Bord Oideachais & Oiliúna
LUIMNIGH & AN CHLÁIR
LIMERICK & CLARE
Education & Training Board

COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION & TRAINING

Recognition of Prior Learning in Irish FET/VET

Academic Information Centre, Latvia

Presented by Patsy Hogan, Quality Assurance Officer
Policies, Procedures, Supports, and Stakeholder Engagement
Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board

11th February 2026

Co-funded by the European Union

Hello and Welcome

- Dia duit agus fáilte
- Sveiki un laipni lūgti

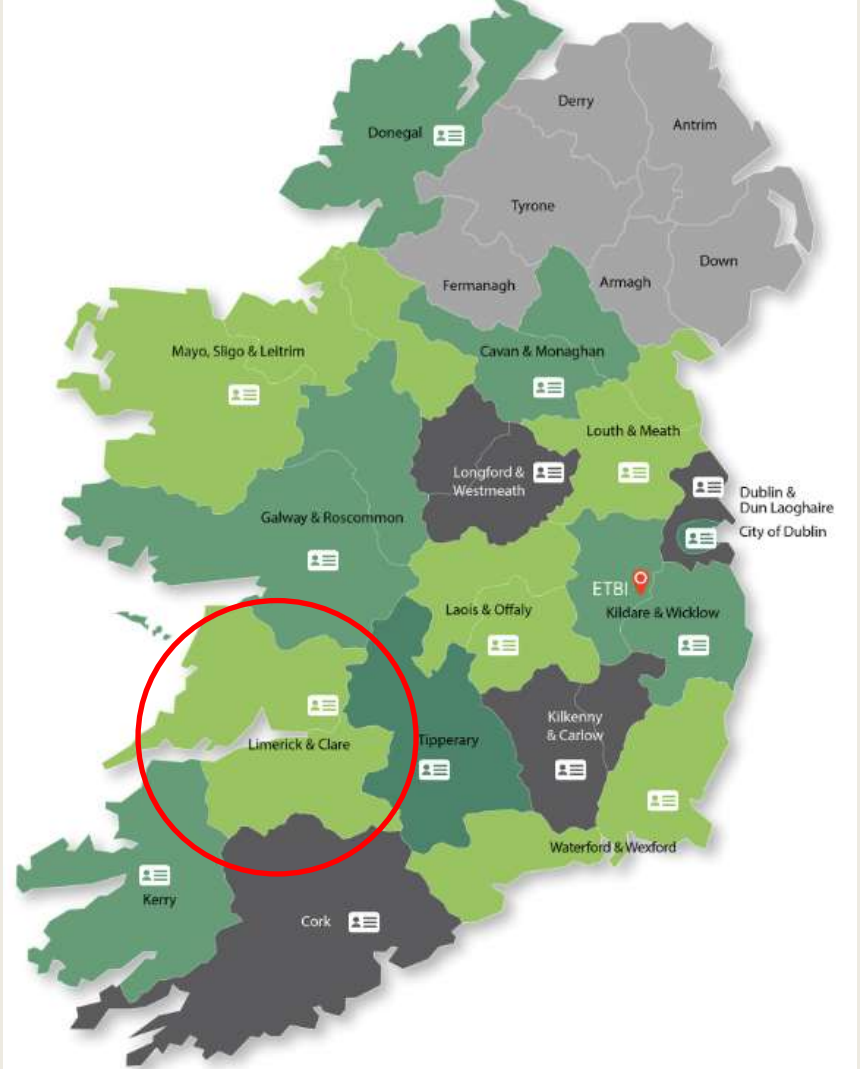
Overview of the Session

- FET in Ireland
- RPL in FET
- Policy to Practice
- Who is involved?
- The Four Stages of RPL
- Limerick and Clare ETB RPL Projects
- In-house RPL PL&D
- Recommended Reading and References
- Q&A

What is FET?

- Further Education and Training (FET) offers a wide variety of life-long education options from Levels one to six on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).
- FET includes apprenticeships, traineeships, Post Leaving Cert (PLC) courses, community education and adult education as well as adult literacy and numeracy services.
- FET courses and programmes are provided through the Education and Training Board network across the country as well as through other local providers.

16 Education and Training Boards in the Republic of Ireland



Bord Oideachais & Oiliúna
LUIMNIGH & AN CHLÁIR
LIMERICK & CLARE
Education & Training Board

COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION & TRAINING

RPL in FET

- Each ETB is a legal authority with it's own budget, Board of Management, policies and procedures, etc.
- This means that even though we must all abide by Irish law and QQI policies, we also have the authority to develop our own internal policies such as for RPL.

Useful links to find out more about Further Education and Training (FET/VET) in Ireland

- FET | Further Education and Training
- ETBI – Representing ETBs
- Solas | Learning Works
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland
- Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
- Home | Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board

Limerick and Clare ETB

- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) | College of FET
- Quality Assurance | College of FET

The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

National Framework of Qualifications | Quality and Qualifications Ireland (qqi.ie)

