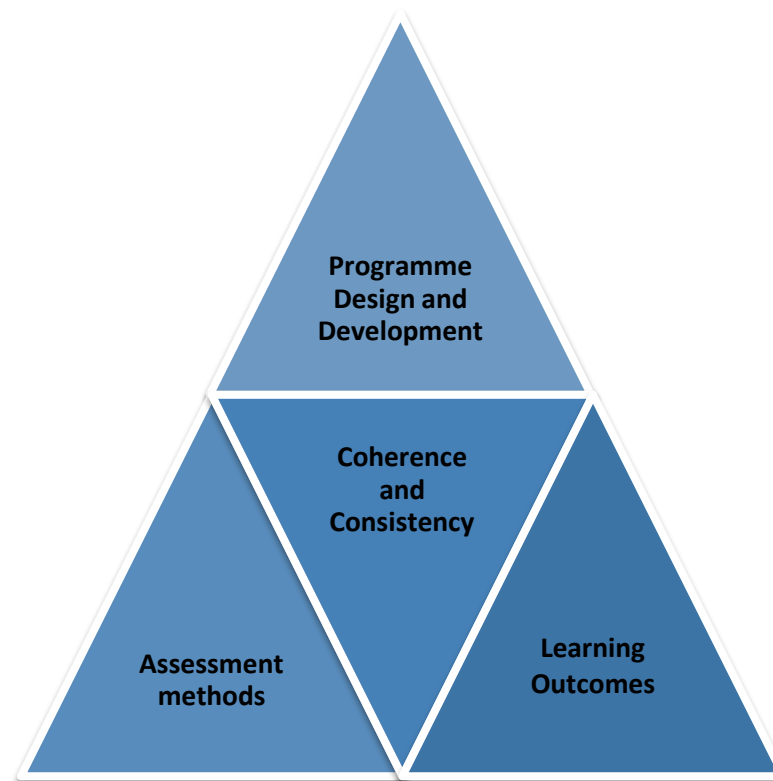
(h) qualifications or, where applicable, parts of qualifications obtained by means of the validation of non- formal and informal learning experiences comply with agreed standards that are either the same as, or equivalent to, the standards for qualifications obtained through formal education programmes;

- 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\**

# RPL within Institutional Quality Assurance Processes



- Validation of prior learning must be fair, transparent and underpinned by quality assurance.





# Strategic inclusion of RPL by institutions



Method	Number of Institutions	University	Institute of Technology	HECA and other
Entry (advanced or non standard)	11	4	6	1
Exemptions	3	1	2	
Full academic award	1		1	
Increase RPL activity	2		1	1
Policy	7	2	5	
Procedures, policy , staff development , information sources	2		1	1

Intentions of use may provide an insight into the implications for the quality assurance systems of the institutions given RPL's association with areas such as assessment, entry, information sources, procedures and policies which are traditionally underpinned by robust quality assurance .

- Explicit procedures and/or process and scope of how RPL can be incorporated into programmes, modules, assessment within a higher education institution without compromising the integrity of programmes
  - Policy requirements which is explicit in its language as to how RPL fits within the general operations of the institution and how it is to be managed within such a system.
  - The use of equal standards (learning and programme outcomes, National framework level descriptors)
  - Role division, responsibilities of the institution, staff and the learner
  - Academic rigour through quality assurance procedures which are clear and transparent to all stakeholders.
  - Embedded within existing structures including student supports
  - Linked with national and local policy and procedures through references to published position papers.
  - Limitation and exceptions of the system within the individual institutions in keeping with their education principles
- \* Autonomy of the colleges and schools were emphasised in some policies\*

# 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

- No clear or consistent standard approach adopted by all institutions which presents a difficulty for the potential learner
- Variety of learners and individual learning pathways pose interesting challenges
- RPL exists within Higher Education systems with policies and practices at institutional level
- Given the autonomy of institutions , variations in missions and practice is evident but not unexpected

# Thank you

**Deirdre Goggin**

**RPL / WBL**

**Cork Institute of Technology**

**[deirdre.goggin@cit.ie](mailto:deirdre.goggin@cit.ie)**

**353 21 4335133**

# Discussion question 1



- How the recognition/ validation of informal and non formal learning is currently integrated into local/ national arrangements?
  - Where/How is quality assurance included in the process ?

# Discussion question 2



- What are /where do the major challenges exist between QA and the Validation of Non Formal and Informal Learning?
- What is needed to overcome these ?



# Discussion question 3



- How can/ should organisations/ institutions work closer together in the Validation of Non Formal and Informal Learning and QA ?