Statutory and Deputed Functions of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI): a context for RPL in Ireland

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European Training Foundation PLA
Dublin, 27 January 2026

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Role of QQI

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Promotion of

- Quality, integrity and reputation of Ireland's tertiary education system (further and higher education)

Ensuring

- That learners achieve qualifications that are valued nationally and internationally

QQI's core statutory functions as a quality agency and qualifications authority (and related deputed functions) provide the essential context for its involvement in the validation and recognition of RPL

QQI Statutory Functions and Deputed Functions

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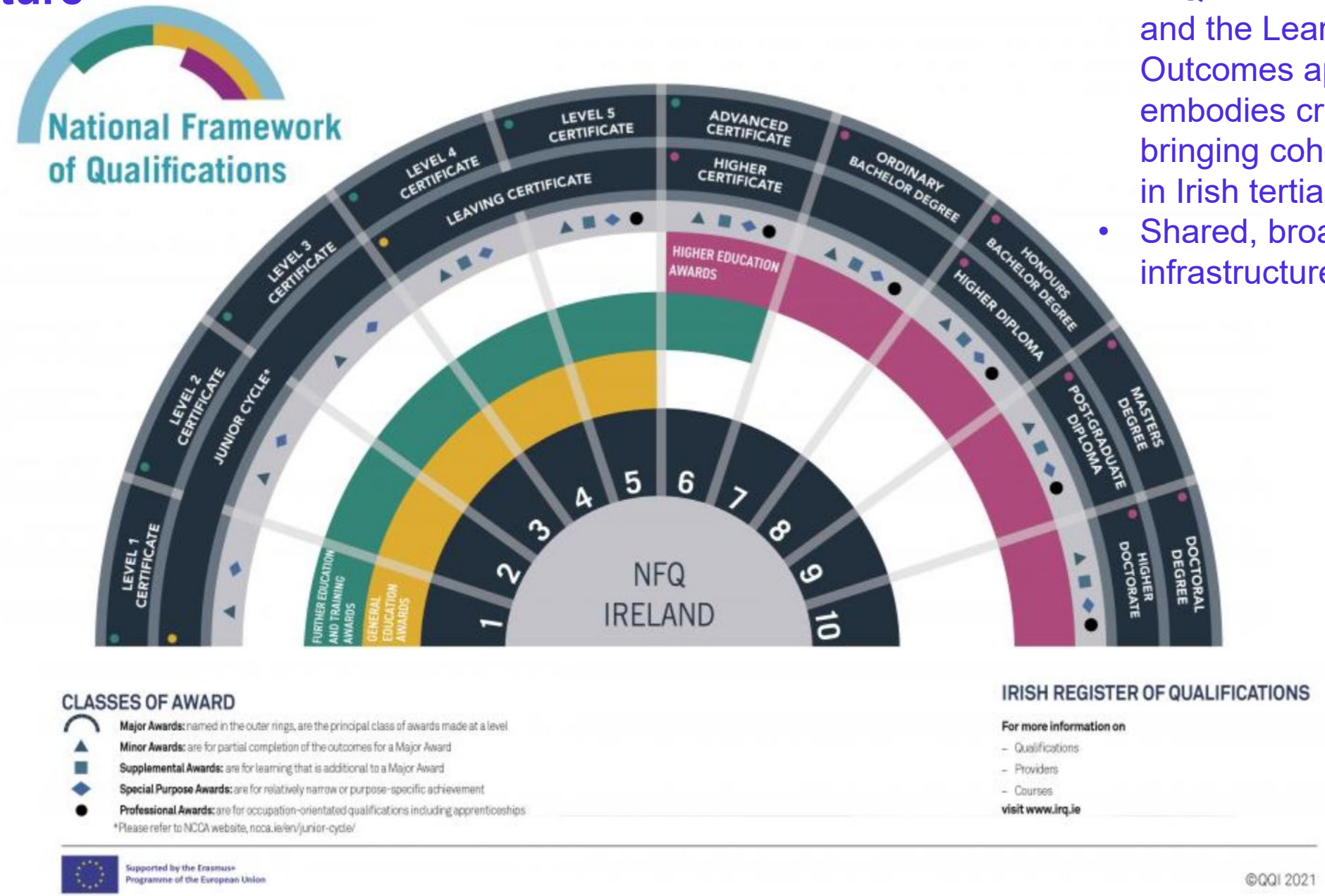
QQI's Role in RPL: a decentralised system

