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KCETB – RPL experience

Agenda

- Welcome and introductions
- FET, KCETB Context, Tertiary (Martha Bolger, DFET)
- Tour of facilities Carlow Institute of FET
- RPL in KCETB with applicant case studies (Sarah Barron & Amanda Butler)

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KCETB in context

Martha Bolger
Director of Further Education and Training
Kilkenny Carlow Education and Training Board

Further Education and Training

Further Education and Training or FET, offers a wide variety of life-long education options to anyone over age 16.

FET includes apprenticeships, traineeships, Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses, community and part time adult education as well as core literacy and numeracy services.

FET courses and programmes are provided through the Education and Training Board network throughout the country including online through SOLAS' eCollege.

FET courses are provided at levels one to six on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). With RPL offered levels four to six.

In 2024, there were **230,000 unique learners** registered in FET programmes nationally with a total **budget allocation of €1.08 billion** (SOLAS; Annual Report and Financial Statement 2024)

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KCETB Context

Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board was established on 1 July 2013 under the *Education and Training Boards Act 2013*. In March 2016, Training Services transferred to KCETB under the *Further Education and Training Act 2013*

(KCETB) provides a wide range of quality-assured, diverse Further Education and Training programmes through its FET Centres in Carlow and Kilkenny.

22 individual programmes are funded through SOLAS (including Apprenticeship), with other initiatives and services funded through Department of Education and Youth.

The FET Service offers full-time and part-time programmes accredited by QQI, City and Guilds, CIDESCO, ITEC and other awarding bodies.

The FET Strategy, ***(Creating Futures: Further Education and Training Strategy 2026 – 2030)*** underpins the direction of KCETB's Further Education and Training Service.

In addition, the KCETB and SOLAS Strategic Performance Agreement and annual targets highlight the areas of growth required to deliver the FET strategy priorities.

30 Further Education Locations with 16,470 beneficiaries attending a FET course/programme during 2025

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KCETB Service Location

- Adult Education Programmes
- PLC
- Training Services (Apprenticeship, Traineeship & SST)
- Local Training Initiative
- Community Training Centres
- Youthreach
- KCETB Offices
- Schools

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Tertiary Education System in Ireland

The creation of a unified tertiary system is one of the priorities of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

The vision for **"Progressing a More Unified Tertiary System for Learning, Skills and Knowledge"** identifies the need for more diverse and accessible approaches to learning aimed at meeting the needs of learners.

This policy aims to ensure pathways between Further Education and Training and Higher Education are clear and coherent and that any barriers to progression are removed.

KCETB are in a strategic alliance with the SETU co-delivering four degrees that align to regional skills requirements.

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Tertiary Degrees available in Kilkenny and Carlow

Carlow Institute of FET	College of FET Kilkenny
BSc in Applied Health Care to SETU's Waterford campus	BSc (Hons) in Public Health and Health Promotion to SETU's Waterford campus
BBus in Tourism and Hospitality Services to SETU's Waterford campus	BSc (Hons) in Information Technology Management to SETU's Carlow campus

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RPL in KCETB

Sarah Barron, Quality Assurance Manager & Tertiary Manager
Amanda Butler, QA Co-ordinator (RPL Lead)

The Development of RPL in KCETB

RPL Professional development delivered to KCETB staff in 2017 by Munster Technical University

KCETB was part of the Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL) TOBAR pilot run with the Defence Forces in 2018

Pilot enabled KCETB to create robust Quality Assurance (QA) procedures for RPEL

Further Employer Engagement supported expansion of RPL

Suite of resources created to promote RPL

CPD offered to KCETB to train as mentors and assessors

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The Common Awards System

- The CAS system covers Level's 1-6 on the NFQ.
- All awards have the same structure: title, level, size assessment type and grading structure
- There are types of awards that can be certified as part of CAS: major, minor, special purpose and supplemental.
- Each award has listed learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competencies)

Benefits for RPL:

- **Learner mobility** - qualifications recognised and stackable across qualifications
- **Flexibility** - smaller awards (CAS Minor awards (micro qualifications) can build to major awards over time
- **Quality Assurance** - QQI validates all programmes

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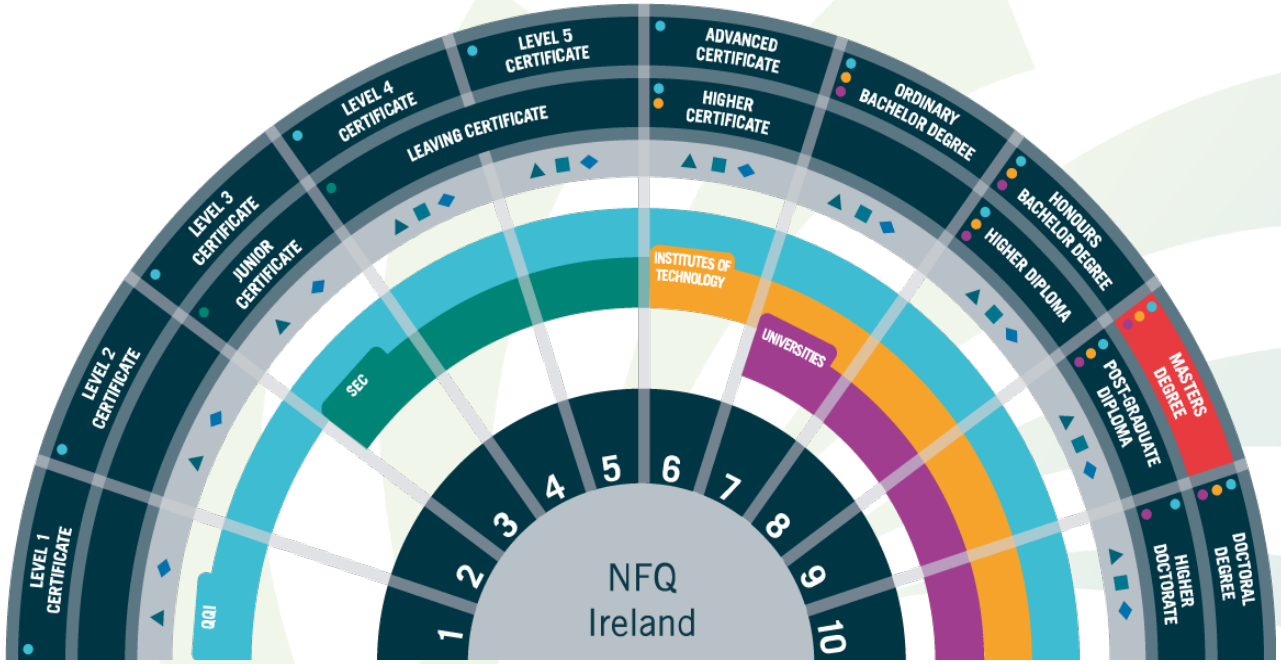
National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

- The NFQ system demonstrated how all the qualifications in Ireland fit together
- There are 10 levels from basic (Level 1) to doctorate (Level 10)

Benefits from an RPL perspective;

- This supports learners to visualise their progression journey and makes Irish qualifications clear and recognised internationally
- It supports life long learning and transitions between education and employment.



