Developing Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

The Role of RPL in delivering on the National Skills Strategy Upskilling Objectives

April 2011
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3. RPL and the National Skills Strategy
4. The potential market for RPL in Ireland
5. RPL infrastructure and practice in Ireland
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Defining RPL

- Prior learning encompasses:
  - Formal learning
  - Non-formal learning
  - Informal or experiential learning

- RPL is the process by which prior learning is given value

- RPL can be used to:
  - Gain entry to a programme
  - Gain exemptions from an education/training programme
  - Gain credit towards an award
  - Attain an award
Context & Background

• Request by Department of Education and Skills in context of National Skills Strategy (NSS) Implementation Statement (March 2010)

• Focused on the policy role of RPL in NSS objective to upskill 500,000 people in the labour market by at least one NFQ level

• Other policy contexts:
  – Labour market activation
  – More efficient use of education and training resources
  – More flexible and relevant training for individuals and enterprises, avoid duplication of learning
Potential benefits of RPL

• For the individual…
  – Avoid duplication of learning
  – More relevant education and training
  – Engage in education and training at the appropriate level
  – Reveal hidden competencies and skills
• For the enterprise…
  – Improved documentation of staff skills and competencies
  – Better matching of employees to tasks
  – Improved identification of training needs and savings on training costs
• For government…
  – Increasing participation in lifelong learning
  – More efficient use of education and training resources
Common features of RPL process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>Identifying what someone knows or can do, and possibly recording it. (Personal stage, possibly with supervision)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment (Measurement)</td>
<td>Establishing what someone knows or can do. This is a measurement stage. (This may be a personal stage or, where there is significant formalisation, involve reliance on an external evaluator.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation</td>
<td>Establishing that what someone knows or can do satisfies certain requirements (points of reference, standards). A level of performance is set and requires the involvement of a third party.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Certification</td>
<td>Stating that what someone knows or can do satisfies certain requirements, and awarding a document testifying to this. (Necessitates the involvement of an accredited authority to certify performance and possibly its level.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Recognition</td>
<td>Acceptance by society of the signs of what someone knows or can do</td>
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Assessment instruments

- Skills Audits
- Written exams / e-testing
- Practical exams, skills tests and demonstrations
- Oral exams / Interviews
- Skills and competency portfolios
- Simulations
- Project evaluation
### Qualifications Authorities
- RPL embedded in QA arrangements with providers
- RPL can be used for programme enter, credit, exemptions, or eligibility for whole awards
- OECD thematic review of RPL in Ireland (2007)

### Further education and training
- FETAC RPL pilot project
- NALA www.writeon.ie initiative
- Fáilte Ireland
- Teagasc
- Progression pathways to higher education

### Higher Education
- HE providers have RPL processes in place
- Roadmap for Employment-Academic Partnerships (REAP)
- IUA Framework Implementation Network

### RPL and the workplace
- FÁS Líonra Project
- Skillnets RPL task group
- IBEC Retail Skillnet
- Fáilte Ireland
- CIF
- Thomas Crosbie
- Citizens Advice Bureau
Costs of RPL

• Evidence on costs difficult to collate
• RPL as part of the fee structure in many countries
• Different funding arrangements internationally – State/Employers/Unions/Individuals
• Cost depends highly on RPL instrument/procedure and time/resources required
• OECD review – Costs in Ireland range from approx €600 to €2,000 per RPL procedure
• Average cost est. €1,250 in Ireland – broadly in line with Netherlands
• Costs can decrease over time
Mainstream development – policy choices

• Other countries e.g. Netherlands have mainstream RPL system
• Features of a ‘mainstream’ system
  – One-Stop-Shops for RPL advice, guidance and assessments
  – Dedicated RPL resources, personnel and infrastructure
  – Dedicated RPL ‘knowledge centre’ for policy, information and promotion
• Good experience of RPL practice has been built up in Ireland, however, largely ad-hoc or project based to date
• More mainstream development takes time and resources
• Costs can be recouped over time
• Policy and practice should focus on areas of demand – expand on the basis of existing effective practices and demonstrated successful outcomes/benefits relative to costs.
• Development likely to be incremental – focus on reconfiguring and developing existing resources rather than introducing new structures
Demand for RPL