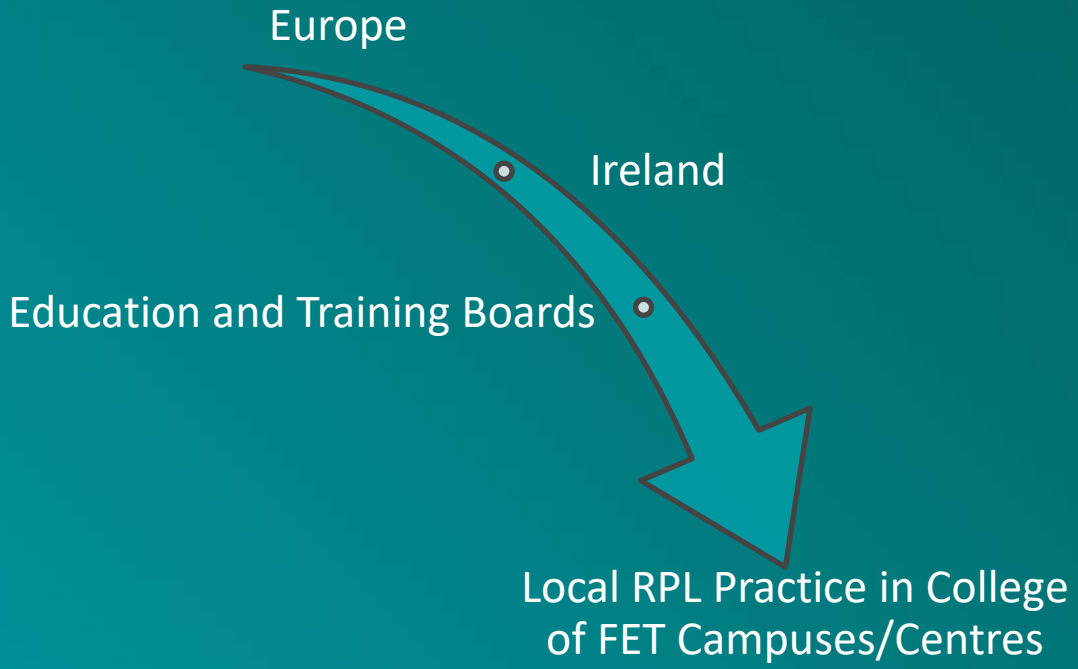
The NFQ describes what learners need to know, understand and be able to do to get a qualification. It also lays out these qualifications from one NFQ level to the next.

Bord Oideachais & Oiliúna
LUIMNIGH & AN CHLÁIR
LIMERICK & CLARE
Education & Training Board

COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION & TRAINING

Policy to Practice

European, National and ETB Policy Related to RPL



Individuals have a legal entitlement to avail of RPL

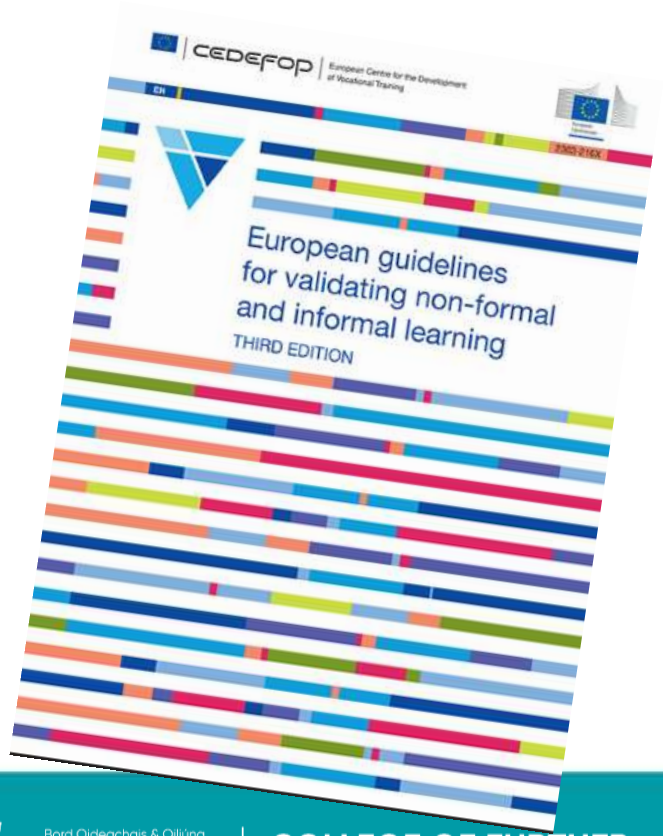
How does policy development at a European, national and ETB-level influence on-the-ground RPL practice?

Setting the Context

- 2012 Council Recommendation and European Guidelines
- Ireland: Skills agendas, QQI policies, SOLAS FET Strategy 2020 – 2024, etc.
- Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board's response to national policy development:
  - College of FET Strategic Framework 2022 - 2025
  - RPL Assessment Procedure and College of FET policies
  - RPL Projects
  - Embedding RPL into Provision and Practice.

European Guidelines for Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning

In May 2023 Cedefop (the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training) published the third edition of their **European Guidelines for Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning**.



- The purpose of the guidelines is to share experiences and to support mutual learning between those involved in the development and implementation of validation arrangements in Europe.

- The guidelines **put the individual at the centre** and provide insights into provision and methodologies and how the process can be coordinated and carried out.

Cedefop (2023). European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop reference series; No 124. http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/389827
European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (europa.eu)

Definition of RPL

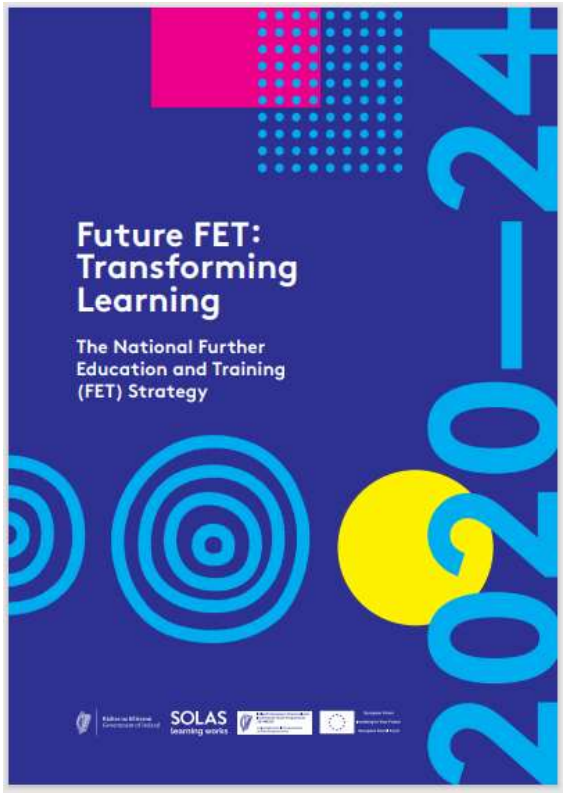
‘RPL incorporates prior formal, informal and non-formal learning and that which is validated within the context of a specified destination award from level one to ten on the National Framework of Qualifications.’