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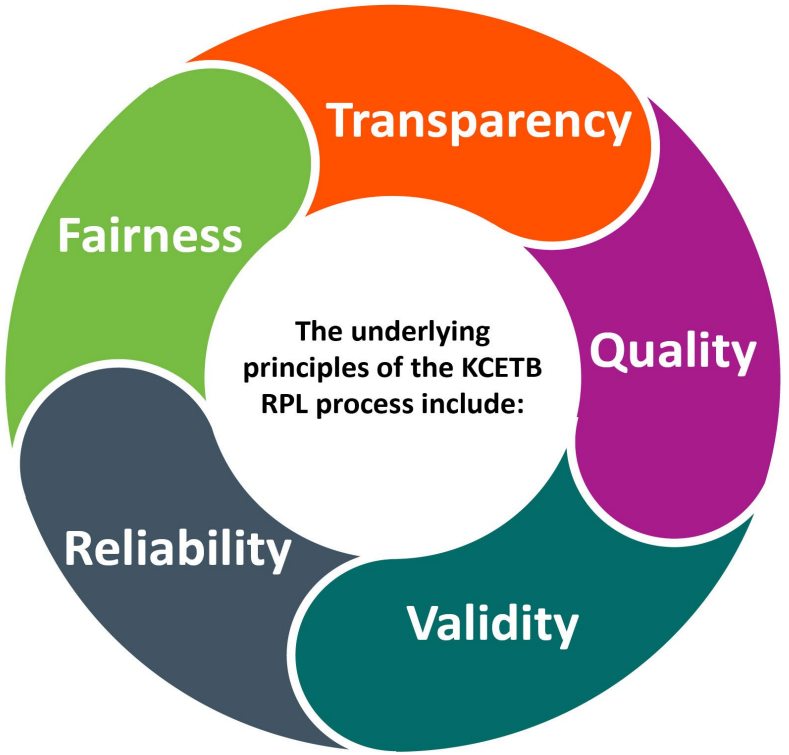
KCETB – Quality Principles and Policy

RPL in KCETB

- **Quality** - all RPL applications are **part of the overall KCETB Quality Assurance process.**
- **Validity** - all RPL applications are judged to have achieved the relevant **standard** of knowledge, skill or competence required to achieve an award **in line with the NFQ**.
- **Reliability** - all RPL applications are assessed to ensure they are accurate, valid, and **consistent with national standards.**
- **Fairness** - all RPL applications are assessed in a **fair and consistent manner.**
- **Transparency** - all RPL applications are **processed** in a transparent manner. In turn all assessment is conducted **in line** with the standards of the **relevant level on the NFQ**.



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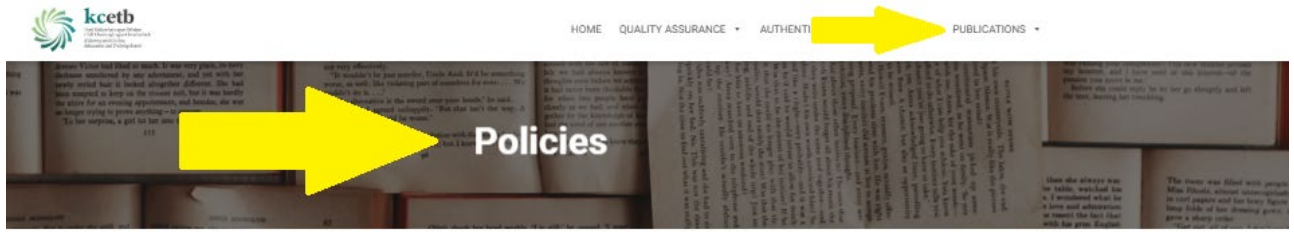
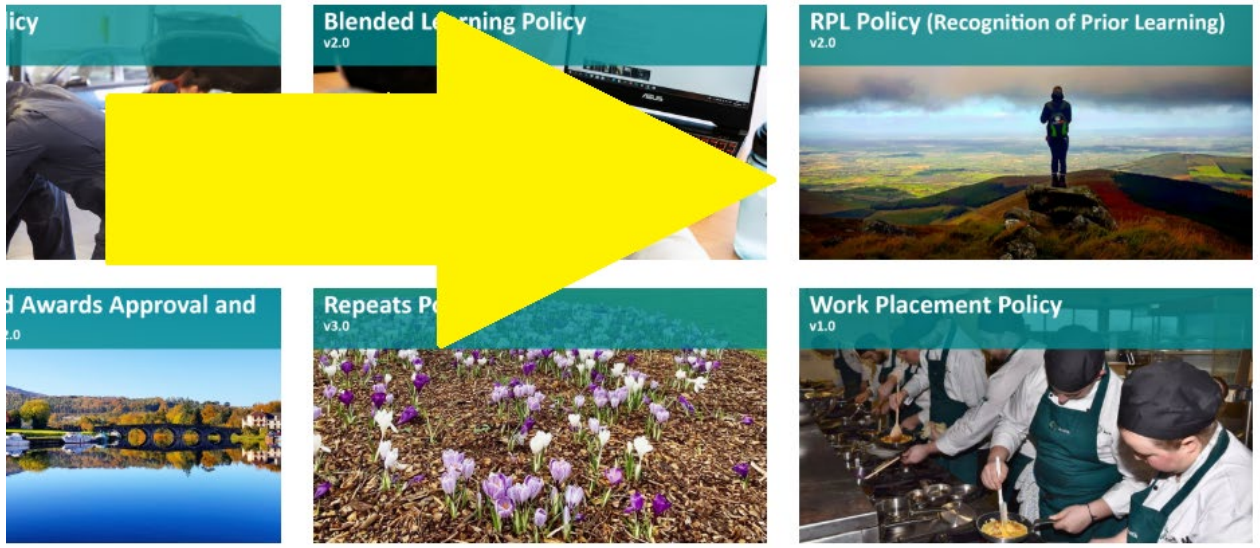
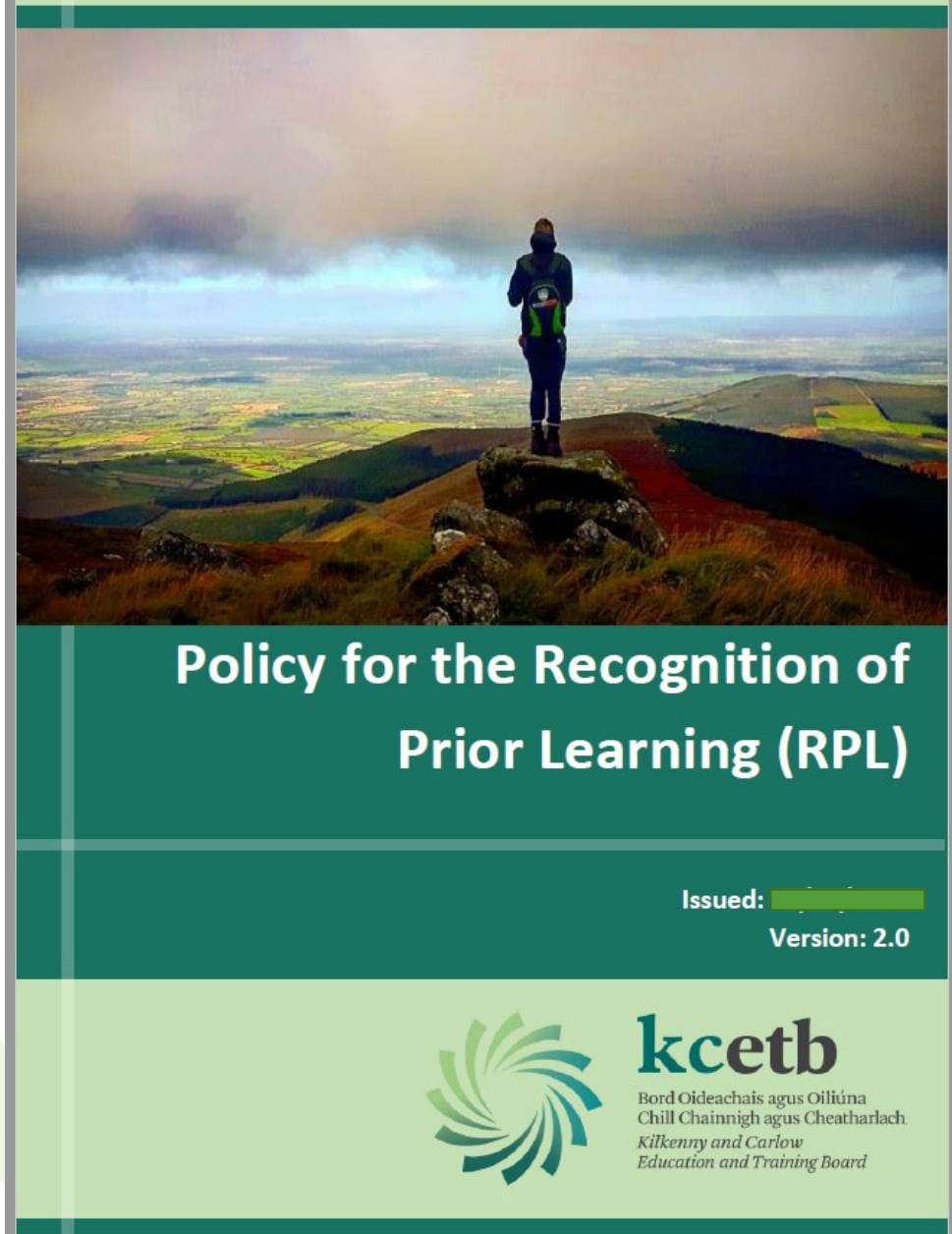
RPL policy

