RPL
Recognition of Prior Learning
Your Learning Counts

RPL in Higher Education Project: Outcomes and Achievements

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priorlearning.ie

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TUA Technological Universities Association

Our Partner Institutions

Ollscoil Teicneolaíochta an Atlantaigh
Atlantic Technological University

DCU
Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University

DUNDALK INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
INSTITIÚID TEICNEOLAÍOCHTA
DHÚN DEALGAN

Institute of Art, Design + Technology Dún Laoghaire

MTU
Ollscoil Teicneolaíochta na Mumhan
Munster Technological University

Maynooth University
National University of Ireland Maynooth

SETU
Ollscoil Teicneolaíochta an Oirdheiscirt
South East Technological University

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

TU DUBLIN
OLLSCOIL TEICNEOLAÍOCHTA
BHAILE ÁTHA CLIATH
TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY DUBLIN

TUS
Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest
Ollscoil Teicneolaíochta na Sionainne: Lár Tíre Iarthar Láir

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

UCD DUBLIN
University College Dublin
Ireland's Global University

OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHE
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY

UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

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Key Project Achievements

COLLABORATION BETWEEN PARTNERS

PILOT FRAMEWORK FOR RPL IN HIGHER EDUCATION

RPL STAFF DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

DATA COLLECTION/ REPORTING SYSTEMS INTEGRATION

LEARNER INFORMATION AND AWARENESS RAISING

Collaboration between Partners

Sector-Wide Collaboration Across 14 HEIs

Framework for RPL in Higher Education

A shared sector-wide understanding of RPL to drive coherence and consistency in policy and practice across 14 HEI Partners.

The framework provides definitions of key terms related to RPL, outlines principles as well as the 5-stage RPL process.

The Framework shows that RPL is underpinned by two core values:

1. Learner-centredness: The learner is central to the RPL process. A wide range of learners may wish to apply for RPL: RPL is for everyone.

2. Quality assurance: The RPL process is embedded in the quality assurance procedures of each higher education institution and is aligned with the National Framework of Qualifications.

Definition of RPL

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a process by which prior learning is formally valued. It is a means by which prior learning is identified, assessed, and recognised by an educational institution as part of its programmes, courses, and/or modules on Ireland's National Framework of Qualifications. This makes it possible for an individual to build on learning achieved and to be rewarded for it.

The RPL Process typically has 5 stages. These are:

A. Information	B. Identification	C. Documentation	D. Assessment	E. Certification
The learner obtains information about what is possible and how the RPL process works.	The learner explores their learning with a view to making an application.	The learner undertakes a reflective process and gathers relevant materials to substantiate their application.	The learners application is assessed. A range of assessment mechanisms may be used (e.g. portfolios, interviews, essays, examinations, etc.).	If the application is successful, the learner will receive formal recognition or certification, which will lead to one or more of the following outcomes.

- **Credit towards an award or exemption from some programme modules**
- **Advanced entry to a programme**
- **Entry to a programme**

Note: *In some higher education institutions, RPL may also be used to gain a full academic award. The availability of these outcomes of RPL is at the discretion of each higher education institution.*

Staff Development

600

Higher Ed Staff reached through the RPL Digital Badge

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RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

" This was a really great badge. The content was excellent and it really enhanced my understanding of RPL both in the Further Education and Higher Education sectors. I would highly recommend it to others.

" One of the best badges I have ever completed...the material and conversations were very relevant to me. The guest contributors were excellent, a pleasure to listen to.

