

# Exploring how VPL strengthens inclusion in an Irish and Finnish context



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*Kilkenny and Carlow  
Education and Training Board*

# Introduction

**Martha Bolger**

**Director of Further Education and Training  
Kilkenny Carlow Education and Training Board**



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## Questions:

**Strengths:**

What are the strengths of the VPL process?

**Challenges:**

What are the challenges to the VPL process?

**Opportunities:**

What are the opportunities for VPL?

**Threats:**

What are the threats to the VPL process?

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# Wider Benefits of Learning

**Fergus Craddock**

**Further Education and Training**

**Inclusion Unit Manager**

**Education and Training Boards of Ireland (ETBI)**



**etbi**

Education and Training  
Boards Ireland

*Boird Oideachais agus  
Oiliúna Éireann*



## Wider Benefits of Learning

- **Central role of recognition in adult and lifelong learning.**
- **Bringing learning out as sole preserve of institutions and into the community , closer to home and the workplace.**
- **Invitation to engage in reflective practice, a key tenet of adult education.**
- **Challenges the narrative as to what is regarded as knowledge.**

## Wider Benefits of Learning



***“Only through feedback by others and their own reflections participants will fully realise and internalise the meaning of the experience.”***

(Kolb, 1984 cited in Mutz and Müller, 2016 p107)