www.kcetbqa.ie

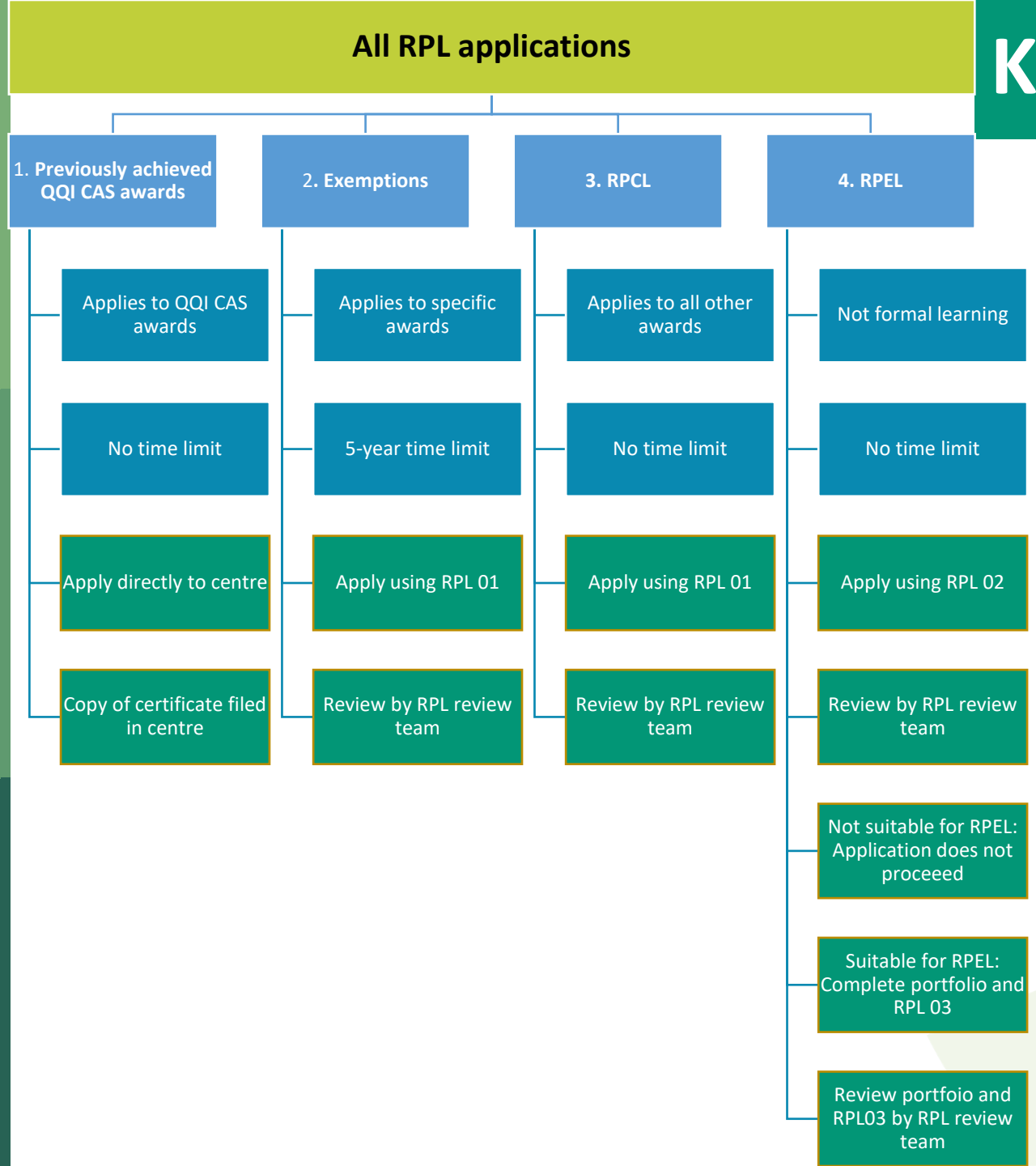


TB wide policies in place. To access the policy and related forms please click on the policy image.

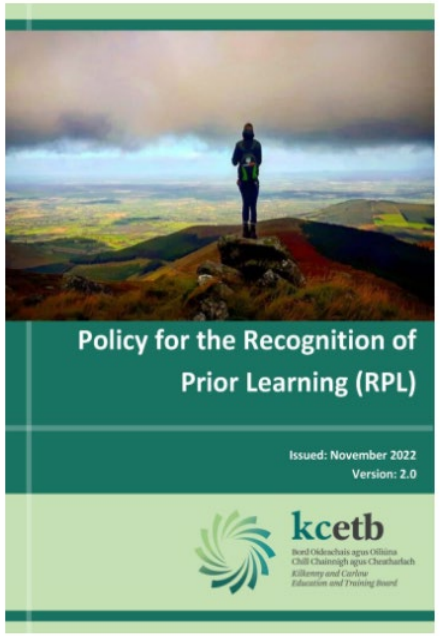




KCETB RPL Policy



- The KCETB RPL policy is built around the framework of different categories of RPL available to applicants
- All categories have:
  - A step-by-step procedure
  - How to grade
  - How to submit results



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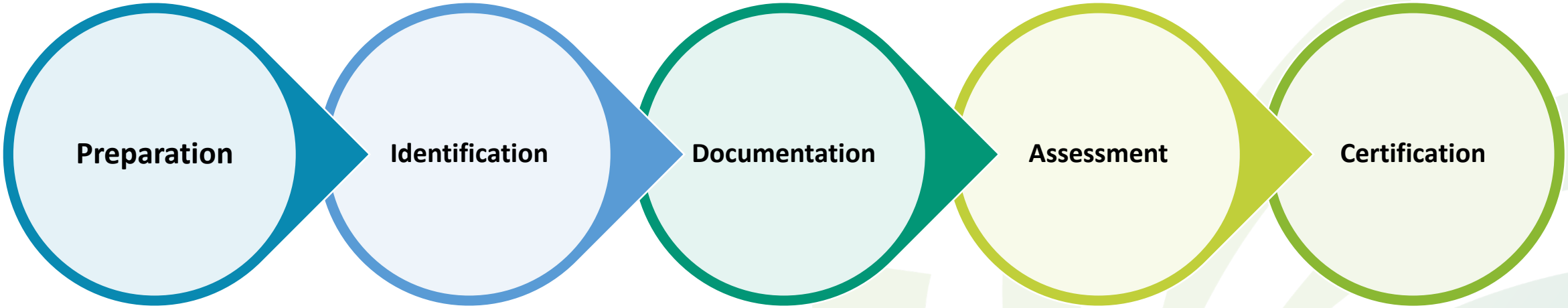
Stages of RPL Process