- QQI does not directly practice Validation of Prior Learning
- RPL operates in a decentralised system:
  - education and training providers have the primary responsibility for RPL practice in the context of their own legislative remits; and
  - in the context of their varying statutory relationships with QQI
- The statutory relationships with QQI can encompass
  - broad requirements to subscribe to statutory quality and qualifications' policies/guidelines that may relate to or encompass RPL, or
  - specific requirements that particular sets of providers must meet e.g. providers (public and private/ independent) who develop programmes that lead to QQI awards

QQI's stewardship of NFQ and quality assurance infrastructure

- The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and the Learning Outcomes approach it embodies critical to bringing coherence to RPL in Irish tertiary Education
- Shared, broad quality infrastructure also critical



Access, Transfer and Progression: a broad, policy requirement

- QQI has a function under the Quality and Qualifications (Education and Training) Act to:
    - determine policies and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners, and
    - to monitor the implementation of procedures for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners by providers.
- Current policy (under review) requires providers to:
    - Develop a statement of arrangements available in respect of each of their programmes for the recognition of prior learning, for entry, for credit towards an award and for access to a full award
    - Statements should define purposes for which RPL processes can be used e.g. to enable entry to a programme; exemptions and credit towards an award; or establish eligibility for a full award.

QQI can facilitate providers, through existing validation processes, to utilise RPL to meet programme requirements/award standards leading to QQI awards

- Example: the National Hairdressing Apprenticeship
- A three year programme, coordinated by Limerick and Clare ETB
- Through RPL, experienced hairdressers seeking formal certification can complete the programme in 6-9 months
- RPL associated with this programme provides for capture of certified and non-certified learning, life skills etc, under an RP L mentor

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) | College of FET

National Hairdressing Apprenticeship and use of RPL – particular statutory requirement relating to quality assurance of programmes/awards

External Policy Drivers: OECD Skills Strategy Ireland 2023

OECD Recommendation

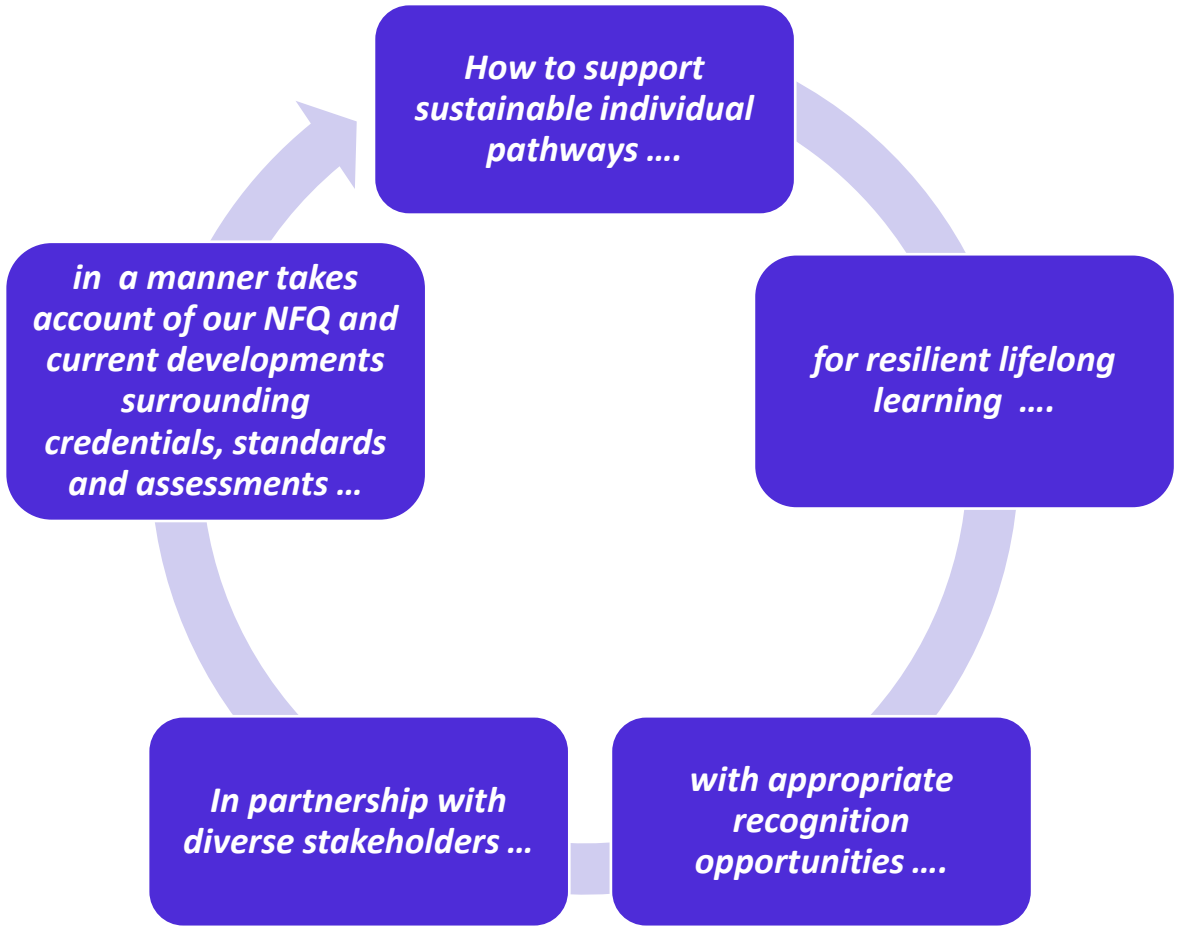
Strengthen the capacity of education and training providers to offer recognition of prior learning, including by establishing national guidelines outlining the procedures and processes of RPL

