Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Introduction

This section explores the topic of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Firstly, we examine the essential elements of RPL both from the point of view of the individual who is considering undertaking it and the institution that will recognise and potentially award credit for the learning. We recognise that RPL is only one of many ways of supporting entry into learning and examine the conditions and circumstances that make it a favourable choice. The BeFlex project (http://www.eucen.org/BeFlex/index.html) noted that RPL for entry and RPL for part of a Diploma were the least likely services to be developed to give flexibility to learners. Although the most recent survey for the BeFlex Plus project (http://www.eucen.org/BeFlexPlus/index.html) shows more activity, it is clear that many universities have not yet developed procedures and processes to offer this service. Noting this, we review what the setting up of an RPL process in a university might involve and consider the benefits for learners, organisations, (particularly employers) and the institution itself. We conclude the section by examining the challenges of running an RPL programme and where possible seeking to address them.

In this section, we have used the term Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) – it is the terminology used in the Bologna documents – but we note that a variety of other terms are also used, particularly Accreditation/Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) or the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL) or the Valuation of Prior Learning (VPL).

The following activities are included in this section. The time in brackets after each section indicates approximately how long we would expect a small group of people working together to take to complete the activity, but of course, this can be extended for greater depth of discussion. The case studies referred to in each activity are also noted and all of them (and others) are on the website in full (www.eucen.org/BeflexPlus/index.html).

Activity 1 (1.5 hours)

What are the essential elements of an RPL process?

In this activity, we review the essential elements of an RPL process and ask you to look at the practical implications of each for delivery.

Case study

- Recognition of Prior Learning at the Open University of the Netherlands (NL)
Activity 2 (1.5 hours or 2.5 hours if you decide to complete an action plan)

How do we set up RPL?

Here we focus on what needs to be done to set up RPL with the option of completing an action plan to get you started.

Activity 3 (2 hours)

Where and why might an RPL process be used?

In this activity we consider when an RPL process might be used and look in detail at the benefits for an individual and an organisation in seeking this route.

Case studies

- Co-operation between a university and a private company in working and learning for a bachelor degree.
  Hogeschool van Amsterdam (NL)
- The 5 phases of VPL (Valuation of Prior Learning)
  Hogeschool van Amsterdam (NL)

Activity 4 (1.5 hours)

What are the challenges of RPL?

Activity 4 concludes the section with a consideration of the challenges of delivering RPL in a university.

Case studies

- The widespread development of recognition of formal, informal and non-formal learning in the French speaking Belgian universities
  Conseil Interuniversitaire de la Communauté française de Belgique - CIUF (BE)
- The resumption of studies at the University of Bretagne Occidentale
  University of Brest (FR)
- Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning
  University of Pierre and Marie Curie (FR)

Working with the learning material

The learning material we have provided is designed to be useful and relevant for those who are relatively new to the area of lifelong learning as well as people with more experience. We hope that where you are already aware of the practical issues we raise, you will extend your discussion to consider additional areas that we have not had space to cover. We also hope you may challenge our point of view in your discussion – we recognise that our approach is often only one of many legitimate ways to address a situation!

We recognise that those working on this material may have a lot or very little experience of RPL. The activities are designed to stimulate structured discussion about areas critical to this topic, supported by case study examples – so we are not seeking answers to specific problems but providing a framework for you to reflect on the relevant issues, whatever your experience.
We have designed this learning material to be used in small groups either with or without a facilitator. The material can also be used by individuals working alone, but most of the activities require you to reflect on different approaches to issues, so discussion with others will be helpful – perhaps you could organise to do this online?

Look out for this notepad icon, where you see it we have suggested a task for you to do to support your learning.