Applies to Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning

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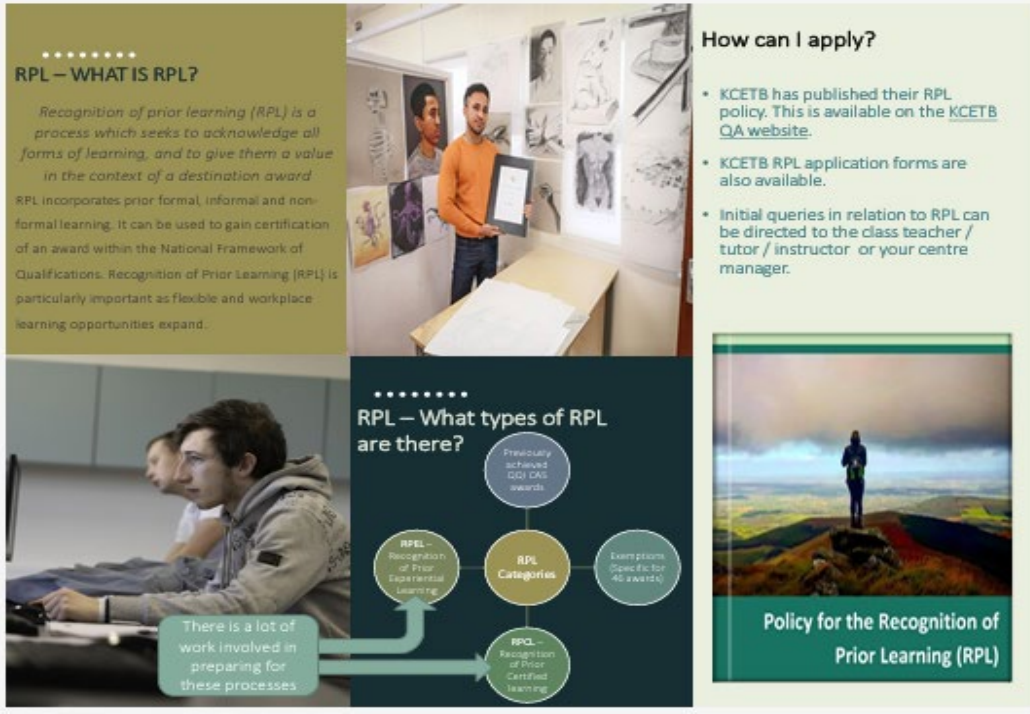
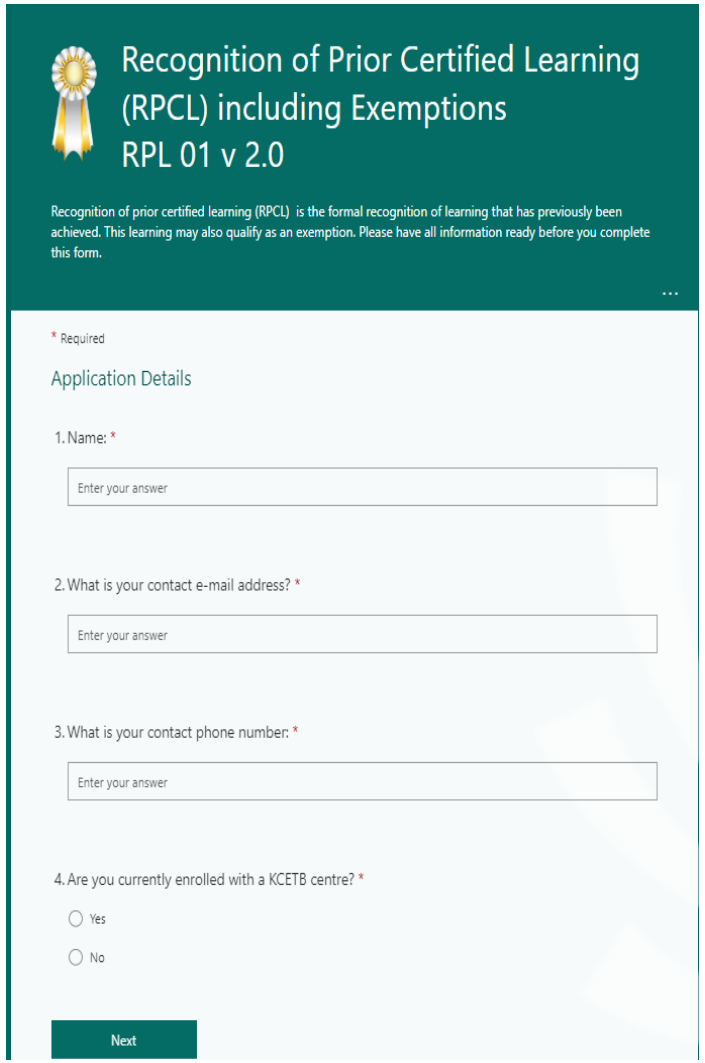
Stage 1: Preparation

Information for learners / applicants

- Leaflet available on KCETBQA website
- Staff awareness at ETB and Centre level



RPL Application Forms



Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL) including Exemptions
RPL 01 v 2.0

Recognition of prior certified learning (RPCL) is the formal recognition of learning that has previously been achieved. This learning may also qualify as an exemption. Please have all information ready before you complete this form.

* Required

Application Details

1. Name: *

Enter your answer

2. What is your contact e-mail address? *

Enter your answer

3. What is your contact phone number: *

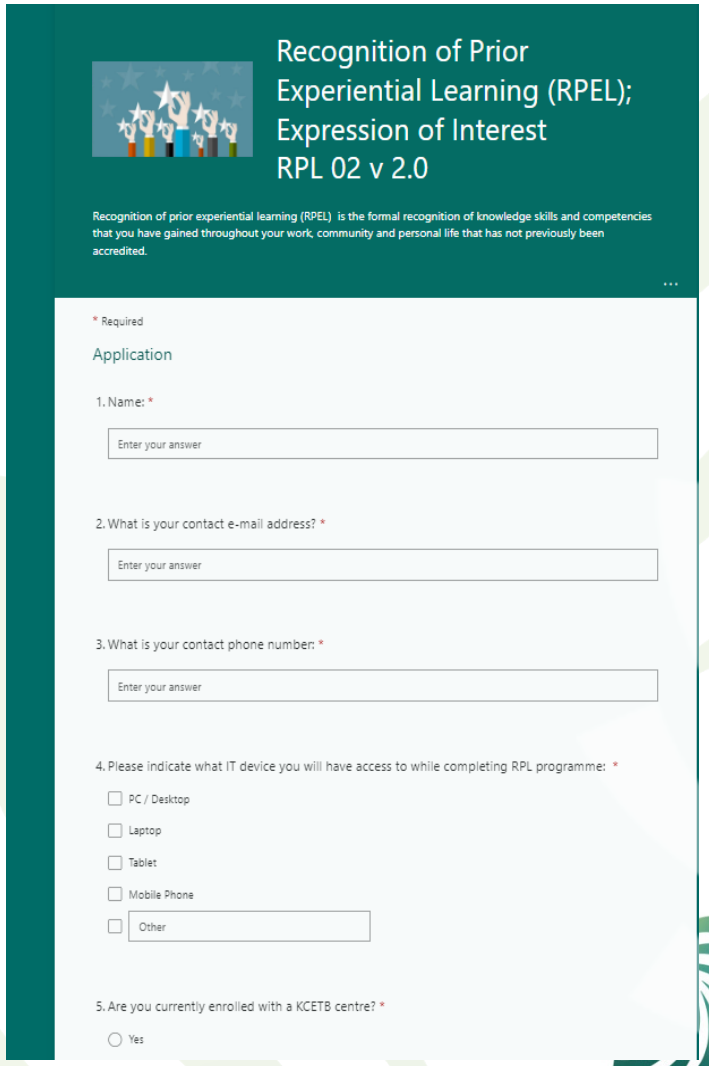
Enter your answer

4. Are you currently enrolled with a KCETB centre? *

Yes

No

Next



Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL); Expression of Interest
RPL 02 v 2.0

Recognition of prior experiential learning (RPEL) is the formal recognition of knowledge skills and competencies that you have gained throughout your work, community and personal life that has not previously been accredited.

* Required

Application

1. Name: *

Enter your answer

2. What is your contact e-mail address? *

Enter your answer

3. What is your contact phone number: *

Enter your answer

4. Please indicate what IT device you will have access to while completing RPL programme: *

PC / Desktop

Laptop

Tablet

Mobile Phone

Other

5. Are you currently enrolled with a KCETB centre? *

Yes

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Stage 2: Identification

RPL Motivators

- What motivates applicants to apply for RPL?
  - **Exemption** – to get an exemption from a module to reduce the workload across a full programme
  - **Certification:**
    - ➢ to meet regulatory requirements, for example Early Learning and Care sector
    - ➢ to meet employer requests as part of identified professional development (typically a learner cohort)
    - ➢ to meet criteria for job applications to gain employment
    - ➢ to get recognition for personal development reasons

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What to consider at Identification stage

Identification

- Is the award meet the needs of the applicant?
- Will the applicant have enough evidence to achieve the award based on prior learning?
- Is the applicant at the correct level (National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ))?

