

Recognition of Prior Learning: An International Scan

Executive summary

The recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a process which recognises prior learning that has occurred in a range of educational and training contexts and/or where learning is achieved outside education or training systems and is recognised for academic purposes. RPL is used for admission to a course, and/or counted towards an award or qualification.

This report is based on a digital scan of the publicly-available information about the recognition of prior learning (RPL) on the websites of 39 higher education providers across the world. It provides an overview and examples of RPL approaches and practices internationally, and insights into the clarity and accessibility of information for prospective students and RPL candidates which is available on institutional websites.

The scan demonstrates that, although the process of recognising prior learning is referred to by various terms internationally, the recognition of skills and knowledge achieved through work, community or voluntary experience, and/or prior study, is widely practiced by higher education providers. Institutional approaches to RPL reflect the diverse missions and histories of providers and are implemented in the context of varying national and international policy agendas with regard to the role of higher education, and differing degrees RPL policy coordination and regulation.

Although the clarity and accessibility of information about RPL varies between institutions, the scan identifies examples of clear signposting and the provision of positive and engaging information and initial guidance, and innovative support arrangements for RPL applicants. This includes, for example, mature or adult learners' pages with information and guidance specifically targeted at older applicants and details of additional support to aid their transition into higher education; dedicated RPL information and services pages accessible from admissions pages; introductory and explanatory videos about the process; testimonials from students who have been through the process; online workshops on RPL and evidence gathering. The websites also reveal the availability of a variety of face-to-face guidance arrangements in place alongside the use of technology.

The scan shows that there is a variety of methods used to assess RPL applications. These methods most commonly involve: applicants providing information about their learning, with supporting evidence, demonstrating how they meet module/course learning outcomes; and/or the use of tests and examinations. The use of portfolios and application forms as a means of providing information is widespread among the scan institutions. However, there is also evidence of attempts to streamline the application process through the use of e-portfolios, and the use of alternative assessment methods to better meet the needs of applicants and the learning outcomes to be assessed.

It is recognised that the findings of the scan are limited by what information institutions choose to provide publicly, and that the level of detail varies between institutions. However,

the exercise has brought together a lot of information on the extent and types of RPL implemented internationally and provides examples of interesting and innovative practice. It is hoped that the outcomes of this scan will contribute to the further development and design of institutional approaches to RPL.

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