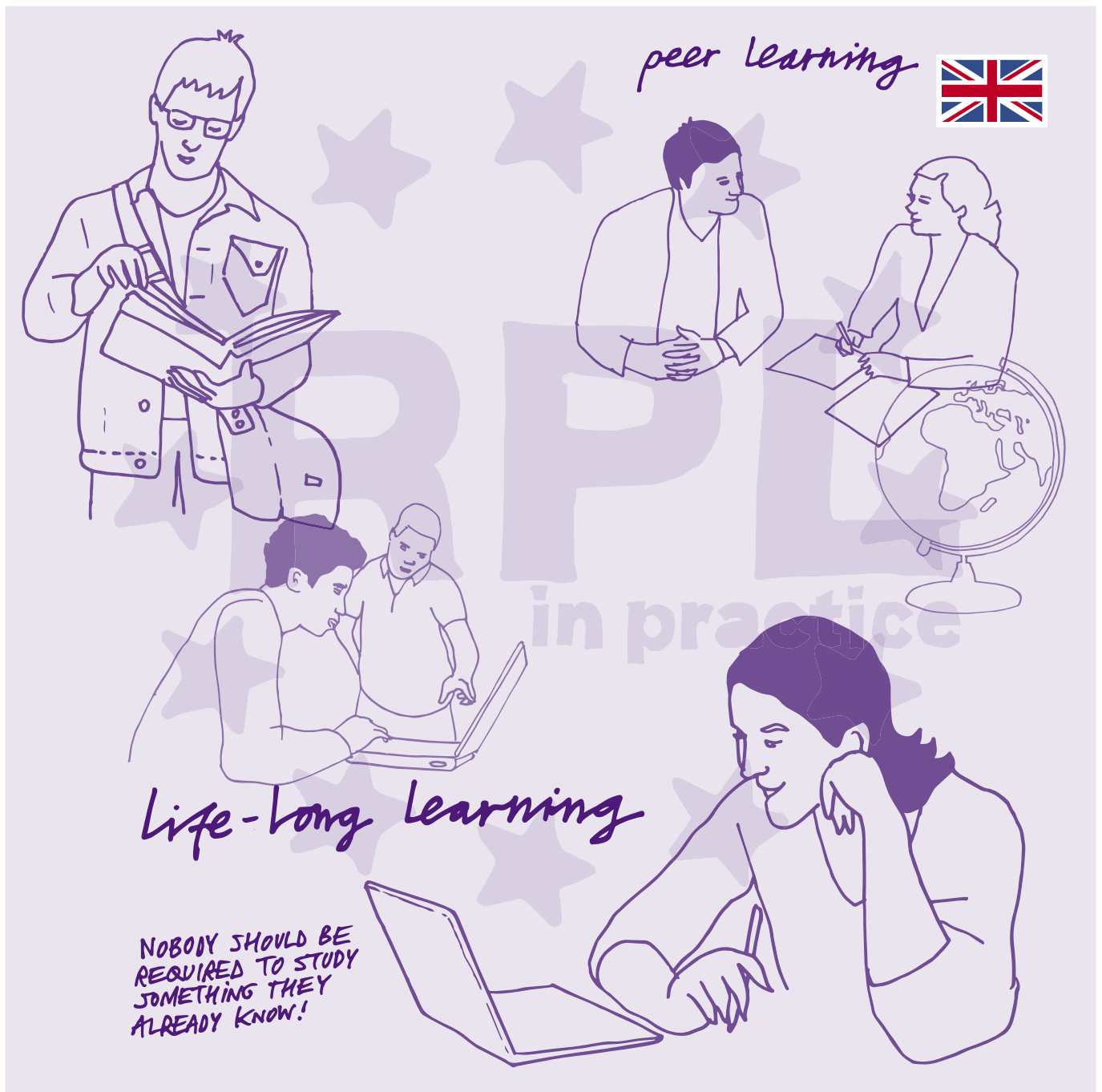# Recognition of Prior Learning in Practice

Putting policies to work – experiences from two years of peer learning

peer learning

life-long learning

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Recognition of Prior Learning in Practice

Putting policies to work – experiences from two years of peer learning

Erasmus+

Contents

Preface

The Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHR) led the EU-funded project "Recognition of Prior Learning in Practice", RPLip, with ten formal partners and 11 associated higher education institutions (HEIs) in five countries, for two years, from April 2019 to April 2021.

Recognition of prior learning has long been on the agenda of the European Union and in the Bologna Process as a support for social inclusion, lifelong learning, upskilling and reskilling.

Although the Bologna process is an international process, work on implementation is done nationally. For the process to progress and to truly establish the European Higher Education Area, countries must cooperate. It is only possible to see national or institutional practices or policies if you benchmark against others: you need help to see your own system from the outside. Therefore, UHR initiated this project to learn from others and to benchmark.

Within the project, we have learned from each other. One success factor was that the project consisted of a mixed group of participants at different levels of implementation and from different types of HEIs, government authorities and organisations.

Another insight was provided by the project in following national developments in the participating countries, which are also presented in a chapter in this report.

Much of the learning in the project is laid out in the materials produced by, and in the documentation of, the three online events organised by the project. Interested readers are therefore advised to consult the project's website https://www.uhr.se/en/rplinpractice.

The project spans the period from April 2019 to April 2021, during which time the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged traditional approaches to living, working, learning and mobility. This has made recognition of prior learning even more relevant, but has also hampered the project participants in their project work.

The aim with this report is to share our experiences and the material developed within the project. We hope that it will inspire the development of RPL practices in HEIs, because nobody should be required to study something they already know.

Anders Ahlstrand
Coordinator of RPLip, Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHR)

Summary

The Swedish Council for Higher Education ran the EU-funded project "Recognition of Prior Learning in Practice", RPLip, with ten formal partners and 11 associated higher education institutions (HEIs) in five countries, between April 2019 and April 2021.

The project's goal was to use organised peer learning to promote ways to recognise prior informal and non-formal learning for access to further studies and for credits. One conclusion is that peer learning works. The mixed group of project participants, from different levels of implementation and different types of HEIs, government authorities and organisations contributed to this success.

All the activities organised by the project had peer learning in mind. Produced materials, such as films, the template and the documentation of the online events are published on the project's website https://www.uhr.se/en/rplinpractice for peer learning purposes.

The foundation of the peer learning was that practitioners at the participating HEIs work with "real" RPL cases, reporting back to the group in a structured way during PLAs. For this purpose, the project developed a self-assessment template, based on the Cedefop Guidelines and covering the four phases of validation, and an information leaflet with the fundamental building blocks for RPL. Both can be adapted to national/local circumstances to support the implementation of RPL in HEIs. The project also arranged two webinars and a final conference.

Another insight provided by the project was the ability to follow national developments in RPL in the participating countries, which are also presented in a chapter in this report.

The project has produced conclusions about the fundamental building blocks for implementing RPL at HEIs. Based on these conclusions, the project recommends that ministries and national authorities revisit the Council Recommendation and the topic of RPL/validation, and that they initiate discussions at a national level to facilitate cooperation and peer learning. The project recommends that the learning outcomes of courses and programmes are revisited with validation in mind and that they are clearly referenced to a qualification framework. For successful implementation of RPL at institutions, the whole institution must be committed to the task. The project also recommends that HEIs learn from what has been done before and initiate networks.

Background

Recognition of prior learning

Recognition of prior learning, RPL, has been on the agenda of the Bologna Process since the ministers of education met in Berlin in 2003. RPL has been re-addressed several times since.

The European Union's Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning[1] (hereafter: The Council Recommendation) states that Member States should have validation arrangements in place no later than 2018. In February 2020, the European Commission released the Final Report for the study supporting the evaluation of the Council Recommendation[2]. The study shows that "Member States have made good progress in developing VNFIL arrangements since 2012 even if service provision often remains asymmetrical or fragmented across different levels of education" (Executive summary).

This project examines RPL in the higher education sector which, for various reasons, is lagging behind the vocational education sector in its implementation of RPL. The Bologna Implementation Report 2020 shows that alternative entry routes to higher education are in place in less than half of all EHEA systems[3]. Approximately half of the systems allow recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning for study progression in higher education. Even in countries with legislation that permits the recognition of prior learning for access or credits, the recognition procedure is not always used at institutions, and only six countries have nationally established and regularly monitored procedures, guidelines or policy for the assessment and recognition of prior learning as a basis for both access and allocation of credits towards a qualification.

Cedefop published[4] the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning in 2016 (hereafter: the Cedefop Guidelines) to assist in the practical implementation of RPL and the Council Recommendation. This project used the Cedefop Guidelines as a framework for practical peer learning (see below).

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1. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A320 12H1222%2801%29
2. Study supporting the evaluation of the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning – Publications Office of the EU (europa.eu) (February 2020)
3. The European Higher Education Area in 2020: Bologna Process Implementation Report (ehea2020rome.it) chapter 4.3.2. Page 119
4. European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning, https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/3073

Cedefop has monitored the implementation of validation in the European Inventory on Validation[5] biannually, with 2018 being the most recent update. The inventory covers national reports as well as thematic analyses.

One obstacle to RPL is the wide interpretation of the concept. According to the definitions in the Council Recommendation, recognition of prior learning means "the validation of learning outcomes, whether from formal education or non-formal or informal learning, acquired before requesting validation". Validation is the definition of the actual process to recognise the learning achieved. In this project, we have focused on recognition of non-formal and informal learning in higher education. At the project's first peer learning activity (PLA), the project decided to use the Council Recommendation's definitions and agreed on a common glossary to avoid misunderstandings.

The ENIC/NARIC Networks are important stakeholders in recognition, but primarily of formal foreign education. The focus of the ENIC/NARIC networks is set by the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), and RPL has not yet been mentioned in the LRC. However, RPL has received increasing attention since the concept of recognising learning outcomes has received greater emphasis in the ENIC/NARIC networks. This is reflected in discussions about the recognition of non-traditional learning and the recognition of refugees' undocumented qualifications, as well as the introduction of the short cycle as a stand-alone cycle in the QF-EHEA. There is a chapter on the recognition of non-traditional learning in the European Area of Recognition Manual (EAR Manual)[6], but the focus is the recognition of qualifications *based on* RPL or other non-traditional learning.

During the project's lifespan, micro-credentials[7] have been intensely discussed in the higher education sector, and a definition has been proposed by a European Commission expert working group. This project has not focused on micro-credentials.

EU-funded project

The RPL in Practice project was funded through Erasmus+ Key action 3: Support to the implementation of EHEA reforms. In this action, the European Commission provides support to Member States for the implementation of Bologna reform, i.e. to create the European Higher Education Area, EHEA.

The project started in April 2019 and had a contract period of two years. The Swedish Ministry of Education and Research was the applicant and the contractor of the project but assigned the Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHR) to coordinate the activities.

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5. European Inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning | Cedefop (europa.eu)
6. European Area of Recognition - EAR Manual (enic-naric.net) Chapter 13 Non-traditional Learning
7. A European approach to micro-credentials | Education and Training (europa.eu)

Project participants

Government agencies, ministries, quality assurance agencies and HEIs in five EHEA countries and EURASHE participated in the project. They were at different levels of the implementation of RPL, but were all either in the process of implementing validation practices or developing ones already in existence. The project strived to involve a mix of national agencies, quality assurance agencies, ENIC/NARICs, ministries and HEIs and other organisations to achieve the best possible conditions for peer learning.

The project had formal partners, as well as closely associated HEIs. The HEIs had an important role in the project, because the aim was to focus on the recognition of prior learning *in practice*.

Formal partners

- **Sweden (coordinator)**
  Swedish Ministry of Education and Research (Assigned UHR responsibility for project coordination)
  Swedish Council for Higher Education, UHR
- **Austria**
  Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria – AQ Austria
  Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research
- **Croatia**
  Ministry of Science and Education
- **EURASHE**
  The European Association of Institutions in Higher Education
- **Iceland**
  Ministry of Education, Science and Culture
  Rannís The Icelandic Centre for Research
- **Ireland**
  Munster Technological University (MTU) formerly Cork Institute of Technology[8]
  Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
  Irish Universities Association (IUA)

Participating Higher Education Institutions

- **Austria**
  Universität für Bodenkultur Wien
  FH Campus Wien
  Pädagogische Hochschule Oberösterreich (PH OÖ)
- **Croatia**
  University of Rijeka
  Algebra University College
- **Iceland**
  University of Iceland
  Iceland University of the Arts

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8. On 1 January 2021, the Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) became Munster Technological University (MTU).