**Aims of this section**

- To identify the essential elements of an RPL process
- To examine when and why RPL might be used
- To explore how an RPL process might be set up and managed
- To consider the benefits of using RPL for individuals, organisations and universities
- To examine the challenges of running a successful RPL programme

**Activity 1 (1.5 hours)**

*What are the essential elements of an RPL process?*

Recognition of Prior Learning is a method of assessment by which learners can gain recognition for knowledge, understanding, skills and competences that they already possess. They may use this formal recognition or validation for entry to a programme of study in place of the usual entry qualifications or for part of the final diploma so that they avoid repeating learning that they can already demonstrate. In France it is possible to obtain a whole diploma on the basis of RPL. Where learners have the opportunity to have their prior learning and experience recognised it can provide motivation for further study and mean that they can achieve valuable qualifications in a shorter period of time, so making the learning process more flexible and tailored to their needs.

Although RPL is designed to offer learners flexibility it is also essential that the process of awarding credit or part of a diploma for prior learning is regulated and managed to ensure quality. This is especially important as the credit which learners gain through RPL has exactly the same weight and value as credit gained by completing an assessed learning programme.

Below we identify the essential elements of an RPL process. In this activity we write from a general viewpoint. For each element we would ask you, from your experience, to identify how such elements have been (or could be) manifested in practice. We provide some case study material to get you started with this.
The RPL process must be learner centred. It must provide an accessible route for learners to seek credit for what they already know. The process must accept a variety of evidence to reflect the diversity of experience from which learners may choose to demonstrate their prior learning and experience.

Learners must be offered clear guidance about RPL in terms that they can understand to allow them to make informed choices about whether they wish to follow the RPL route, and if they do, what is required of them. They must also be informed of how they can use the credit they have achieved either to enter a programme of study to use it to gain exemption within a programme they wish to study; or other alternatives.

Learners seeking credit by RPL must provide evidence of their learning. The way in which they provide evidence will vary depending on the type of learning they are seeking to gain recognition for and the arrangements of the assessing institution. The assessment process should be transparent, rigorous and quality assured and learners should be able to appeal against a decision. Normally the assessment should include some element of externality – someone from outside the course or the university involved in the process.

Learners must be supported to present evidence of their learning. It must be recognised that learning from experience often looks very different from learning achieved through a course or programme. Learners who wish to gain credit for experience may need help in working out the best way to present it to achieve a successful outcome to assessment and to decide what is relevant. Learners should be encouraged to present evidence of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Good support helps the RPL process to be flexible, accessible and effective for the learner and efficient for the university.

The credit which learners achieve by RPL has exactly the same value as credit achieved from completing an assessed learning programme. The acceptance of this within the institution awarding credit should be enhanced by the transparency of the processes for assessing evidence and for the quality assurance of assessment.

The case study below provides a good starting point for discussion about how good RPL can be delivered.

**Recognition of Prior Learning at the Open University of the Netherlands**

**Open University of the Netherlands (NL)**

The first version of an RPL procedure was developed in 2006. The subject area was academic computer science in distance education. Two content specialists, members of the support department, a member of the examination committee, a legal advisor and a researcher on RPL developed a RPL-procedure for academic computer science.

The RPL-procedure starts with a general information session, in which all necessary procedural information is given. Subsequently, if candidates are still interested in RPL, they can request an advisory consultation with a tutor. In this consultation, the tutor and candidate analyze the final attainment levels in relation to the capabilities of the candidates and discuss the possibilities for evidence they might present.
After the advisory consultation, the candidate starts with the composition of the portfolio. The first part of this portfolio includes evidence for certified learning; the second part includes evidence for informal and non-formal learning. Candidates are required to deliver the following information: (a) curriculum vitae, (b) descriptions of evidence in relation to the final attainment levels, (c) a work place scan and (d) products that serve as evidence. In this stage of the procedure, the tutor supports the candidate by answering questions and in helping to decide what information is useful as evidence for the final attainment levels.

