

Developing Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

The Role of RPL in delivering on the National Skills Strategy Upskilling Objectives

April 2011



1. Defining RPL
2. Benefits of RPL – International Evidence
3. RPL and the National Skills Strategy
4. The potential market for RPL in Ireland
5. RPL infrastructure and practice in Ireland
6. Expenditure and Costs of RPL – International Evidence
7. Information on RPL costs in Ireland
8. Stakeholders and Policy Objectives
9. Recommendations



- Prior learning encompasses:
 - Formal learning
 - Non-formal learning
 - Informal or experiential learning
- RPL is the process by which prior learning is given value
- RPL can be used to:
 - Gain entry to a programme
 - Gain exemptions from an education/training programme
 - Gain credit towards an award
 - Attain an award



- Request by Department of Education and Skills in context of National Skills Strategy (NSS) Implementation Statement (March 2010)
- Focused on the policy role of RPL in NSS objective to upskill 500,000 people in the labour market by at least one NFQ level
- Other policy contexts:
 - Labour market activation
 - More efficient use of education and training resources
 - More flexible and relevant training for individuals and enterprises, avoid duplication of learning



- For the individual...
 - Avoid duplication of learning
 - More relevant education and training
 - Engage in education and training at the appropriate level
 - Reveal hidden competencies and skills
- For the enterprise...
 - Improved documentation of staff skills and competencies
 - Better matching of employees to tasks
 - Improved identification of training needs and savings on training costs
- For government...
 - Increasing participation in lifelong learning
 - More efficient use of education and training resources

Common features of RPL process



Stages	Definition
Identification	Identifying what someone knows or can do, and possibly recording it. (Personal stage, possibly with supervision)
Assessment (Measurement)	Establishing what someone knows or can do. This is a measurement stage. (This may be a personal stage or, where there is significant formalisation, involve reliance on an external evaluator.)
Validation	Establishing that what someone knows or can do satisfies certain requirements (points of reference, standards). A level of performance is set and requires the involvement of a third party.
Certification	Stating that what someone knows or can do satisfies certain requirements, and awarding a document testifying to this. (Necessitates the involvement of an accredited authority to certify performance and possibly its level.)
Social Recognition	Acceptance by society of the signs of what someone knows or can do



- Skills Audits
- Written exams / e-testing
- Practical exams, skills tests and demonstrations
- Oral exams / Interviews
- Skills and competency portfolios
- Simulations
- Project evaluation

Examples of RPL policy & practice



Qualifications Authorities

- RPL embedded in QA arrangements with providers
- RPL can be used for programme enter, credit, exemptions, or eligibility for whole awards
- OECD thematic review of RPL in Ireland (2007)

Further education and training

- FETAC RPL pilot project
- NALA www.writeon.ie initiative
- Fáilte Ireland
- Teagasc
- Progression pathways to higher education

Higher Education

- HE providers have RPL processes in place
- Roadmap for Employment-Academic Partnerships (REAP)
- IUA Framework Implementation Network

RPL and the workplace

- FÁS Líonra Project
- Skillnets RPL task group
- IBEC Retail Skillnet
- Fáilte Ireland
- CIF
- Thomas Crosbie
- Citizens Advice Bureau