- **Ireland**
  Munster Technological University (MTU)
  Mary Immaculate College (MIC)
- **Sweden**
  University of Gothenburg
  KTH Royal Institute of Technology

Objective to support development of RPL

The overarching goal of the project was to promote ways to recognise prior learning for access to further studies and for credits. The objective was to encourage, through structured peer learning, the participating countries/ institutions to develop quality assured and consistent processes to recognise non-formal and informal learning that suit the conditions of the participating countries/institutions.

Peer learning – the method

In recent years, there has been a focus on peer learning within the Bologna process. Peer learning was also the method used to achieve the goal of the project. Peer learning provides the opportunity to benchmark and to learn from others. It is also a way to build trust.

All events organised within the project had peer learning in mind. Over the course of the project, the project group met at four peer learning events. To facilitate structured peer learning and to have a common ground for discussions, the project group decided on a list of definitions at the first PLA.[9] As a reference for the discussions on validation the project decided to use the four phases of validation from the Council Recommendation[10] which were further developed in the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning[11]. Furthermore, the project group decided to develop a template[12] as a tool for self-assessment of its own RPL process. The template was also to be a means of sharing the results of RPL practice at participating HEIs to facilitate structured peer learning.

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9. See appendix 1.

10. The Council of the European Union, Council recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning 2012/C 398/01, 2012.

11. Cedefop, European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning, Cedefop reference series 104, 2015.

12. See appendix 2.

Project activities

The project arranged a variety of activities and produced materials to stimulate peer learning between the project participants. For dissemination purposes, the project also developed a website.[13]

Surveys

The first work package in the project was a survey that mapped the implementation of RPL in the countries and HEIs involved in the project. The results were presented at the first project PLA in June 2019. The scope of the survey (only 19 respondents) was small, but interesting outcomes gave the idea of opening the survey to other HEIs in Europe. From the survey, we saw that the implementation and experience of RPL varied between the project participants. Other results turned out to correspond to the European survey presented below.

As a follow-up to the internal survey, EURASHE launched a similar, but slightly amended survey of European HEIs and RPL. The results have been presented in a report.[14] Despite efforts to spread the survey, the majority (approx. 73%) of the 113 respondents are HEIs in Ireland and Sweden, and approx. 83% of respondents have experience of RPL. This makes it difficult to draw any policy conclusions at a European level, and the results should only be taken as input for further discussions. However, they can still serve as a mapping of institutional practices.

The survey focused on the recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning for access to higher education and the provision of credits for academic purposes. The results clearly show that there are challenges that need to be tackled.

Bearing in mind the non-representativity of respondents, the survey shows that the drivers for HEIs' work on RPL for access or for credit provision are the increased options for access and inclusion, as well as enhanced lifelong-learning opportunities and employability. However, there are no obvious financial incentives for HEIs to perform or offer RPL. Swedish HEIs state the financing of validation as the biggest challenge when working with RPL. According to majority of survey responses, the costs for applicants are low, but high for the institution due to the complexity of validation. Irish HEIs, on the other hand, state that the lack of awareness of RPL is the main challenge. Overall, the understanding of RPL as a concept, the lack of routines and expertise, and attitudes in the academic community are factors which need to be addressed.

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13. https://www.uhr.se/en/rplproject
14. Karpíšek, Michal & Garbuglia, Federica: Mapping the situation – Mapping Institutional Experiences of Recognition of Prior Learning in Higher Education – Focus on Non-Formal and Informal Learning. Survey Results. EURASHE. 2021

Looking ahead, the survey responses suggest that HEIs need to provide better and more consistent training for their staff (academic and administrative) to increase awareness and to establish routines and guidelines, as well as strengthen the consistency of decision-making. National platforms/frameworks or communities for RPL would be beneficial. Information exchange, best practice databases and peer learning are suggestions for support which can be developed at institutional, national, and European levels.

Peer learning activities

Peer learning activities, PLAs, were the main activities in the project. At these events, the project partners and the participating HEIs shared experiences and the self-assessment template was developed. In between meetings the HEIs tested the template. The project conducted four peer learning events.

At the first PLA, the members of the project group presented the status of RPL in each country. The participants were at different stages of implementing RPL, which was a good starting point for peer learning. Participants agreed upon common definitions[15] and other fundamental documents. The group also started developing a self-evaluation template for institutional RPL practices based on the four phases of validation in the Council Recommendation, and developed in the Cedefop guidelines.

At the second PLA, work on the self-assessment template for the validation process continued, with a focus on the identification and documentation phases. The HEI participants that had "tested" the draft template in their practical work shared their experiences. We discussed some of the crucial points for successful implementation of RPL, such as:
- commitment at all levels of the institution
- clear information about all aspects and counselling/support for the candidate
- well-defined learning outcomes to validate against
- learning from what you did previously, i.e. save and use previous decisions to improve practice
- staff development
- refine and redefine the RPL process and use different sets or combinations of methods.

During the PLA, the group also had an in-depth discussion about the importance of well-constructed learning outcomes as a basis for successful institutional implementation of RPL. It was highlighted how RPL would benefit if it is considered in the early stages of course development. The argument was that there is a correlation between didactic methods, learning outcomes, and assessment. Consideration of didactic methods makes it more apparent that learning is possible in various ways and surroundings, and that assessment could be done in different ways. FH Campus Wien has a curriculum design

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15. See appendix 1.

handbook that stresses this, and MTU has a curriculum development facilitator who provides help.

It is also important for RPL candidates to have easy access to information about learning outcomes at programme, course, and module levels. A potential candidate must know the intended learning outcomes to be able to document that they achieved this learning. The participating HEIs have organised this in different ways. MTU has a database with all courses and modules easily accessible on their webpage, and all courses and programmes relate to the Irish National Framework of Qualifications. The required learning outcomes for one course may be the intended learning outcomes of a course at a lower level. MTU has appointed officers who serve as course module moderators, coordinating the work on updating and establishing new courses.

Work with the template continued at the third PLA, with a special focus on assessment methods and practices. The project group concluded that the template works as a self-assessment tool, as well as a support for institutions' discussions on the implementation of RPL. However, it would be more useful if it was translated and adapted to the national or institutional context.

The fourth and final PLA focused on summing up of the experiences gained, looking ahead and on evaluating the work conducted in the project.

Self-assessment template

To have a common focus when looking at the different phases of validation, the project developed a self-assessment template based on the Cedefop guidelines and recommendations. The template was an important tool in achieving structured peer learning in the project.

The HEIs participating in the project were asked to fill in the template during practical work on a validation case. The purpose was to help the institutions examine their own process to see if it was in line with the recommendations in the guidelines and, secondly, to think about the different aspects of the process in order to extract the fundamental building blocks for RPL and the most crucial points in the different phases.

Besides serving as a common focus in the project group, the purpose was also to produce a tested template which can be used by institutions outside the project. Depending on the level of implemented practices at the institution, the template can be used as a checklist during planning or as an instrument for analysis and self-assessment. It can also serve as a basis for focused discussion about RPL within the institution.

The importance of transparent procedures and guidelines was stressed both within the project and during the webinars (see below). The template can help to implement such procedures.

However, as stated by HEIs participating in the project, the template will benefit from translation and should be adapted to the national or institutional context.

The template was also used as basis for a peer learning session during the final conference.

Information leaflet

The RPLip project produced an information leaflet[16] with a short description of the validation process, examples of the fundamental building blocks for establishing a quality-assured validation process, and a description of the four phases of validation.

The information leaflet can be used as an introduction to the validation process in discussions at an HEI, with students or colleagues. The general overview which it provides can be adapted to a national or institutional context.

Webinars

In order to raise awareness about the recognition of prior learning, provide peer learning and to stimulate debate, the RPLip project arranged two webinars in the autumn of 2020[17]. Each webinar attracted approximately 140 participants representing 24 countries.

The first webinar "Why recognition and validation of prior informal and non-formal learning?" focused on the drivers for RPL. After an introduction about the key principles of RPL and an overview of its formal aspects, the theme was addressed in two examples from the project and in a panel with participants from the project group, as well as external experts.

The main reasons for implementing a methodology for RPL that were raised in the examples and by the panel were: to reduce skills mismatch, contribute to social inclusion, support flexible learning paths and lifelong learning. The importance of learning outcomes-based curricula as a precondition for RPL was stressed, as was the argument that RPL can play a role in the development of learning outcomes-based curricula. The workplace as a centre of learning was also highlighted.

The results of the above-mentioned survey on drivers and challenges for RPL were also presented at the first webinar, and the audience was polled about what they saw as the main driver for RPL. The audience saw better access to HE and inclusion, as well as strengthening lifelong learning and employability, as the main drivers.

The second webinar "How to validate and recognize prior informal and non-formal learning" focused on more hands-on examples of the validation process at the institutional level. It contained concrete examples from two HEIs and a presentation of the self-assessment template developed in the project.

The two examples and a panel stressed the importance of transparent procedures and guidelines, as well as clearly defined learning outcomes to make the RPL process work. As one panellist put it: "there can't be any RPL if there are no learning outcomes".

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16. Link to the information leaflet: https://www.uhr.se/contentassets/e70b9255c14340b7ab2f25e1af9f7b21/uhr-validation-of-non-formal-and-informal-learning-in-higher-education.pdf

17. Links to the webinars at https://www.uhr.se/en/rplresources

The participants were once again invited to give their view on the topic in a poll, and their responses were very much in line with those of the presenters and the panellists. To the question "Which is the most important point in order to implement and develop RPL at your higher education institution?", "transparent procedures and guidelines" and "learning outcomes-oriented curricula which consider RPL in the course development" were considered the most important points. When asked to give their opinion on the main priority for systematic implementation and development of RPL at the national level, the most common answer was "creating a uniform RPL process with national guidelines".

Voices from the project

"For a small country like Iceland, international collaboration in policy developments is vital. The benefit of learning from the experience of others coupled with ensuring that the policies and processes we develop are understood and recognised within the EHEA were some of the main reasons we wanted to be part of this project. In addition, it provided an impetus to revise the National Qualification Framework, which needed updating, both to allow for RPL and to take account of more recent developments in the Bologna Process, such as short-cycle qualifications and micro-credentials."

Una Strand Viðarsdóttir
Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Iceland

Final dissemination conference

The project concluded on 16 March 2021 with a final dissemination conference, held online. There was considerable prior interest in the conference, with 240 participants attending from 32 countries, mostly from the countries represented in the project. At the conference, the main activities and results of the project, i.e. the survey, the peer learning activities, the self-assessment template etc, were presented in detail.

However, the conference was not only intended as a means of disseminating the project's results. Its aim was also to broaden the discussion about recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning in general, and in Europe in particular. For this reason, a wide variety of individuals and organisations working with or with an interest in the recognition of prior learning were invited to attend the conference. As a result, the participants ranged from RPL practitioners at HEIs, policy makers, representatives of quality assurance agencies to ministries, to name a few.

The intention of highlighting the issue of recognition of prior learning at a European level, on the background of the immediate outcomes of the project, was reflected in the conference programme. As indicated above, the major outcomes of the project and its background were presented, but presenta-

tions also included an overview of the development and current status of recognition of prior learning, placing the topic in a broader European context.

In other presentations, emphasis was placed on solid foundations for recognition of prior learning practices, such as institutional commitment, the need for well-defined learning outcomes and considering RPL when designing educational programmes. Other important factors in recognition that were mentioned during the presentations included good implementation of national qualifications frameworks and the importance of quality-assured processes for recognition of prior learning.

As mentioned above, the project's peer learning approach was also reflected in the programme, in the form of group discussions on the self-assessment template. An important takeaway from the group discussions was the importance placed by participants on trust and transparency for building sustainable processes for RPL.

However, the programme also considered the future of recognition of prior learning in the European Higher Education Area. The final item on the conference agenda was a panel discussion on present and future perspectives on RPL. The panellists, who represented the European Commission, The Council of Europe, HEIs, accreditation agencies and the European Students' Union all addressed the difficulties associated with RPL but also emphasised its importance and its continued need in higher education throughout Europe.

Conclusions

The following conclusions are based on the discussions during the PLAs, the survey results, the practical use of the self-assessment template, the webinars and the final conference. One of the main conclusions of the project is that it is important to show all parties, HEIs, governments and other stakeholders, that RPL is both possible and necessary: nobody should be required to study something they already know.

The project has not only drawn conclusions about implementing an RPL process, but also about the project's working method. Peer learning works and is enhanced by a mixed group.

Although the project was affected by the pandemic in practice, the discussion of RPL has increased in importance due to the unfortunate situation. The need for flexibility in HE is obvious when many people need opportunities to reskill and upskill.

