

Recognition of Prior Learning and Professional Bodies

Introduction

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) National Framework for Scottish Higher Education (the Framework) was developed in 2014. The Framework was intended to inform and raise awareness of RPL among learners, institutions and professional bodies as well as provide advice and guidance to these stakeholder groups on RPL policy and implementation. QAA Scotland (QAAS) is currently leading a review and update of the Framework in partnership with a range of stakeholders - the RPL Expert Review Group. This review is being undertaken as part of the [Resilient Learning Communities Enhancement Theme](#).

One of the sections of the 2014 Framework is aimed at professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). PSRBs are a diverse group of organisations that include professional bodies, regulators and those with statutory authority over a profession or a group of professionals. In respect of PSRBs, a number of questions were raised by members of the RPL Expert Review Group:

- the current level of awareness of recognition of prior learning (RPL) among PSRBs
- whether the term RPL is used extensively, or another term is more common - for example, APL
- whether PSRB personnel would describe their organisations as PSRBs or professional bodies in general communication
- the ease of access to RPL information on organisations' websites.

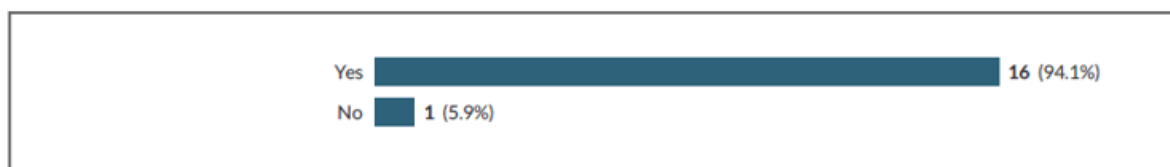
A survey was designed to explore the first three of these questions. To provide a snapshot of the ease of access to RPL information on organisation websites, a scan of professional body websites was undertaken. The methods and results of these exercises are presented below.

PSRB RPL Survey

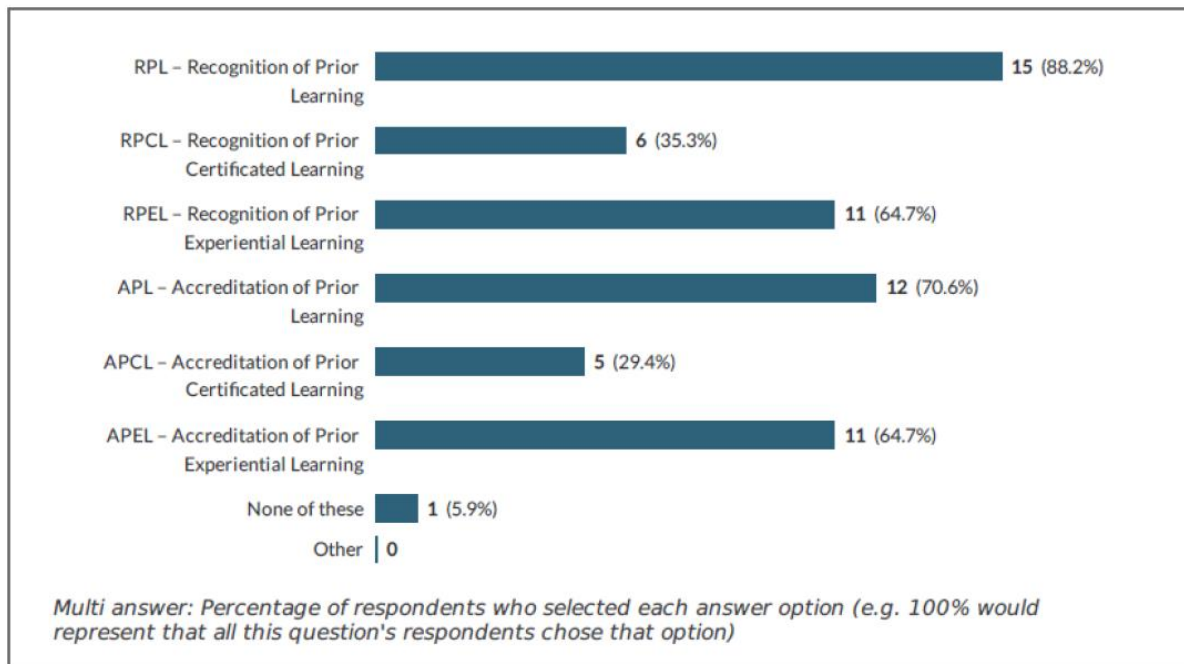
A short survey (10 questions) was designed to explore the first three questions listed above. In order to facilitate a rapid turn-around, the survey was only open for 10 days. The survey was distributed in May 2022 by QAA to its PSRB Forum members. The [QAA PSRB Forum](#), held twice a year, enables those involved in the education of professionals to consider key issues, share good practice and keep up-to-date with higher education policy.