-Digital Badge Participants
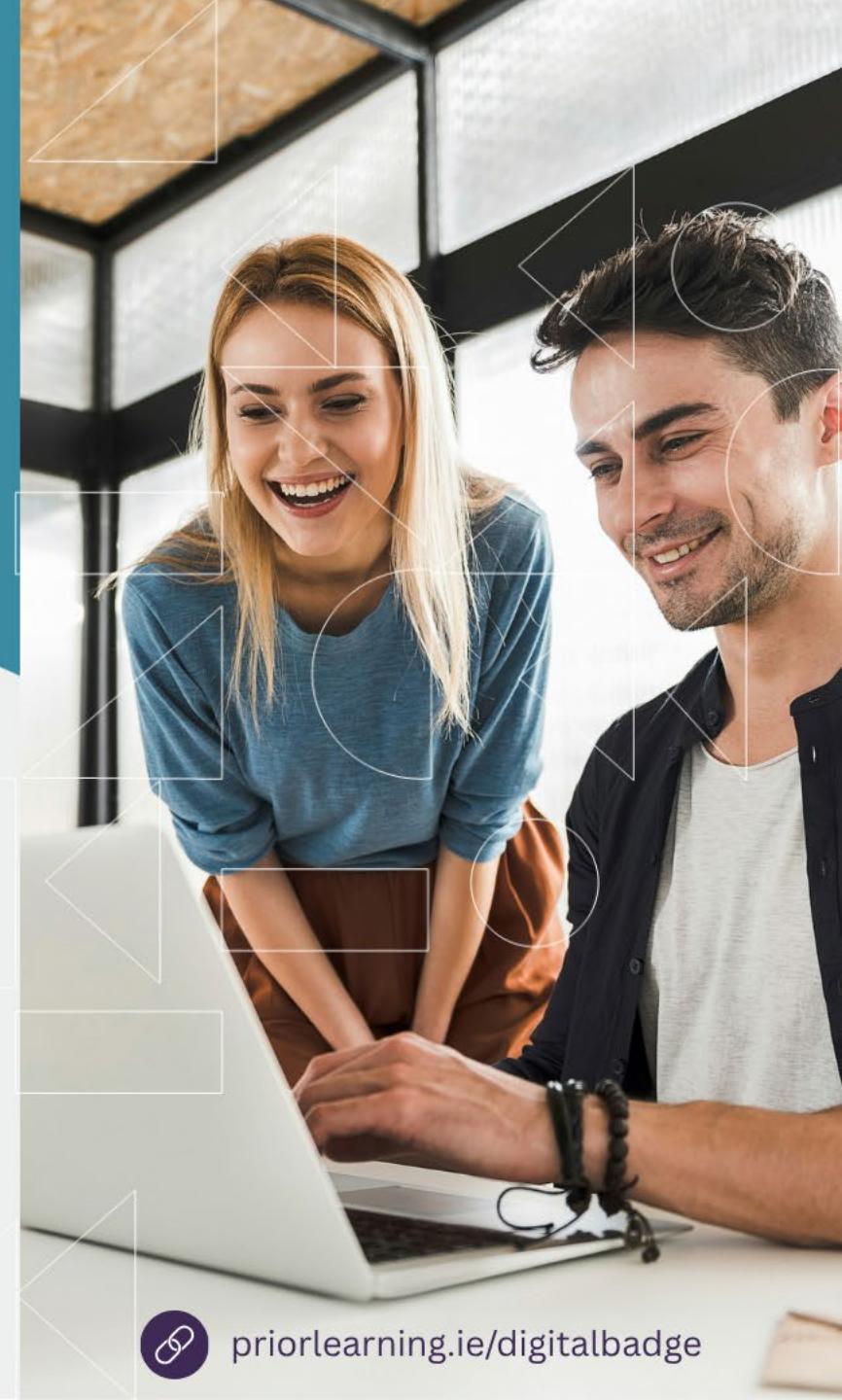
Key Achievements

813 staff registered for the RPL Digital Badge, with **400** badges awarded

51 facilitator badges issued, empowering participants to deliver the badge and support RPL development within their own institutions

70% of badge earners are based in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs); of these, more than half hold academic roles

96% satisfaction rate reported among surveyed participants Strong cross-sector engagement, with high levels of participation from academic and professional services staff.