Parallel to the project, micro-credentials have evolved as a "hot topic". This project has not discussed micro-credentials and their connection to RPL as such, but this will be an important issue for HEIs and other stakeholders working with recognition, in particular recognition of micro-credentials offered by providers other than HEIs.

This project has not discussed the recognition of formal education, as referred to in the Lisbon recognition convention (LRC); but similarly to the LRC principles on recognition, RPL must build on transparency and trust.

Peer learning works

The mix of participants in the project group contributed significantly to the results of the project. The participants in the project represented a mix of national authorities and HEIs, a mix of HEIs from different sectors, a mix of countries with different levels of RPL implementation, and a mix of quality assurance agencies, ENIC/NARIC offices, ministries and national and European university associations.

The partners in the project were at different levels of implementing RPL practices and were all actively working with RPL: either implementing validation practices or developing already existing practices. These two circumstances made the opportunities for peer learning ideal. To involve a group of external peers when you are in the process of developing something has proven effective.

There is much to learn from each other. The participants in the project came from different HE systems, with different laws and regulations, leading to a variety of challenges. However, ultimately, many of the basic questions are similar. HEI participants gained confidence and first-hand experience from other participants. The mix in the group has also contributed to better

understanding of challenges in implementation between national organisations/ministries and HEIs.

Even though many of the basic questions are the same it has become clear that RPL is not "one-size-fits-all". Different approaches should be applied depending on context. This is true of both the implementation of processes, as well as individuals requesting RPL.

The fact that one of the HEIs in the project, MTU, was very experienced and had a long history of working with RPL contributed a lot to the peer learning process. It inspired and built confidence. MTU shared their experience of previously implemented methods and practical examples, such as a quality assured process for RPL.

Some countries had national projects for the recognition of prior informal and non-formal learning in parallel with this project. This has benefitted the project, as it led to cross-pollination and increased the level of engagement.

National implementation projects have been inspired by cooperation and bilateral exchange. The projects have benefitted from the insights and the contacts gained in this project, and vice versa. This has been manifested in study visits, contributions at each other's conferences, asking questions in the network, etc.

Basic prerequisites/building blocks for validation

There are many things that need to be in place to achieve a well-functioning and quality assured RPL process. The project has listed what it considered the most important building blocks in implementing RPL. This list is based on experience from the self-assessment template, the survey, and in-depth discussions at the PLAs. The importance of many of the items in the list has also been confirmed in the webinars and final conference.

- Transparent procedures and guidelines, including agreed standards and definitions
  - So the candidate understands the procedure
  - So the involved staff in the institutions know the procedure and work in the same way
  - For quality assurance and to build confidence and trust in the procedure at the institution and among other stakeholders
- Learning outcomes-oriented curricula related to a national qualifications framework
  - RPL should be considered at the earliest stages of course development and when writing the learning outcomes.
  - recognition of competences representing the same learning outcomes, regardless of whether the decision is based on an RPL process or after formal learning.
- Information, student guidelines and support
  - transparent information, templates and guidance/mentoring. The candidate needs to know what to do and what to expect in order to manage expectations.

- Committed and well-informed academic and administrative staff
  - RPL requires teamwork, the HEI must have a good team.
- Institutional and programme level commitment
  - There must be commitment at all levels of the institution, from top management to academic and administrative staff. The vision of applying RPL must be in the HEI's strategy and workplan, and involve all staff.
- Appropriate funding
  - Requires strategic decisions by national authorities or the HEI.
- Clear legal provisions/legislation
  - Unclear legislation hampers RPL or makes it impossible.

Voices from the project

"I'm surprised that many seem to consider recognition of prior learning to be an administrative process. I don't know how else to interpret the fact that most participants at our events work in administrative positions at HEIs. Very few academic staff have participated. Throughout the project, it has become increasingly clear to me that RPL is an issue that must involve many actors at the institutions, not least academics, course and programme directors, etc. RPL is not an administrative process, it is a process in which administration and academia have to work together. In the project group, we were fortunate to have both administrative and academic staff from HEIs."

Anders Ahlstrand
Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHR)

Need for networks and information sharing

From the start, the project knew that a great deal of work has already been done in RPL. There is plenty of information and theory available but, for many, the difficulty lies in interpreting the information into hands-on guidance for practical application in the daily work of the HEI. One way forward is to form networks for exchanging experience and to establish mutual trust and confidence. For examples of national networks, please see the chapter with national reports (Ireland and Sweden).

During the project, in the survey results, in the webinars and the final conference, it became obvious that there is a great need for networking and discussions about RPL practices at European, national and institutional levels. European cooperation is about trust and European cooperation through peer learning could not only help to provide learning, it could also establish and strengthen trust and confidence.

Peer networks can be national or international, between administrative staff, academic staff working with the assessment of specific subjects; between universities of technology or nursing schools.

Voices from the project

"My role in the RPL in Practice project on behalf of Rannís has primarily involved providing administrative support to our ministry and the universities participating in the project, as well as coordinating our work with a wider network of higher education institutions in the country. For someone like me, who has not worked with RPL before, the process has been extremely enlightening and informative. We have learnt from different RPL practices and perspectives in Europe, ranging from well-established systems to less formal ones. While this European exchange of practices has been very useful, the project has also provided a valuable opportunity for me to learn about recognition in the Icelandic context – the strengths as well as the shortcomings. Thanks to the project, we have taken a huge step towards a well-functioning system for RPL which takes into account existing skills and competences and will benefit society as a whole."

Rúna Vigdís Guðmarsdóttir
Rannís, The Icelandic Centre for Research

Recommendations

Based on the above conclusions, the project offers the following recommendations:

European level

The survey and the outcomes of the final conference indicate strong interest in a continuous exchange of ideas and cooperation. The project group recommends that the European Commission and the BFUG continue to support and promote peer learning at the European level and ensure that peer learning projects involve different actors, which has proven successful in this project.

Ministries and national authorities

Ministries/national authorities are recommended to provide necessary frameworks for HEIs to work with RPL. Legal provisions need to be in place. A functional qualifications framework facilitates the implementation of RPL. Initiate discussion between national authorities, quality assurance agencies and HEIs, which can facilitate cooperation, networking and peer learning.

The issues of funding and how potential additional costs for RPL should be covered needs to be addressed.

Ministries/national authorities should revisit the Council Recommendation and the topic of RPL/validation. The pandemic has highlighted that RPL is a necessary tool for recognition of competences, which can facilitate re-entry to the labour market or to higher education when the situation returns to normal. For these reasons, it is essential that the Council Recommendation of 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning be fully implemented.

Higher education institutions

Practitioners are recommended to use the information and tools already in existence. HEIs that are new to validation and recognition should consult the Cedefop guidelines developed to support implementation of the Council Recommendation. HEIs can also make use of the self-assessment template, which has been developed within this project for this purpose, as well as national guidelines where available.

It is also highly recommended that HEIs draw on previous experience. Learn from what has already been done – save and use previous decisions to improve and quality assure practice. Difficult cases will improve, refine and redefine the process.

The project has highlighted the importance of well-defined learning outcomes for the recognition of prior learning. The project therefore recommends that the learning outcomes of courses and programmes are revisited with validation in mind and that they clearly reference a qualification framework. This is an important element of quality assurance because it can facilitate the recognition of prior learning.

HEIs are recommended to initiate internal discussion and involve all staff categories in the issue, from top management to academic and administrative staff.

Continuous peer learning with other HEIs, nationally or internationally, is also recommended. Peer learning works and is instrumental in developing practices, thus facilitating recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning.

National contexts

An important part of the project's peer learning approach was sharing information about national and institutional contexts. At the peer learning events, the project participants shared information about the national and institutional regulations, guidelines and practices. The participating countries and institutions had reached different levels of national coordination and implementation of RPL practice at institutions.

Some of the countries had national projects for the recognition of prior informal and non-formal learning in parallel with this project. During the project's lifespan, a lot has happened. Some developments are a direct effect of the project, but much has been done in parallel and cannot be referred to as a direct result of the project. This is the nature of the peer learning approach – it is sometimes impossible to distinguish between cause and effect. One conclusion the project has drawn is that peer learning works particularly well when it involves participants that are in a development phase. The drawback is that it is difficult to discern the direct results.

In this chapter, the participating partners from each country describe the status of RPL and national developments over time. The national descriptions are all structured in in a similar way, describing the legal provisions, the status of RPL at the start of the project, followed by national developments.

Austria

Legal provisions for RPL in Austria:

Initial situation – a restrictive legal basis for RPL
In Austria, recognition of prior learning in the higher education system was, for a long time, limited to the recognition of formally acquired competences. The introduction of alternative entrance qualifications, the TVE Diploma Examination and the university entrance qualification examination, can be seen as the first important steps towards opening higher education to new, non-traditional target groups and rethinking questions of recognition and crediting of competences. A second major step in this direction was taken with the establishment of the new higher education sector of Fachhochschulen (Universities of Applied Sciences – UAS) in Austria in 1994. For the first time, vocational qualifications were recognised for access to studies and also for exemptions. This was a milestone, in that recognition gained importance not only in the procedural sense as a result of a validation process, but also in the sense of "societal" recognition of the value of competences acquired in a professional context.

RPL gained further importance with the Austrian strategy on lifelong learning (LLL strategy) of 2011. In one of its lines of action, this strategy

stipulates: "*The acquisition of knowledge in classic education institutions such as schools and higher education institutions is complemented by learning at non-formally organised learning facilities. Acquired skills and competences are recognised and certified as qualifications regardless of where they were obtained and are equal to non-formal and informal education processes.*"[18]

The vision from the national strategy on lifelong learning, to allow non-formal and informal education processes to be of equal value alongside formal education pathways, was opposed in Austria at that time by the rather restrictive legal basis, which until recently essentially limited recognition to the cases mentioned in the first paragraph.[19]

About ten years later, Austria is facing a major amendment to the legal provisions on the recognition of competences. In the course of 2021, recognition of non-formally and informally acquired competences will be possible in all sectors of the higher education system and for all study formats. The path to this goal was accompanied by a great deal of information and persuasion work on the part of representatives of HEIs, the responsible ministry and the national quality assurance agency AQ Austria.

National development and implementation projects – implementation steps for RPL in the national higher education system

Despite the restrictive legal framework and a generally low level of knowledge about the principles and procedures of RPL, there had already been initiatives and efforts to implement RPL and some development projects at some HEIs. For example, the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU), a project partner in our national project and also in the RPLip project, ran the Erasmus+ project "Peer Review on Validation of informal and non-formal Learning – the external evaluation of VNFIL institutions/providers by Peers" from 2015 to 2018. The focus was on quality assurance through a peer-to-peer process. A quality framework developed in the project 'Europeerguid-RVC' (2014–2015) was implemented. This contributed to the European guidelines for the validation of non-formal and informal learning which were published in 2015[20].

Building on such initiatives and experiences and the interest of some HEIs, the implementation of the above-mentioned objective of the LLL strategy started in Austria. With the support of the responsible ministry, a project group was formed in which recommendations for the design of procedures for the recognition and crediting of non-formally and informally acquired

18. LLL:2020, Strategie zum lebensbegleitenden Lernen in Österreich; Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur; Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft und Forschung; Bundesministerium für Arbeit, Soziales und Konsumentenschutz; Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft, Familie und Jugend; July 2011, p. 44 f.

19. Subsequently, RPL was included in two other national strategies, which are listed in the last chapter.

20. http://www.peer-review-network.eu/pages/peer-review-vnfil-extended.php

competences were developed.[21] These recommendations were intended to contribute to the development of quality-assured procedures in HEIs and thus to strengthen confidence in recognition and credit procedures. In addition, these recommendations formed a basis for further developing RPL at the national level and expanding the legal framework.

In order to ensure the practicability and relevance of the results and to ensure the use of the results, the project was carried out together with HEIs that already had experience with RPL processes and/or had a strong interest in their development and implementation. For the development of common understanding, it was important to involve all relevant stakeholders. Therefore, all higher education sectors (private and public universities, universities of applied sciences and university colleges of teacher education) were represented in the project.

The project was coordinated by AQ Austria. This not only ensured the relevance and practicability of the project results through cooperation with the HEIs, but also ensured the development of quality-assured procedures. The involvement of the Ministry also made it possible to continue dialogue about necessary changes in the law. Experts from abroad who had experience with RPL were regularly involved in the development work. Experiences from European countries were also brought in through participation in conferences. As a result of these extensive activities, the 'Recommendations for recognition and crediting procedures' were presented and published in 2016.

