

We make the road by walking...
the organic development of RPL in Ireland
Horizontal recognition and validation of Learning Outcomes

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QQI

Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Dearbhú Cáilíochta agus Cáilíochtaí Éireann

RPL in Ireland- you can't help yourself...

[Galway Girl – Sharon Shannon, Mundy & Galway City – KamilFilms © Kamil Krolak](#)



National Policy

The 'Programme for Government, Our Shared Future' commits to 'Develop and implement a standardised system of *accreditation* of prior learning taking account of previous education, skills, work experience and engagement in society'

RPL is *integrated* into the National Skills Strategy, the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 and the National FET Strategy

Significant *funding* of national initiatives in higher and further education and training to support RPL particularly where there is a link with *industry, upskilling and reskilling and social inclusion*.

Yet:

- No single national policy or system
- Practice provides a coherent resource- spirit of innovation
- Practice-Policy dynamic- many opportunities and challenges

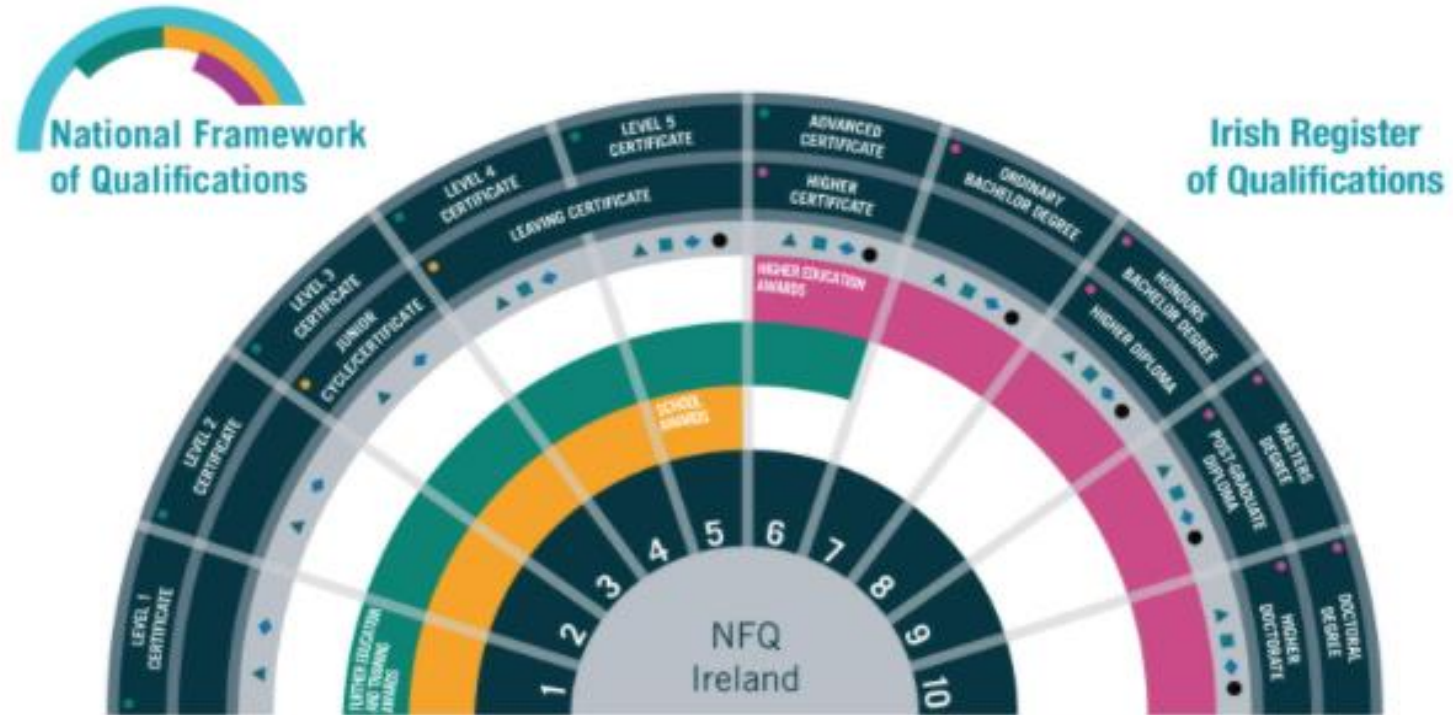
Legislative framework- Quality Assurance- QUALIFICATIONS AND QUALITY ASSURANCE (EDUCATION AND TRAINING) ACT 2012