priorlearning.ie/digitalbadge

Technical (Data) Definition for RPL in Higher Education

A critical enabler for counting RPL across institutions
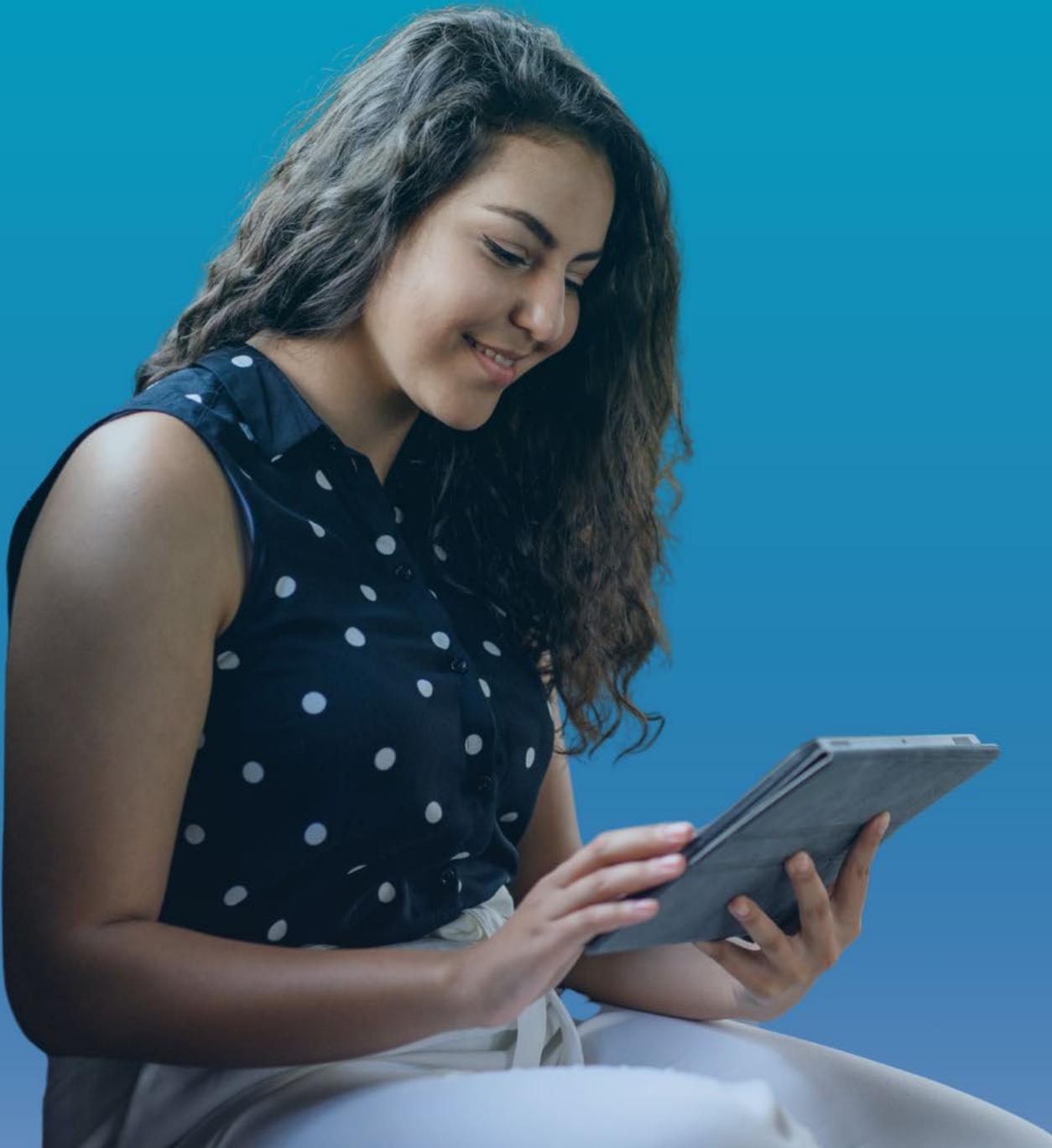
Standardising and Tracking RPL

- A collaboratively developed Technical (Data) Definition (14 partner HEIs) that standardises what RPL data to capture and how.

- Built to work consistently across SIS platforms: Banner, ITS, SITS.

- Anchored to the Pilot RPL Framework (shared language, principles, QA alignment).

- To enable consistent RPL reporting for:
  Entry, Credit/Exemption
  Advanced Entry
  Full Award

Pilot Projects

- One HEI led a pilot to test system upgrades and data mapping in Banner, now implemented university-wide.
- Two HEI's began pilots for ITS and SITS

Learner Data

Learner Information and Awareness Raising

- Dedicated RPL institutional webpages with guides, FAQ's, explainers and video testimonials to help learners tart and navigate the RPL process.

- Increased visibility through priorlearning.ie and active social media channels

- Dissemination of learner video testimonials: real-world examples of how RPL can be applied across a range of industries and career paths