A national approach for RPL

QQI charged with proposing a national approach to VPL/RPL, arising from OECD review, and grounded in QQI's existing engagements with providers and other stakeholders, to ensure that learners achieve valued qualifications through our National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

A national approach for RPL

Follows years of organic, collective innovative learning and development with our partners, both nationally and internationally.
Takes account of significant progress within formal sectors, and seeks to embed and optimise systemic responses to the provision of services to maximise their ***effectiveness*** **and** ***inclusiveness.***



Key Challenge arising from OECD Skills Strategy

- QQI has a statutory function to ‘co-operate with international bodies on qualifications and quality assurance policies’, and in particular to:
    - liaise with awarding bodies outside the State for the purposes of facilitating the recognition in the State of awards of those bodies, and
    - facilitate the recognition outside the State of awards made in the State

- QQI is also the designated ENIC-NARIC centre (deputed role from Irish Government) that reinforces statutory recognition function. As such:
    - QQI provides advice on the academic recognition of a foreign qualification by comparing it, where possible, to a major award type and level on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

- Latterly, QQI has been examining the interface between qualifications’ recognition practice and RPL practice, and to explore whether it is feasible to build ‘a culture of recognition’ across the two domains
    - Examination not yet concluded, but has potential.

    - In recognition circles, RPL is increasingly becoming part of the necessary toolkit to meet individuals and society’s needs; and in RPL practice, the recognition of partial qualifications, legacy awards and periods of learning achieved overseas blur the edges between the two fields increasingly.

Searching for policy cohesion: the interface between Qualifications’ Recognition and RPL

Searching for policy comprehensiveness in RPL

Established purposes in practice

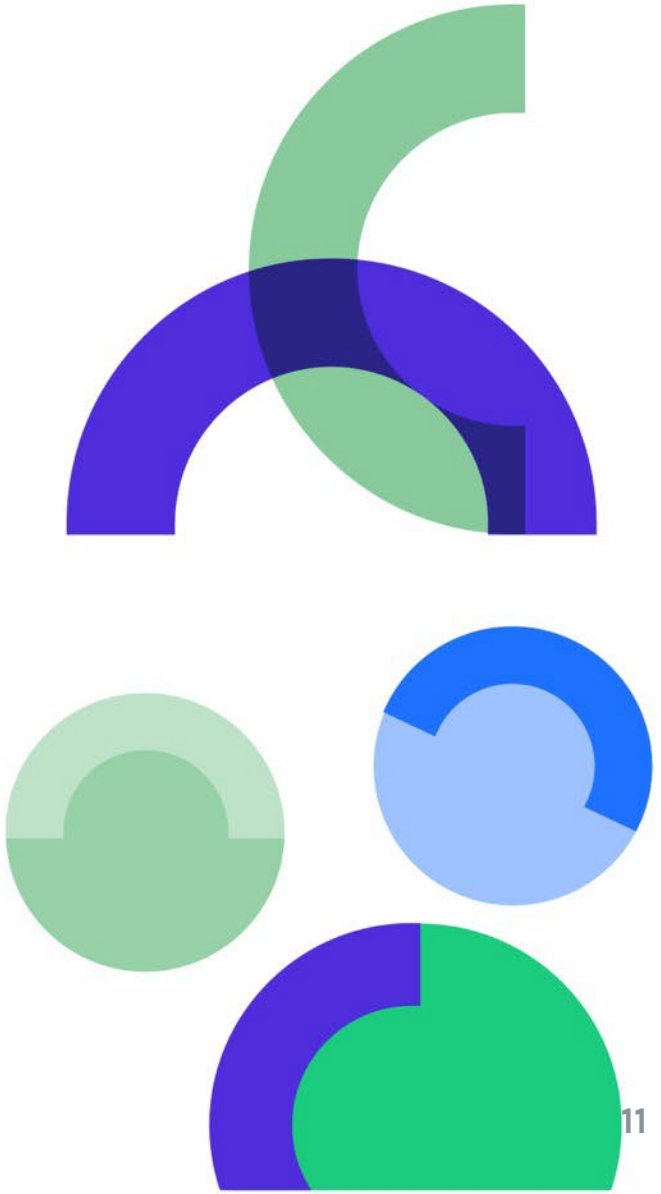
- **Contexts of education and training programmes & their history and relationship to the NFQ**
- Exemptions
- Awards
- Access