The support department for the exemption based on diplomas and certificates receives the portfolio for a check on completeness. At the same time, one of the four available trained assessors get the portfolio. The assessors assess the portfolio by means of a scoring system and compose questions about the content of the portfolio for the assessment conversation. After this, all candidates are invited for one assessment conversation in which two assessors are involved. The objective of the assessment conversation is to examine some subjects in the portfolio in depth. In the assessment conversation the assessors have the option to ask for additional evidence. Assessors may require learners to undertake additional assignments, like an essay or a program analysis. All this information serves as input for the assessor to define advice for the examination committee. Finally, this committee examines the advice and decides which part of the study remains for the candidate to obtain a bachelor diploma. The validated result will be confirmed in a disposition and each candidate receives a study plan with a remaining study path outlined.

Discussion

You will have considered several examples of how an RPL process can be put into practice – though as you may have discussed, it can be a complex and challenging process, especially where there are relatively few students using it. One of the major challenges can be that very different arrangements are needed for either individual or small groups of students meaning that each time a process is used, new approaches must be considered. However the case study above demonstrates that a robust process can be relatively straightforward to deliver and provides a managed entry to higher education for students.

Activity 2 (1.5 hours or 2.5 hours if you decide to complete an action plan)

How do we set up RPL?

Consideration of the essential elements of RPL provides a good starting point for looking at how to set up an RPL programme. You might also want to read through the examples in activity 3 on page 8 to find out more about what an outline of the process of undertaking RPL might look like from the point of view of an individual and a company.
We start our consideration of this question by defining what needs to be done to set up RPL. We have defined broad tasks that will need to be done and then outlined the implications for each task. As with the design and delivery of any new procedure in a university it is essential that the effects on the wider university systems and procedures are also considered. We would like you to discuss the design and implementation tasks we have identified. Where you have experience of setting up an RPL process, we hope that you will reflect on the action plan you used and that you will be able to challenge or augment our list. We have also completed the second column and third columns assessing the implications of each task and possible effects on the wider university system. Again we would like you to discuss and add to these columns working from your own experience.

We recognise that to encapsulate this process into an activity we have had to considerably simplify tasks necessary for set up, but hope that this provides a starting point for developing an action plan for those who are interested in doing this.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Immediate implications</th>
<th>Wider university implications</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify study programmes that will accept RPL for entry or for credit or for part of a diploma.</td>
<td>Where a programme of study has not previously accepted RPL for entry or exemption.</td>
<td>Agreements about which programmes will accept RPL for credit may need to be negotiated with individual programme managers or may be cross school or faculty. Your institution may also have rules about how much credit or exemption can be achieved by RPL when using it towards a specific diploma.</td>
<td>Your institution may have an overarching RPL policy or may be aiming to adhere to national or European guidelines. Limits may be placed on which programmes can accept RPL by professional body requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set up an advice and guidance process for individuals wishing to undertake RPL.</td>
<td>To give effective advice and guidance staff will need to have a thorough understanding of what will need to be demonstrated to meet learning outcomes of the receiving programme. Staff will need to be confident to provide advice on the types of evidence that are appropriate especially when demonstrating learning through experience or informal routes.</td>
<td>Although where possible individuals seeking recognition for learning should dictate what evidence they choose to produce, in some cases institutions may set certain parameters.</td>
<td>Where evidence is being gathered from a particular occupational sector or employer it will be important for staff offering guidance to be familiar with the working context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design process for assessing evidence of prior learning produced by learners. The process should also allow the volume of credit awarded for evidence produced to be judged.</td>
<td>Staff may need assessor training especially where they may need to develop new skills, for example in carrying out assessment decisions. Where RPL is managed by separate unit collaboration between that unit and the subject specialists from the programme(s) accepting RPL will need to take place. The assessment process will need to include verification of the results through some form of externality.</td>
<td>The university may already have or wish to produce guidelines about assessment of RPL to ensure consistency of judgements made across different departments...</td>
<td>Since quality assurance of any assessment decisions made during RPL is essential the assessment process should be moderated to ensure equity across candidates or departments. This may involve some co-ordination across departments /faculties. It will also have implications for record keeping especially where assessment is made by observation of performance or professional conversation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design process for giving individuals feedback on their submission of evidence and support in planning future study.</td>
<td>Staff will be required to provide feedback an individual basis and support students in action planning future study. The process may differ depending on whether individuals are required to achieve competencies defined by their employer or are using RPL to seek entry to a particular programme or exemption from certain elements.</td>
<td>The university will need to ensure an appeals process is in place and that all those undertaking RPL are made aware of it.</td>
<td>This may have implications for the careers guidance service or other services provided by the university to support students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure a robust quality assurance process for RPL. This needs to be aligned to quality assurance processes for the programme(s) into which RPL is accepted.</td>
<td></td>
<td>The proposed assessment process may need to be considered alongside approval and assessment processes for the programme into which RPL is accepted to ensure transparency and parity between those gaining credit through RPL and those gaining it through a programme of learning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We hope that you will use this table as a starting point for considering how an RPL process might be set up and the wide ranging implications if you choose to do this. If you or one of your group is considering setting up a process you might now choose to make an action plan for the process. This is a particularly useful process as the timing of several of the actions is critical and also interdependent. So, for example, it may be essential for a robust quality assurance process to be in place and documented before a department will agree to accept RPL into a particular programme.