We would like to mention some of them here, as they are important to us as a basis for our work and accompany us in all discussions and procedures:
- RPL should be integrated into the HEIs' strategy. The commitment of the university management is necessary.
- HEIs should develop appropriate, quality-assured procedures.
- Transparency in the design and implementation of procedures is a basic requirement.
- Transparency can be achieved primarily through the development of regulations, the provision of information on the procedures, the clear definition of responsibilities, the definition and adherence to criteria, the documentation of the procedures and the training of the advisors.

This publication – also translated into English – formed an important basis for information work in the Austrian higher education area, but also for active cooperation with European partners, such as in the present project. The recommendations of the project group could also be introduced into relevant national strategy development processes and thus contributed significantly to an increased and more positive perception of RPL in Austria.

After completion of this phase, it quickly became clear that the recommendations on quality-assured procedures now had to be followed by concrete implementation steps at the universities. For this reason, AQ Austria – again

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21. AQ Austria 2016: Recognition of non-formally and informally acquired competences. Recommendations for recognition and crediting procedures. https://www.aq.ac.at/de/anerkennung_anrechnung/dokumente-anerkennung-anrechnung/AQ_Austria-2016_Recommendations-RPL.pdf?m=1615218375&

with financial support from the Ministry – launched another project dedicated to the implementation of the procedures at HEIs.

The principles from the first project were retained: the involvement of (eleven) HEIs from all HEI sectors, cooperation with the Ministry, focus on quality assurance and involvement of experts from abroad with experience in implementing RPL at HEIs. The focus of the project activities this time was on counselling for the implementation of RPL procedures at the individual HEIs. This took place within the framework of counselling interviews conducted by AQ Austria together with experts from Germany and Finland directly at the universities (on site). In this way, concrete pilot projects could be developed at some HEIs, while at other HEIs internal guidelines were developed or adapted to RPL aspects with this support, as the following examples show.

FH Campus Wien, project partner in the national and the international projects, found in this consulting project that an organisational development process was initiated, which included several levels up to a cultural change. It is about motivation, attitudes and behaviour, which are then expressed in policies and procedures, for example. In Austria the heads of the study programmes at UAS are responsible for recognition of prior learning. Therefore, the processes for RPL must be designed in cooperation with all heads of study programmes in a UAS. Development can therefore be very time-consuming, and the above-mentioned organisational development process and the rethinking are therefore a necessary basis for successful implementation.

At BOKU, a project on the implementation of validation procedures in the context of lifelong learning has been launched, which is to be implemented in the performance agreement 2019–2021 between the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research and BOKU. The overarching goal is transparency at all levels to make people's diverse and rich learning experiences visible and to enable access to higher education. BOKU sets high standards to meet reliability, validity and quality assurance. Particular emphasis is placed on the correct procedure and transparency. However, it is also important to involve all important departments in the development, to gain the greatest possible acceptance. This makes it all the more important to have quality-assured independent or external monitoring, in this case by the national quality assurance agency, AQ Austria.

An important aspect in this consultation phase was that the Ministry had taken over the financing of the counselling sessions, thus also underlining the importance of implementing RPL at HEIs. Parallel to these processes, the project group was also active in supporting the implementation of the still missing legal foundations. Advice for the legal design was regularly provided in the form of recommendations, which have now largely been incorporated into the development of the new regulations.

The new legal regulations

After the amendments of 2020, RPL is still regulated in the various laws, currently still with deviations in definitions and also with different levels of detail in the requirements. The latter results from the different nature of the sectors: private universities versus public universities, universities of applied

sciences with a stronger vocational orientation compared to the scientifically oriented universities; universities of teacher education, which are federal agencies and whose autonomy is comparatively strongly restricted.

Nevertheless, all laws are based on the same idea: that RPL should be made possible and quality-assured procedures should be developed and applied. Insofar as the legal requirements provide for this, RPL procedures have also become part of external quality assurance.

The legal basis will probably be tightened to some extent in 2021. The amendment to the Universities Act, which regulates public universities (and by far the largest sector), will not be passed at all until 2021. Therefore, we would like to refer at this point to a central website[22], which will keep the current versions available.

Parallel to these amendments, a legally regulated[23] national contact point for RPL issues in the higher education sector has been established, located at the national quality assurance agency, AQ Austria. This is responsible for information and counselling on questions of recognition of non-formally and informally acquired competences for all higher education sectors.

Outcomes – cooperation in the RPLip project and what we have learned from it

On the one hand, the project in question was an excellent opportunity for an exchange with partners who are at a similar stage of development as Austria. On the other hand, it was invaluable to learn during a period of two years from an institution, the Cork Institute of Technology CIT, which can already look back on 20 years of experience with RPL and has already developed strategies, processes and documentation, and is very generous in making its knowledge and experience available.

As we had already set up the national project group in Austria, it made sense to link this with the RPLip project. Therefore, project partners from Austria also participated in the RPLip project, namely FH-Campus Wien, BOKU, and the University of Teacher Education Upper Austria.

Activities in Austria during the project period can only be attributed to the RPLip project per se in isolated cases at the national level, as a very structured process was already underway in Austria. Rather, it was important to support the national project with experiences from the partner countries and to bring about decisions in this way, but also to be able to justify them. An example of this was the question that accompanied us from a national perspective for almost the entire duration of the project: whether all HEIs should be obliged to RPL or whether the benefit is greater if the legal foundations "only" enable and promote RPL. The Austrian legislator opted for the "voluntary" option, as we had also taken away from the project as a suitable way. We also learned

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22. Legal framework in English: https://www.aq.ac.at/en/recognition/legal-framework/legal-framework.php Legal framework in German: https://www.aq.ac.at/de/anerkennung_anrechnung/rechtliche-rahmenbedingungen/rechtliche_rahmenbedingungen.php

23. Section 3 para 3 item 12 HS-QSG: Federal Act on the External Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education – HS-QSG)

in the project how a national qualifications framework and RPL can interact constructively and how the communication of the formulation of learning outcomes can be promoted at HEIs.

From our point of view, the exchange in the project was also particularly fruitful because here too – as in our national cooperation – all relevant actors were represented: different HEIs and types of HEIs, the ministries or central institutions entrusted with coordinating national tasks, and the quality assurance agencies. The interplay of these different functions and perspectives was thus never lost sight of, and there was always the possibility of an exchange with similar institutions, even in a short way.

In concrete terms, the HEIs in the project have tested the self-assessment template developed within the project and discussed the learning experiences. FH Campus Wien collected this template in interviews with programme leaders and supplemented it with a university-wide survey on the understanding of RPL. This created a dynamic in the university to deal intensively with the topic and organisational as well as individual learning was initiated. FH Campus Wien used its experiences with the template and the survey in one of the two webinars designed in the project. FH Campus Wien shows a way to build up procedures and motivation of the stakeholders on RPL.

Peer learning was also particularly important, discussing the challenges but also the positive examples at the HEIs and proposing solutions. The BOKU Lifelong Learning Department was able to learn a lot about the heterogeneous target group of candidates and to learn from this for the relevant areas at BOKU.

In the long-term perspective, we assume that international cooperation will continue, at least on an informal level. The more optimistic scenario would be to put long-term cooperation on a more stable footing; we would certainly commit ourselves to this from an Austrian perspective.

Outlook

As already mentioned, the coming years will be important for continued work with RPL in Austria: information work for and at the HEIs, implementation of the procedures at the respective institutions, training, persuasion work, etc. We are looking forward to the new legal framework, which provides us with a better position for implementing RPL.

Through our involvement with RPL, our understanding of other areas (including problems) has also developed, such as the link between curriculum development and learning outcomes orientation with RPL or the contribution of qualification frameworks to recognition procedures, which we will work on more intensively in the future.

What we would like to maintain, and also formulate as a recommendation for imitation, is to set up an implementation process with all the relevant actors and to remain in dialogue with each other. At the national level, we will form an institutionalised network from the existing project cooperation and continue to seek international contact. We would also like to recommend the development and recording of a common understanding of how RPL can

be promoted and how procedures and processes can be developed according to the principles of organisational development.

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Voices from the project

"Peer to peer learning was also particularly important, discussing the challenges but also the positive examples at the HEIs and proposing solutions. Validation of non-formal and informal learning is not a very good research object; it is something you have to discover through implementation. Within this group it was obvious that persons who had the opportunity to lead candidates through the whole process, they were really satisfied with the work they had done. My personal opinion is that projects are more lively, more energetic if there are good examples of implementation with real results – in this particular project, best practice examples of people who went through a validation process and their success. Within this project we all gained motivation to work with validation and it gave us the impression that validation could change views, opinions, open doors and lead to success stories."

Christina Paulus
Universität für Bodenkultur Wien (BOKU), Austria

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RPL in Austria – brief facts

National coordination
- The integration of lead actors, institutions, the Ministry and the National Agency is an effective model for starting the implementation process in all HEI sectors.
- A legally regulated national contact point for RPL issues in the higher education sector has been established, which is located at the national quality assurance agency AQ Austria. This is responsible for information and counselling on questions of the recognition of non-formally and informally acquired competences for all higher education sectors.

National policy
- There is a national commitment to RPL, which is laid down in a strategy paper from the ministry. The objective here is: acquired skills and competences are recognised and certified as qualifications regardless of where they were obtained and are equal to non-formal and informal education processes.
- Recommendations for the design of RPL procedures were drawn up in a cooperation between HEIs and AQ Austria.
- In 2021, the adaptation of the legal basis for RPL will be completed, then RPL will be possible in all higher education sectors.

Implementation of RPL in HE
- RPL has not been possible in all higher education sectors until now.
- Accordingly, there has been different progress in the various sectors.
- At the universities of applied sciences, RPL has been provided for since their foundation in 1994 and is accordingly established. The universities and teacher training colleges are partly breaking new ground here.
- In 2020, pilot projects for implementation were started at individual universities.

Obstacles
- The biggest obstacle so far, which is soon to be resolved, has been the lack of a legal basis for RPL at universities and teacher training colleges.
- Besides very convinced, committed and informed university representatives, there are also those who are suspicious of RPL; this is often due to a lack of knowledge about the principles and procedures of RPL.

Data
- Apart from university admission data based on qualification, there is currently no central data collection on RPL issues.

Croatia

Legal provisions for RPL in Croatia

Croatia has a binary system of higher education with universities and polytechnics/schools of professional higher education. The Croatian QF for HE has been aligned with the QF-EHEA since 2013. While there is evidence that RPL was used before the 1990s, as experienced workers were allowed to 'fast-track' their education in the field and progress to more demanding positions, these were not legally formalised practices, but rather based on the agreements between large socially owned companies and educational institutions, and thus were not continued after the Croatian independence.

It was only in 2013 that the Law on Higher Education was amended by the Article 76.a., which specifically allows HEIs to adopt RPL ordinances and procedures to recognise competences gained outside education for admission purposes. And, even though Croatia joined the Bologna Process in 2002, the amendments were also the first mention of the use of learning outcomes in Croatian regulations. In parallel to the adoption of these provisions, the Law on the Croatian Qualifications Framework was introduced, which specified that the Ministry would adopt an ordinance to regulate RPL procedures. This opened the question of whether HEIs were allowed to independently develop their own ordinances on RPL, as the Law on Higher Education specified, or if they needed to wait for the Ministry to develop its ordinance. The Ministry, on its side, was not able to develop an ordinance which would be equally accepted by stakeholders working at all levels of education, and its 2014 draft ordinance was never adopted. Thus, in 2018, the Law on the CroQF was amended; it currently states that for CroQF levels 6 and above (CroQF

levels are parallel to the EQF levels and 'level 6 and above' refers to higher education), HEIs are able to independently develop their own RPL procedures through HEI general acts, normally ordinances at the HEI level.

However, certain limitations remain in both laws. The Law on Higher Education specifically states that a student needs to acquire a full qualification at one level before proceeding to the next, and allows exceptions only for admitting exceptionally talented students prior to graduation from the previous level. The Law on the CroQF additionally specifies that it is not possible to award a full qualification solely through RPL at level 6 or above. Thus, HEIs can only use RPL for course exemptions during admission or a course of study, not for access. Neither laws contain additional provisions on RPL in HE, but expect HEIs to develop their own procedures and general acts to regulate RPL. HEIs are not obliged to introduce RPL, but are encouraged to do so through national QA standards.[24]

National development and implementation projects

Certain pioneering HEIs, most notably the University of Rijeka and its Faculty of Economics, launched efforts to develop RPL as early as 2005. However, these efforts were blocked by the fact that they were not based on any legal provisions, and they had to wait until 2018 to actually be able to adopt a university-level ordinance.