Underlying purposes

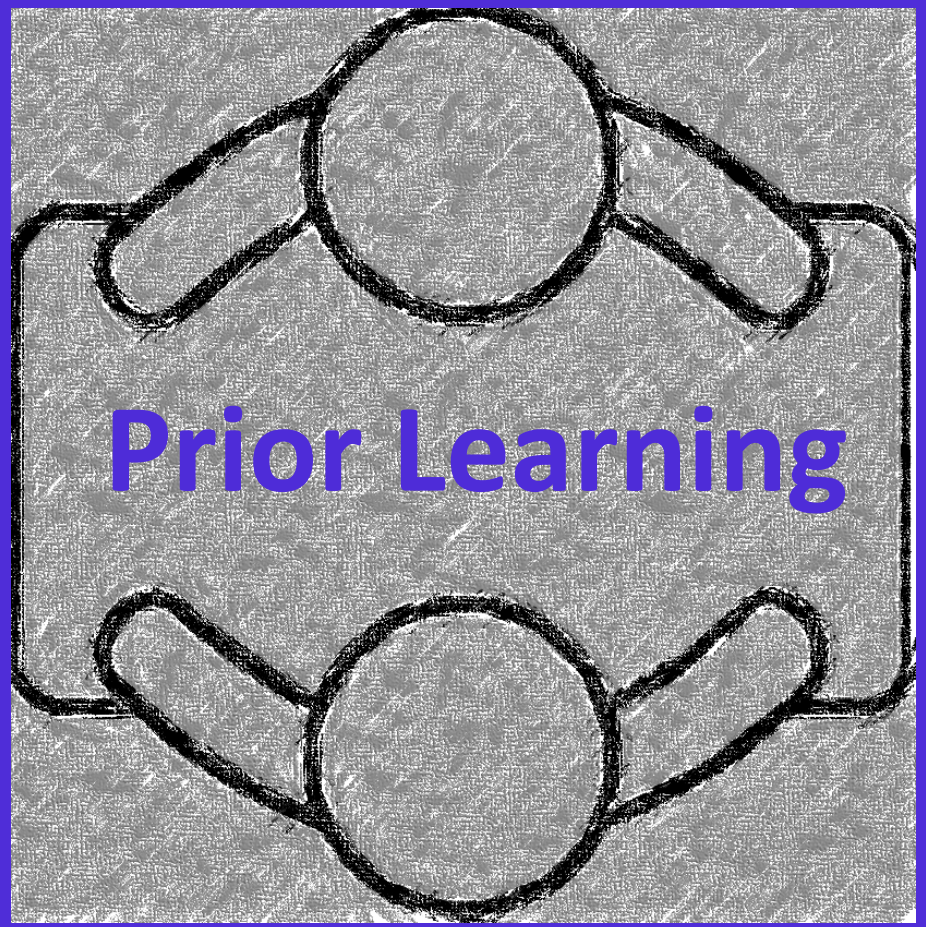
- **Literacy**
- **Participation**
- **Skills pivoting and strategic partnerships**
- **Curricular relevance and foresight**

Emerging purposes

- **Meetings needs of new migrant populations**
- **Meeting needs of new cohorts of learners**
- **Supporting recognition of new forms of credentials**
- **Affirming values of inclusivity and respect in a global context**



Inclusion and participation of key stakeholders



- RPL with education and training
- RPL with the labour Market
- RPL with the third sector
- RPL with communities

Challenge of coherence with diverse stakeholders; challenge of infrastructure

Individuals and Users

Civic Society, volunteering & youth organisations

Business Sector

Education and Training Institutions

Regional and Local Stakeholders

National Stakeholders

European Stakeholders

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Mobilisation and coordination of RPL stakeholders: some key questions

What technology?