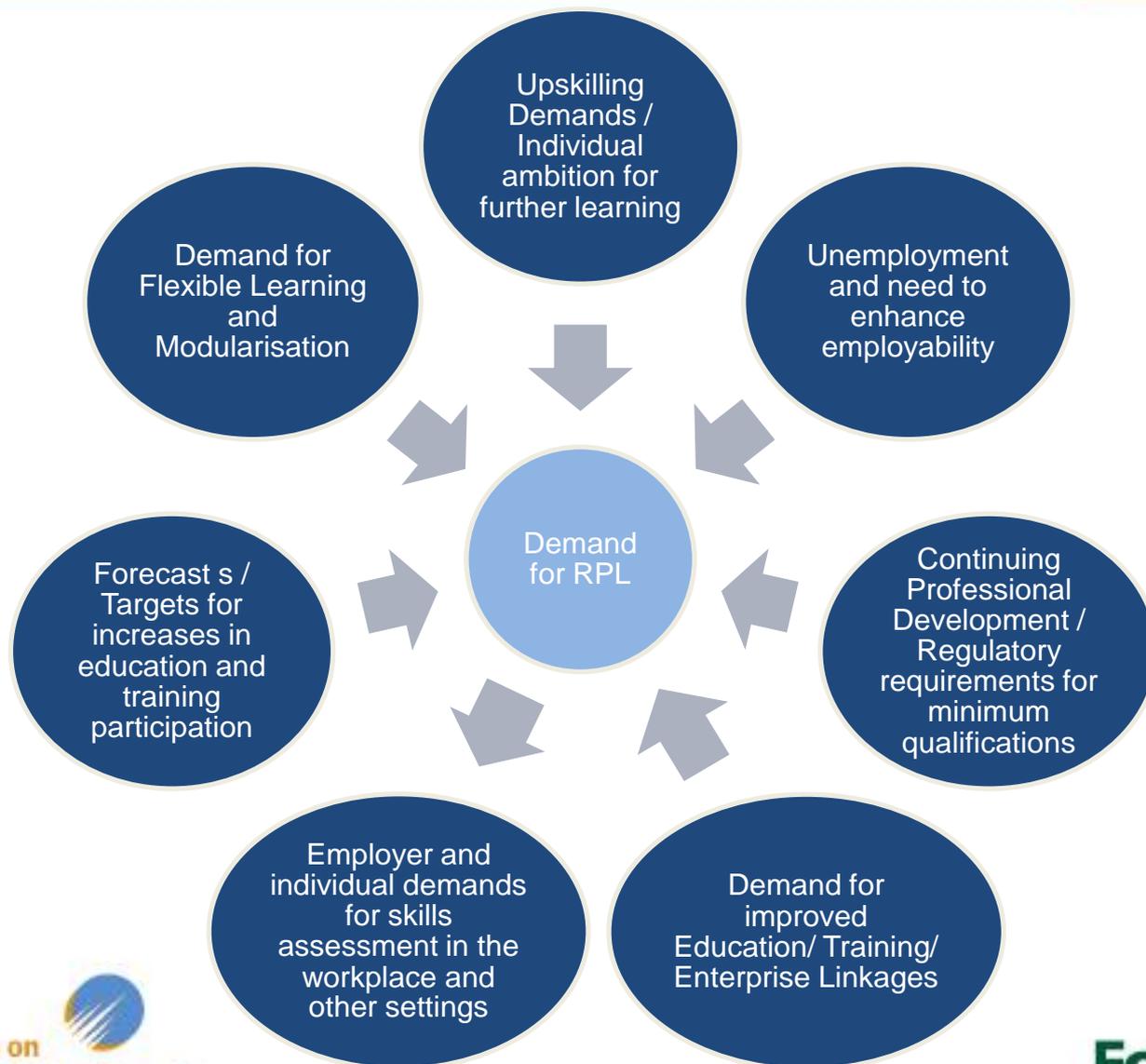


- Evidence on costs difficult to collate
- RPL as part of the fee structure in many countries
- Different funding arrangements internationally – State/Employers/Unions/Individuals
- Cost depends highly on RPL instrument/procedure and time/resources required
- OECD review – Costs in Ireland range from approx €600 to €2,000 per RPL procedure
- Average cost est. €1,250 in Ireland – broadly in line with Netherlands
- Costs can decrease over time

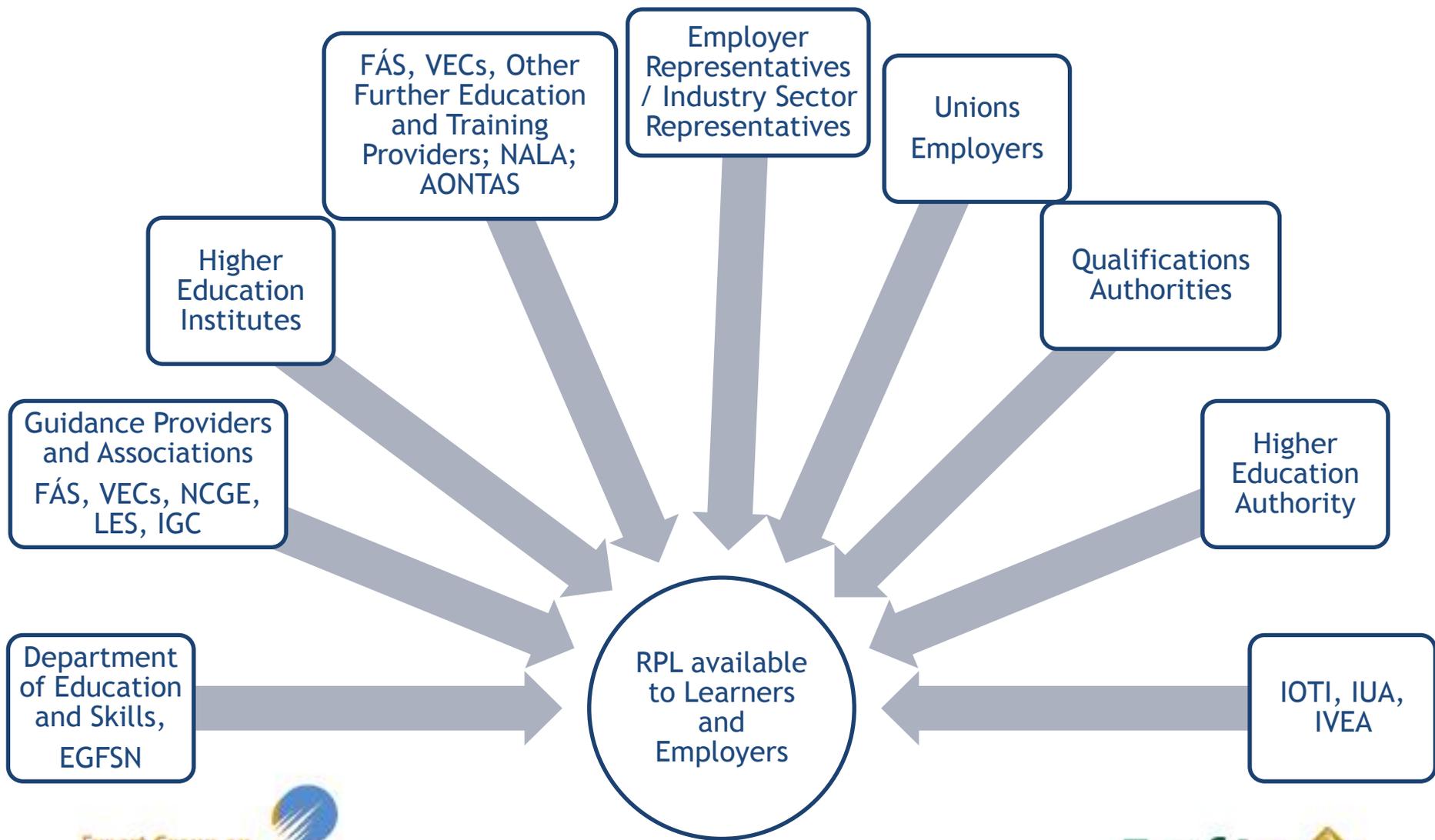
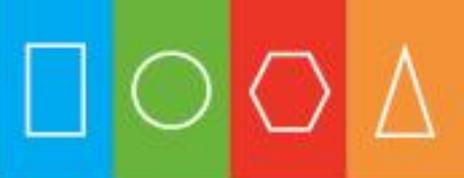