After the legal changes in 2013, a non-profit, the Institute for the Development of Education, participated in an international project called "URPL: University Recognition of Prior Learning Centres Bridging Higher Education with Vocational Education and Training", which resulted in a publication, *Recognition of Prior Learning in Higher Education: Challenges of Designing the System.* In 2012, two HEIs active in developing the Qualification Framework initiatives, Algebra University College and University of Split Faculty of Science joined forces with the national quality assurance agency, the Agency for Science and Higher Education, to develop an EU-funded project on RPL, which was only approved for funding in 2014 and implemented until 2016. Within the project, an expert group was established. This also included representatives from the University of Rijeka, and some pilot procedures were implemented – recognition of informal and non-formal learning for course exemptions (mostly parts of courses). Detailed guidelines[25] were also published and some 30 students were piloted through RPL in three digital qualifications.

More generally, strategic guidelines for the implementation of RPL[26] were then developed in 2018 by a governmental strategic body, the National Council for the Development of Human Potential. While both guidelines outline the key steps for developing and implementing a system of recognition and evaluation of prior learning in Croatia, they are partly outdated due to the

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24. See 3.1. in https://www.azvo.hr/images/stories/novosti/ENG_STANDARDS_FOR_THE_EVALUATION_OF_QUALITY_-_UNIVERSITIES.pdf

25. https://www.azvo.hr/images/stories/publikacije/Smjernice_i_postupci.pdf

26. http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2018-05/Preporuke%20NVRLJP-a%20za%20strate%C5%A1ki%20razvoj%20priznavanja%20i%20vrednovanja%20prethodnog%20u%C4%8Denja.pdf

amendments to the Law on the Croatian Qualifications Framework described above.

Developments/activities during the project period

RPL was identified as a strategic issue in HE in Croatia, due to demographics and for improving access to HE, within the 2019 National Plan for the Development of Social Dimension of Higher Education. Almost at the same time, the legal changes noted above enabled HEIs to adopt their RPL ordinances and start implementing RPL procedures, and the Ministry joined the RPL in Practice project and launched a parallel KA3 project on RPL and the social dimension, SIDERAL. The first to adopt an ordinance was the University of Rijeka, in 2019, followed in 2020 by Algebra University College and the University of Split Faculty of Science. The Ministry established an advisory group on RPL, which gathered the representatives of the pioneering HEIs and other interested HEIs to create new guidelines and provide mutual support in implementing the procedures. Due to the pandemic, project activities were briefly halted and the project was extended to enable the completion of the planned site visits and workshops online, which is currently underway.

Within the RPL in Practice project, the University of Rijeka and Algebra University College used the opportunity to implement the procedures, as described below.

University of Rijeka

The University of Rijeka has had RPL in focus since 2005. However, due to legal conditions noted above, it was only able to pass a university-level ordinance on RPL in October 2019. This enabled the development of specific activities directed to the promotion of RPL. Three stand out:

1. the organisation of university level workshops (four in 2020) and participation at the national level workshops and meetings (three) with the main goal being to disseminate knowledge and good practice on both validation and recognition of prior learning, and especially to try to mitigate obstacles for RPL procedures, both fundamental (attitudes towards RPL) and technical (national software for tracking student progress – ISVU);
2. development and implementation of a reporting system for tracking all RPL procedures university-wide, which includes the recognition of prior formal learning (since it is plagued with the same problems as the recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning);
3. directly linked to this project, the development of validation and recognition procedures for informal learning at the Faculty of Health Studies (more details provided below).

Mid-January 2021 we received partial, preliminary data on all recognition procedures at UNIRI in the academic year 2019/2020. Data was delivered from 11 out of 16 (70%) constituents of the UNIRI (Faculties and Departments). Data shows that 11/11 (100%) have performed recognition of prior formal learning (259 cases, 10,960 ECTS exempted), 3/11 (30%) non-formal (56 cases, 6,875

ECTS exempted) and 2/11 (20%) informal (201 cases, 582 ECTS exempted.) It is noticeable that there is an established practice in the recognition of formal learning, whereas the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is only done sporadically. Additional activities should be implemented in order to enhance and promote the inclusion of non-formally and informally acquired competencies in the students' learning pathways.

One of the obviously fruitful activities is the participation of the University of Rijeka in the "RPL in practice" project, which led to the validation and recognition of informal learning at the Faculty of Health Studies. In the academic year of 2019/2020, for undergraduate studies of Nursing and of Midwifery, there were a total of 188 requests for recognition of informal learning that were positively resolved, 135 in the field of nursing and 53 in the field of midwifery. Nursing and midwifery belong to regulated professions and education in these fields is regulated by the European Union, Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the recognition of professional qualifications in regulated professions. The Croatian Act on Regulated Professions and Recognition of Foreign Professional Qualifications transposed the provisions of the Directive into the Croatian legal system.

After the UNIRI Senate adopted the Ordinance on the recognition and validation of prior learning, the Faculty of Health Studies enabled part-time students to have learning outcomes and competencies acquired in the workplace recognised. Pursuant to Article 8 of the Ordinance, the vice dean for teaching was appointed to lead recognising and validating prior informal learning. Part-time students of nursing and midwifery work and study at the same time, and acquire some of the prescribed learning outcomes at their workplace. Along with the request for recognition of informal learning, students need to submit a certificate which states the position and time spent performing a task in that position. The certificate is issued by the employer. For example, Directive 2005/36/EC requires that at least 40 births be performed during midwifery studies. But if a student has been working in the delivery room for more than a year, which is considered to be enough time to master skills and acquire related competencies, and has a certificate certified by the employer that she attended 40 births at work, the learning outcomes of these clinical exercises are recognised. We have similar examples for Nursing undergraduates, for example, who have worked at the Paediatric Clinic for more than a year and receive recognition for the learning outcomes and skills acquired in the workplace. Recognition of informal learning is currently only possible for part-time students.

"Our university has been committed to the recognition of informal and non-formal learning for more than a decade, and we have done much to promote it in Croatia. The project started right after the regulations have finally recognised it as a possibility in Croatian higher education. The primary benefit of the project was that, through many discussions with peers and the valuable detailed insight into the procedures of other HEIs, it really has changed the way people think about RPL, and this changed understanding was then disseminated through our newly-established committees and networks. The years of experience of our colleagues from Cork Institute of Technology (now Munster Technological University), combined with their enthusiasm and a genuine willingness to share and provide peer support, have been especially valuable in this regard. Secondly, even though we were not formal partners but only associates, the project provided a framework for implementation, with clear goals and deadlines. Even though we would have possibly achieved the same goals without the project, it has enabled us to treat them as a priority, and sometimes the project even served as an excuse to push our long-standing RPL plans to the forefront. In conclusion, the project has done much to improve the quality of our procedures and their outcomes, and ensured that they have been implemented in time and in line with our plans, and we are completing it with enthusiasm to continue improving and developing RPL in the context of our university."

Marta Žuvić
University of Rijeka, Croatia

Algebra University College

Algebra University College passed an Ordinance on the recognition and evaluation of non-formal and informal learning in June 2020. It prescribes the purpose, scope and procedure for recognition of non-formal and informal learning; the body responsible for conducting the recognition procedure; evaluation of acquired competencies through non-formal and informal learning; decision-making procedure, and other issues of importance for the implementation of these procedures. Recognition and evaluation of non-formal and informal learning are based on equal accessibility, fairness, transparency, the equal value of acquired and recognised sets of learning outcomes, and quality assurance.

The process of recognising non-formal and informal learning was carried out exclusively for enrolment in Algebra University College programmes and evaluating sets of learning outcomes within them.

The RPL procedure can be short (for recognition of certified prior learning) or full (for recognition of other kinds of prior learning).

The short procedure used for recognition of certified prior learning means that if someone brings a certificate that is listed in the decision on recognition of certificates, which is part of the ordinance when enrolling in a study programme, they can get recognition and hence exemptions. Certificates listed there are checked regularly, and the college can be sure they correspond to the module content and learning outcomes within its programmes. Cisco, Microsoft and Adobe mainly issue certificates listed there. This procedure is depersonalised because any person possessing a relevant and valid certificate would get recognition of specified learning outcomes within the programme, as a result of the certificate.

The full procedure includes the evaluation of submitted documentation and appointment of an expert committee or expert commissioner in order to give an opinion on the applicant's request prior to the recognition procedure.

A candidate initiates the recognition procedure by submitting the application form and the accompanying documentation. The necessary accompanying documentation for the completed application form is a CV plus other evidence of learning/knowledge/skills and/or competences. Depending on the type of request, the candidate can attach the following additional documents:

- certificate of completed programme or part of a programme,
- description and plan of the completed programme issued by the competent authority (not necessarily the formal authority) as the original or a certified copy.
- the original of the certificate, with validation that certificate is valid and in the name of the person who requested recognition,
- a certificate of completed projects, proof of author's work, portfolio or any other document that may serve as proving the acquired competencies,
- data on work experience, videos, portfolio of artistic work, etc.

So far, Algebra has had four applications for the full procedure. Three applications were from candidates for the study programme in Applied Computer Engineering. One person (of those three) applied for the module recognition process: English for IT, 4 ECTS. The second person applied for the recognition process for the modules Programming, Data Structures and Algorithms and Introduction to Databases, amounting to a total of 17 ECTS. The third person applied for recognition of the modules Programming, Introduction to Databases and Standards in the Application of Internet Technologies, a total of 16 ECTS. One application was from a person interested in the study programme in Digital Marketing asking recognition for eight modules: Statistics, Digital Advertising, Social Media and Social Networks, Interaction Analysis in Digital Marketing, Search Engine Marketing and Advertising Networks, Integrated Marketing Communication, Content Marketing and Digital Agency Organisation.

The applicant for the recognition of English for IT based his application on an English language certificate. Following the procedure prescribed by the

ordinance, the module teacher interviewed the applicant in order to make a better decision about the final grade.

The other two applicants for Applied Computer Engineering based their applications on previous work experience and submitted evidence of completed projects. After reviewing all the submitted documentation, and following the procedure prescribed by the ordinance, separate interviews were conducted with applicants to obtain more detailed insight into the applicants' contribution to the projects.

The applicant for the study programme in Digital Marketing based his application on a certificate and work experience. The committee rejected his request because he did not submit more detailed evidence of work experience. The certificate itself, i.e. the content covered by that certificate, did not correspond to the content/learning outcomes of the modules for which he requested recognition.

In conclusion, three candidates went through the process with a positive result and one with a negative result. Upon completing the procedure, applicants were given grades in the modules for which they applied for recognition, and tuition fee was reduced according to the recognised ECTS credits.

Also, Algebra had around 30 applications for the short procedure where all that applicant needs to do is to submit a certificate that is listed on the decision on recognition of certificates, which is part of the ordinance. If the certificate is listed, candidate gets recognition according to conditions prescribed there.

Voices from the project

"At the beginning of the project, in June 2019, when we first met in Stockholm and started to discuss four phases of validation and the European guidelines for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, I was not sure we were going to get very far. After all, for me, this was the second RPL project in some ten years: I thought that we were starting slowly and expected to get "cookbooks", regulations, examples and materials from more advanced (in terms of RPL) countries as soon as possible.

Two years and after a few more live and on-line meetings with project participants, I can see great value in the approach the project took. Now I know that if we were "given" best practice examples ready for "policy copying" at the very beginning, we would have skipped discussions about the RPL concepts, deep analysis and real understanding of the national contexts in which some solutions and approaches were designed and implemented. We would have gotten tools but potentially skipped acquiring the skills and understanding to develop them by ourselves."

Mislav Balković
Algebra University College, Croatia

Outcomes

As explained below, both the legal changes and the continued efforts of the HEIs involved in the project have been favourable for implementation of RPL in Croatian HE. The parallel SIDERAL project has provided funding and administrative support for promoting RPL, which has been especially crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic. The specific contribution of the RPL in Practice project can be summed up as follows:

- Promotion of the Cedefop Guidelines. As a document aimed at adult and vocational learning, they have been mostly unknown to Croatian HE stakeholders, who have previously had only legal documents on RPL at their disposal and were thus happy to be able to work with an accessible, procedural document which they could immediately put into practice.
- Real peer support. The project succeeded in creating a network of peers who share their knowledge, experience and ideas both within and outside the project. Well beyond the intended project activities and outcomes, all the project participants were more than happy to accept invitations to meetings, discussions and presentations outside the scope of the project, review documents, suggest further steps and point to possible issues, without expecting any kind of reward for such support.
- An opportunity for in-depth comparison. A 'typical' project would involve few partners and have them work on some ambitious output. This project involved a number of partners and associates, and apparently did not strive for ambitious achievements. However, thanks to precisely that, the participants were able to discuss their procedures in depth; to really show to their peers what they have been doing and to tackle all potentially controversial issues. Thus the Croatian participants were really able to question the details of their opinions and procedures, to spot the points of divergence between them, and to really understand an array of practices rather than gaining a superficial idea of what is 'good practice'.