- 1999 Act provided for establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications- inclusive vision- all learners, all learning
- "Access, Transfer and Progression" describes the pathways available to learners to enter and transfer between, and progress from programmes of education and training, which are the main route to achieving awards and qualifications
- QQI establishes policies and criteria for access, transfer and progression (ATP) for providers
- Providers then establish policies and procedures which include policies on *credit* accumulation, credit transfer and identification and for the formal assessment of the *knowledge, skill and competence previously acquired by learners*, i.e. RPL or validation
- QQI remit includes the quality assurance of FET and HE




Enabling policy architecture

- Providers without designated awarding powers may make a request to QQI for an award to a learner who has met the standards of that award *based on the assessment of previously acquired learning*.
- A University or Institute of Technology can, in line with their own ATP procedures make awards, *including certificates, diplomas and degrees* on the basis of assessed previously acquired learning.
- QQI published
 - [Access, Transfer and Progression Policy Restatement 2015](#),
 - [Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education and Training](#)
 - [Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines](#) (which require that provider policies and procedures for learner admission, progression and recognition include 'fair recognition of education and training qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning' and that the provider ethos enables flexible learning pathways)
 - [Policies and Criteria for the Validation of Programmes of Education and Training which](#) include explicit reference to RPL for the purposes of access, advanced entry and exemptions