17 responses were received within the 10-day window. A summary of the responses is provided here with each of the relevant questions.

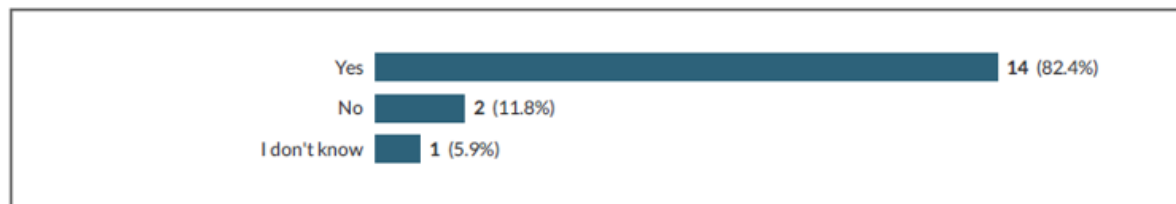
1. Have you previously heard of or been aware of Recognition of Prior Learning?



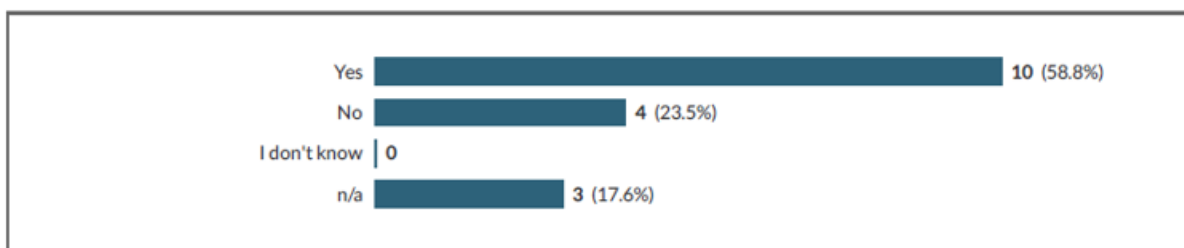
2. Which of these terms for prior learning are you aware of or are used by your organisation? Please select as many as apply.



3. Is there an opportunity to use RPL (or similar) to gain membership of your organisation or accreditation by your organisation?



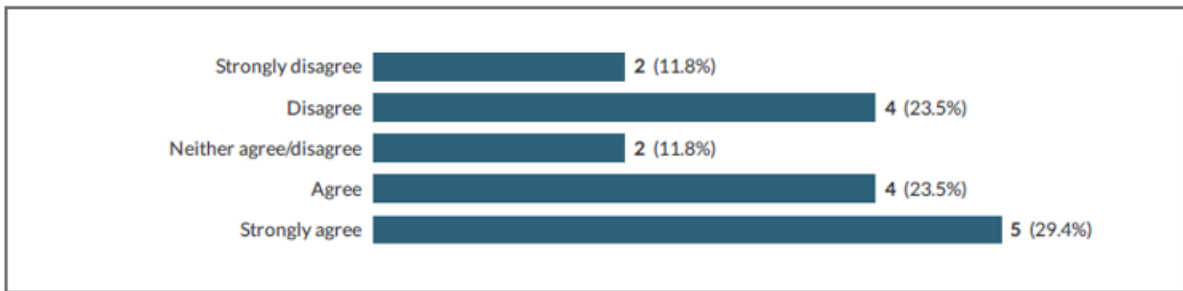
4. If you answered Yes to question 3 - does the prior learning need to have been recognised or accredited by a college, university or other reputable learning provider?