RPL in Croatia – brief facts

National policy and coordination

- Croatian higher education legislation started referring to learning outcomes, qualifications frameworks and recognition of prior informal or non-formal learning only in 2013. The relevant legislation has been amended a number of times since then, showing in the process that a common understanding of these terms is still lacking among the stakeholders.
- The legislation allows for RPL for credit exemption, but it is not possible to receive a qualification solely on the basis of RPL. RPL can be done during admission, but not used for access, as formal qualification on one level is necessary to access the next.
- Before 2018, it was not clear if HEIs were allowed to implement RPL on the basis of their own general regulations, or if they needed to wait for a national-level ordinance on RPL. Since 2018 it has become clear that HEIs

are able to perform RPL on the basis of their own general acts, and no additional regulations are necessary.

Implementation of RPL in HE

- Since 2018, a few HEIs have been able to adopt the necessary general acts, establish the required committees and processes and implement procedures.
- The roll-out is slow, and recognition of non-formal and informal learning is still not possible at the majority of HEIs. The Ministry established a working group with the hope of changing this.

Data

- There is a national database for RPL consistency and documentation, which has not yet been used.
- RPL is monitored in the national quality assurance system, which has been applied since 2017. Because each procedure takes a year or more, it is still too early to use the outcomes for further analyses.

Iceland

Legal provisions for RPL in Iceland

There is no regulation for RPL in higher education in Iceland.

In Iceland, RPL in higher education is solely used to describe the recognition of prior learning to meet the learning outcomes of a higher education qualification.

Access to first cycle higher education through RPL is considered the domain of the secondary education system, in that it calls for the recognition of learning outcomes met through prior knowledge and experience at secondary level. Certifying education at the secondary level is outside the remit of higher education assessors, and only education and evaluation facilities at the secondary level can register credits into the national system at that level. This is to ensure that credits recognised through RPL at secondary level are evaluated by specialists in learning outcomes at that particular level, and to ensure that credits thus obtained will be acceptable for consideration for access to all HEIs.[27] As such, RPL for access was outside the Icelandic focus of the RPL in Practice project.

Access to higher education for applicants with five years of work experience and a minimum of 140 out of 200 credits from secondary school can, in some cases, be given exemptions to formal entry requirements. In some cases, specific subjects, such as Icelandic, English and Maths, are also required up to a particular level. Not all programmes offer these exemptions and some call for entry requirements exceeding those of the standard university entrance qualification.

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27. Information on RPL at the secondary level in Iceland can be found here:
    https://frae.is/um-fa/about-us/

National development and previous implementation projects for RPL in higher education (state of play in 2019)

Implement a clear connection between RPL and the ISQF/EQF/NQF/QF-EHEA and learning outcomes is necessary at module/course level, as well as quality assuring the validation process.

Drivers for RPL are societal needs: i.e. lack of qualified teachers, etc., and the need to provide education opportunities for students with a more varied background.

University of Iceland

A pilot project at the Faculty of Education and Pedagogy to "upgrade" teachers with previous non-university qualifications and long work experience, to give credits within a Bachelor's programme through RPL.

> **Voices from the project**
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> "Participating in the RPL in Practice project has been beneficial for the University of Iceland. We have seen first-hand how other universities have implemented RPL and can learn from their experience. As the University of Iceland embarks on its first pilot project in RPL, we are basing our processes and implementation on the results of the projects. We also value the network we have gained through our participation and have already utilised it in our internal project."
>
> **Ína Dögg Eyþórsdóttir**
> University of Iceland

Iceland University of the Arts

A pilot project in the Department of Art Education took place in 2017. RPL for access at Master's level with a focus on art teachers within visual arts or performing arts teaching in preschool, elementary school or secondary school, but without a previous Bachelor´s degree. Currently, the Music Department is developing RPL with a focus on highly skilled musicians with long teaching experience in music schools, but no formal education in teaching, who want to get a teaching degree. The RPL in this case will mostly be for credits.

Developments/activities during the project period

There has been good progress towards the objectives of the project in Iceland. The COVID-19 pandemic has delayed some activities slightly because of the increased workload in the HE sector and a strong focus on the transition from on-site to online teaching and learning, as well as pressure from government to allow greater numbers access to higher education.

The **University of Iceland** plans to initiate an RPL pilot project at the Faculty of Education and Pedagogy in the academic year of 2021–22. The pilot will focus on current students in the Pedagogy BA programme. Many current students have extensive work experience in the field. A working group at the university is being formed with assistance from the Education and Training Service Center, who have vast experience with RPL at the vocational secondary school level. The plan is to start a test group of current students to go through RPL with the goal of awarding ECTS credits towards their Bachelor's degree while developing best practices for RPL at the university.

Iceland University of the Arts: Procedures for RPL have been developed within the institution, one for ECTS credits at Bachelor's level and another for admission at Master's level. IUA will pilot RPL in the academic year of 2021–2022 in all departments.

In June 2020, the Icelandic representatives in the RPL project organised a Zoom meeting to present the project and discuss progress, as well as to move forward with the review of the Qualification Framework. This was an excellent opportunity for explaining the objectives of the project and to promote planned webinars and expected outputs to this target group, which consists of staff working on validation at all HEIs in the country, representatives of ENIC/NARIC and the Education and Training Service Centre. Furthermore, this group of experts has been used as a focus group for the RPL project and asked to engage in discussions about matters relating to implementing the Bologna Process in Iceland.

At a conference on Education Policy and Research in October 2020, Ína Dögg Eyþórsdóttir, one of the Icelandic participants, gave a presentation on the RPL project and ongoing work at the University of Iceland and Iceland

University of the Arts to facilitate recognition of prior learning for credits. Rannís promoted the event specifically to the abovementioned focus group to ensure that all HEIs in the country were up to date on the project's progress.

Outcomes

- The project has led to the development of pilot projects at both the University of Iceland and the Iceland University of the Arts, which would not otherwise have happened (see above)
- A national framework for RPL processes is being developed in tandem with the pilot projects. It will be open for consultation in the following months to allow consideration of different perspectives from institutions across the country. This framework will be based on the tried and tested work at the upper secondary level where applicable. It will be revised based on lessons learnt from the HE pilot projects, once available.
- The RPL information leaflet produced as part of the RPL project will be translated into Icelandic and disseminated among all HEIs in the country.
- The revision of the National Qualification Framework for Higher Education is in its final stages. A draft will be open for consultation at the end of February 2021. The objective is to ensure that the framework fully respects the Bologna principles, allows for RPL and will be able to allow the recognition of micro-credentials.

RPL in Iceland – brief facts

National policy and coordination
No national coordination or national policy for RPL currently exists.

Implementation of RPL in HE
- Little or no of official RPL today. Few applicants and limited knowledge and expertise.
- Admission of students who would benefit from RPL is based on exemptions.
- No credits have been given for RPL at the University of Iceland so far.
- At the Iceland University of the Arts credits for RPL have only been given to students for access at Master's level.

Obstacles
- It is difficult to find the time, skills and funding for RPL. There is limited knowledge about the process of RPL and the opportunities it offers, both among students and in institutions.

Data
- Currently no collection of RPL data as little or no official RPL is taking place yet.

Ireland

Legal provisions for RPL in Ireland

The recognition of prior learning is provided for in national legislation in the context of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), which forms the basis of a flexible and integrated system of qualifications, putting the needs of learners first and supporting the national objective of moving towards a 'lifelong learning society'. The aim is that in this society, individual learners will be able to take up education and training opportunities at any stage throughout their lives that are appropriate to their ambitions, commitment and capacity and receive due recognition for what they achieve. The Qualifications Act, Section 9(g) of the 2012 Act[28] requires QQI to "*determine policies and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners, and monitor the implementation of procedures for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners by providers*".

The National Qualifications Authority (NQAI) was responsible for the development of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The NQAI was established under legislation in 1999 and ultimately dissolved and its functions subsumed into Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) in 2012. The establishment of the Framework reflected strong support from national stakeholders, including universities and HEIs, and their representative bodies. Building on the definitions of the Act, and side by side with the development of the NFQ, the NQAI developed and published *Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression* (2003). With the establishment of QQI, NQAI policies were 'saved' under the 2012 Act. Following consultation, in 2015, a *Policy Restatement on the 2003 Access, Transfer and Progression in relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training*[29] was published. This provides the basis for providers to establish, at local level, their own policies and procedures for access, transfer and progression (ATP). These must include policies on credit accumulation, credit transfer and identification and for the formal assessment of the knowledge, skill and competence previously acquired by learners (Section56 (1), (2), (3)). The 2012 Act included a provision for direct awarding by QQI to learners on the basis of prior achievement.

In 2019, the Qualifications Act was amended[30], reflecting environmental changes. The Act (amended) states that providers without designated awarding powers may make a request to QQI for an award to a learner who has met the standards of that award based on the assessment of previously acquired learning. Designated awarding bodies, e.g. universities and institutes of technology, can, in line with their own ATP procedures make awards, including certificates, diplomas and degrees on the basis of assessed previously

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28. QQI Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training, 2003 (Restated 2015).
29. ATP Policy Restatement FINAL 2018.pdf (qqi.ie)
30. Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Act 2019 (irishstatutebook.ie)

acquired learning[31]. QQI publishes Quality Assurance Guidelines[32] to which providers must give due regard. Designated awarding bodies retain primary responsibility for the quality of their own provision through comprehensive internal quality assurance procedures meeting both national and European standards. QQI conducts Cinnte independent cyclical external reviews and annual monitoring of quality assurance according to agreed criteria. RPL provision is explicitly referenced in Quality Assurance Guidelines and is therefore included in review processes.

RPL provision is further strengthened by the 2019 amendment to the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992 (36), which provides that institutes of technology may make awards on the basis of previously acquired learning in accordance with ATP procedures established by the college, where learners have attained an appropriate standard in examinations or other tests of knowledge or ability or have performed other exercises in a manner regarded by the academic council of the college as being satisfactory.

The ethos of the legislation and of the NFQ is clear; learners achieve qualifications which record or certify that they have acquired or achieved a particular standard of knowledge, skill or competence, including certificates, diplomas and degrees. Importantly, learners may acquire such knowledge, skill or competence, including that associated with courses of study, instruction or an apprenticeship, without being an 'enrolled learner' in a programme of study, leading, on assessment, to certificates, diplomas and degrees.

National development and implementation projects

The RPL in Practice project spans an implementation period from April 2019 until April 2021, wherein government has changed and a pandemic has challenged traditional approaches to living, working, learning and mobility.

At national level, significant developments include the announcement within the Programme for Government 'Our Shared Future[33]' to 'develop and implement a standardised system of accreditation of prior learning, taking account of previous education, skills, work experience and engagement in society' in the context of VET and community education. The Programme for Government is the framework for all national planning. Following the establishment of the new government, a new Ministry was formed, with responsibility for policy, funding and governance of the higher and further education and research sectors and for the oversight of the work of the state agencies and public institutions operating in those areas, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS).

One of the significant impacts of the pandemic was the implementation of a more integrated approach across the newly formed tertiary education and training sector, as provision and services collaborated to sustain the quality of teaching, learning and assessment under challenging conditions. QQI published 'The Impact of COVID-19 Modifications to Teaching, Learning and

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31. This encompasses all forms of learning, experiential, non-formal, informal, previously certified etc.
32. Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.pdf (qqi.ie)
33. gov.ie – Programme for Government: Our Shared Future (www.gov.ie)

Assessment in Irish Further Education and Training and Higher Education'[34]; some institutions and providers referred to RPL as a strategy to provide opportunities for assessment of learning outcomes in lieu of (non-vocational) work experience as 'lock-down' occurred.

A range of new strategies are either in development or launching, including the development of a new National Access Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education, to take effect from 2021. The current Plan invited all HEIs to work with QQI to put in place a national framework for RPL, and for each HEI to develop and implement an RPL policy, which will be monitored in the strategic dialogue process by the Higher Education Authority. SOLAS, the Further Education and Training Authority, has launched 'Future FET, Transforming Learning 2020–2024' as the new strategy for VET, based on four pillars, simplified pathways, easier access, learner experience, more powerful identity; the strategy calls for RPL to play a more prominent role in FET, reflecting the growing emphasis on RPL in practice, and echoing European Recommendations, evaluations and analyses. Other policies and strategies are in the process of being reviewed. Typically, RPL policies across all sectors support widening participation, supporting social inclusion and driving economic competitiveness.

