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# Two decades of RPL/APEL in IRELAND: Practitioner Views

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| Respondent: | **Oran Doherty** |
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| | **Letterkenny institute of Technology (LYIT)** |

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| **What was your first involvement with APEL/RPL?** | In 2006, I commenced employment at Letterkenny Institute of Technology as the RPL Facilitator. This position was funded by Líonra (Higher Education Network for the Border Midlands and Western region of Ireland). The purpose of the project was to recognise with a third level qualification learning that occurred in the workplace – specifically learning in IT and Business |
| Year? | 2006 |
| **How did that first model of APEL/RPL operate?** | Two RPL facilitators were appointed to promote the RPL initiative to employers and employees in the Border Midland and Western (BMW) region of Ireland.  Various marketing efforts were implemented in the promotion of RPL e.g. press releases, radio broadcasts, direct mail and company visits. Generic IT and Business modules were identified for promoting the RPL initiative. For example employees with skills in areas such as IT, customer care, office administration, managing people, communications and marketing were invited to information sessions that explained the RPL initiative. In order to receive their single subject certificate, applicants were expected to complete an RPL portfolio. The RPL facilitator provided training and support to learners. |
| **What aspects worked well?** | The initiative as a whole worked well. It improved relationships between the college and industry as employers liked the idea that skills in the workplace could be accredited. |
| **What worked less well?** | |
| **If the model** | Widen it out to more areas e.g. engineering, science etc…. |

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| **continued what changes were made for subsequent versions?** | |
| **What RPL involvement have you had since that first instance?** | <ul><li>Delivered RPL training to staff at various Institutes throughout Ireland and Europe.</li><li>Represented Ireland at an International conference in the accreditation of non-formal learning in Istanbul.</li><li>Collaborated with employer groups such as IBEC in developing Work Based Learning programmes where much emphasis was put on RPL.</li><li>Worked with various Skillnets in providing training on RPL.</li><li>RPL is very much mainstream now in LYIT with over 60 lecturers receiving RPL training.</li><li>Currently working in a project with two partners in the development of an E-Portfolio system.</li><li>Participated in a 3 year EU project (FLLLEX) that identified the challenges in LLL with special focus on RPL</li><li>Currently engaging with KHLeuven University in a European project promoting RPL and WBL.</li><li>Currently writing a chapter on RPL in Ireland with Dr. Anne Murphy and Kate Collins in an international publication.</li></ul> |
| **Did you use any new 'tools' or 'technologies' in subsequent models?** | As mentioned above, currently building an E-portfolio systems whereby learners can learn all about RPL on-line and develop their RPL portfolio on line. This project only commenced late 2012 |
| **In your view, how has the National Framework of Qualifications (NQF) contributed to RPL/APEL practice?** | From my experience it has helped with progression issues. Also it helps with the recognition of prior experiential learning as providers can compare the experiential learning to the level indicators suggested by the framework. |
| **In your view how has the NQF level descriptors influenced RPL practice?** | I think the level descriptors provide a good comparison guide in the evaluation of prior learning. |
| **How has the Learning Outcomes paradigm influenced RPL practice?** | Learning outcomes have assisted with the RPL function. It makes it easier to compare modules with prior certified and prior experiential learning. |
| **In your view are national standards for** | I suppose they could provide a benchmark for comparison purposes when assessing experiential learning. |

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| **occupations and sectors helpful for RPL?** | |
| **In your view are professional body RPL practices more influential than the NQF?** | No |
| **Do you refer to the National Principles and Operational Guidelines for RPL 2005 in your own RPL practice?** | Yes, when we were developing the RPL policy in LYIT we ensured we were consistent with the recommendations outlined in the National Principles and Operational Guidelines. Also the training we provide to our staff in LYIT refers to the National Principles and Operational Guidelines. |
| **In your view, has the particular design of the NQF hindered the potential of RPL practices?** | No I would not say the NQF has hindered the potential of RPL. |
| **How important are minor awards for RPL in your view?** | LYIT has a number of Minor Awards whereby 50% of the award is completed through recognition of prior experiential learning and the remaining 50% is delivered through traditional class delivery. Employers and employees especially like this model as it speeds up and reduces the cost of a qualification. |
| **In your view, what has been the impact of the Bologna process for RPL?** | Whilst the Bologna process has harmonised academic degree standards somewhat throughout Europe, there are still some difficulties comparing qualifications from abroad. |
| **In your view what is the usefulness of the EQF for RPL in Ireland?** | |
| **In your view how well has RPL worked for labour market activation initiatives so far?** | In my limited experience with the labour activation fund, I would say RPL really helped applicants access programmes by providing recognition for learning achieved through experiential learning. Many of the applicants on our labour market activation funded programmes did not have the prior certified learning required to access the programmes, but because many of them had significant work experience, we were able to recognise this learning and provided it met the proper standards, candidates were able to access the programme. |
| **What is your view of recommendations for RPL as articulated in the Hunt report?** | I think the Hunt report contained a number of positive recommendations in relation to RPL e.g. wider participation and fairness of access and indeed engagement with society including business, local communities, the wider |

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| | education sector and the wider international world |
| **As a practitioner, what is your view of the application of RPL in the Forfás RPL document?** | The Forfás document did provide a good overview of RPL and did indeed make some very good recommendations.<br>However in my opinion the majority of the general public and employers are still not familiar with the RPL concept.<br>Many Higher Education providers have still not fully grasped the potential RPL can have.<br>The benefits of RPL to the various stakeholders were very well highlighted in the Forfás report but these benefits need to be promoted better. |
| What ideological shifts have you noticed about RPL since your first involvement? | From a personal perspective, I would notice a shift in terms of audience for RPL. Initially at LYIT our main focus would have been on full-time and part-time learners. Now the main focus of RPL seems to be in relation to employers and employees completing Work Based Learning programmes where perhaps up to 50% of the credits are completed via RPL. |
| **What operational/technical shifts have you noticed?** | There has been some talk recently in Ireland about adopting E-portfolios to document the learners/applicants RPL experiences. LYIT along with IT Sligo and GMIT are currently developing an E-Portfolio system. |
| **What is your prediction about RPL practice in the next five to ten years?** | I think as more and more employers seek to engage with HE providers, the need to included RPL components in education and training programmes will increase.<br>However only those providers that have invested in RPL (e.g. a dedicated RPL person, staff trained in RPL, proper RPL policies and procedures) will be in a position to satisfy employer requirements. |
| *Any other remarks you would like to make?* | |

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| ***Resources and publications recommended by the respondent:***<br><br>EGFSN (2011) *Developing Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): the role of RPL in the context of the national skills strategy up-skilling objectives*<br>http://www.skillsireland.ie/media/egfsn110411-developing-recognition-of-prior-learning.pdf<br><br>Scattergood, J. (2011) *Recognition of prior learning in the university sector; policy, case studies and issues arising*<br>http://www.nfgnetwork.ie/fileupload/FIN%20REPORT%20%28Final%29.pdf<br><br><br>National Strategy for Higher Education 2030 (Hunt report) (2011)<br>http://www.hea.ie/sites/default/files/national-strategy-for-higher-education-2003.pdf |

Murphy, A. (2011 and 2012) *RPL Matters in the DIT: policy and practice guides for staff, parts 1 & 2*
http://arrow.dit.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=ltcrep
http://arrow.dit.ie.cgi/viewcontent.cgi?filename=)&article=1001&context=ltcrep&type=additional

*UNESCO Guidelines for the recognition, validation and accreditation of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning*
http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002163/216360e.pdf