European Commission, CEDEFOP, ICF International; 2014 p.3

Cedefop (2025). *Cedefop information hub on validation of non-formal and informal learning*. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/validation-non-formal-informal-learning.

SOLAS FET Strategy 2020 – 2024

- 6.3 Targeting Priority Cohorts
  - **…..ensuring that recognition of prior learning plays a more prominent role.**
- 7.2 Pathways within FET
  - **This should encompass strong support for recognition of prior learning….**
- 7.4 Facilitating Lifelong Pathways
  - **….models that have been piloted should now be mainstreamed…**



College of FET Strategic Framework 2022 – 2025

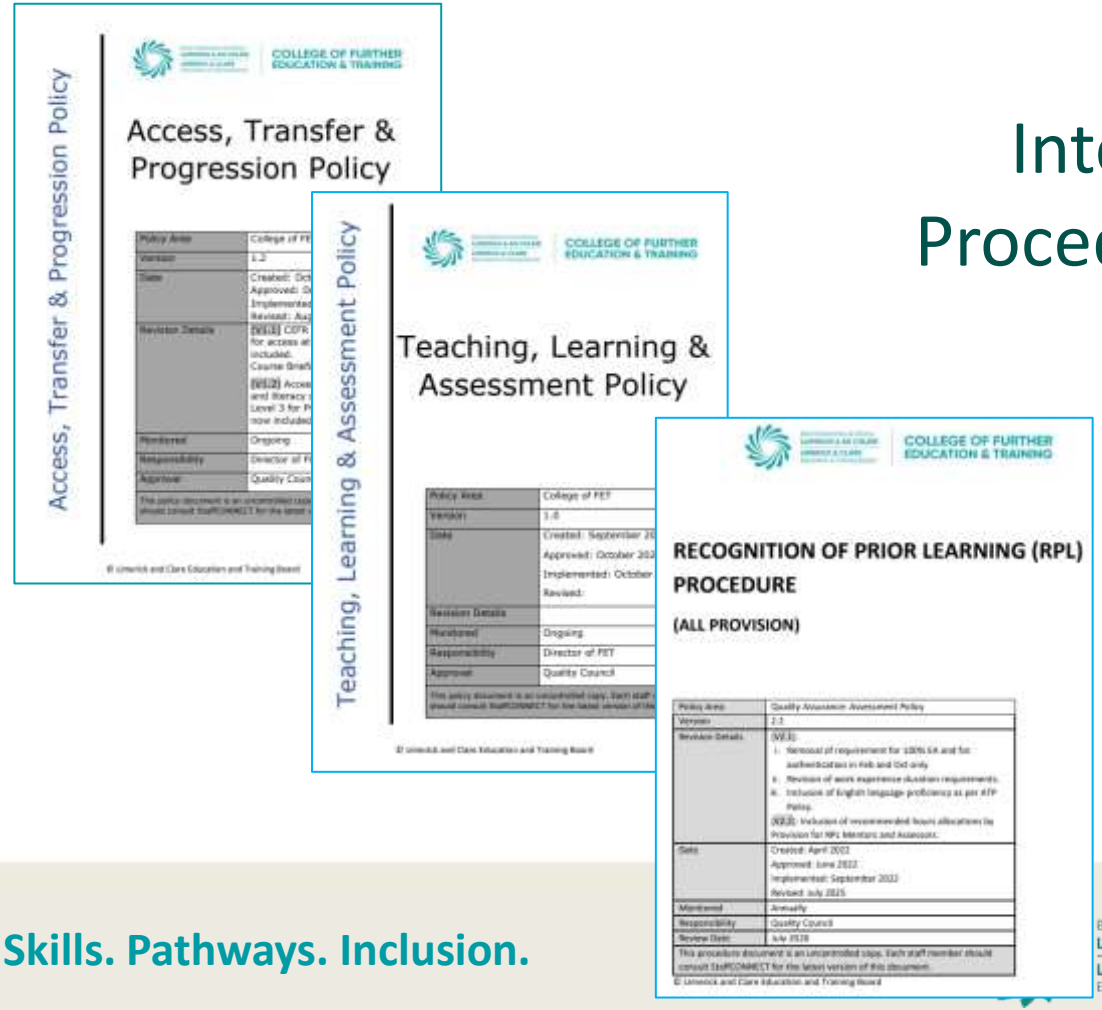
Priority 1: Learner-Centred Approach

1.7: Continue to develop mechanisms to recognise prior learning and certify experiential learning.

Priority 2: Staffing

2.7: Explore the area of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to identify and certify the range of staff skills and competencies.

[Framework | College of FET]



Internal Policies and Procedures Related to RPL

Who is Involved?

