

## Identification of good practices

This is the template for collecting existing good practices in which any kind of validation of people’s prior learning experiences was part of the integration process. It could be processes concerning non-national candidates or national ones. The important purpose of this template is to identify successful stories and to explain how the experience that you present can be adapted or can be useful when dealing particularly with the validation of migrant or refugee candidates. Please do not surpass a max of 3 pages in total.

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### Questions to be replied:

#### 1. The VNIL/VPL practice in your country/institution

- Briefly, how does it work? How long has it been operational?
- Which are the **strengths and the areas for improvement** of this practice?

There is no separate or dedicated infrastructure for RPL in Ireland. Instead, it is practiced and largely understood in the context of education and training. Awarding bodies and institutions use RPL in relation to accessing programmes and qualifications. They evaluate prior certificated as well as prior experiential learning. In the principles and operational guidelines for the recognition of prior learning in further and higher education in Ireland (NQAI, 2005), RPL is defined as:

“the process by which prior learning is given a value. It is a means by which prior learning is formally identified, assessed and acknowledged”. (p. 2)

The key terms associated with RPL are a) ‘prior’, i.e., learning already achieved; and b) ‘process’ i.e., the distinct stages of identification, assessment and certification. RPL encompasses all forms of prior learning, including learning acquired by following a course of study (i.e., formal learning), learning acquired outside of the formal education system which may not lead to certification (i.e., non-formal learning) and learning acquired through experience. The process of RPL can be used to gain:

- admission to courses where a person may not have obtained the standard entry requirements;
- exemptions from course components which duplicate the learning an individual has already acquired;
- credit towards a qualification; and

- a qualification solely on the basis of prior learning.

There are different means of assessment in place for RPL depending on the type of RPL an individual wishes to gain, i.e., it can be dealt with by an admission officer who reviews previous certification and experience, or (in the case of experiential learning) it can involve an assessment of the individual against the learning outcomes associated with the relevant unit, module, programme or qualification (FIN Report, 2011).

Adult Continuing Education (ACE) represents University College Cork (UCC) on the RPL Practitioners Network Ireland. The network, which was established in 2015, aims to:

- o provide a coherent practitioner voice to shape and inform policy development
- o support the development of a community of practice, providing opportunities to share learning, face to face, online and through practical sharing of toolkits and resources
- o promote good practice, informed by national and international practitioner and policy perspectives (<http://www.rpl.ie>)

The establishment of the RPL Practitioner Network Ireland has provided an opportunity for the ongoing sharing of national practices, however no standardised national policies have been agreed.

## 2. The candidate

- a) Key details of the **candidate** of this case study (if applicable): age, gender, country of origin...
- b) What **qualifications and/or experience** did the candidate bring to the VNIL/VPL process?

### **The West Cork Dairy Farmers' RPL (recognition of prior learning) Project**

Our project involved 17 farmers from the South West of Ireland who gained access to and successfully completed UCC's Diploma in Environmental Science and Social Policy (NFQ Level 7) through a recognition of prior learning (RPL) process. An RPL method was specifically developed to allow these farmers access this third level qualification based on the skills, competencies and knowledge they had gained outside of a formal educational setting. This process involved a close working collaboration between Adult Continuing Education (ACE) at UCC and the Carbery Multinational Group which is a major international manufacturer of quality nutritional ingredients, flavours and cheeses in West Cork, South West of Ireland.

These farmers had gained considerable experience on farming sustainability through the Carbery Greener Dairy Farms Project (CGDF), an initiative established by Teagasc in 2012 which is the Agriculture and Food Development Authority in Ireland. A RPL methodology was created whereby the learning and experience achieved by the farmers on the CGDF project was compared to the specific learning outcomes of the Diploma programme. The methodology that was created and used for the RPL purpose can be summarised in five main steps as follows.

Step 1: Initial Mapping Process

Step 2: The Traffic Light System

Step 3: Weighting the Learning Outcomes

Step 4: The Learning Outcome Portfolio

Step 5: Assessment and Validation of Evidence

Essentially, this RPL project involved the identification of learning by the farmers and the recording of this learning in a form suitable for assessment. A Learning Portfolio was created

which was assessed by a number of suitably qualified individuals. As a result of the method presented, the farmers were granted exemptions on 40 credits (5 modules) of the Diploma by the ACE Academic Standards Board in December 2017. This is the first time that UCC has approved a group RPL portfolio and as the 40 credits constitutes 60% of the programme it is beyond the current UCC policy recommendation of a 50% limit.

**3. What was the **outcome** of the process? (e.g. access to or credits within a course, part or whole diploma BA/MA, create a job opportunity and/or a social opportunity...)**

As a result of the RPL process that we developed, the 17 farmers were successfully granted exemptions on a full 40 out of 60 credits on UCC's Diploma in Environmental Science and Social Policy (NFQ Level 7). They completed the remaining 20 credits of the programme in a fully blended learning fashion and one that adopted both an adult education ethos and teaching for understanding approach. The farmers graduated with the full Diploma Award alongside the traditional university students in October 2018.



**4. Impact and sustainability**

- a) What was the impact of the process for the candidate? (i.e. further study, a job, etc)
- b) How are the processes and impact sustained and how are they integrated into existing structures and processes?

This project has had a very powerful and positive outcome for the farmers. According to the Carbery Group Management, the project has added value in terms of profitability to the farmers, while at the same time minding and improving the environment. These farmers have already spread the meaning of sustainability which is now easily understood by all suppliers/farmers in West Cork.

As a result of this project, a sub-committee of UCC's Academic Standards and Development Committee (ADSC) was established to review UCC's RPL policy. ACE has a staff member on that committee and this work is ongoing.

**5. Relevance and Transferability to VINCE:**

- a) Are there any aspects of your practice that are adapted to the needs of refugees or people with a migrant background - what makes these aspects special?
- b) Are there any aspects of your practice that could be adapted to these groups of learners? What adaptations would be needed?

The key aspect of this project was the development of the methodology which could be adopted to other groups such as people with a migrant background. The 5 step methodology creates a clear pathway to gathering the evidence necessary to complete a portfolio that is used for assessment purposes. For example, Step 2 of the methodology involves the Traffic Light System. This involves the use of a colour coded system of Red, Orange and Green which can be applied as a way of visually representing the work completed by the candidates against the requirements of a particular module or course of study.

Red indicates that the desired outcome has not been achieved by the candidate.

Orange indicates that the desired outcome was partly achieved.

Green indicates that the learning outcome is deemed to have been fully achieved by the candidate or candidates.

Overall, this project highlighted access, success and inclusivity within the University sector in Ireland. The aim of this project was to create an RPL method that could be applied to the farmers as a group rather than each of them applying individually to the University which would be standard RPL practice.

Through the RPL process, UCC has been able to highlight and validate the tremendous work that they have completed in making their farms both more sustainable and profitable. Key achievements in their farming careers are now certified in an NFQ Level 7 programme. By developing a transparent and strong RPL methodology, the academic standards and rigour of the Diploma course has been maintained. It was important to the RPL team from the outset that both the farming cohort and the conventional student cohort in UCC both remained happy with the process and the outcome.

**References:**

FIN report (2011). Recognition of Prior Learning in the University Sector: Policies, case studies and issues arising. Framework Implementation Network

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