- RPL features in leading national media

Key Resources
Delivered

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RPL Toolkit
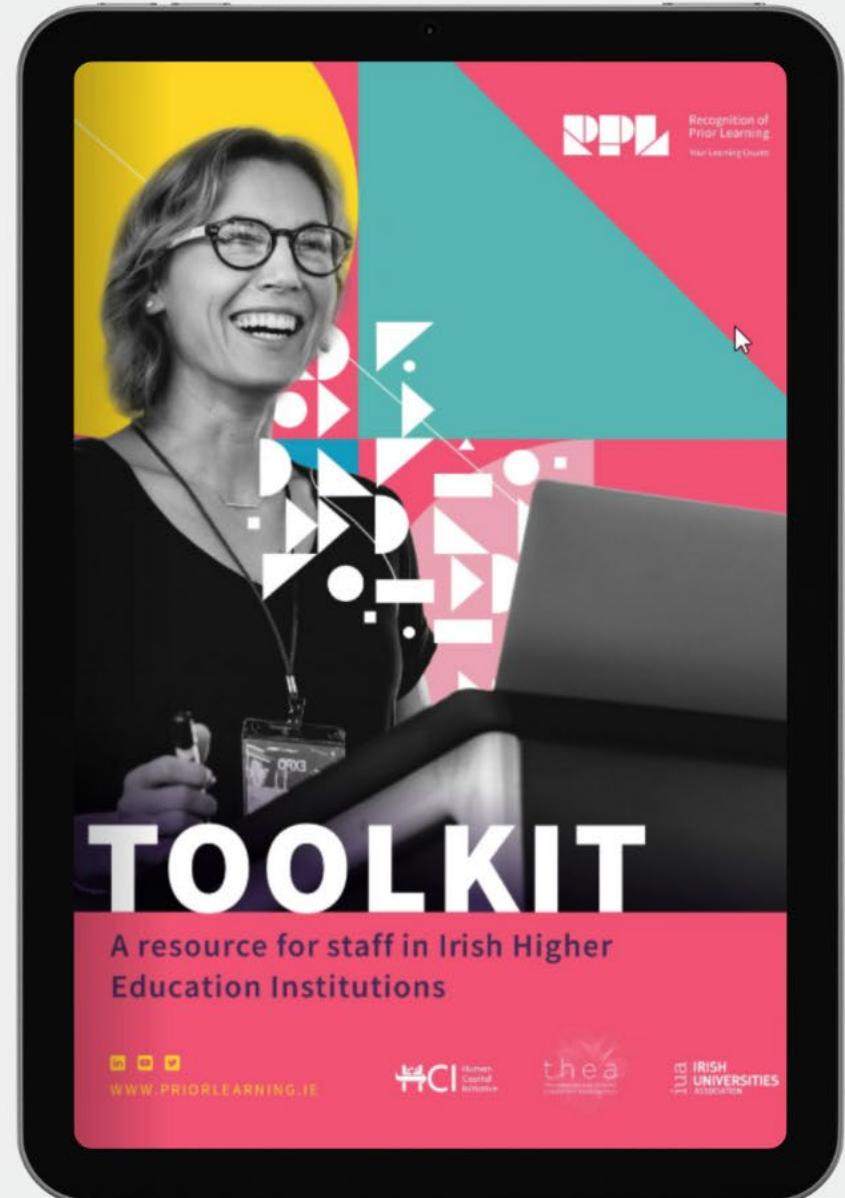
- Resource for the Practice of RPL for Academic, Professional, Quality Assurance and Administrative Personnel

RPL Exemplars and Templates

- Practical, real-world examples of RPL practice, providing guidance for staff, including assessment templates, and exemplars provided by partner HEI's

RPL Guide for Learners

- A comprehensive guide for learners with clear, step-by-step guidance on how to identify, document, and evidence prior learning.

Findings of the External Evaluation of the RPL in Higher Education Project

"The initial lifespan of the project has enabled the sector to reach agreement on the necessary preconditions; for example, the technical (data) definition and pilot framework, for establishing a coherent, national approach to RPL across Irish higher education."

-External Expert Evaluation of the RPL in Higher Education Project, p. 77.