- RPL Applicant
  - Anyone who applies to an education provider for RPL
  - It is the applicant's responsibility to gather and present the evidence required for assessment according to the instructions given by the RPL Mentor
- RPL Mentor
  - Guide and support the applicant through the RPL process and assist the applicant with the gathering of evidence that is consistent with the award standard
- RPL Assessor
  - Grade submitted assessment evidence in accordance with Quality Assurance procedures and the award standard
- Quality Assurance
  - Develop and maintain RPL procedures and processes in line **with existing ETB quality assured procedures**
  - Ensure that all RPL portfolios submitted for certification go through the **same authentication process** as all other portfolios submitted by classroom-based learners.

The Four Stages of RPL

1. Identification

What does the Applicant know?

2. Documentation

What they know aligned to LOs and built into a portfolio of evidence

3. Assessment

Grading by the RPL Assessor; submission for IV, EA, RAP

4. Certification

Education provider submits results for certification by the awarding body, QQI

This phase is also sometimes connected to profiling or screening in a career guidance process (Cedefop, 2020).

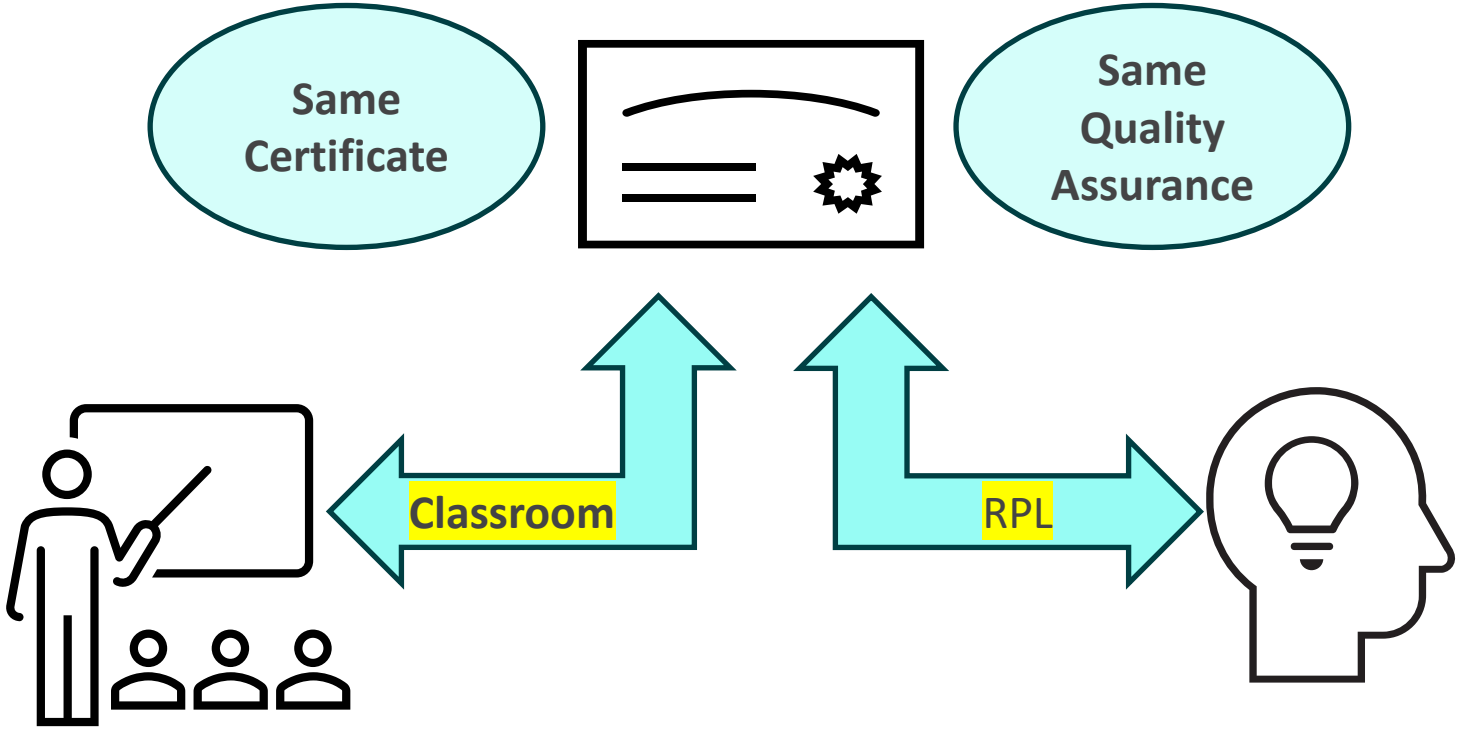
Building an RPL Portfolio

- Applicants will be given an assignment brief(s) based on the learning outcomes of a module(s)
- They will reflect on their current and past life, work, volunteering, sporting experiences, etc.
- They will provide verified evidence of this supported by their RPL Mentor (next slide)
- This evidence will form an RPL portfolio that will be graded by an RPL Assessor
- The portfolio will be internally and externally examined
- Results will be approved by the ETB's Results Approval Panel
- Results will then be submitted to QQI for certification
- All under the same robust Quality Assurance system that all learner portfolios go through.

