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**Terms of Reference**

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| **Recognition of Prior Learning Network** |
| **Contact persons**  **Raul Ranne (Estonia), Archimedes Foundation**[-**Chair**](mailto:raul.ranne@archimedes.ee-Coordinator)  **Heather Gibson(Scotland)**  **Ruth Whittaker(Scotland)**  The network is coordinated by a steering group, currently consisting of members from Estonia and Scotland. Meetings of this group constitute the formal mechanism for planning the activities of the network. |
| **Composition**  The Network consists of 44 members representing 24 EHEA countries and 20 organisations. |
| **Purpose and/or outcome**   * To help promote and inform the effective use and practice of RPL across the EHEA member countries. * To provide a means for member countries to share and learn from policies and practice across wider Europe in relation to RPL development. * To build links between EHEA countries at various stages in RPL development. |
| **References to the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué** Paragraphs 9, 10, 11, 13. |
| **Specific tasks**   * To work within this definition of RPL: ***RPL is the process for recognising previous learning that has taken place in informal, formal or non-formal contexts: for example, in the workplace and through life experiences. Once recognised through this process, prior learning can be used to gain credit or exemption for qualifications, and/or for personal and career development.*** * To build upon the existing evidence base provided by CEDEFOP and OBSERVAL through the collation of evidence on the use and impact of RPL in the Bologna countries, and through considering how cross-border RPL might be fostered. * To allow educators, practitioners and policy-makers working in RPL to share practice and inform progress. * To hold workshops in which practitioners can share and explore ways in which RPL can: * best support student-centred learning, flexible learning paths, lifelong learning, and widening participation agendas across the Bologna process; * help support issues such as employer engagement and workforce development in Bologna. * To facilitate bilateral or multilateral engagement between countries and organisations on RPL areas of mutual interest. * To link with other countries developing RPL. * To consider the conclusions and recommendations from the 2010 RPL seminar (see below) and how these might best be taken forward. The full seminar report is available on the EHEA website (www.ehea.info). * To liaise with other relevant networks and working groups, in particular the BFUG Working Group on Structural Reforms. |
| **Reporting**  The minutes of the meetings will be made available to the BFUG on the protected part of the EHEA website. |
| **Meeting schedule of the RPL Network:**  13 December 2012, Prague  **Other events of the RPL Network:**  14 December ‘EURASHE Seminar on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): Flexible Ties within Higher Education’, organized by EURASHE in cooperation with the European RPL Network, the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MŠMT) and the Czech Association of Schools of Professional Higher Education (CASPHE). |

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| **Background information: conclusions and recommendations from the 2010 RPL seminar**  ***General***   * While there is a good deal of RPL practice, it remains too concentrated in a small number of systems and HEIs and even where it is most established, it is not developed across the whole sector * There is no uniform approach or single model of RPL which fits all qualifications or situations. There are however some generic tools which can help and which can be adapted for different contexts * RPL can help with and should be considered in the context of, skills, employability and equality/widening participation agendas * The national context seems to be crucial in providing a policy drive or impetus for the development of RPL. This is clear from the Irish and Scottish contexts in particular, but also in the context of the Netherlands. Although the French situation was not represented, it is the case that in France, it is possible to award degrees entirely on the basis of RPL, a development which was driven by national policy concerns and context * It is important to achieve a good balance, between regulations/guidelines and institutional autonomy, between generic and discipline-specific practices and between national and European infrastructure and contexts * RPL fits with and needs the other elements of the EHEA infrastructure and recognition 'tools' * The learning outcomes approach and the use of national qualifications frameworks are helpful to institutions both in driving and enabling efficient and effective approaches to RPL – indeed ESU argued that they are pre-requisites   ***Lifelong learning, widening participation, wider access***   * RPL can break down barriers and expand horizons of learners and institutions alike   ***Flexible learning paths***   * RPL is a useful tool in helping to develop more flexible and varied learning paths, as evidenced by several projects presented at the seminar.   ***Engagement with employers and workforce development***   * RPL can lead to greater efficiency (workers spend less time out of workforce) and greater effectiveness (c.f. Scottish Police College initiative) * Dialogue with stakeholders, including learners and employer/professional bodies can play a crucial role in the development of and the acceptance of RPL   ***RPL processes and procedures – designing RPL programmes and innovative developments***   * It is important for higher education institutions to have RPL policies and procedures which are transparent and consistent * Streamlined and more diverse procedures for RPL are helpful both for widening its application and can be beneficial in terms of improving professional practice of teachers and knowledge and learning strategies of learners. * If RPL is to become more widely practiced and to be more widely accepted, it will be important to emphasise and demonstrate that the same standards and equally robust quality assurance arrangements exist for RPL as exist for traditional undergraduate and graduate provision   Dialogue with stakeholders, including learners and employer/professional bodies can play a crucial role in the development of and the acceptance of RPL  ***Student experiences of RPL across Bologna countries***   * Concerns expressed at the lack of penetration of RPL within the EHEA in plenary were reinforced by student representatives, who reported that the perceptions of students indicated that the practice of RPL was limited to a small number of countries, In this context, the importance of engaging students in dialogue regarding the development and use of RPL at all levels, was endorsed.   **Building assessment capacity and capability for RPL**   * Given the current mismatch between policy and practice, between lofty ambitions and the current reality, it might be helpful for the next two years to concentrate on 'big wins' to ramp up capacity and thereby awareness and demand   **Proposed RPL Network**   * It would be helpful to have an agreed definition of what is meant by RPL in the context of the proposed network, and for that definition to be inclusive * It would be helpful if the scope and purposes of RPL could be articulated in such a way as to bring together skills, employability, lifelong learning and quality agendas * There was broad support from participants for the proposed European RPL network and that it should, at least initially, be led by Scotland, Ireland and the Netherlands. * It was agreed that there was a need to share and disseminate more widely existing experience of RPL processes and practice, but also further to undertake research into the use and impact of RPL. * It was agreed that there should be some scoping of the role of the network, particularly including learners, but also considering whether or not the network would focus on HE only, or would also cover other aspects of RPL developments, such as the EQF for lifelong learning. Areas of activity which could be tested in the scoping exercise might include:   Capacity building; the role of NQFs in supporting RPL in different contexts; collaborative partnerships; impact of RPL on learner; impact on HEIs/pedagogy/assessment; impact on workplace; role of RPL in supporting mobility/transitions between different learning contexts.  **Recommendation to the Bologna Follow Up Group**  That BFUG agrees the establishment of a European RPL network for sharing and developing practice in RPL and to advise the BFUG as required and that the network should, at least initially, be led by Scotland, Ireland and the Netherlands.  **Recommendation to higher education institutions and national rectors conferences**  That HEIs and NRCs incorporate RPL within the development of their approaches to lifelong learning and specifically within their implementation of the European Universities' Charter on Lifelong Learning.  That HEIs and NRCs involve student representatives in the development of their RPL processes and procedures.  **Recommendation to quality agencies**  That national and European quality agencies incorporate appropriate reference to RPL procedures and processes within their own guidelines, procedures and regulations. |