The National Framework of Qualifications



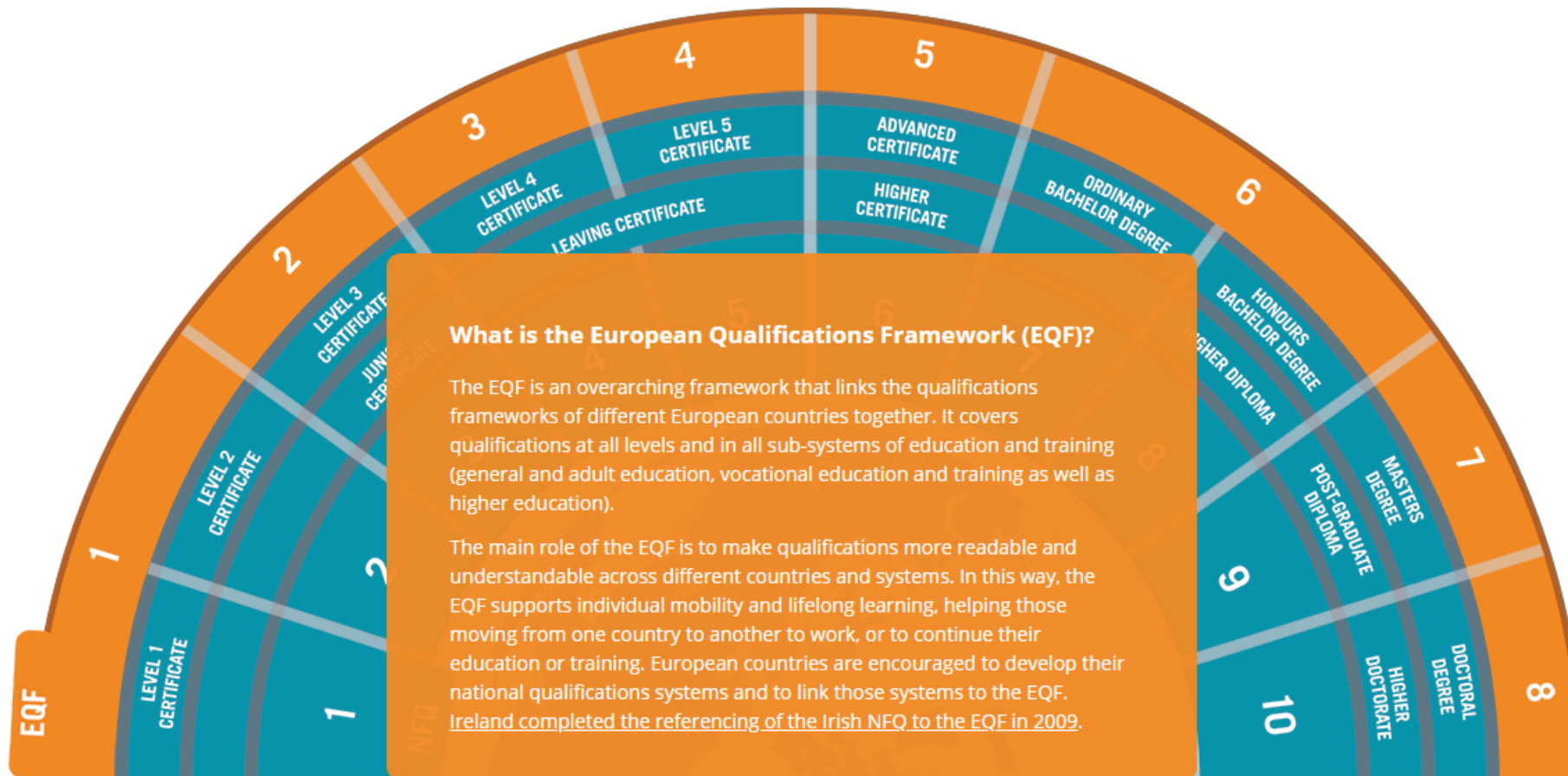
CLASSES OF AWARD

-  **Major Awards:** named in the sub-regions, are the principal class of awards made at a level
-  **Minor Awards:** are for partial completion of the outcomes for a Major Award
-  **Supplemental Awards:** are for learning that is additional to a Major Award
-  **Special Purpose Awards:** are for relatively narrow or purpose-specific achievement
-  **Professional Awards:** these are for occupation-oriented qualifications including apprenticeships

IRISH REGISTER OF QUALIFICATIONS

- For more information on
- Qualifications
 - Providers
 - Courses
- visit www.irqi.ie

NFQ: EQF



Quality Assurance

- Any provider engaging with the NFQ *must publish* ATP policies and procedures, including arrangements for RPL
- QQI *monitors* the effectiveness of arrangements generally, respecting provider autonomy, and conducts cyclical *reviews*
- Policy allows for *RPL for access, exemptions, and for awards and parts of awards at every level.*
- RPL *practice* is evolving- within providers practices, within sectors, and nationally
- There is a *demand for revised ATP policy and guidelines*, including for RPL, with strong awareness of the 2012 Recommendation, EU Guidelines and a desire to adopt efficient approaches to meeting national needs

Making the road by walking- pros and cons

RPL is associated with Education, Training and qualifications

A tradition of RPL with varying definitions and interpretations- a desire for system, consistency, transparency

2014-15: RPL Practitioner Network Ireland

- Support the development of a community of practice, providing opportunities to share learning, face to face, online and through practical sharing of toolkits and resources
- Promote good practice, informed by national and international practitioner and policy perspectives
- Provide a coherent practitioner voice to shape and inform policy development

Active programme of events to support, inform and connect practitioners in policy, management and field engagement, including industry, Regional Skills Fora, HR, youth and community, social partners (outreach)

Share and discuss resources, policy developments opportunities and implications

Significant initiatives

European Projects, e.g.