QQI has continued to monitor the effectiveness of institutional internal quality assurance policies and procedures over the duration of the project, and to conduct and publish independent external 'Cinnte' Institutional reviews. At the time of writing, four Synthesis and nine Cinnte review reports, and twenty-four Annual Institutional Quality reports have been returned by Institutions to QQI and published pertaining to the project period. However, a broader scope of reviews, e.g. all AIQRs from 2018, 2019 and 2020 was briefly surveyed to inform consideration. Not unsurprisingly, institutional reports demonstrate variability in language and definitions, contexts, processes and circumstances under which prior learning may be recognised for access and exemptions including credits, and in arrangements for recording and documenting decisions. RPL is used to contribute to enhancing access, combatting disadvantage and supporting wider participation. Most reports comment on methodologies, commending distributed decision making which provides for institutional flexibility. Policies suggest increased interest in experiential learning, and a level of interest in review of policies.

Internationally, QQI has updated the referencing of the National Framework of Qualifications to the European Framework of Qualifications and self-certified against the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Published[35] responses noted that RPL practice was consistent with the 2012 recommendation, and organic development was characterised by commitment to excellence, with QQI 'providing an overarching governing structure for the co-ordination of RPL' and supporting the 'implementation in partnership with stakeholders. Cedefop published the

34. The Impact of COVID-19 Modifications to Teaching, Learning and Assessment in Irish Further Education.pdf (qqi.ie)
35. NFQ Referencing Report 12-2020.pdf (qqi.ie)

Country Inventory[36] in January 2020, noting progress in implementing the 2012 Recommendation and active policies for different sectors and addressing specific issues, with single national quality assurance policies and guidelines for RPL for the education and training sector with regard to programmes and assessment, for access, transfer and progression. The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning[37] has developed a Professional Development Framework for academic staff in higher education. As part of this National Professional Development Framework, a typology of non-accredited learning of academic staff has been highlighted as activities undertaken and accomplished as part of the formation of an academic. Training and development in RPL is also conducted by various HEIs as part of professional development or in Masters of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. The RPL Practitioner Network[38], a national voluntary network for practitioners of all sectors combining policy and field work and supported by QQI, was identified as a cross sectoral strength for sharing of practice and learning. The Network has shared practice, tools, case studies and resources since 2014. It has consistently facilitated cross sectoral collaboration and peer learning integrated with European perspectives.

Developments/activities during the project period

During the project period, Munster Technological University (MTU) and Mary Immaculate College (MIC) on behalf of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education developed an online Introduction to RPL short course in spring 2020 for staff in higher education, which was subsequently expanded to the further education sector. A facilitator course for those who successfully completed the introductory short course was also offered to staff in higher education with the intention of expanding capacity and capability within the sector. A self-study version of the short course has also been developed by MTU, which will be launched in spring 2021 by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.

New funding programmes were announced for higher education as part of the Human Capital Initiative, under the National Training Fund. Twenty-one publicly funded HEIs leveraged to develop a national collaboration in RPL, with specific focus on engagement with enterprise, and the recognition of the informal and non-formal learning gained in the workplace. The focus of the call is on increasing capacity in higher education in skills focused programmes designed to meet priority skills needs.

This innovative national collaboration aligns skills and labour market intelligence, the National Skills Strategy, Technology Skills 2022 and other government strategies with the strategic ambitions and priorities of HEIs. The project stimulates a national consensual approach to RPL among HEIs and is supported by the higher education representative bodies of THEA

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36. Cedefop, European Commission, ICF, European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Synthesis report, 2019.

37. www.teachingandlearning.ie

38. https://rpl-ireland.ie

and IUA. It continues the policy direction, including for RPL of the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030.

Outcomes

The project, RPL in Practice, was implemented nationally in line with the grant application.

Mary Immaculate College and Munster Technological University were the participant institutions from the Irish context. As part of the project activities they contributed to the peer learning activities of the project, which included the mapping of competence, the development of documentation and guidance materials. Consideration around how to measure competence and learning outcomes was also contributed to by the institutional representatives. As part of the project activities, institutions tested the project guidelines on validation in the institutional context for its relevance and application.

Munster Technological University (MTU)

On 1 January 2021 the partner Cork Institute of Technology (CIT), merged and became the Munster Technological University (MTU).

During the project, MTU shared their extensive practice of RPL for the non-traditional student and in their engagement with industry for upskilling, reskilling and upqualifying opportunities. The modules and programmes at MTU comprise learning outcomes which are developed consistently through a module development tool and stored in a central module database. RPL is considered at module development stage and in programme development, specifically for programmes developed in conjunction with industry and enterprise. Case studies of industry engagement encompassing RPL were shared by MTU through peer learning activities in the project. Contribution to the development and use of the self-assessment tool for institutions was used by MTU during the project to review existing systems and processes to ensure good practice.

As part of peer learning activities stemming from the project, MTU hosted a delegation from Austrian higher education QA and universities in Cork in February 2020 to share practices on RPL, collaborative course development, programme, module, learning outcomes, quality assurance and qualification frameworks. This followed a presentation to Austrian QA Agency in October 2019, a request which emerged through this project. In addition, MTU contributed to the Swedish conference on RPL in higher education in September 2020, sharing practice models of RPL in MTU.

In the timeframe of the project, MTU celebrated 20 years of RPL practice. A publication and other promotional resources were developed by the institution to document and capture the achievements of RPL over the timeframe from European, national, staff and student perspectives.

MTU contributed to the two EURASHE-hosted webinars as part of the dissemination of the RPL in Practice project which focused on the broader strategic directions of RPL and the practice models of RPL.

Mary Immaculate College

MIC presented two examples of RPL at the project commencement stage: (1) for access to the Graduate Diploma in Adult and Further Education; (2) and credit for the Certificate in Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years programme (LINC). The project has enabled staff to develop the use of RPL for these and other programmes. It has increased awareness about RPL within the institution and progressed the development of a more consistent approach across programmes and academic units, all the time in line with the University of Limerick's policy.

QQI

QQI presented comprehensive national contextual updates over the course of the project and leveraged learning and developments in relevant national initiatives including in the RPL Practitioner Network and across the range of QQI and Ministry networks. Relevant updates from European networks were also shared with project partners. The developments of networks with other partners and opportunities for peer learning from diverse experiences and practices was of interest in relation to Framework development and implementation. QQI participated in the Peer Learning Activities.

IUA

IUA supported partners in the dissemination of project deliverables across the university and HEI networks, in line with project commitments.

National support from stakeholders

National participation in the EURASHE survey and in project PLAs indicated strong commitment to and interest in the project outcomes and to the emergent possibilities signalled in the approaching national RPL collaboration of publicly funded HEIs.

RPL in Ireland – brief facts

National coordination
- The integration of lead actors, institutions and national agencies including Quality Assurance bodies, and representative bodies such as the Irish Universities Association, and the Irish Technological Higher Education Association in concerted action is an effective model for ongoing deep-rooted RPL development.
- Integrated collaboration among actors is not new in Ireland but is necessary for effective sustainable development.
- Such partnership informs policy development, e.g. of Quality Assurance approaches, of funding and strategic supports at national level, and of effective collaborations regionally. This is necessary in a national context to provide for the needs of citizens and learners generally in relation to access, transfer and progression nationally, and for those learners who enrol to obtain RPL through specific services.

National policy
- Access, transfer and progression policy, including explicit, overt RPL policy or principles is an essential reference point and support for practice within Institutions.
- Systems and sectors are 'policy ready'.
- There is an opportunity, a willingness and an imperative to align sectoral policies and strategies so as to rapidly support comprehensive development and engagement with RPL.

Implementation of RPL in HE
- Successful implementation of RPL in HEIs is reflected in a combination of committed top-down and bottom-up support, including from senior leadership.
- Successful implementation is aware of an accountability agenda – of responsibility to learners, to learner success, opportunity, progression, employment and life chances, and to quality assurance, and to system impacts.
- Peer learning and networking is a hallmark of practice nationally, as is strong engagement internationally in RPL as in other domains; it is both essential and beneficial.

Obstacles
- Strategic leadership and commitment continue to be necessary. Institutional commitment is modelled through the National RPL project in higher education as part of the Human Capital Initiative and is essential to development. Where RPL thrives at institutional/departmental level, it is aligned with institutional/departmental Strategy and embedded in practice.

Data

- The recent Country Inventory notes as a challenge a 'need for improved levels of data integration across sectors, regionally and nationally', echoing observations of the National Forum[39] which recommended both the adoption of a nationally agreed common definition and understanding of what constitutes RPL within a higher education context, and improved data collection models in the report of 2015.
- Data collection mechanisms to capture activity based on the common definition should be established within each HEI and fed into a national repository of data, facilitating strategic monitoring of progress against policy measures. At an institutional level, the data would provide the opportunity to develop a precedence database and a baseline for continuous improvement and organisational learning.

Sweden

Legal provisions for RPL in Sweden

During the last 20 years, many reasons have been given for the necessity of providing RPL in Sweden: widened participation in higher education, social inclusion and integration, lifelong learning, development of employees' knowledge, competences and skills etc.

There is legal support for RPL in HEIs in the Higher Education Ordinance, chapters 6 and 7: the provisions on RPL for access are far more contemporary than those on RPL credit, see below. Validation is not defined in the Higher Education Ordinance but in the Education Act (regulating primary and secondary education), it is defined as "a process that implies a structured assessment, evaluation, documentation and recognition of knowledge and skills that a person possesses irrespective of they were acquired."

As far as guidelines are concerned, the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions issued a set of recommendations on RPL for access. These have recently been updated and will be valid from the autumn semester of 2021[40]. There are no national guidelines on RPL for credit, the main reason being that, as government agencies in their own right, Swedish HEIs take their own decisions on RPL for credit. Many, but not all HEIs, have developed internal policy documents on RPL for credit, this concerns also recognition of prior formal learning.

National development and implementation projects

A governmental investigation in 2001, in which the concept of RPL and its importance in the future HE landscape of Sweden was highlighted, was followed in 2003 by amendments to the Higher Education Ordinance. While not explicitly mentioned, RPL for access became mandatory for HEIs in Sweden.

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39. www.teachingandlearning.ie/wp-content/uploads/NF-2015-A-Current-Overview-of-Recognition-of-Prior-Learning-RPL-in-Irish-Higher-Education.pdf
40. https://bedomningshandboken.uhr.se/bedomningsprocessen/

However, there were few amendments to the provisions on RPL for credit, which, with the exception of the amendment of a paragraph to include the concept of substantial differences, remained essentially unchanged.

During this time, the government allocated funds for projects on RPL, aimed at developing guidelines and methods for validating informal and non-formal learning. In 2004, the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions conducted an evaluation of the projects. The conclusion was that the main obstacles to a successful implementation of the changes envisaged by the government included insufficient and sometimes contradictory legislation, attitudes to RPL and financial issues. There has been less focus on the role of the Swedish Qualifications Framework in RPL, probably because the framework has not yet been fully implemented in all sectors.

In late 2015, a new national delegation was appointed by the government with a mandate to establish and promote a national structure for validation in all sectors in line with the Council recommendations of 2012. The delegation, Valideringsdelegationen, formally finished its work in December 2019, although the third and final report of the delegation was published in January 2020.

Parallel to establishing a new delegation on validation, the government also assigned the Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHR) a project aimed at supporting HEIs in establishing sustainable structures, developing guidelines and reliable methods for the validation of informal and non-formal learning. Most, but not all, HEIs in Sweden participated in the project, which started officially in 2017. The project ended in December 2018 and the main results were presented in a report published by UHR. Although quite a lot had been achieved, especially in the fields of developing guidelines and collaboration between institutions, some of the obstacles singled out for mention in 2003 remained in place: in particular issues relating to legislation, funding and attitudes to RPL. UHR has subsequently been mandated by the government to follow up on how structures and guidelines have been implemented at the HEIs that participated in the project.

It is important to mention that individual institutions in Sweden have been very active in the field of RPL, and sometimes forming networks to facilitate work on RPL at HEIs in the same region. One example is Valideringsnätverk Väst (Validation Network West) a network of seven universities led by University of Gothenburg. The network collaborates with Validation West, a regional initiative to support validation for skills supply on the labour market. There are also other similar networks for other universities, such as REKO-nätverket (the REKO network) involving nine universities. The different regional RPL networks for HEIs have also formed a national network to disseminate information and keep each other updated about news and best practice. The aim is to see to that all HEIs are included in a regional network with representation in the national one.

Another example is a network for validation in engineering education, involving several of the leading engineering institutions in Sweden. Within some of these networks, joint efforts have resulted in detailed manuals with

methods and guidelines on RPL for both access and credit, to support the validation process.

