FROM THEORY TO PRAXIS: THE HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS OF SCOTLAND

Prof. Ruth Whittaker

Head of GCU LEAD: Learning Enhancement and Academic Development, Glasgow Caledonian University, UK

rgwh@gcu.ac.uk
Overview

• From theory to praxis: a decade of development in Scotland

• The transformative dimension of RPL

• Realising the dream? RPL in Higher Education

• Application of research to practice
From theory to praxis: SCQF and RPL - a decade of development

2001-2003
• EU-funded project APEL and Social Inclusion: The Learner’s Perspective
• 4 stages of Learner redefinition
• Development of identity in changeable social context

2003-2005
• EU-funded Valuing Learning through Experience (VaLEX)
  • model of RPL for hard to reach learners
  • Key driver of RPL: the Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework
  • Development of SCQF RPL Guidelines:
    • formative and summative dimension, sector-wide

2005-2013
• Sector RPL development:
  • Policy drivers: a changing landscape
  • Role of Networks e.g. QAA/Universities Scotland HEI RPL Network
  • Link to European developments
Exploring the transformative dimension of RPL in Scotland: current research and development

In Higher Education:

- Streamlining and enhancing RPL practices linked to national and institutional strategic objectives

In the workplace:

- E.g. Scottish Social Services RPL profiling: impact on workforce development, learner identity and professional practice

In a guidance context:

- *My Skills, My Future* RPL toolkit: impact on young people in secondary school, young people from a care or looked after background, older learners, people facing redundancy
Recognising prior learning in HE: realising the dream

• What does this require?
  • Support and assessment processes that act as enablers rather than barriers to further learning

• How can this be achieved?
  • Opportunities presented by NQFs to challenge current practice
  • More formative, developmental approaches to RPL: the transformative dimension
  • Flexible pathways to and within HE: from policy rhetoric to reality
  • Requires greater understanding of nature and outcomes of informal learning
QAA Universities Scotland HEI RPL Network

Purpose:

• Vehicle for sharing practice and research in RPL to assist development in Scottish sector

• Raise awareness of developments in the rest of the UK, Europe and internationally

• Link into post-Bologna developments

• Link into other RPL developments via SCQF RPL Network and international research community e.g. PLIR

Programme of Work 2011-13

• Developing guidelines for streamlining RPL processes

• Researching the effectiveness of RPL from the learner perspective

• Raising the visibility of the network

• Developing and supporting the Curriculum Enhancement Theme
# Streamlining and Enhancing RPL Research project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose:</th>
<th>To support the Scottish HEI RPL Network in the development of guidelines for the streamlining of RPL support and assessment for the HE sector</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Timescale:</td>
<td>CRLL commissioned by QAA to undertake the project between April and July 2011</td>
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<td>Approach:</td>
<td>3 Phases</td>
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<td>1. On-line scoping study</td>
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<td>2. Web-based survey</td>
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<td>3. Follow up telephone interviews</td>
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<td>Outcomes:</td>
<td>• Scoping study (separate resource)</td>
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<td>• Recommendations for HEIs: key areas of development and institutional enablers</td>
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<td>• Typology to support development of guidelines</td>
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Key research findings

- Clearly identified need to enhance:
  - CPD for staff
  - Use of Technology
  - Assessment practices
  - Monitoring, Tracking and Evaluation
Enabling RPL in institutions

Streamlining and enhancing RPL support and assessment within HEIs require a set of enablers related to:

- **Policy and process** that mainstreams and integrates RPL within admissions, learning, teaching and assessment strategies and quality assurance mechanisms;
- **Curriculum design** that explicitly addresses flexible modes of entry, progression and delivery;
- **Clear points of contact** for RPL for potential applicants, existing students and staff;
- **Building staff capacity and capability**, linked to the need for CPD opportunities and the increased visibility of RPL across the institution and in staff workload;
- **Greater use of technology-enhanced** RPL provision through VLEs and e-portfolios as part of a blended learning approach;
- **Integration of RPL processes** within related developments such as PDP, employability, WBL and distance learning; and
- **Data gathering and analysis** to ensure effective monitoring, tracking and evaluation as part of a process of reviewing and enhancing practice.
Subsequent developments

