



Implementation of RPL in higher education

Marin Gross
Tallinn University
marin@tlu.ee

SRHE 2010



Recognition of prior learning (RPL)

- **Recognition of prior learning (RPL)** is a process through which learning achieved **outside** formal education systems is assessed and recognized for academic purposes.
- The concept of **RPL** values learning despite the place or time learning has been acquired.



Recognition of prior learning (RPL)

- The concept of **RPL** is problematic in the higher education context because the predominant perception of an institution of higher education is as a place where people come to learn or to be taught, rather than one where people bring their existing knowledge for recognition or sharing.



Key challenges for implementing RPL

- The shift from an input to an outcome model of learning
- Curriculum structure and examinations
- What makes a university diploma if the learning has taken place elsewhere?
- Tools and procedures – lack of confidence and currency
- New skills and competences for assessors and counselors
- Quality and legitimacy – social value as well as individual added value
- Cost and payment

(Feutrie 2005)



Methodology and sample

COUNCELLORS

- Focus group interview
- 10 councellors (total nr of councellors 27)

ASSESSORS

- In depth interviews
- 3 assessors, members of experts council for RPL (total nr of assessors 9)

APPLICANTS

- Online questionnaire
- Applicants feedback to the RPL process
- 23 applicants

STUDENTS

- Online questionnaire
- Awareness of RPL process
- 366 students (total nr of students 8962)

ACADEMICS

- Online questionnaire
- 41 academics (total approx. 600)

- Data has been collected in 2009/2010 academic year and still continues.
- Data has been analyzed qualitatively.



RPL – what is that?

- 57% of the students don't know what RPL is. Only 12% of the students had any knowledge about RPL process.
- The applicants see RPL as an easier and faster way to go thru studies. They don't fully understand the process of RPL.
- Counselors comprehend RPL as technical tool for students to gain credit points.
- Assessors view RPL as process of assessing learning outcomes.
- Academics are divided in two groups: RPL as an opportunity for the learner; RPL as HE quality risk



RPL – problems, many problems

- Councillors see RPL counselling as a very problematic part of their everyday work.
 - Applicants are not aware of the RPL process nor their own learning
 - Lack of skills for supporting applicants and understanding their prior learning
- Assessors see applicants problematic as well.
 - Applicants have lack of knowledge about the curriculum, their own knowledge, reflective writing is poor and supportive documents are often not enough
 - Quality assurance
- Applicants find RPL process too complex and don't understand various parts of the process (eg counselling, assessment).



RPL – any changes?

- Applicants, assessors, councilors and academics say that RPL brings flexibility and more individual opportunities to the university.
- Applicants say that different sources of knowledge might be recognized in university if you as an applicant can put that knowledge in the form that university expects it.
- Councilors and assessors mention new knowledge and skills they need for the new RPL related job assignments.



Anything positive in RPL?

- Applicants who have succeeded in RPL see it as great opportunity.
- Councillors see as positive the feedback they get for their job once applicant has succeeded.
- Academics mention flexibility and individual opportunities for the students.



Conclusions

- Overall lack of awareness of RPL process thus it's hidden away in university.
- Attitudes towards RPL are mostly positive but there is a lot of scepticism.
- Applicant is seen as a “problem” in RPL process by counsellors and assessors.
- Learning that is not presented as the university prescribes will not be recognised in RPL process.
- RPL is seen as a technicality and the full potential of the process is not used in the university.
- RPL implementation is university led and thus is concerned with quality assurance issues and fitting the RPL to the existing systems. Learning and learners as central for RPL process are not present in implementation and are rather seen problematic.



THIS RESEARCH WAS SUPPORTED BY EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND'S DOCTORAL STUDIES AND INTERNATIONALISATION PROGRAMME DORA



Recognition of prior learning – “shaking up” university?

Marin Gross
Tallinn University
marin@tlu.ee

SRHE 2010