A substantial amount of work in the field of RPL has also been done at institutional level, and it is important to mention that RPL has long been a priority in some academic disciplines due to governmental initiatives. Fields in which progress has been made include bridging programmes in nursing and teacher education, generally as part of governmental initiatives with separate legislation and targeted funding. In 2017, the government assigned UHR the task of coordinating efforts on the validation of work experience for vocational teachers, a task previously assigned to Malmö University.

In July 2018, UHR was tasked by the government with initiating a pilot project aimed at developing a national competence test for applicants lacking a formal high school or comparable qualification.

Developments/activities during the project period

As mentioned above, the third and final report of the national delegation on validation was published in January 2020. The report built on two preceding reports, which had focused on a proposed cross-sectoral structure for validation and validation in higher education, but also discussed previously unexamined topics. The reports will now form the basis for a governmental proposition on validation, and it is reasonable to expect that the proposition will be completed sometime during the spring of 2021.

In April 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government decided to task HEIs in Sweden with intensifying and developing their work on the recognition of previous education and work experience, with the emphasis on teaching and healthcare. The initiative aimed at increasing throughput rates in those areas.

Work is still ongoing at several Swedish universities. Examples include workshops and courses for academic staff and the development of manuals on validation.

Outcomes

RPL has remained at the centre of governmental interest for nearly two decades, although the many projects and initiatives during these years have produced rather mixed results, with validation in teacher and nursing education as the positive examples. The main reasons for the difficulties in other HE sectors have been discussed above and will need to be addressed if the proposed national structure for validation is to be fully implemented. That said, an important outcome of the 2017–2018 project coordinated by UHR and the work done by the national delegation on validation is that there is an active interest in RPL in the higher education sector, resulting in great deal of cooperation between HEIs in Sweden. The networks created by various universities have not only made it possible to continue the discussion about RPL, but also to develop methods and tools in the form of guidelines and manuals.

There have also been developments and outcomes at institutional level during the RPL in Practice project.

University of Gothenburg (GU)

Learning outcomes have become increasingly important at the University of Gothenburg, and work is underway to make learning outcomes measurable from a validation perspective. In addition, the link between validation, learning outcomes and the Swedish qualification framework (SeQF) has been highlighted. For GU, there has also been a change in focus in the sense that RPL is not just seen as tool for widening participation but as an integral feature of lifelong learning. The RPL in Practice project has been inspirational and has given input to further discussions within the Validation West network.

Voices from the project

"The project has been such a great inspiration, and it has been so interesting to learn that we largely struggle with the same obstacles and challenges, though with different prerequisites. One challenge is how to get 'the academics' – lecturers, professors, persons responsible for study programmes or courses – more involved in the validation process. Another is how to cooperate at different levels.

Somehow, it has been comforting to learn that we are not alone with these challenges. Most of all, it has been very beneficial to learn from others' experience, how they have handled situations similar to ours. Dealing with learning outcomes is one example, how some find support in the national qualification framework is another. All the discussions we have had initiated ideas about how we can improve our own processes and what we might need in order to make a successful change.

I am sure there will be more contact between the participating countries, even after the project period has finished."

Pernilla Hultberg
University of Gothenburg, Sweden

KTH Royal Institute of Technology (KTH)

The situation is similar at KTH, but the institute has taken additional steps towards centralising applications for and decision-making in RPL for both access and credits, making it possible to gather data and do follow-ups on the extent of RPL. Information on RPL has been updated and there is increased interest in RPL among programme coordinators for undergraduate programmes. As a consequence of this, KTH organised a workshop for various staff categories in February 2021. One of its outcomes was the establishment of a network for assessors of prior learning, aimed at providing a platform for peer learning and guidance with respect to assessment. KTH is planning for further workshops and webinars on validation in 2021 and for a short film about validation to be published on the website.

Furthermore, KTH and GU are of the opinion that the way both institutions work with RPL has developed and intensified. Validation is starting to be

taken more seriously and attitudes to RPL are slowly changing. According to both universities, the RPL in Practice project is important in keeping the discussion about RPL alive but, at the end of the day, there is also a dire need for sustainable incentives and the coordination of these initiatives.

Voices from the project

"At KTH, we have worked with the recognition of prior learning for a long time and we participated in several national studies and projects. Over the years it has become apparent that all Swedish universities wrestle with questions about the process and how to best evaluate prior learning. During the RPL project it has become clear that universities in every country struggle with the same questions. Some have obviously come further than we have. At KTH we have tried to listen to the experiences of others, select where others seem to be doing it right and tried to implement them into our process. We have, for example, tried to highlight the topic of recognition of prior learning to make more people aware of the necessity of prioritising it. This has been done by creating a regulatory document. We have also held workshops for new groups of people, often further up in the hierarchy. We hope to continue this rewarding cooperation with our international peers even after the project has ended."

Kristina Skogh
KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden

RPL in Sweden – brief facts

National coordination
- Sweden has no national authority with overall responsibility for RPL, it is the responsibility of the HEIs. As a consequence of this, the extent to which systematic quality assurance of RPL is included in the overall quality assurance processes at individual HEIs varies. It is, however, mandatory for HEIs to describe the progression of work on RPL in detail in their annual reports to the government.

National policy
- A national policy for RPL has been identified as necessary to ensure common understanding of the terminology, as well as consistency in the process between and within institutions.

Implementation of RPL in HE
- The extent to which HEIs work with RPL issues varies greatly. There is a need for improved information about the possibility of RPL to students and stakeholders. Lack of trust and attitudes to RPL, both within and between institutions is also an obstacle.

Obstacles

- Funding and legislation are the main obstacles, particularly with respect to RPL for credit, which is generally considered both expensive and time-consuming.

Data

- There are no national statistics and no requirements for HEIs to collect data for statistical purposes.

Involved in the project

In addition to the people mentioned below, more people were involved at each institution. They were not involved in the day to day project work but have nevertheless been important to the project's success.

Sweden
- **Swedish Ministry of Education and Research (Assigned UHR responsibility for project coordination)**
- **The Swedish Council for Higher Education, UHR**
  Anders Ahlstrand, Analyst
  Cecilia George, Senior Credential Evaluator
  André Hesselbäck, Senior Credential Evaluator
- **University of Gothenburg**
  Pernilla Hultberg, Education Officer
- **KTH Royal Institute of Technology**
  Kristina Skogh, Project Manager
  Katarina Jonsson Berglund, Head of department

Austria
- **Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria – AQ Austria**
  Barbara Birke, Head of Department
  Reinhard Jakits, Project Management
- **Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research**
  Edith Winkler, Head of Department
- **Universität für Bodenkultur Wien (BOKU)**
  Christina Paulus, Head of Lifelong Learning and Continuing Education
- **FH Campus Wien**
  Susanna Boldrino, Head of Academic University Development
- **Pädagogische Hochschule Oberösterreich (PH OÖ)**
  Josef Oberneder, Vice-Rector

Croatia
- **Ministry of Science and Education**
  Đurđica Dragojević, Senior Specialist for Higher Education Quality
  Ana Tecilazić Goršić, Head of Sector for Quality of Higher Education
- **University of Rijeka**
  Marta Žuvić, Vice-Rector for Studies, Students and Quality Assurance
- **Algebra University College**
  Mislav Balković, Dean

EURASHE

- **European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE)**
  Michal Karpíšek, Secretary General
  Federica Garbuglia, Communications and Events Officer
  Sylvie Bonichon, Associate Expert

Iceland

- **Ministry of Education, Science and Culture**
  Una Strand Viðarsdóttir, Senior advisor
- **Rannís The Icelandic Centre for Research**
  Rúna Vigdís Guðmarsdóttir, Director of the Erasmus+ National Agency
- **University of Iceland**
  Ína Dögg Eyþórsdóttir, Project Manager
- **Iceland University of the Arts**
  Sigríður Geirsdóttir, Project Manager

Ireland

- **Munster Technological University (MTU) formerly Cork Institute of Technology**
  Deirdre Goggin, Recognition of Prior Learning and Work Based Learning Company Advisor
  Irene Sheridan, Head of Extended Campus
- **Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)**
  Andrina Wafer, Head of Access and Lifelong Learning
- **Irish Universities Association (IUA)**
  Sinead Lucey, Head of International Affairs and External Engagement
  (until September 2019)
  Nora Trench Bowles Head of Lifelong Learning, Skills and Quality
  (from October 2019)
- **Mary Immaculate College (MIC)**
  Cathal de Paor, Director of Continuing Professional Development

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Appendices

I. Definitions

In its initial stages, the RPL in Practice project agreed on the definitions related to the area of recognition of prior learning that should be used in the project. The focus of the definitions - as well as the project - is on RPL of non-formal or informal learning in higher education.

The definitions are based on the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (CR), ECTS Users' Guide, 2015 and the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

Formal learning

Learning which takes place in an organised and structured environment, specifically dedicated to learning, and typically leads to the award of a qualification, usually in the form of a certificate or a diploma; it includes systems of general education, initial vocational training and higher education. (CR)

Non-formal learning

Learning which takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present (e.g. student-teacher relationships); it may cover programmes to impart work skills, adult literacy and basic education for early school leavers; very common cases of non-formal learning include in-company training, through which companies update and improve the skills of their workers such as ICT skills, structured on-line learning (e.g. by making use of open educational resources), and courses organised by civil society organisations for their members, their target group or the general public. (CR)

Informal learning

Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure and is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support; it may be unintentional from the learner's perspective; examples of learning outcomes acquired through informal learning are skills acquired through life and work experiences, project management skills or ICT skills acquired at work, languages learned and intercultural skills acquired during a stay in another country, ICT skills acquired outside work, skills acquired through volunteering, cultural activities, sports, youth work and through activities at home (e.g. taking care of a child). (CR)

Qualification

A formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards. (CR)

Learning outcomes

Statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competences. (CR)

(National) qualifications framework

An instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims to integrate and coordinate national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society. (CR)

There are different Qualification Frameworks, related but established in different contexts:

European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF)

The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning is a common European reference framework which enables countries of the European Union to link their qualifications systems to one another. It was adopted by the European Parliament and Council on 23 April 2008. The EQF uses eight reference levels based on learning outcomes that are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. It shifts the focus from input (lengths of a learning experience, type of institution) to what a person holding a particular qualification actually knows and is able to do. It makes qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems in the European Union. (ECTS Users' Guide, 2015)

Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA)

In the European Higher Education Area, qualifications frameworks are found at two levels. An overarching framework (QFEHEA) has been adopted in 2005 and all Member States committed themselves to develop national qualifications frameworks that are compatible with this overarching framework. A national qualifications framework for higher education encompasses all the qualifications in a higher education system. It shows the expected learning outcomes for a given qualification and how learners can move between qualifications. The aim of QF-EHEA is to organise national higher education qualifications into an overarching European-wide qualifications framework. Within this framework, qualifications are defined according to levels of complexity and difficulty (Bachelor, Master, Doctor). (ECTS Users' Guide, 2015)

Validation

A process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard and consists of the following four distinct phases:

IDENTIFICATION through dialogue of particular experiences of an individual; a model to identify the knowledge, skills and competences of a potential candidate for RPL.

DOCUMENTATION to make visible the individual's experiences; the provision of evidence of the knowledge, skills and competences.

A formal ASSESSMENT of these experiences; and the phase in which the documented evidence of the individual's knowledge, skills and competences is compared against specific standards/learning outcomes.

CERTIFICATION of the results of the assessment which may lead to a partial or full qualification; the official recording confirming the achievement of learning outcomes against a specified standard. (CR)

Recognition of prior learning

The validation of learning outcomes, whether from formal education* or non-formal or informal learning, acquired before requesting validation. (CR)

*The RPL in Practice project focused only on RPL of non-formal or informal learning, not formal learning.

From the Lisbon Recognition Convention

Access (to higher education)

The right of qualified candidates to apply and to be considered for admission to higher education.

Admission (to higher education institutions and programmes)

The act of, or system for, allowing qualified applicants to pursue studies in higher education at a given institution and/or a given programme.

II. Self-assessment template

https://www.uhr.se/en/rplresources

III. Information leaflet

https://www.uhr.se/en/rplresources

Education, exchange, enrichment
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The Swedish Council for Higher Education is a government agency tasked with providing support to the education sector through a number of various activities. The council is located in Stockholm and Visby.

The Council's areas of responsibility are:

- providing information prior to higher education studies, managing the Swedish Scholastic Aptitude Test, producing regulations, and coordinating the admissions process to higher education,

- developing and managing IT systems and electronic services for the education sector,

- facilitating international exchange and training across the entire education spectrum,

- recognising foreign qualifications,

- promotion, support and analysis within the HE-sector.