## Wider Benefits of Learning

# Why do we need to document these outcomes?

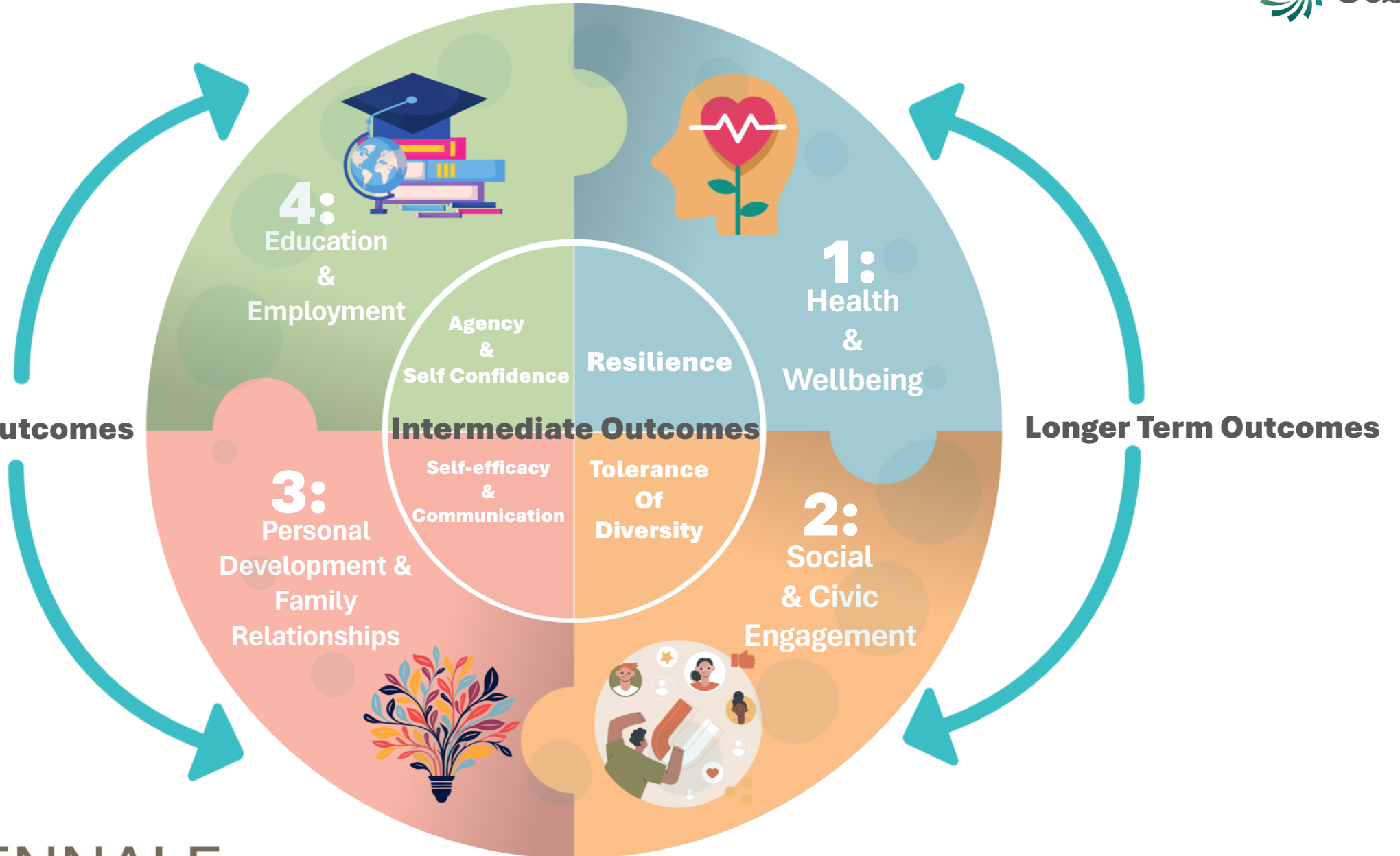


- **Acknowledgement that when a learner participates on a course, there can be many outcomes for that individual person – hard and soft.**
- **To show the social and personal impact experienced by learners in FET, other than or in addition to any certified outcomes, and to ensure it is valued equally in overall learning outcomes.**
- **To encourage and assist learners to reflect on their own journey and record the impact from their learning experience.**
- **To inform government policy on practices.**

# Wider Benefits of Learning



Longer Term Outcomes







**Need to ensure that value is put on outcomes such as improved learner confidence, empowerment and engagement, increased appetite for additional study, community development and enhanced societal engagement and integration.**

# Thank you!

**Fergus Craddock**

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# Peter Pahlman, AMKE ry



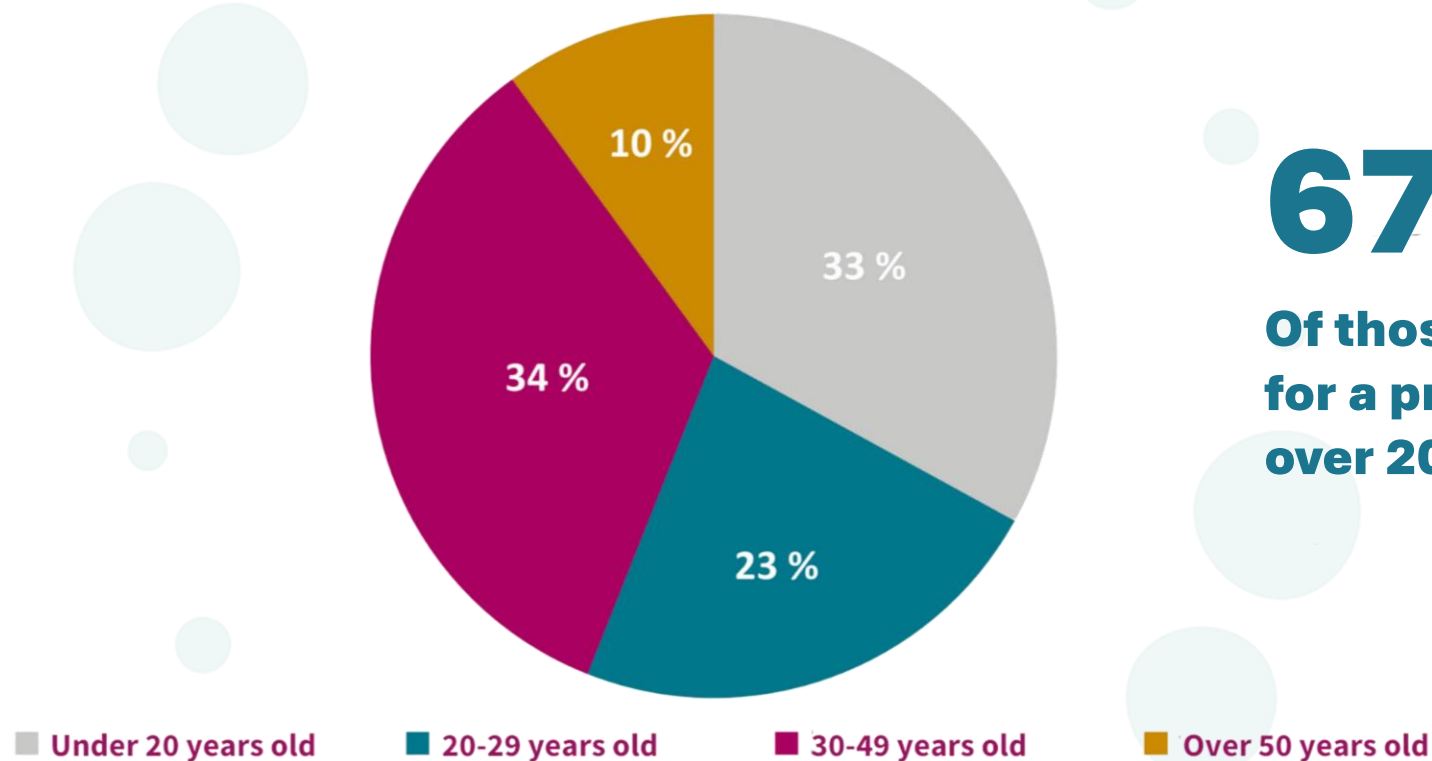
# **AMMATTIOSAAMISEN KEHITTÄMISYHDISTYS AMKE RY –** **Advocate for Vocational Education and Training (VET)** **Providers in Finland**