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Stage 3: Documentation

Documentation

RPL portfolio – created by applicant for Experiential applications

KCETB Assessment documentation templates are used

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RPL Assessment Brief for Level 5 Work Experience

Using knowledge gained in your individual workplace and reflections on your own work practices and experiences, please complete 3 tasks. Task 1 Experience of sector Task 2 Personal profile Task 3 Reflection and evaluation **Please complete the attached task sheets for RPL Work Experience**	Grade: Distinction

Learning Outcomes covered

The following learning outcomes are addressed by this assessment

Minor Award/Unit	*Code*	*Learning Outcome Number*
Example: Communications	*5N0690*	*1, 5, 8*
Example: Philosophy	*5N3506*	*2, 4*
Work Experience Task 1	5N1356	1, 2, 3, 9
Work Experience Task 2	5N1356	4, 5, 6
Work Experience Task 3	5N1356	7, 8

This task relates to:

Module Title:	Work experience	**Module code:**	5N1356
Assessment Type:	Portfolio		
Task Title:	Experience of sector		
Total number of tasks:	3	**Task number:**	1
Name of Internal Assessor	TBA		

Task

What you submit/complete	Complete
Outline the task the learner must complete to meet the requirements of a part or portion of an assessment. The full assessment details must be completed on Assessment Brief AP02.	*Tick when completed*
Using your own experience of working in your sector, please provide the following information: • The structure of the organisation you work(ed) for- can you provide a diagram? • your own rights and responsibilities as an employee. • the rights and responsibilities of your employer • Name the policies and procedures that you both have to adhere to, and, if possible, include copies. • Name other organisations that provide services in your sector in Ireland. • What are the options available for working / progressing in the Sector? • What are the challenges experienced in your sector?	☐

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Stage 4: Assessment

Comparison of RPL versus Classroom based assessment

What is the same?

Assessment focus:	Class Assessment	RPL Assessment
All learning Outcomes assessed	✓	✓
Assessments graded	✓	✓
Internal verification	✓	✓
External authentication	✓	✓
Results approval panel	✓	✓
Learner supports	✓	✓
Access to reasonable accommodation / compassionate consideration for assessment	✓	✓
Potential for UDL in assessment	✓	✓
Access to appeals process	✓	✓
Certification	✓	✓

Comparison of RPL versus Classroom based assessment

What is the different?

Focus	Different (Classroom)	Different (RPL)
Support / direction	Teacher	Mentor
Learning	Guided	Reflective
Environment	Classroom	Work
Scheduling	Timetabled classes	Drop in clinics
Evidence	Class assessment	Individual portfolio
Engagement	Group	Individual

These are general and caveats apply!

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Stage 5: Certification

KCETB Quality Assurance Systems

- RPL Assessments are processed using existing Quality Assurance systems:
  - Internal Verification
  - External Authentication
  - Results Approval Process
  - Certification request from Awarding Body (QQI)
  - Appeals
- All RPL portfolios are subject to the same authentication rigours as ‘traditional’ portfolios

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RPL Supports

Local structures: RPL Training – internally in KCETB

Format:

Six sessions – 14 hours; Jan – March 2024

Session 1: Introduction and overview of RPL process

Session 2: RPL process and stages, including a case study

Session 3: Structure – Roles and documents

Session 4: Process of mapping experiential learning to learning outcomes

Session 5: Assessing an RPL portfolio

Session 6: Review and evaluation

Participants:

- Staff in KCETB and second providers who wanted to learn more about RPL
- People interested in becoming RPL mentors and RPL assessors

Outcomes:

- Provider-level certification for participants
- Building RPL Team to support RPL applications
- Working towards a complete RPL handbook in KCETB to provide all resources required for RPL assessment

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National Structures: RPL Practitioner Network (Ireland)

National, cross-sectoral, cross-institution network, established in 2015

- Voluntary, inclusive, independent
- Further education, higher education, civic society
- Relationships, collaboration, conversation and sharing
- Bi-annual face to face events and webinars
- Influence, promote and share locally, nationally and internationally

RPL PRACTITIONER NETWORK·IRELAND

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How do people know about RPL service?

Word of mouth between learners

Staff communications and events

KCETB QA website with links to policies and RPL leaflet

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Key roles and how they support the applicant

RPL Mentor	RPL Assessor	RPL Co-Ordinator
Provide appropriate guidance and support to the applicant	Assessing submitted assessment materials/portfolio	Manages the RPL Programme in line with KCETB policies
Support applicant to understand the RPL process, award/component specifications and learning outcomes	Design assessment briefs that reflect the learning outcomes	Provides guidance and support to the RPL team and to applicants
Sometimes dual / overlap of roles		

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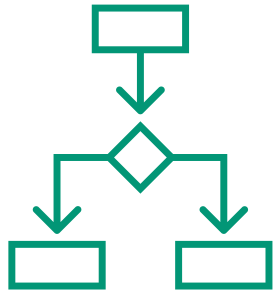
RPL outcomes

RPL outcomes

- RPL applications at KCETB are typically used for:
  - Exemptions – to get an exemption for one or more modules in a programme
  - Certification – to get certification for an award that leads to:
    - Progression – working towards an award at a higher level in Further Education or Higher Education
    - Employment – to meet employer requirements



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RPL data 2021 to 2025

- RPL tracker in use since 2021 (data source)
- RPL put through as :
  - Major award – full programme award (typically 8 minor awards)
  - Minor award – component or unit award
  - Sometimes can be more than one minor award (e.g. 4 minors towards a major)
  - **103 applications received 2021 to 2025**

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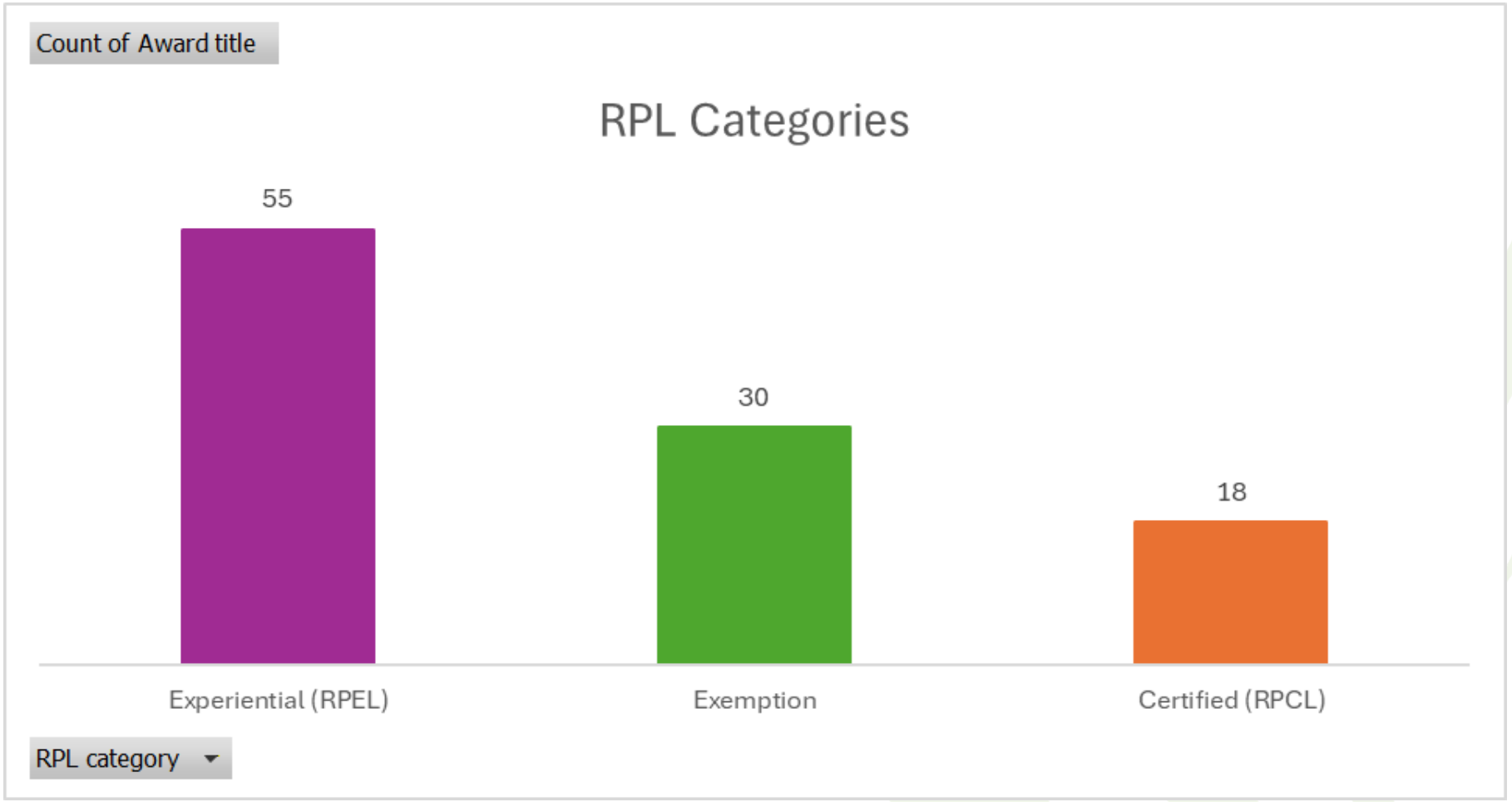
Categories of RPL from 2021 to 2025