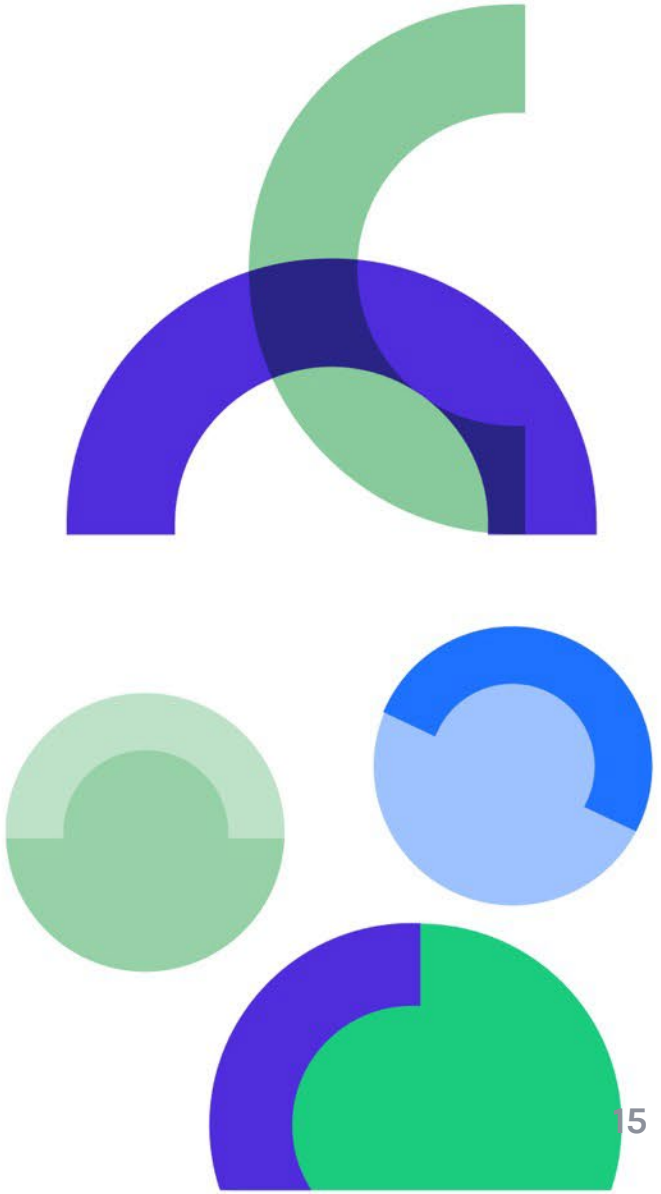
- Digital and open credential systems and their relationship to RPL?
- What can AI do to help?
- Questions of cost?

What supports are needed for students?

- Holistic recognition
- Lifelong guidance systems
- Better and more transparent use of existing infrastructure, especially learning outcomes
- Questions of cost?

How to resolve underlying philosophical and technical issues?

- Teasing out the relationship between policy set embedding transversal skills in formal education, and policy set on embedding VPL systematically
- Teasing out the relationship between Qualifications' Framework levels, credit and transfer systems and validation toolkits
- Funding strategies across a diverse tertiary system and the role of RPL
- Articulating more clearly and convincingly more comprehensive vision for learning and the complementary roles of RPL and formal learning

Conclusion

- QQI's role in RPL in Ireland is complex: it involves thinking, facilitating and regulating
- While not directly involved in the validation of prior learning, QQI's wide-ranging statutory and deputed functions in quality assurance and qualifications touch on many aspects of RPL
- Similarly, its broad remit brings the agency into daily contact with education and training providers who constitute the main and officially designated providers of RPL services
- QQI treads a fine line between its regulatory and enhancement roles, which can sometimes become blurred in the eyes of stakeholders, including in relation to RPL
- QQI is undertaking a major policy refresh of the National Framework of Qualifications and associated policies at this time
- In consultation with key stakeholders, this will help us navigate and further clarify our role in relation to RPL in the next phase of the organisation's development.