- AMKE is a national interest guardian and service organization for vocational education providers
- We promote the attractiveness of vocational education and ensure the operational conditions for independent education providers
- Our 87 members consist of municipal and private, multidisciplinary and specialized education providers
- AMKE's members educate over 97 % of adults and young people studying for a profession
- We actively network with stakeholders and decision-makers in vocational education
- The AMKE office employs 7 staff members

## Vocational Education In Finland 2023

- 330 177 students
- Vocational qualifications 68 755
- Training agreements 103 722
- Apprenticeships 91 260
- Most popular fields: Technology and transport (26 %), Social, health, and physical education (19 %), Service (19 %), Commerce, administration, and law (18 %)
- 2,080909 bn. € government funding

## Age Distribution of Students in Vocational Education



**67%**

**Of those studying  
for a profession are  
over 20 years old.**

Source: Vipunen

# **INTO – ETSIVÄ NUORISOTYÖ JA TYÖPAJATOIMINTA RY –**

## **Association for Outreach Youth Work and Workshop Activities**

- Youth workshop activities operate in over 90 % of Finland's municipalities .
- Into represents over 270 workshops.
- 22 000 participants in the year 2022.
- The ambition is to advance the workshop participants' path into education and employment in a goal-oriented fashion.
- Focus on effective and multi-disciplinary co-operation between employment services, education services, youth services, social services and healthcare.

# The Collaboration Between Vocational Education Providers **AMKE** And Youth Workshops

AMMATTIOSAAMISEN KEHITTÄMISYHDISTYS

- Workshops offer a safe environment and strong guidance before entering the vocational education system
- Inclusion is one of the key principles
- Workshops typically involve small groups and emphasize learning by doing, both soft and hard skills
- Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) is common within workshops and often takes place at the end of the workshop period, which typically lasts for 3-6 months
- Participants receive unofficial certificates, which adhere to the same qualification requirements as those within the official vocational education system
- These unofficial certificates are then taken into account if the individual decides to start studying for a vocational qualification unit or a vocational qualification
- The unofficial certificates are proven useful even when the individual is seeking employment



**Thank you!**  
**Peter Pahlman,**  
**AMKE ry**

# How the NFQ Supports Validation of Prior Learning

**Sarah Barron**

**Adult Education Officer**

**Kilkenny Carlow Education and Training Board**



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## VPL Context

## The Development of VPL in KCETB

## Case Study of VPL in Action

## Benefits of NFQ for VPL

# VPL Context

*“Serving around **200,000** unique learners each year, **Further Education and Training (FET)** provides a **continuum of learning opportunities from Level 1 to Level 6** of the **National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)** focused on both core and specific skills development, accompanied by a range of learner supports to facilitate the **active inclusion of all citizens**”*

(SOLAS; FET Strategy 2020-2024 p. 21).