RPL Portfolio of Evidence

Examples of NFIL evidence that can be used:

- Evidence can come from the workplace or any community/voluntary work, social clubs, hobbies, family life
  - Job description
  - Write-up of experiences
  - Record of tasks undertaken
  - Photographs
  - Samples of documents
  - CV
  - Professional development records
  - Letter/report from employer/manager/etc.
  - References
  - Audio/video interviews/conversations
  - Response to a brief
  - Record of previous certification


Same Certificate
Same Quality Assurance
Classroom
RPL

Bord Oideachais & Oiliúna
LUIMNIGH & AN CHLÁIR
LIMERICK & CLARE
Education & Training Board

COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION & TRAINING

Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board RPL Projects

- Staff RPL
- SEED (Defence Forces)
- National Hairdressing Apprenticeship
- County Clare Volunteers
- Marketing and Promotion Campaign (raising public awareness)
- Locally devised in-house PL&D

Staff RPL

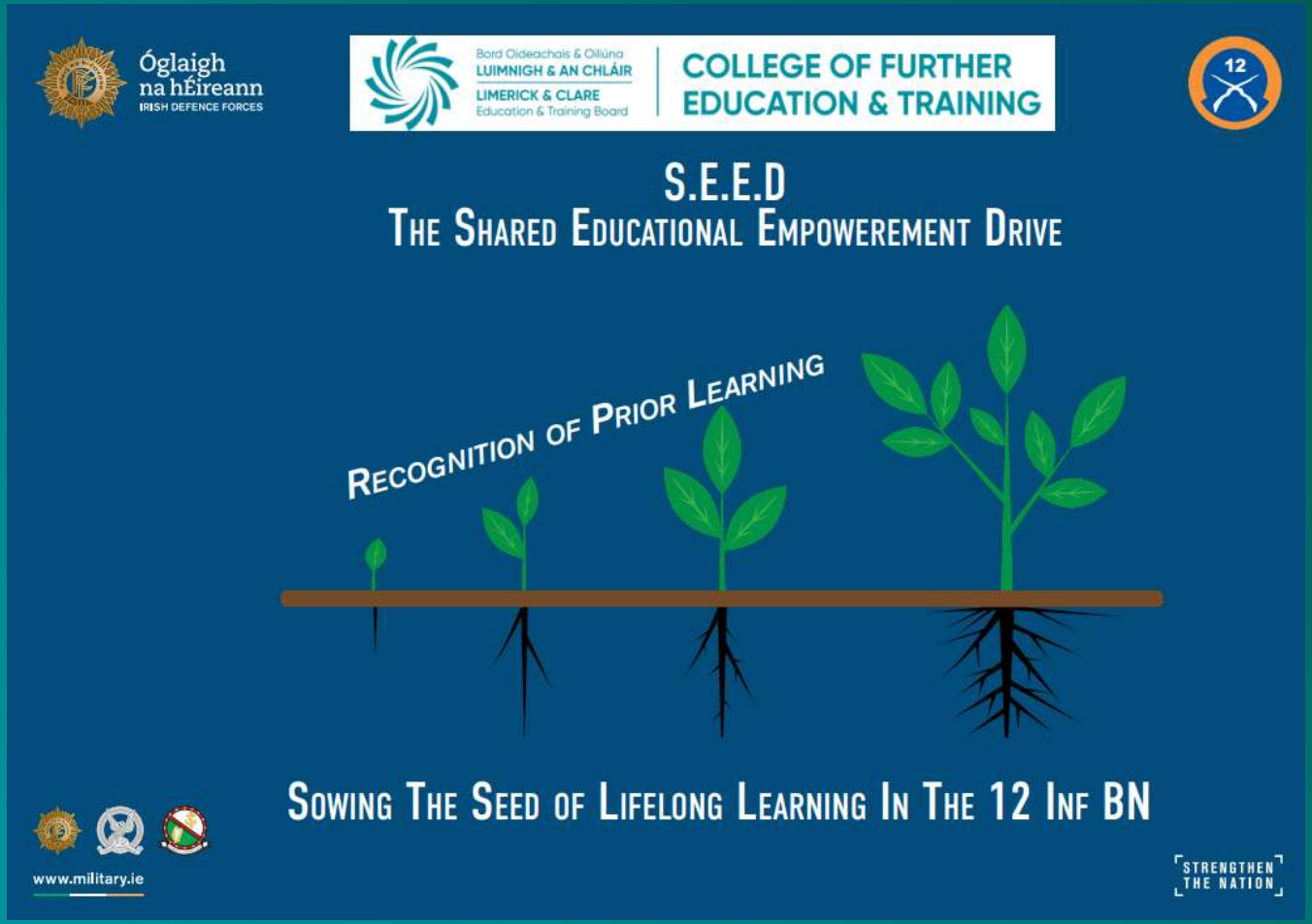
- NFQ Level 6 (EQF Level 5) Advanced Certificate in Hairdressing – 7 Limerick and Clare ETB hairdressing instructors
- Their RPL Mentor was a former applicant for this award who is now teaching in our ETB

(read her story and watch the short video here: Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) | College of FET)

Staff RPL

- Level 6 Special Purpose Award in Tour Guiding – 3 staff members (2020)
- Current project, admin staff
  - Briefing sessions online
  - 21 expressions of interest via a MS Form
  - Currently in progress with 12 staff
- RPL is available to all FET staff who wish to avail of it.

Project with the Defence Forces



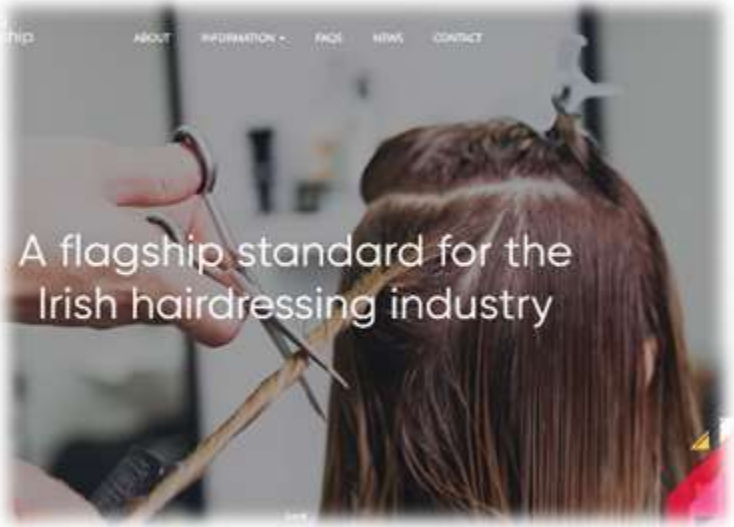
SEED

- TOBAR was focussed on members about to retire. SEED is open to all members who have achieved skills through membership of the Defence Forces and professional development
- Link with Commanding Officer is crucial
- First cohort finished in late 2024
  - Work Experience level 5 – three achieved certification
  - Work Experience level 6 – six achieved certification
- Members being overseas can be an issue.

