

Learners through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): Fostering Active Engagement and Career Advancement

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Defining a “vocational learner”

- Those looking to gain precise skills and knowledge to carry out a specific craft, technical skill, or trade
- “Job-specific skills” (Olfindo 2018, p.80)
- Sometimes considered to only exist *external* to higher education (Eichhorst et al 2015, p.314)
- “...vocational education and training (VET), as well as further training, will become decisive in order to continuously develop competencies” (Wuttke et al 2020, p.9)

RPL for Empowering Vocational Learners

Education is the highest determining factor of earning potential (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos 2004; Peet, Fink and Fawzi 2015)



RPL recognises expertise and bridges gaps between experience and education providing a pathway for vocational learners

Equitable Engagement

Fair and inclusive
involvement of all
individuals



“All public bodies in
Ireland have a legal
responsibility to promote
equality, prevent
discrimination and protect
the human rights of their
employees, customers,
service users and
everyone affected by their
policies and plans”
(assets.gov.ie)



Responsibility to ensure
that all learners have
equal access to
opportunities for having
their prior learning
recognized and valued

Individualised Learning Pathways:

The diverse backgrounds and experiences of vocational learners

As a key component in life-long learning RPL facilitates those with formal learning, non-formal learning, informal learning

Applicants may possess skills and competencies in areas such as music, sports, technology, and agriculture

RPL makes visible and places formal value upon this knowledge, skill and/or competency

RPL provides mentorship, guidance, a supportive space

Objectives: Enable the learner and thus build confidence, significantly improve self-esteem and strengthen employability

Five stage model

Information

Identification

Documentation

Assessment

Certification

Learning Pathways



Postgraduate level – Music, Sport, Technology, Engineering and more.

Undergraduate level – Music, Sport, Technology, Engineering and more.

MicroCreds – Business and Management, Aviation, Communications & Transferable skills, Education and more.

A photograph of Jack Cooney, a man with short grey hair, wearing a dark blue jacket, standing on a sports field. In the background, a player in a blue jersey with the number 28 is visible, along with other players and spectators in a stadium setting.

UL Case Study: **Jack Cooney**

GAA National Player Development Lead

✓ Empowerment of learners in identifying and articulating transferable skills through RPL

✓ The transformative effects of RPL on career development

“I think [RPL] is a great opportunity and I think there is great comfort and support knowing that the practical experience that you've built up over the years is beneficial in your application process, and [that] your practical knowledge is well recognised and can help you progress through your third level studies” (Jack Cooney 2023).



✓ **RPL and increased confidence and self-awareness leading to career advancement**

“I was probably twice their age in a lot of situations and that itself is a challenge; to connect with people that are younger than you” (Jack Cooney 2023).

“Since [the course at University of Limerick], I have coached at a high level within the GAA and I'm now working full time within the GAA as National Player Development Lead, all stemming from my study here in UL and I'm very grateful for that” (Jack Cooney 2023).



- ✓ **Empowered vocational learners and their contribution to an evolving workforce**

Jack Cooney Video

Implementing RPL

It is vital to ensure that the implementation of RPL in a 3rd level institution is given due consideration and strategically approached, in order to ensure that associated policies and procedures are fair, transparent and effective



"A comprehensive RPL policy framework is essential for ensuring transparency, consistency, and fairness in the assessment and accreditation of prior learning, promoting the recognition of diverse learner experiences and contributions." - (Yorke & Longden, "Institutional approaches to RPL in higher education: Policy and practice in the UK," Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 2008)

Three Main Considerations

1. Effective and accountable policies and procedures

2. Training and supports for staff and applicants

3. Communicating importance of and openness to RPL with both institutional staff and potential applicants

Values of RPL Implementation



Clear, consistent and accountable approaches are important across the institution, in terms of how to assess RPL applicants



Evaluation criteria should be clearly defined to aid both applicants and staff assessing applications – complexities across the institution in terms of different programmes, different assessment criteria for programme entry, accreditation, etc.



As well as ensuring that academic standards are met, it is also important to ensure that policies and procedures also reflect workplace relevance



Equality, Diversity and Inclusion should be at the heart of implementation of RPL in a third level institution



Supports should be there to guide applicants and staff at every step of the process



Regular feedback from both staff and applicants should be integrated into RPL policies and procedures to ensure that the implementation process is evaluated and analysed – it is important to strive for continuous improvement



There should be the capacity to incorporate regular improvements into RPL implementation procedures

"Continuous evaluation and enhancement of RPL systems are necessary to address emerging challenges, ensure alignment with changing educational and industry landscapes, and uphold the integrity and credibility of RPL outcomes" (Tynjälä & Virtanen 2005).



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