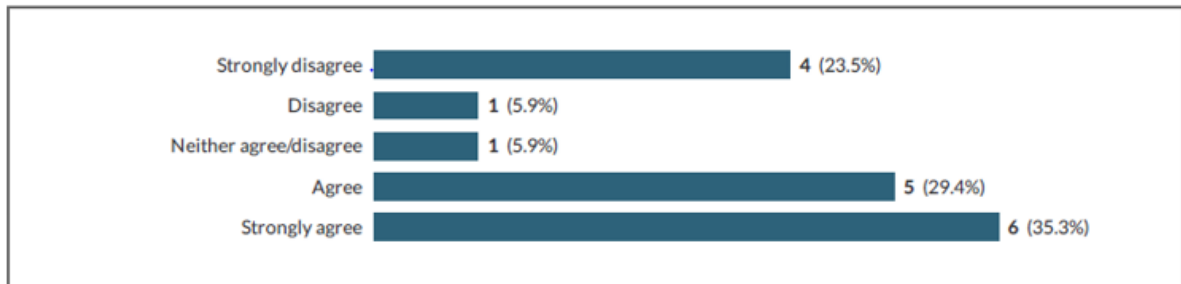
5. Were you previously aware of the term PSRB - professional, statutory or regulatory body?



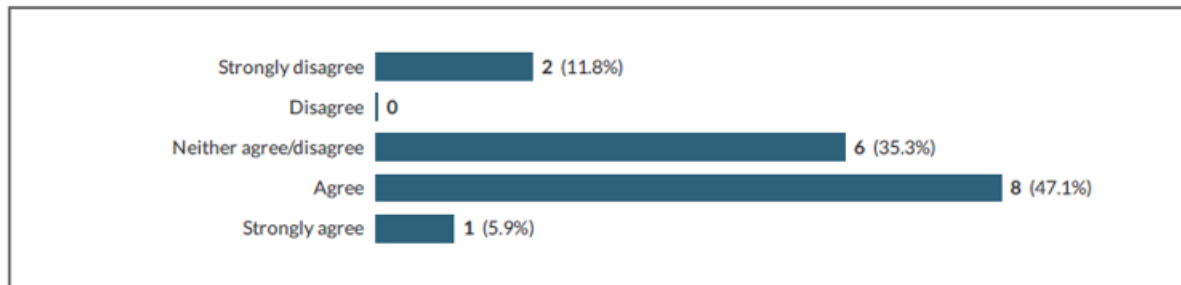
6. In general communication I would describe my organisation as a 'professional body' rather than a PRSB.



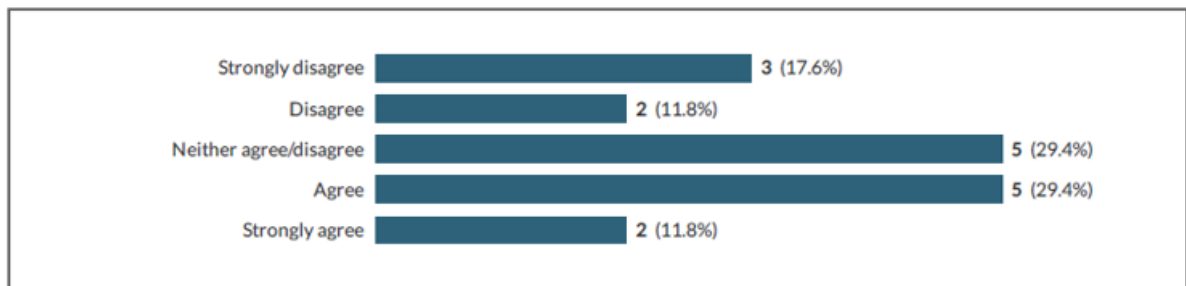
7. Professional bodies should recognise the value of non-traditional learning such as CPD, on the job training, etc.