You will also recognise that where a university introduces RPL staff will be required to undertake new roles functions and gain new skills. Staff development will be necessary for all those involved.
Activity 3 (2 hours)

**Where and why might an RPL process be used?**

The table below indicates the extent to which institutions are offering RPL as an option to learners. As we noted in the introduction, although some RPL is offered at many of the institutions surveyed for BeFlex Plus, it is not universally available, especially as part of more substantial awards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Most</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advice and Guidance are available</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APEL/RPL is offered for access to a course</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APEL/RPL is offered for part of a diploma</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APEL/RPL is offered to award full qualification</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>answered question</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skipped question</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this activity we would like you to consider and compare the benefits of using RPL when working with an organisation and when working with individuals. To support this we ask you to look at two descriptions of when and how RPL is used. Both examples relate to the RPL unit at Hogeschool van Amsterdam. The first describes how the RPL system works and then gives brief information about a particular example where it is used for a programme with a private company called Yacht. (You will have read about this case study if you have studied the section on Curriculum in Partnership). The second example describes how the RPL model at Hogeschool van Amsterdam works focusing on how it affects the individual.

Once you have read through these two examples we would like you to consider how the opportunity to undertake RPL benefits:

- An employer such as Yacht
- An individual learner
Co-operation between a University and a private company in working and learning for a bachelor degree.

Hogeschool van Amsterdam (NL)

The University Of Applied Sciences Of Amsterdam (Hogeschool van Amsterdam, HvA) offers bachelors and masters degree programmes in a professional field, in the following domains: business administration, engineering, built environment, social work, law, education, communication, health. More than 34,000 students are studying, mainly for a bachelor degree. About 6,000 of them are working adults, studying part time. All degree programmes are competence based, which means that students must be able to perform professional tasks in a realistic context to show that they have mastered the relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes.

In 2002 the HvA started with Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), to determine which competencies working adults already have acquired through work based learning. The goal is to determine a flexible, tailor made bachelor degree programme, in which students only learn what they need to learn and with the possibility of shortening the regular 4-year bachelor programme substantially. In 2006 a central RPL unit was installed to be able to address the questions of organizations as well as individuals more adequately. The assignments of this central unit are:

- Being a portal for organizations and individual candidates; developing RPL tools and procedures in co-operation with educational departments of the HvA and, when necessary, with the client;
- planning and organizing of the RPL assessments; quality assurance, including accreditation as a RPL provider (in 2009 a national requirement for all RPL providers) and training and accreditation of assessors; gaining and disseminating further expertise on RPL and support a lifelong learning policy of the HvA.

The HvA was the first university of applied sciences with an accredited RPL system. Accreditation is obligatory in the Netherlands to be registered as a RPL provider.