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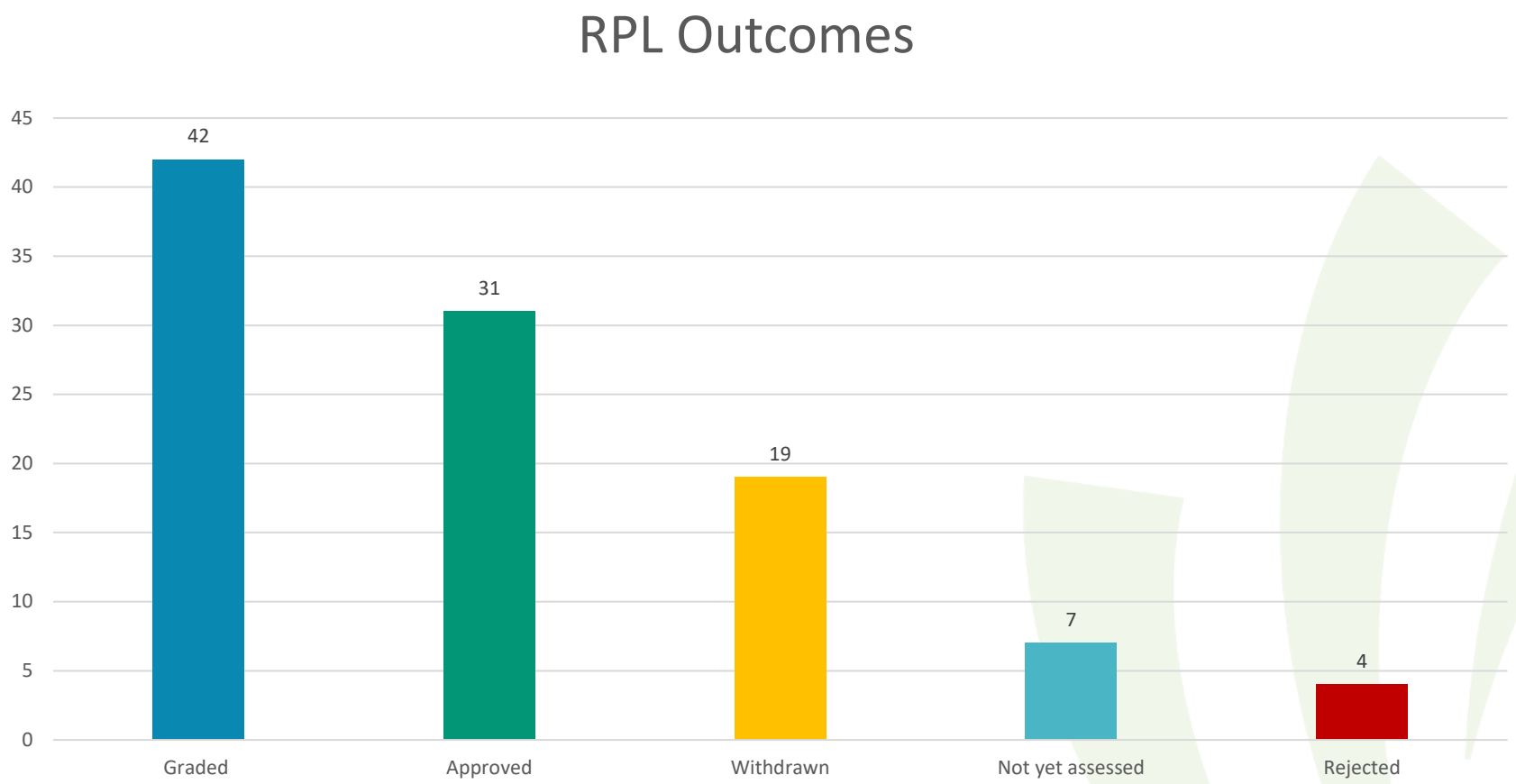
Outcomes of RPL from 2021 to 2025



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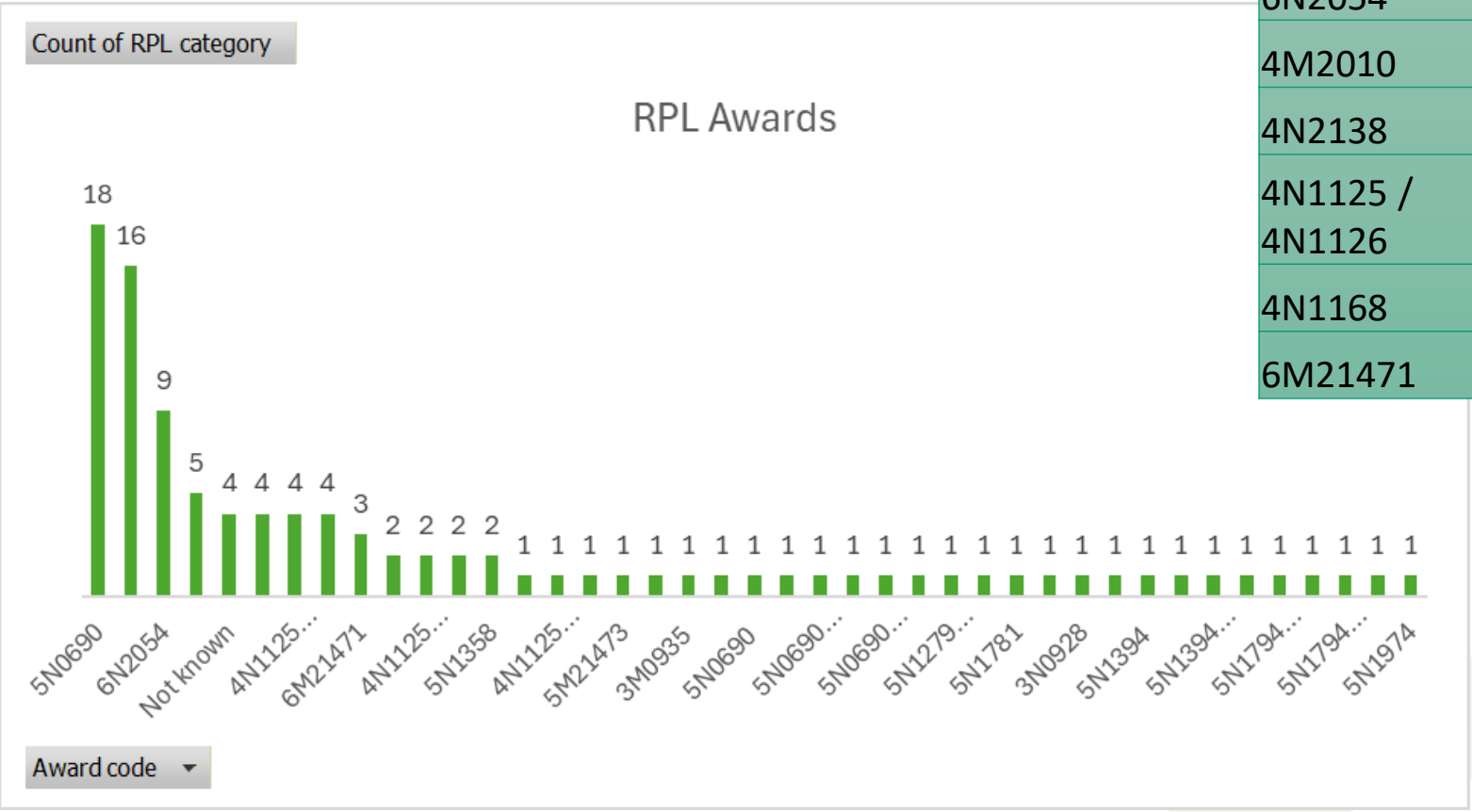
RPL Awards: 2021 - 2025