In 2022, there were **232,218 unique learners** registered in FET programmes nationally with a total **budget allocation of €948.8 million**.

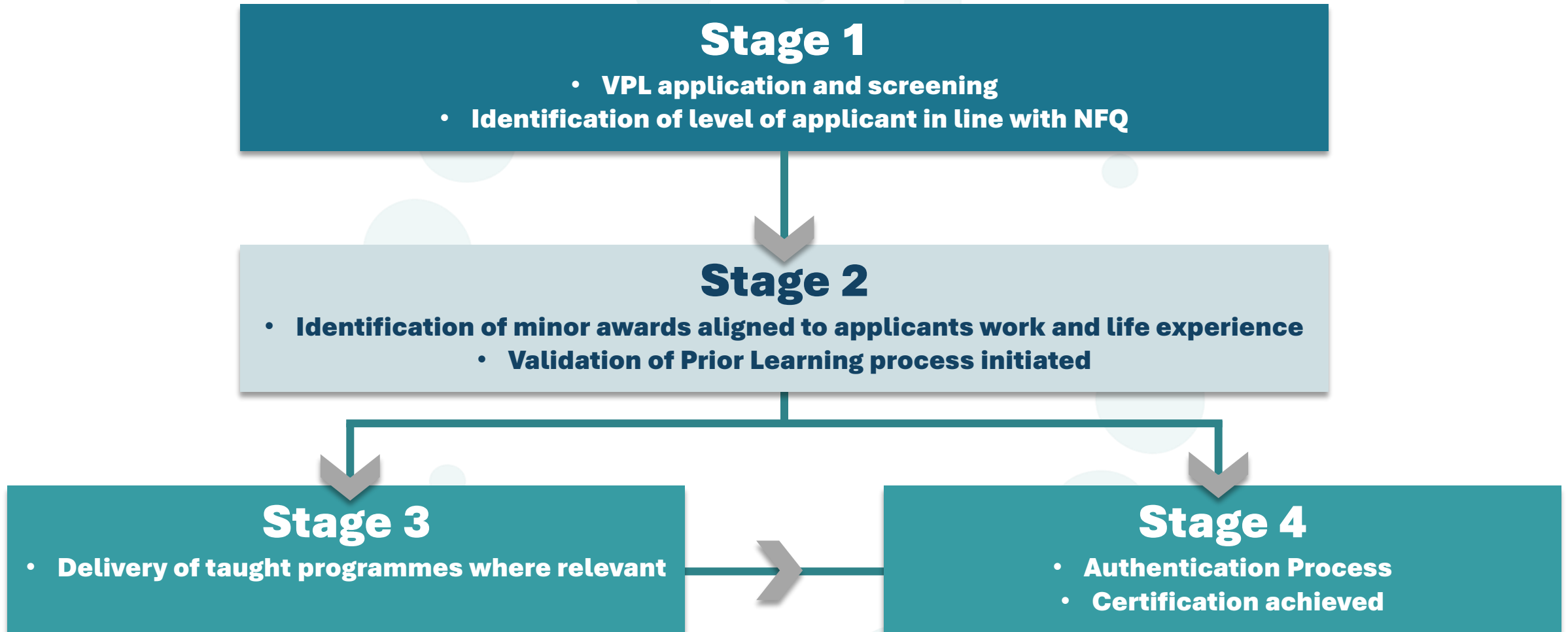
(SOLAS; Annual Report and Accounts 2022 p. 12).

Validation of Prior Learning (**VPL**) forms part of this **continuum of learning** opportunities by facilitating lifelong learning pathways for learners.