Óglaigh na hÉireann
IRISH DEFENCE FORCES

RPL and the National Hairdressing Apprenticeship

- The National Hairdressing Apprenticeship programme was validated by QQI in September 2019
  - www.hairdressingapprenticeship.ie
- NFQ Level 6 (EQF Level 5)
  Advanced Certificate in Hairdressing
- RPL of this award is a good practice example of how NFIL can be recognised in a workplace setting
- This process can potentially be replicated in other VET national consortium-led apprenticeships using the quality-assured processes developed for this apprenticeship.



RPL and the National Hairdressing Apprenticeship

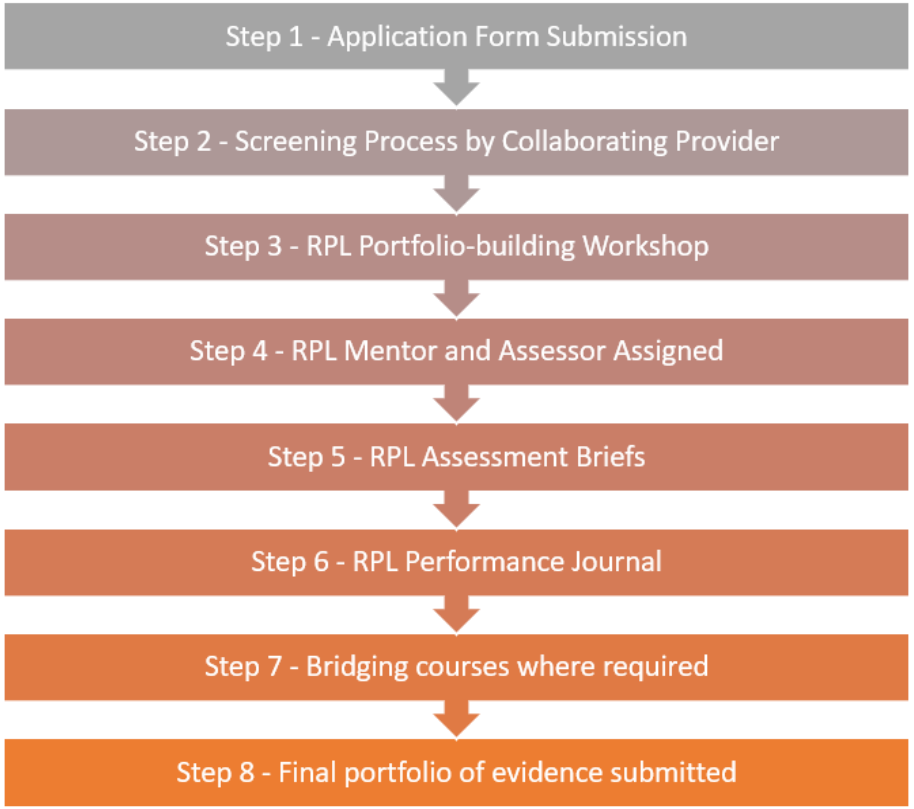
1) Non-standard entry into Stage 1 (where the minimum entry requirements as specified in the validated programme aren't met by the applicant)
2) Advanced entry into Stage 2 of the programme
3) Certification of the Major Award.
   i. Mobility of qualifications
   ii. 100% experiential learning (NFIL)
   iii. 6-9 months timeframe
   iv. Set entry requirements
   v. Full RPL toolkit available for all providers

MIMLOs Vs MIPLOs

- Over the three Stages there are 18 assessed modules with 69 Minimum Intended Module Learning Outcomes (MIMLOs)
  - How could these be individually evidenced?
- The programme itself has 11 Minimum Intended Programme Learning Outcomes (MIPLOs)
  - Could we evidence these instead?

RPL of the Programme Learning Outcomes

- There are 11 Minimum Intended Programme Learning Outcomes (MIPLOs) in the apprenticeship programme.
- The MIPLOs were developed to align with the Occupational Profile of the Hairdressing Apprenticeship.
- The RPL applicants for the Major Award are expected to evidence achievement of the 11 MIPLOs through an RPL Portfolio of Evidence to achieve certification for the qualification.



RPL of the MIPLOs

- If a gap occurs in a portfolio where one full MIPLO or a minor part(s) of a MIPLO(s) cannot be met, then an RPL Mentor (in consultation with the RPL Assessor as a subject matter expert where appropriate) may decide that an additional piece of work or assessment can be completed to bridge the gap.
- Additional work may include a workshop, a seminar or the submission of a piece of work following attendance at a class/part of a course that will address the shortfall.
- All decisions on what constitutes a gap in learning evidence will be discussed with the applicant and outcomes/actions agreed in consultation with the RPL Mentor and/or Assessor as appropriate.