- **VISKA**- Steering Groups with the range of national stakeholders are an opportunity to build consensus and open conversation
- **RPL in Practice**- HE project examining consistency in RPL practices in Higher Education

National initiatives

- **TOBAR**- national project with Education Training Boards and Defence Force personnel led to major and minor awards over levels 3-6 (EFQ 2-5), development of contextualised systems and procedures, local champions
- **Human Capital Initiative**- National RPL project in Higher Education meeting skills development needs in industry
- **Apprenticeship** programmes- Hairdressing (LCETB), Early Learning and Care (DDLETB)
- **National Adult Literacy Agency**: digital approach- Read, Write Now, Check in and Take Off- in line with National Adult Literacy for Life Strategy

Significant initiatives

A total Business Partnership and Learner development model:

Munster Technological University- (Cork Institute of Technology)- scholarship and national leadership in HE environment:

[CIT - Cork Institute of Technology - Recognition of Prior Learning](#)

Regional developments with **Cork Education and Training Board**- suite of awards, programmes and initiatives

Connaught Ulster Alliance- My Experience digital toolkit

Innovation funding- RPL Regional Co-Ordinator appointed regionally, Donegal (NW Ireland) Specific **RPL engagements with industry**- Foyle Food Group (188 awards) collective process, Hospitality, Health and Social Care, Banking, Retail...

Aontas- Community Education (Third Sector) Capacity Building, readiness for engagement

Skillnets Ireland- collaboration in industry with social partners using RPL

To get a champion's feet tapping...



What are we learning?

Challenges remain – often are complex, and take time to surface-

- Cultural
- Institutional
- Dispositional

We lack

- *Formal* national co-ordination
- Consensus on definitions and on ways of using learning outcomes for RPL
- Integrated data models/mechanisms- not straightforward, expensive to retrofit

We are concerned about but are addressing

- National transparency of Learning Outcomes associated with programmes – being addressed in the Irish Register of Qualifications ([Irish Register of Qualification \(irq.ie\)](http://irq.ie))
- Capacity building
- The development of tools appropriate to level and context
- Integrated personal guidance
- Our use of Learning Outcomes
- How to assure consistency of experience, process and assessment outcomes

The darkness echoing- feeling out obstacles...

When the answer is yes to any of these

- Is it easier to do the course?
 - Is the outcome better for the person if they do the course?
 - Is progression and ultimate recognition in the desired field better if the person does 'the course' completely in the traditional way?
 - Is the person *required* to do taught elements to augment RPL?
 - Do programme participation outcomes favour those who are not time or finance poor over those who seek more efficient participation because of prior learning?
 - Does the person get access to the progression programme without a formal accreditation resulting from their RPL process?
 - Does the evidence for assessment really have to look the same as for the taught programme to provide sufficient reassurance or to meet the LOs?
- there is at best a distance to travel with an RPL policy, approach to assessment and or to credits, recognition or awards.

The phoropter test: different lens, experiences.



RPL participants say...

Evaluation report (TOBAR) is pending (ETBI). RPL participant responses noted

- *Confidence increases*
- *Learning is owned*
- *Education and training systems are understood and typically further engagement is planned*
- *Enhanced value is attached to current employment and roles*
- *The intensity of reflection and the value of time out from the routine*
- *Major and minor awards are achieved*

This is also reflected in substantive HE evaluations of RPL experiences.

[CIT - Cork Institute of Technology - Recognition of Prior Learning](#)

Regions are strengthened. Cross sectoral collaboration and Networking with industry and communities enable e.g. the Cork Learning City Festival

[Cork Learning City - Cork Learning City](#)

Our next steps

Collaborative, accountable:

Context

- 2012 Recommendation, 2016 Recommendation, the European Skills Agenda, European Area of Education
- Post COVID recovery- significant impacts globally

QQI Statement of Strategy 2022-24:

- acknowledges the demand for 'recognition of both previously credentialed learning and non-formal and informal learning' and commits to 'ensuring that learners can achieve their potential within the further and higher education system by evaluating provider adherence to a national approach to access, transfer and progression and the appropriate recognition of prior learning'
 - Significant national initiatives and collaboration, formal communications, strengthening of qualifications system underpinning our NFAQ
 - Review of ATP policy- new wine, new wineskins

How best can we respond in a universe where we learn without boundaries?