- Upskilling Demands / Individual ambition for further learning
- Unemployment and need to enhance employability
- Demand for Flexible Learning and Modularisation
- Forecast s / Targets for increases in education and training participation
- Continuing Professional Development / Regulatory requirements for minimum qualifications
- Employer and individual demands for skills assessment in the workplace and other settings
- Demand for improved Education/ Training/ Enterprise Linkages

Demand for RPL
RPL Stakeholders

- RPL available to Learners and Employers
- Department of Education and Skills, EGFSN
- FÁS, VECs, Other Further Education and Training Providers; NALA; AONTAS
- Higher Education Institutes
- Guidance Providers and Associations FÁS, VECs, NCGE, LES, IGC
- Employer Representatives / Industry Sector Representatives
- Unions Employers
- Qualifications Authorities
- Higher Education Authority
- IOTI, IUA, IVEA

Expert Group on Future Skills Needs
Forfás
Recommendations: NFQ Levels 1-3

• Targeted at:
  – No formal qualifications
  – Long term unemployed, inactive
  – Employees with low/no formal qualifications
• Focus on RPL for core/basic skills
• Driven by Department of Education and Skills
• Developed and delivered through FÁS-IVEA partnership in conjunction with NALA
• Skillnets, Employers and Unions to co-ordinate on RPL in the workplace
• Requires support/input from e.g. AONTAS, Guidance Organisations, NCGE
Recommendations: NFQ Levels 4-6

- Targeted primarily at:
  - Those seeking to upskill in a sector with significant previous experience
  - Upskilling due to regulatory/mandatory qualification requirements
  - Employers seeking to upskill staff e.g. new technologies and work practices
- Assessment through e.g. challenge exams, skills demonstrations, skills audits.
- Encourage initiatives at sectoral or regional level with employers/unions
- Led by FÁS, VECs and Skillnets under the direction of the Department of Education and Skills
- In consultation with: awarding bodies, NALA; Employer Representatives; Unions; Skillnets and Guidance Services
**Recommendations: NFQ Levels 6-10**

- **Targeted at:**
  - Unemployed professionals reskilling to new areas
  - Unemployed persons with significant experience at upper secondary seeking to upskill
  - Occupations with minimum qualification requirements
  - Enterprises with specific skills needs training

- **Policy should focus on RPL for entry/advanced entry**
- **RPL practice should be developed at the level of academic unit/department with the support of RPL officers**
- **Need stronger sharing and dissemination of existing practice**
- **Requires policy direction from Department of Education and Skills and HEA**
- **Proactive engagement with enterprises in conjunction with Skillnets**
• QA procedures are paramount and must continue to be embedded
• Need to ensure proper risk assessment and good governance procedures
• Improved data, especially re: participation and costs
• Closer interaction between stakeholders re: guidance, promotion and communication
Funding options

• In the long term, a structured funding model is required for a system of scale, but only where cost-benefits and successful outcomes of RPL practices are demonstrated.

• Short term
  – Labour Market Activation Fund could encourage RPL
  – European Globalisation Fund could have potential role
Co-ordination and Implementation

• NFQ levels 1-6
  – Driven by Department of Education and Science
  – FÁS-IVEA partnership
  – NALA (Levels 1-3)
  – Skillnets
  – AONTAS, NCGE, Guidance Services
  – Employers and Unions

• NFQ Levels 6-10
  – Facilitated by Department of Education and Science, HEA
  – IUA, IOTI, DIT
  – REAP Project, Framework Implementation Network
  – Skillnets, Employers and Unions