RPL Handbook for Providers

Bord Oideachais & Oiliúna
LUIMNIGH & AN CHLÁIR
LIMERICK & CLARE
Education & Training Board

COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION & TRAINING

National
Hairdressing
Apprenticeship

Bord Oideachais & Oiliúna
LUIMNIGH & AN CHLÁIR
LIMERICK & CLARE
Education & Training Board

Table of Contents

RPL Process for Level 6 Advanced Certificate in Hairdressing 3
- Introduction 3
- Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL) 4
- Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL) 4
- RPL Evidence 5
- Minimum Intended Programme Learning Outcomes and RPL 5
- RPL Process Flow for the Level 6 Qualification 7
  - Step 1 – Application Form 7
  - Step 2 – Screening Process by Provider 8
  - Step 3 – RPL Portfolio-building Workshop 8
  - Step 4 – RPL Mentor and Assessor Assigned 8
  - Step 5 – Applicant Builds Portfolio 9
  - Step 6 – Skills Demonstrations 9
  - Step 7 – Bridging courses where required 9
  - Step 8 – Final Portfolio of Evidence Submitted 9
- NHA RPL Moodle Course 10
- RPL Appeals 10
- Appendix 1 – Extract from 06_d.RPL Portfolio Template_NHA 11
- Appendix 2 – 06_a2.RPL Application Form_NHA 16
- Appendix 3 – 06_b.RPL Screening Template_NHA 21
- Appendix 4(a) – 06_c1.Notification of Provider Screening_NHA 23
- Appendix 4(b) – 06_c2.Notification of Provider Screening_NHA 24

DRAFT

RPL for Co Clare Volunteers

- Validate competencies acquired in the community volunteering setting
- New module: NFQ Level 5 (EQF Level 4) Volunteering for Community Engagement 5S22394
- Project began in October 2025 with 3 applicants
- Volunteer Ireland: National Volunteer Organisation

Clare Volunteer Centre
Ionad d'Obair Dheonach an Chláir

- Initial meeting with manager to scope out the project
- Information session for volunteers to let them know how the process will work
- RPL Mentor and Assessor assigned
- Induction workshop incl. registrations and learner supports
- Portfolio building and authentication
- Evaluation and review
- Share tools with other ETBs.

Raising Public Awareness

- Our Marketing and Communications Team devised a strategy to raise the profile of RPL in our region.
- Public awareness campaign **“Recognise Your Past, Empower Your Future.”**
- The campaign features our RPL Heroes Nataliia, Michelle, Matoko, Thomas and Cristina, who share their inspiring stories of completing RPL and transforming their lives highlighting the impact that RPL can have on someone's life.

Our RPL Heroes

RPL has completely transformed my life and that of my family. I am now employed in a job that I never thought possible when I first arrived in Ireland...
– Cristina

What impact has RPL had on your life?

Having recently completed the RPL process, I can already feel the impact in my current role at work. It has made my job easier because I have gained excellent skills that have allowed me to adapt to an ever-changing workplace. My employer was impressed with the skills I had learned, particularly my IT skills, stating that I stood out in my ability to complete the reports on the computer as they are in the process of digitalisation. This gave me a massive boost in confidence as it felt good to have my skills recognised.

What impact has RPL had on your life?

Completing RPL and achieving the QQI Level 5 Certificate in Early Childhood Care and Education has allowed me to progress from assistant to preschool teacher in the centre where I work. It has also put me in a better position to further my studies in Ireland. Now, my goal is to finish my English language course and begin a degree studying Childcare, which will further improve my job prospects.

Skills. Pathways. Inclusion.

Bord Oideachais & Oiliúna
LUIMNIGH & AN CHLÁIR
LIMERICK & CLARE
Education & Training Board

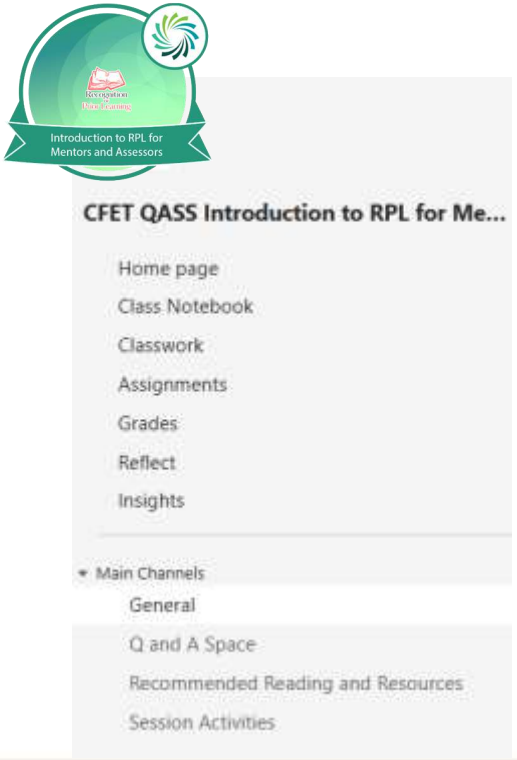
COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION & TRAINING

RPL Course Digital Badge

- Awarded on completion of the course
- Plus, completion of assessment activity

Introduction to RPL for Mentors and Assessors

- The purpose of this programme is to provide education and training for FET staff who want to be involved in supporting applicants through the RPL process as either a mentor or an assessor using Limerick and Clare ETB quality assured processes and procedures.
- 6 x 2½ hour sessions
  - 4 online and 2 face-to-face
  - Learner effort estimated at an additional 6 hours
  - Incorporates activities, assessment and reading time