‘Working and learning towards a bachelor degree in IT’

How a private company and a university work together to stimulate the development of employees in the branch of IT

Institution(s):
- Yacht, an international private company in staffing, temporary management, and recruitment and selection.
- Hogeschool van Amsterdam (HvA).
- Exin, a private educational company providing IT-courses.

Objectives, purposes and context

Many Yacht employees work on a higher IT level, but do not have a bachelor degree in IT. The company has two main reasons why their employees should attain a bachelor degree in IT:

- to show their customers that they only work with highly qualified employees;
- to stimulate the further development of their employees and, in doing so, strengthen the commitment between company and employees.

The objective of the project is: to create a learning- and development programme for Yacht employees, leading to a bachelor degree in IT. To achieve this, the following conditions are leading:

1. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is part of the programme. On the basis of the outcome of RPL a tailor made programme is constructed for each individual employee to obtain a bachelor degree. In this way employees’ motivation to participate in a higher educational programme is enhanced
2. Although Yacht employees work and live in different regions throughout The Netherlands, they should be given the opportunity to participate in one and the same RPL-procedure resulting in similar possibilities to enrol on a tailor made programme.

3. All participants should be prepared for their Yacht focus position in this programme. This means that the contents of the IT bachelor degree should equip them for their next career step. To achieve this, special minor programmes have to be developed in which the competencies of the different focus positions will be worked out.

4. In the development programme relevant IT-certificates like ITIL, Prince II, Java, etc. should be taken into account. Yacht employees are used to do IT-courses with Exin, a private training company. The courses are popular with employees because they are short (a few months) and are valuable in the IT business.

5. Employees only enrol for the university programme once they cannot develop the required competencies at work or with Exin anymore.

6. The university develops a tailor made bachelor degree programme which meets the same quality standards and competencies as the regular programme.

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**The 5 phases of VPL (Valuation of Prior Learning)**

**Hogeschool van Amsterdam**

**Phase 1 Commitment and awareness:** Commitment and awareness of the individual’s competencies and the value associated with them both individually and as interpreted by others in context. Being able to record your competencies in a ‘made to measure’ way is vital for this understanding.

**Phase 2 Recognition:** Identifying or listing competencies is usually done with the help of a portfolio. Apart from a description of work experience and diplomas, the portfolio is filled with other evidence of competencies acquired. Statements from employers, references, papers or photos show the existence of certain competencies. The evidence can be aimed at the profession or position the VPL procedure is developed for. In other cases it can be an open portfolio or a complete overview. Evidence is sometimes aimed at valuation, in other cases at personal profiling. The participant compiles the portfolio him/herself, with or without help.

**Phase 3 The valuation or assessment of competencies:** The content of the portfolio is then valued and assessed, where necessary followed by an extra assessment. The path followed by the person presenting the evidence is unimportant, only the result of the assessment counts. The second step of the process is a valuation. This may be a validation on an organisational, sector or national level in the form of certificates, diplomas or career moves, or a valuation in the form of advice on career opportunities.

**Phase 4 The development plan or the actual valuation:** This phase aims at the development of the individual by turning the validation and/or advice into an action plan. On the basis of the valued competencies and information about missing competencies or other strengths, a personal development plan is made. This plan is about learning activities that will be done in formal or non-formal learning environments, in work situations, during a change of position, by offering coaching or creating an environment in which informal learning is stimulated.

**Phase 5 Structural implementation of VPL:** The last phase of the VPL process focuses on the structural implementation of VPL in the training and personnel policy of an organisation.
Discussion

The first example highlights one of the most obvious scenarios in which RPL can be used to benefit both an organisation and an individual within it. RPL can enable an organisation to audit the skills of its employees and assess where further development should be focussed. If the organisation is seeking to get its workforce better qualified then RPL is a time efficient way of ensuring individuals receive credit for what they already know and do not have to repeat learning where they are already knowledgeable and competent. The RPL process may also help an organisation to articulate the competences and qualities which it requires of its workforce in line with its business aspirations. Individuals may also seek to gain credit for their prior learning and experience, perhaps as a starting point for further study. The RPL process benefits them by providing a structured and supported opportunity to collate evidence of what they already know and possibly gain credit for it. As well as possibly reducing the time it takes to achieve a qualification, this process can also provide motivation by validating knowledge which they have acquired informally and stimulating a reflective process which will enhance their ability as learners throughout their study.