8. My organisation provides clear information and guidance to members or prospective members on the value of prior learning



9. I know where I could direct a member/prospective member to information about recognition of prior learning.

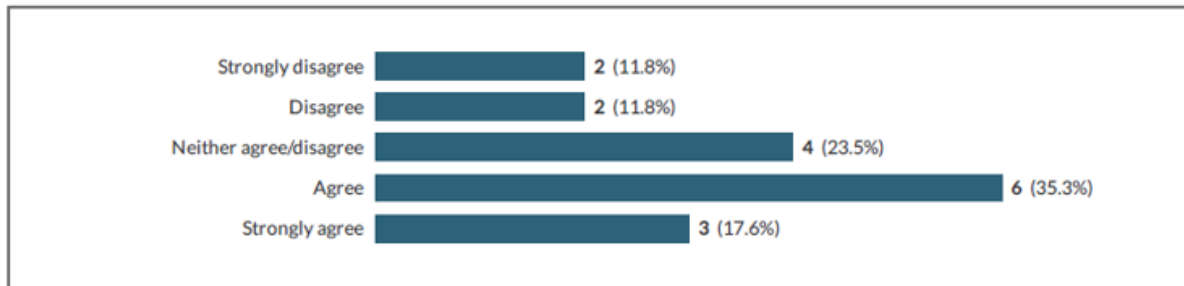


Respondents who agreed or strongly agreed to this statement, listed the following for where they would direct someone to obtain this information:

- any/our accredited course providers/HEIs
- staff at Royal Aeronautical Society headquarters
- the RPEL lead for our organisation and policy
- www.managers.org.uk/education-and-learning/partners-and-centres/policies
- www.managers.org.uk/membership/chartered-manager/routes-to-chartered-manager-status
- www.managers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Recognition-of-Prior-Learning-Guidance.pdf

- the relevant accreditation standards published on the website
- assessment for admission to a programme would be carried out by the provider, assessment for professional registration is by a professional engineering institution licensed by Engineering Council so I would direct as applicable; alternatively to UK-ENIC [UK National Information Centre for the recognition and evaluation of international qualifications and skills].

10. I know where to find out more information about recognition of prior learning.



Respondents who agreed or strongly agreed to this statement provided the following for where they would direct someone to obtain this information:

- Advance HE
- Engineering Council Registration Code of Practice
- Google
- HEI websites
- Ofqual [Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (in England)]
- OfS [Office for Students - the independent regulator of higher education in England]
- 'our' policy/website - two respondents
- QAA
- SEEC [a network of UALL (Universities Association for Lifelong Learning)]
- SPA [Supporting Professionalism in Admissions].

A summary report of the survey responses has been shared directly with respondents who requested feedback from the survey and with the QAA PSRB Forum.

QAAS extends its thanks to the respondents from these organisations:

- British Acupuncture Accreditation Board
- British Computing Society
- Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA)
- Chartered Management Institute
- Chartered Society of Designers
- CILIP (the library and information association)
- Engineering Council
- Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW)
- Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC)
- Royal Aeronautical Society
- Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS)
- Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)
- The British Psychological Society.

Scan of professional body websites

A scan of professional body websites was undertaken to determine the ease by which RPL information can be found by members, prospective members or other interested parties. 30 professional bodies were chosen, covering a range of both UK-wide and Scottish organisations. From the home pages of the professional body websites, 'RPL' was typed into the search facility. Subsequent search terms were 'APL' and 'prior learning', respectively. When one search returned relevant results, no further searches were made. Where the search provided links, these were followed to check whether RPL information was accessible. If RPL was found, no further links were followed. Where numerous links were returned from the search, those appearing to be the most relevant were followed from no more than the first two pages of results or a maximum of 10 links.

The results of this scan are:

- 10 out of 30 searches for RPL resulted in some relevant information; four of these organisations' websites gave information for providers of accredited programmes
- three searches for APL were positive - one website provided information about programme accreditation and the other had member information which was unable to be read because it was password protected
- three PSRBs provided information about prior learning - one of these returned 1041 search results - 10 of the links were followed but did not provide any relevant RPL information.

Summary

The survey results indicate that RPL is valued by professional bodies. The survey findings indicate that multiple terms are in use for RPL including accreditation of prior learning (APL) and variations including experiential (RPEL, APEL) and certificated learning (RPCL, APCL). This may lead to confusion and result in missed opportunities for having skills recognised, individuals missing out on professional recognition or having to repeat learning that has already been achieved.

While some professional bodies provide clear and comprehensive RPL information, the scan indicates that difficulties are faced by some individuals trying to find out about RPL opportunities related to professional body membership and recognition.

These findings will be used to support the updating of the RPL Framework. The Framework will be published on the [QAAS website](#) during 2022 at which time it will replace its 2014 predecessor.

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