- National Streamlining guidelines for RPL in HE
- Evaluating student experience of RPL
- National RPL Framework project
- European context of RPL development
QAA RPL Streamlining Guidelines for HE

Initial information and guidance

- Multiple points of access and modes of information
- Clear contact points

Support processes/system

- Use of VLEs/e-portfolios
- Advisor/Mentor support
- Peer support
- RPL modules
- Centralised resources
- Learning agreements

Flexible Curriculum

- Wider recognition/understanding of RPL across HEI
- More coordinated institutional approach
- Integration into WBL, DL, PDP, Employability
- Link to employer engagement/workforce development
- CPD & support for staff and recognition in workload

Assessment processes/system

- Programme level outcomes/level descriptors
- E-portfolios
- Interviewing/videoconferencing
- Workplace artifacts/evaluation processes
- Integration into normal QA processes

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Improved data capture and analysis
- Tracking of RPL claimants
- Feedback on student experience
- Review of processes to enhance practice
Researching the student experience of RPL

- QAA – funded Network project to explore learner’s perspectives of support and assessment May- July 2012

- Key findings:
  
  - Inconsistencies in assessment practices and lack of coherence between amount of credit claimed and levels of evidence required
  
  - Importance of role of advisor in RPL process, linked to need for professional development and training
  
  - Need to untangle complexities and variances between and within institutions in RPL assessment practices
  
  - Sheer resilience often required of learners reinforces need for more simplified, transparent and consistent practices across the sector
National HE Framework for RPL

- Minimum benchmark for RPL
- Strategic/sector level guidance/principles
- Raise awareness at this level

- Implementation of streamlining guidelines at institutional level
- Update/refresh examples of practice
- Tools for evaluation of Guidelines
- Develop understanding

- Guidance & information
- Resources & toolkits
- Raise awareness

- Guidance on RPL for employers
- Develop resources/case studies
- Raise awareness

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European context of RPL development

- Role of RPL in modernisation agenda of HE within Europe-linked to LLL, economic growth, mobility, meeting skills demands (Europe 2020 strategy)

- Key vehicle NQF developments

- New conception of qualifications?

- Access to RPL remains patchy and uneven across member states in Europe

- EC Recommendation adopted November 2012: all member states comprehensive national systems for RPL by no later than 2018
In conclusion: Application of research to practice

- Policy-driven research and development in Scotland- reflective of wider European context
- Assessment practices do not support drive for more flexible learner journey
- NQF developments provide opportunity to step back and challenge practices that have dominated since late 1980s
- Valuing of RPL in supporting developmental, formative process in range of different contexts
- 3 key areas of development for RPL to become genuine gateway for further learning and development:
  - Exploitation of technology
  - Pedagogical understanding of informal learning
  - Enhance process of monitoring and evaluating RPL processes and outcomes
And Finally..

Role of RPL in supporting developmental process and challenging nature of knowledge not visible outside ‘RPL community’

Need for a rebranding?

‘Learning at Work’: interlinking between RPL; professional learning and development; work-based learning; flexible and blended learning; employability and work-related learning (Harris & Whittaker, 2011)
References


References

RPL and Credit Transfer Guidelines for the Practice Learning Qualifications (Social Services) (SSSC, 2007)


Whittaker, R. (2007) Recognising prior learning in Community Learning and Development using the SCQF. Report 81 Communities Scotland


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Whittaker, R ‘Recognising Prior Informal Learning in Scotland: research and development within a National Credit and Qualifications Framework’ in Researching RPL International Perspectives edited by Judy Harris, Mignonnette Brier and Christine Wihak 2011, NIACE


http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Streamlining-PRL-Processes.aspx