- Other countries e.g. Netherlands have mainstream RPL system
- Features of a 'mainstream' system
 - One-Stop-Shops for RPL advice, guidance and assessments
 - Dedicated RPL resources, personnel and infrastructure
 - Dedicated RPL 'knowledge centre' for policy, information and promotion
- Good experience of RPL practice has been built up in Ireland, however, largely ad-hoc or project based to date
- More mainstream development takes time and resources
- Costs can be recouped over time
- Policy and practice should focus on areas of demand – expand on the basis of existing effective practices and demonstrated successful outcomes/benefits relative to costs.
- Development likely to be incremental – focus on reconfiguring and developing existing resources rather than introducing new structures

Demand for RPL



RPL Stakeholders





- Targeted at:
 - No formal qualifications
 - Long term unemployed, inactive
 - Employees with low/no formal qualifications
- Focus on RPL for core/basic skills
- Driven by Department of Education and Skills
- Developed and delivered through FÁS-IVEA partnership in conjunction with NALA
- Skillnets, Employers and Unions to co-ordinate on RPL in the workplace
- Requires support/input from e.g. AONTAS, Guidance Organisations, NCGE



- Targeted primarily at:
 - Those seeking to upskill in a sector with significant previous experience
 - Upskilling due to regulatory/mandatory qualification requirements
 - Employers seeking to upskill staff e.g. new technologies and work practices
- Assessment through e.g. challenge exams, skills demonstrations, skills audits.
- Encourage initiatives at sectoral or regional level with employers/unions
- Led by FÁS, VECs and Skillnets under the direction of the Department of Education and Skills
- In consultation with: awarding bodies, NALA; Employer Representatives; Unions; Skillnets and Guidance Services



- Targeted at:
 - Unemployed professionals reskilling to new areas
 - Unemployed persons with significant experience at upper secondary seeking to upskill
 - Occupations with minimum qualification requirements
 - Enterprises with specific skills needs training
- Policy should focus on RPL for entry/advanced entry
- RPL practice should be developed at the level of academic unit/department with the support of RPL officers
- Need stronger sharing and dissemination of existing practice
- Requires policy direction from Department of Education and Skills and HEA
- Proactive engagement with enterprises in conjunction with Skillnets



- QA procedures are paramount and must continue to be embedded
- Need to ensure proper risk assessment and good governance procedures
- Improved data, especially re: participation and costs
- Closer interaction between stakeholders re: guidance, promotion and communication



- In the long term, a structured funding model is required for a system of scale, but only where cost-benefits and successful outcomes of RPL practices are demonstrated.
- Short term
 - Labour Market Activation Fund could encourage RPL
 - European Globalisation Fund could have potential role



- NFQ levels 1-6
 - Driven by Department of Education and Science
 - FÁS-IVEA partnership
 - NALA (Levels 1-3)
 - Skillnets
 - AONTAS, NCGE, Guidance Services
 - Employers and Unions
- NFQ Levels 6-10
 - Facilitated by Department of Education and Science, HEA
 - IUA, IOTI, DIT
 - REAP Project, Framework Implementation Network
 - Skillnets, Employers and Unions