# The Development of VPL in KCETB

- **VPL Professional development delivered in 2017 by Munster Technical University (Formally Cork IOT).**
- **KCETB was part of the Validation of Prior Experiential Learning (VPEL) TOBAR pilot run with the Defence Forces in 2018.**
- **Pilot enabled KCETB to create robust Quality Assurance (QA) procedures for VPEL which supported the ongoing development of the KCETB VPL offering.**

# KCETB VPL Lifecycle



# Case Study of VPL in Action



## Private Conor Shovlin:

- **10 years as a 3-star Private in the Defence Forces**
- **Previous education:**
  - **Leaving Certificate**
  - **Defence Forces Training**
  - **Level 3 Fitness qualification and NGB Surfing Instruction**
- **Private fitness business- 3 years**
- **Coaching and player experience in Football and Hurling**



**Private Conor Shovlin:**

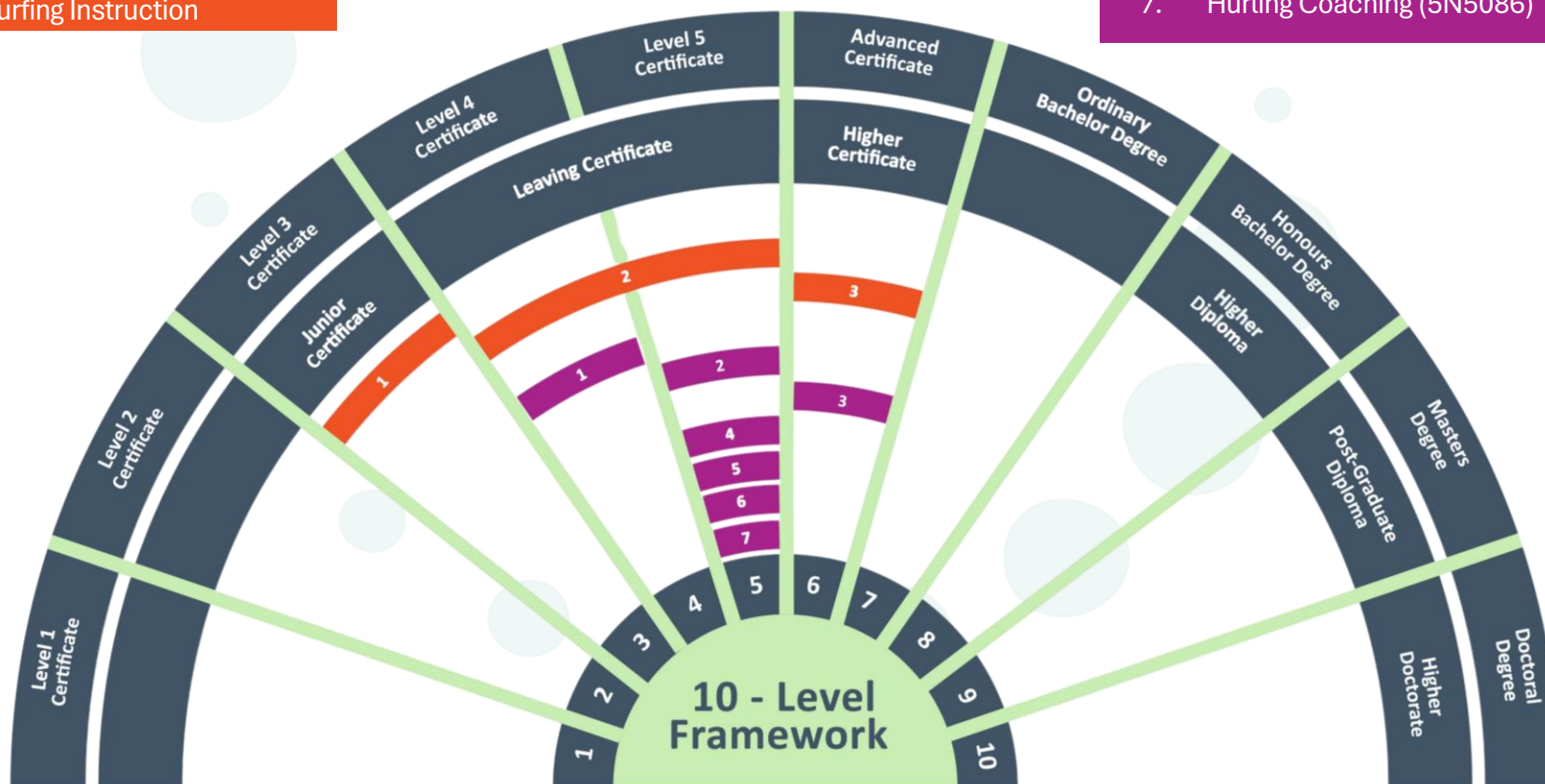
# Case Study of VPL in Action

## Previous Experience

1. Health and Fitness (3N0531)
2. Leaving Certificate
3. Defence Forces Training, NGB Surfing Instruction

## Certification Achieved during VPL Process

1. Information Technology (4N1125)
2. Communications (5N0690)
3. Surfing Instruction (6N5350)
4. Work Experience (5N1356)
5. Safety and Health at Work (5N1794)
6. Gaelic Football Coaching (5N50855)
7. Hurling Coaching (5N5086)





# Benefit of NFQ to Applicant

**Visibility** for the applicant in terms of continuum of learning opportunities.

**Currency** of award transferable and stackable – VPL, VPCL and ability to align to NGB qualifications.

**Assurance** of the value of the award for the applicant.

Applicants can **see** where their Knowledge, Skills and Competencies sit on the NFQ.

# Thank you!

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## References cited in this presentation:

Cedefop (2023). *European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning*.

Luxembourg: Publications Office Cedefop reference series; No 124. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/389827> page 13

SOLAS (2020). Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy 2020-24. Dublin: SOLAS.

SOLAS (2022). Annual Report and Accounts 2022. Dublin: SOLAS.

# **The KCETB Experience of Validation of Prior Learning in enhancing engagement between individuals, educators and employers.**

**Validation and Skills: Democracy in Action?**

**Amanda Butler**

**QA Co-ordinator**

**Kilkenny Carlow Education and Training Board**



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# Introductions:

## Individual:

- **VPL Applicant - Andrejs**

## Educators:

- **Education provider - KCETB** (Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board)