Top awards in RPL 2021 - 2025		
Module code	**Module title**	**#**
5N0690	Communications	18
5N1356	Work experience	16
6N2054	Consultative Selling	9
4M2010	General learning	5
4N2138	Functional Maths	4
4N1125 / 4N1126	Information Technology Skills / Workplace Safety	4
4N1168	Work experience	4
6M21471	ELC	3

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KCETB - RPL Case studies

Case studies

- KCETB are presenting a number of case studies to illustrate RPL in action

CS #	Title	Purpose	Presenter
1	Case study on how the NFQ and CAS Supports Recognition of Prior Learning	Demonstrates Experiential learning for a major award	Sarah Barron
2	Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL) for employment	Demonstrates the impact of certification via RPL for an employed cohort	Sarah Barron
3	RPEL for employment opportunities	Demonstrates the positive outcomes from RPL	Amanda Butler
4	UDL in RPL Assessment	Demonstrates flexible learning and assessment for applicants	Amanda Butler
5	RPCL for exemption	Demonstrates the mapping of international certified learning	Amanda Butler
6	RPL for KCETB Staff member	Combines RPCL and RPEL	Amy Deering

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Case study 1

- Case study on how the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and the Common Awards System (CAS) supports Recognition of Prior Learning

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Case study 1: Benefits of the NFQ & CAS for RPL

Private Conor Shovlin:

- 10 years as a 3-star Private in the Defence Forces
- Previous education: Leaving Certificate, Defence Forces Training, Level 3 Fitness qualification and NGB Surfing Instruction
- Private fitness business- 3 years
- Coaching and player experience in Football and Hurling

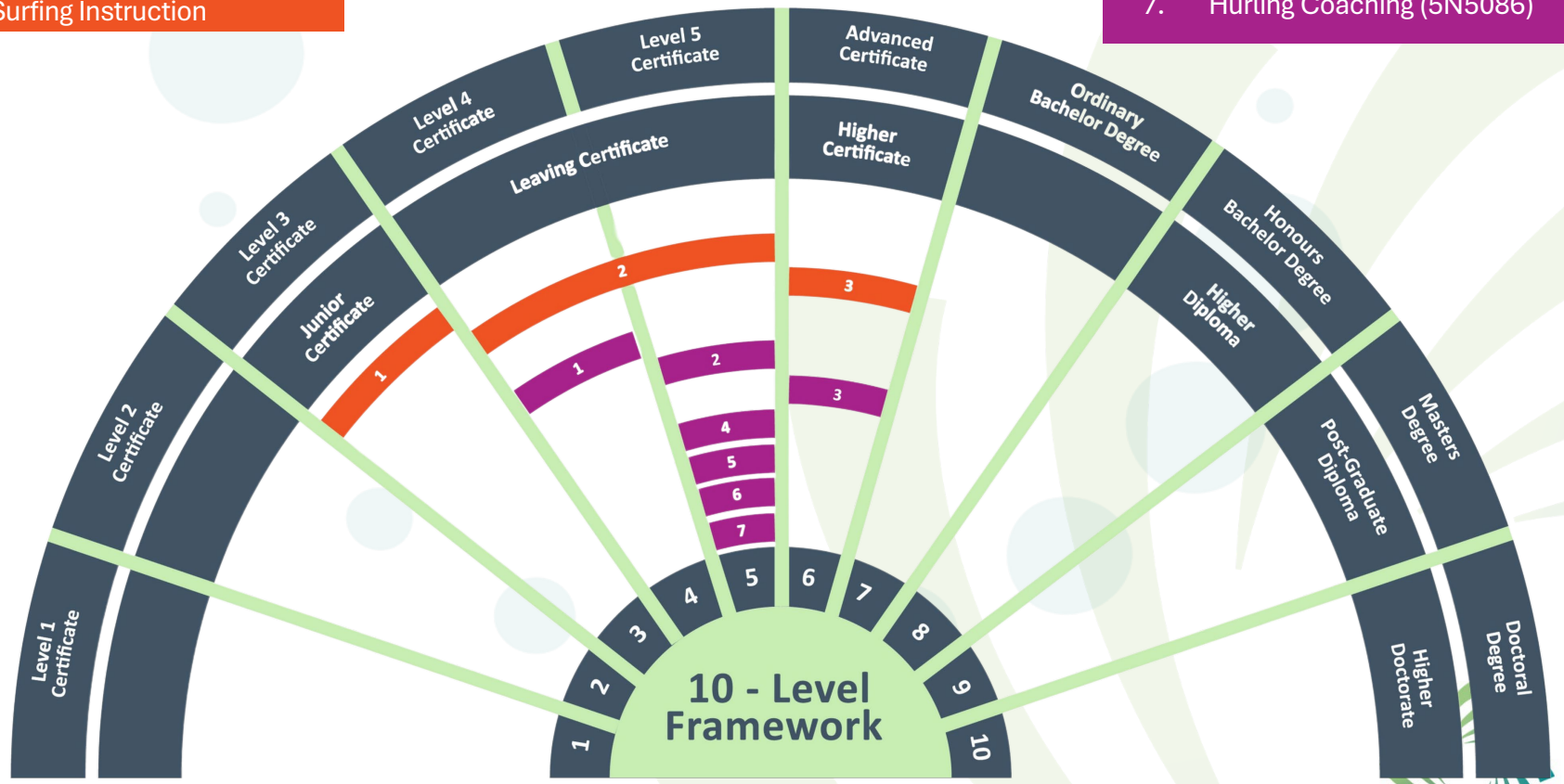
Private Conor Shovlin:

Previous Experience

1. Health and Fitness (3N0531)
2. Leaving Certificate
3. Defence Forces Training, NGB Surfing Instruction

Certification Achieved during RPL Process

1. Information Technology (4N1125)
2. Communications (5N0690)
3. Surfing Instruction (6N5350)
4. Work Experience (5N1356)
5. Safety and Health at Work (5N1794)
6. Gaelic Football Coaching (5N50855)
7. Hurling Coaching (5N5086)



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Case study 2

- Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL) for employment

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Case Study 2: Employer engagement- Defence Forces

- Following on from the relationship developed during TOBAR KCETB engages with the Kilkenny Barracks in 2023
- Over the course of 8 weeks, 7 applicants succeed in completing :
  - Level 4: Team Working, Work Place Safety, Work Experience and IT
  - Level 5: Communications, Work Experience, Safety and Health at work, Gaelic Football Coaching and Hurling Coaching
  - Level 6: Surfing Instruction

Case study 3

- RPEL for employment opportunities

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Case Study 3 – RPEL for employment

- Key question from RPL Biennale (May 2024):
- *'How can validation be quickly harnessed to prepare the individual, workplace and workforce for the future while truly respecting and valuing the process of skills acquisition?'*

Individual:	• RPL applicant – Andreijs
Award:	Media Production 6M5130
Employer:	• YIFM (Young Irish Film Makers)

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Outcomes for Stakeholders

Life-changing opportunity for Andreijs in terms of his career with YIFM to reach his potential and participate fully in Irish society

Opportunity for YIFM to engage an experienced and skilled worker

For KCETB, it was an opportunity to process a RPL application for a full award

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Case study 4

- UDL in RPL Assessment

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Case Study 4: UDL in RPL Assessment

Details

- This case shows how an experienced salesman with little recent formal education achieved a Level 6 Award through a UDL informed assessment and strong assessor support.
- Patrick was one of nine salespeople completing the QQI Level 6 Award in Consultative Selling. Unlike some of his peers, he had not engaged in formal education for about 40 years, though he excelled in his sales role.
- Traditional assessments involving research, reflection, and analysis were challenging for him, but with UDL adaptations he was able to present his evidence through a 90-minute audio recording. He ultimately earned the award with Distinction.