Aims and Objectives

1

Promote understanding of RPL in the context of international and national policy

2

Promote awareness and understanding of RPL principles and practice

3

Build staff capacity of potential RPL mentors and assessors

4

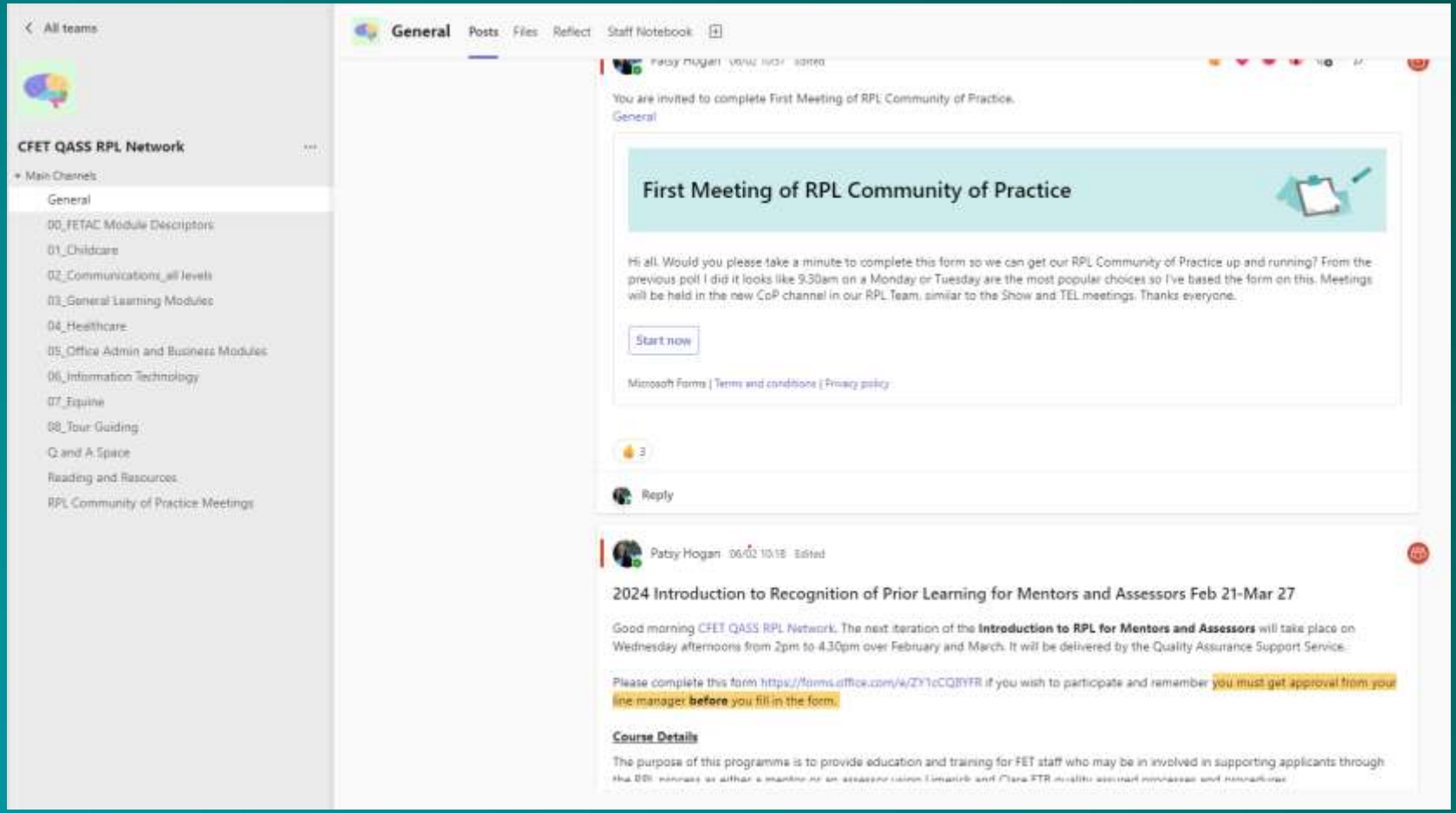
Build knowledge and practical skills amongst staff

Become Part of a Community

RPL Practitioners Network Ireland (rpl-ireland.ie)

- Follow RPL Practitioner Network Ireland: Overview | LinkedIn
- Use this link to join: RPL Practitioner Network Ireland | Groups | LinkedIn

RPL Community of Practice



Bord Oideachais & Oiliúna
LUIMNIGH & AN CHLÁIR
LIMERICK & CLARE
Education & Training Board

Thank You
Any Questions?

LEARN MORE

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) | College of FET

Recommended Reading

- CEDEFOP European Guidelines for Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning: European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (europa.eu)
- CEDEFOP Country Report: Ireland (2023): European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update: Ireland | CEDEFOP (europa.eu)
- Recognition of Prior Learning in Irish Further Education and Training (Deirdre Goggin, CIT, 2017): Prior Learning Report.pdf (qqi.ie)
- Recognition of Prior Learning for the Level 6 Advanced Certificate in Hairdressing | Hogan | PLA Inside Out: An International Journal on Theory, Research and Practice in Prior Learning Assessment (plaio.org)
- Recognition of Prior Learning in Further Education and Training (FET) in Ireland | Magee | PLA Inside Out: An International Journal on Theory, Research and Practice in Prior Learning Assessment (plaio.org)

References

EU Council (2012) *Recommendation number (2012/C 398/01) EU COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.* Available from https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2012:398:0001:0005:EN:PDF [accessed 14 Jan 2025]

Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board (2017). Available from https://collegeofFET.ie/our-courses/quality-assurance/ [accessed 14 Jan 2026]

Cedefop, *European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/389827

Hawley-Woodall, J. (2024). European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update: Ireland. European Commission and Cedefop. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/european-inventory-validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning-2023-update-Ireland

Bord Oideachais & Oiliúna
LUIMNIGH & AN CHLÁIR
LIMERICK & CLARE
Education & Training Board

COLLEGE OF FURTHER EDUCATION & TRAINING

Patsy Hogan
Quality Assurance Officer
Policies, Procedures, Supports and Stakeholder Engagement

Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board
College of Further Education and Training, Ennis Campus

patsy.hogan@lcetb.ie

Skills. Pathways. Inclusion.