- **VPL assessor – Martina Needham**
- **VPL Coordinator – Amanda Butler**

## Employer:

- **YIFM (Young Irish Film Makers)**

# Lead Questions:

**How can validation be quickly harnessed to prepare the individual, workplace and workforce for the future while truly respecting and valuing the process of skills acquisition?**

**How does validation drive or enhance engagement between individuals, educators and employers?**

# Case Study - Background

**YIFM required an experienced instructor in the area of film production.**

**Andrejs was very experienced in this area but did not have the required level 6 qualification**

**Following a discussion, Andrejs was accepted as a suitable candidate for VPL based on his background and experience**

# VPL Process

**1: Award Identification**

**2: Assessment Design**

**3: Integration and Mapping**

**4: Portfolio**

**5: Assessment and Authentication**

**6: Results and Certification**

# Successful Certification

**Andrejs received his full QQI Award for  
6M5120 Media Production in September  
2023.**

**He was then able to apply for a tutor role with  
YIFM.**





# Opportunities/Strengths

## Opportunities:

- Life-changing opportunity for Andrejs in terms of his career with YIFM to reach his potential and participate fully in Irish society.
- Opportunity for YIFM to engage an experienced and skilled worker.
- For KCETB, it was an opportunity to process a VPL application for a full award.

## Strengths:

- Collaborative work between centres in KCETB to support the assessment.
- External support for complex mapping and integration of assessment.
- Engagement with employer to identify opportunity for VPL.

# Threats/Challenges

## Potential threats include:

- No permanent employment for Andrejs.
- Potential loss of key skills for YIFM.
- Lack of resources to support VPL work.

## Challenges encountered include:

- Identifying and filling gaps in what the applicant has and what is needed to address the requirements of the major award.
- Ensuring Quality Assurance and award requirements are met.
- Balancing the reflection on previous experience and mentoring to support gaps.

# Lead Questions - Reflection:

**How can validation be quickly harnessed to prepare the individual, workplace and workforce for the future while truly respecting and valuing the process of skills acquisition?**

**How does validation drive or enhance engagement between individuals, educators and employers?**

# Final Thoughts:

**Le chéile = Together**  
**Thank you!**

**Amanda Butler**

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