Overarching Recommendations

1 Establish a subsequent phase of work in which objectives and key performance indicators (KPIs) target on-the-ground implementation of the National Framework for RPL in HE.
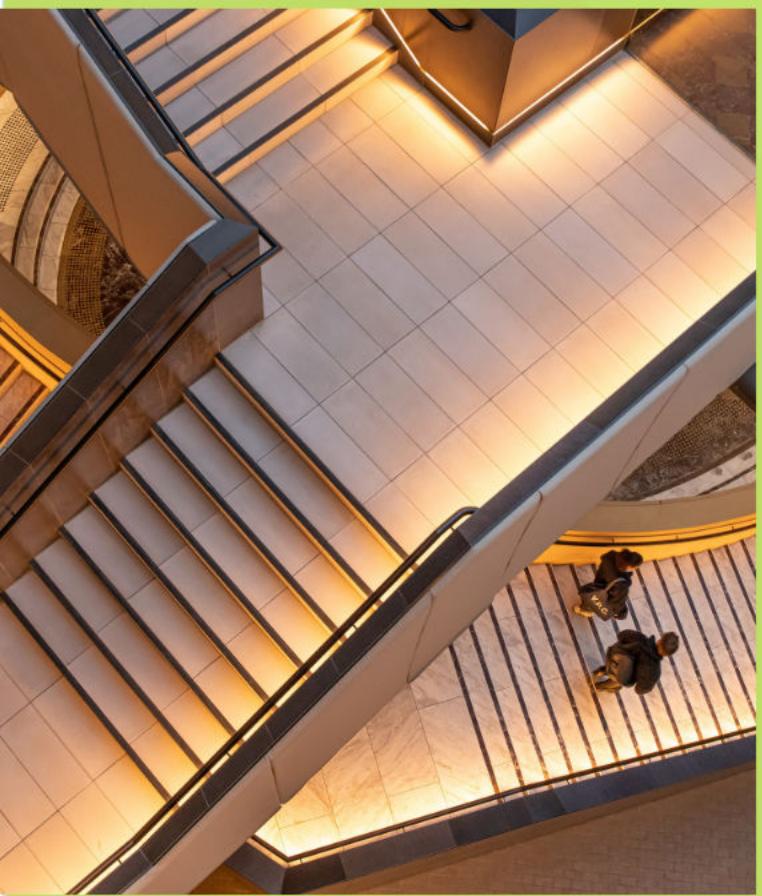
2 Clearly differentiate between objectives and KPIs to be achieved at national level and those to be achieved at institutional level.

Recommendations for National Activity

3. Embed statutory reporting on RPL within HEA's Student Record System to facilitate ongoing reporting on RPL data by HEIs to the HEA.

4. Consider whether HEI reporting on RPL data (see recommendation 3) and/or other direct indicators (see recommendation 9) should be linked to any additional funding to progress RPL practice within HEIs.

5. Coordinate with employer representative organisations to develop a strategy to raise awareness of RPL and ensure the opportunities it presents are understood by enterprise.

6. Require that RPL be considered, embedded by design and made explicit within information pertaining to new programmes or micro-credentials.

7. Ensure that the existing communications material (e.g. priorlearning.ie and RPL stories) and practical resources developed by the project (e.g. pilot framework, case studies) are maintained, hosted and actively promoted for use by the sector, e.g. via the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (NFETLHE). Within this:

a. Facilitate ongoing contributions to a repository of case studies or exemplars of good practice by institutions to maintain the currency of these resources.
b. Enable academic and professional staff in Irish higher education to continue to achieve recognition for their engagement in professional learning via access to the existing RPL Digital Badge.

8. Progress redevelopment of the existing RPL Digital Badge and RPL Toolkit to provide a suite of practical, self-access training resources available for use on demand by institutions and relevant stakeholders.

Recommendations for Institutional Activity

9. At institutional level, propose and agree appropriate indicators of achievement, particularly in the context of any additional funding to progress RPL practice within the HEI. Reasonable example of direct indicators may include:

a. Visibility of RPL in programme information for prospective learners.
b. Visibility of RPL in strategic and operational plans and KPIs.
c. The proportion of academic, external engagement and relevant area (e.g. admissions, registry) staff engaging in RPL training or development activity.
d. Numbers of RPL processes actioned (which may be expected to vary substantially by institutional profile).

10. In HEIs where the RPL coordinator role exists, clarify the role of RPL in relation to roles and responsibilities for RPL throughout the organisation. Within this:

a. Embed responsibility for RPL appropriately in the role descriptions as relevant for academic and professional staff.

11. Embed RPL in the industry communications, external engagement and enterprise strategies of institutions, particularly in relation to cohort RPL.

12. Raise the profile of RPL in communications and promotions material targeting prospective learners.

What next for embedding RPL?

Key Priority 1: Increasing Capacity across the HEIs (Staff Training & Professional Development)
Enhancing staff knowledge, skills, and confidence to embed consistent RPL practices within and across institutions.

Key Priority 2. Awareness Raising and Learner Engagement
Embedding RPL through National and Institutional Communications & Engagement.

Key Priority 3. Continued RPL Integration
Continued engagement with a range of stakeholders to ensure that RPL is positioned within national and local strategies.

Key Priority 4. Institutional and Stakeholder Engagement
Networking, engaging, consulting and collaborating to inform the development and actioning of key priorities.

Key Priority 5. Targeted Initiatives
Designing and delivering focused RPL initiatives.