Case study 5

- RPCL for exemption

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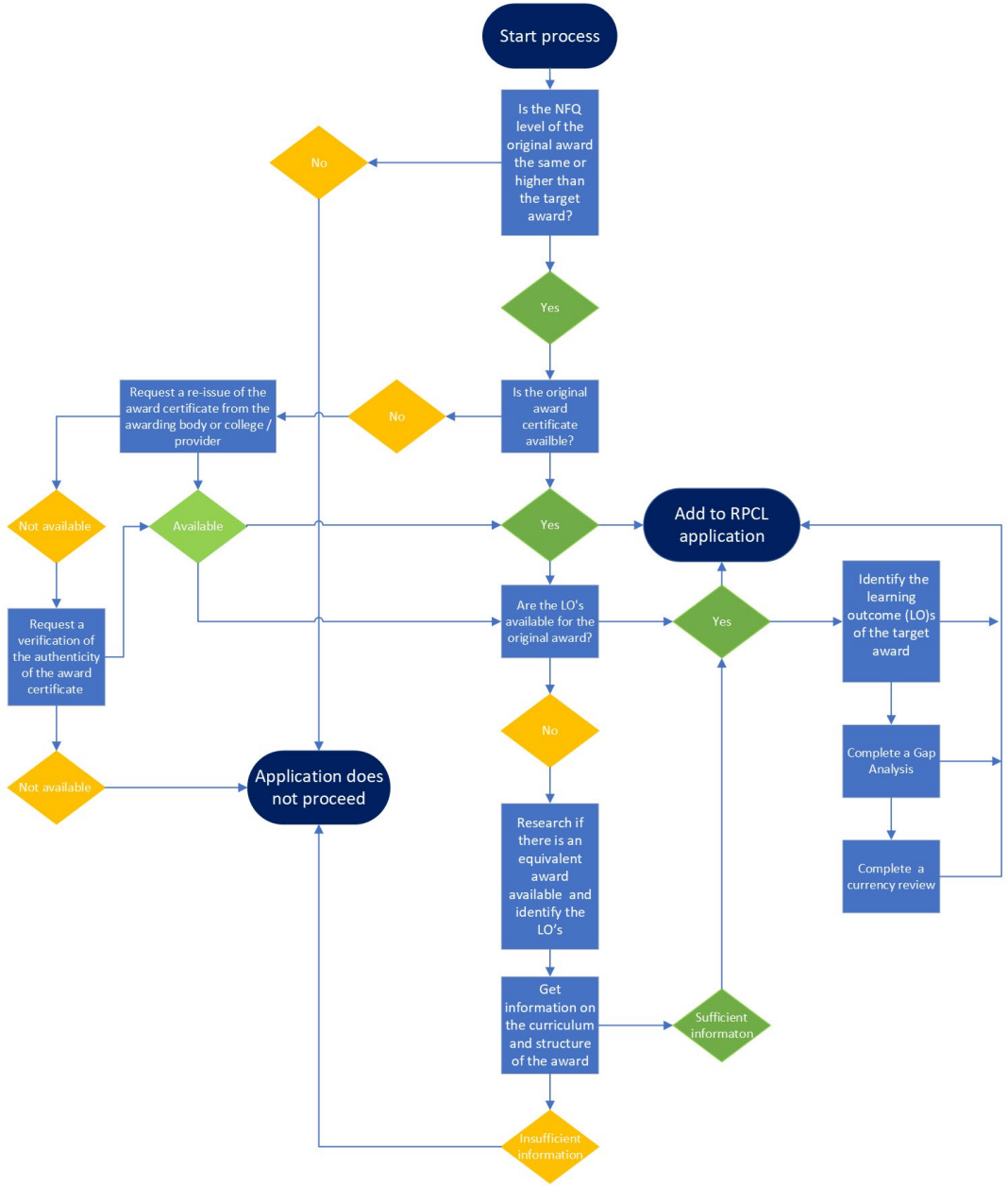
Case Study 5 – RPCL for exemption

- Recognising Prior Certified Learning (Not exemptions)
- Decision making process flow for RPCL application
- Example of applicant with certification from the American University of Paris which could be mapped to Level 5 Communications
- The RPCL process includes a gap analysis and a currency review



Case Study 5 – RPCL for exemption

Learning Outcomes of Level 5 Communications 5N0690

Learning Outcomes	Matched Modules (Colour)
1. Analyse a range of current issues in communications and information technology	
2. Summarise in practical terms the elements of legislation that must be observed in a personal and/or work context, to include health, safety and welfare at work and communications-related legislation	
3. Use appropriate non-verbal and visual communication in personal- and work-related settings, to include one-to-one, in a group/team, and in formal and informal interaction	
4. Demonstrate verbal skills appropriate to working under general direction, to include making a case and presenting a point of view in group discussion, formal meetings, interviews	
5. Demonstrate listening skills appropriate to working under general direction, to include making eye contact, receiving and interpreting information, control of personal response	
6. Use reading techniques appropriate to a task, to include skimming, obtaining an overview, identifying key points, critical evaluation, in depth analysis	
7. Critique information from a range of complex written material, to include technical/ vocational, personal, literary, and written and visual media texts	
8. Research a relevant vocational topic, to include use of primary and secondary sources, acknowledgement of sources, use of enquiry techniques and methods to establish validity and reliability	
9. Use drafting, proofreading and editing skills to write a range of documents that follow the conventions of language usage (spelling, punctuation, syntax), to include creative writing, business proposals, correspondence, reports, memoranda, minutes, applications	
10. Demonstrate communications styles and techniques relevant to different situations in work and leisure, to include one-to-one and group contexts in conversation, interview, oral presentation, question and answer session and for the purposes of persuading, advocacy and informing	
11. Choose the appropriate communications technology to give and receive requests, instructions, suggestions, discussion and feedback in both work and leisure, to include a rationale for choosing one technology over another in different contexts and for different messages.	

Awarding Institute

Modules completed:

Module:	Grade:	Code:
Code A Comparative Mass Communication	X	
Code B Media Analysis	X	
Code C Rhetoric & Persuasion Verbal and Visual	X	
Code D Communication and society	X	
Code E Speech I	X	
Code F Reflective Seminar	X	
Code G Management and organizational behaviour	X	
Code H Journalism I	X	
Code I Cultural Policy - a Comparative International Perspective	X	
Code J Introduction to Internet authoring (Web sites)	X	
Code K Writing and Criticism	X	

Indicative Content

Code A Comparative Mass Communication

Course Description and Objectives

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Case study 6

- RPL for KCETB Staff member

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Case Study 6 – KCETB Staff Member

- Combination of Recognition of Prior Certified Learning and Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning
- **Outcome**: Full level 6 award in Office Administration
- Benefit to applicant

Previous certificates (RPCL)	RPL portfolio of evidence	Gaps by assessment
Certificate in Employment Law	Competency Based Job Application	Proofreading (Task)
Certificate in Pension Officer Training	Workplace Engagement and Progression (Brief)	Role of Administration (Task)
Level 5 award for Customer Service	Communications (Brief)	Personal Development (Task)
CIPD Employment Law	Leading and Managing (Brief)	Managing Resources for Front Office (Task)
CIPD Human Resources	Front Office Administration and Customer Service (Brief)	
PAPS Public Sector Pensions Administrative Cycle & Processes Training Course		
Retail Studies Level 5 (multiple components		

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KCETB RPL - Conclusion

RPL in KCETB

Opportunities

- Life-changing opportunity for applicants to have their informal and formal skills recognised
- Provision of diverse access point for learners to KCETB programmes
- Strong centre awareness of offer

Strengths

- Cost effective mechanism to offer accreditation to applicants
- Robust QA Processes
- Engagement with employers to identify opportunity for RPL

Threats

- Limited resources to support RPL work

Challenges

- Encouraging reflective practice with the applicant
- Managing expectations of applicants

RPL in action

Every application is unique

Lots of learning for all

Mostly very positive feedback from those who engage

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Nutrio bio testimonial

"I found the course on Consultative selling a worthwhile, challenging and enjoyable experience. As an employee in the field, we tend to take for granted what we do everyday.

The course module got us thinking what we bring to our organisation in CAHG. It taught me that we offer our end users a complete package.

For example - we carry out mineral appraisals, dosing & vaccination programmes, calf health protocols, silage sampling and many more tasks to help with the farming enterprise. The learning outcomes emphasised the tasks we carry out on a daily basis.

It got the business managers talking ideas between ourselves which was great after being hindered by COVID for so long to all sit in a lecture together. There was times and stressful moments, where you would be pulling your hair out because the course wanted more constructed info, however that got us thinking and pushed us on even further.

I would like to thank the ETB for facilitating the course, for their time ,energy and dedication to us as participants and to our own company for making further education available to us in our organisation.

Thank you all."

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Piecing together the RPL jigsaw

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Q&A

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