Activity 4 (1.5 hours)

What are the challenges of RPL?

We have noted the benefits of RPL and seen how useful it can be for both individuals and organisations. However we have also seen from the data collected in the BeFlex Plus survey that RPL is not especially widely used. In this activity we identify the challenges of RPL for the individual, the institution and at a wider national and European level. Where possible we have used case studies to illustrate challenges. After each challenge we have included some stimulus questions to get you started with discussion on how to address them. We would like you to continue and extend this discussion. If you have completed an action plan as part of activity 2, or you are evaluating an existing action plan you should also consider whether there is anything you should add or amend at the planning stage to address these challenges.

Achieving consistency in recognition and valuing of prior learning.

The system of RPL works best where those who are undertaking it see that consistent judgements are taken about the value of what they know. Ideally this consistency should be apparent within and between institutions. This is particularly important for learners making choices about how they might use the credit achieved by RPL. In the case study below a group of universities and the council of the universities of the French community of Belgium (CIUF) have instigated a project to ensure equity in approach to RPL across a regional community. In striving to delivery equity the project also aims to publicise RPL widely and encourage more people to make use of it.
The widespread development of recognition of formal, informal and non-formal learning in the French speaking Belgian universities

Conseil Interuniversitaire de la Communauté française de Belgique – CIUF (BE)

This project is designed to co-ordinate the activities of RPL in the French speaking universities of Belgium. The objectives of the project are to:

- Promote RPL as a new way to start university study, both inside and outside the academic community
- Guarantee equity during the RPL process
- Improve the quality of RPL in the French community in Belgium
- Harmonize RPL practices in French speaking universities

This project has set up a platform to co-ordinate activities, share best practice and evaluate progress.

In your institution is there a university wide RPL policy? Or does implementation differ between departments?

How is RPL promoted institutionally? How is it promoted regionally and nationally?

What are the challenges for a student who wishes to have prior learning recognised and has a choice between regional institutions?

Ensuring RPL is a developmental experience

Potentially the process of RPL could be simply instrumental for students – where all that is required of them is to collect evidence of what they can already do. However if the process is handled in an enlightened way and students are well advised and supported the process should be developmental and formative, especially where they are encouraged to reflect on non-formal and informal learning and experience. The quality of the student experience is likely to depend on the advice and guidance received in early stages of RPL when students are selecting and analysing their current experience and learning to see how it matches what is required to enable them to gain recognition. In the case study below the importance of the role of the counsellor is recognised.

The resumption of studies at the University of Bretagne Occidentale

University of Brest (FR)

At the University of Bretagne Occidentale, individuals who are interested in RPL can attend a workshop which is held every Tuesday evening. Here they can talk individually about their learning needs and their aspirations with advisors. They can also approach tutor for expert advice. Then working with an RPL advisor they agree an individual contract which outlines what they need to do. They are given clear advice on finance, funding and costs. As well as having access to special study modules, for example in research techniques, they have access to RPL advisors throughout the year who can help with individual questions.
• Can you identify other ways that institutions can ensure RPL is developmental and formative for students?
• How can you achieve balance between encouraging individual approaches to selection and presentation of evidence of prior learning with ensuring learners demonstrate knowledge and experience against pre-defined learning outcomes?

How can the ‘made to measure’ aspiration of RPL fit with university policy and processes that are designed to manage large cohorts of students studying and learning in similar ways?

One of the attractions of RPL is that it allows people to gain credit for experience that is individualised depending on the way they have gained it. This ‘made to measure’ or individualised approach can mean that evidence of prior learning even for a single programme can vary widely and may even require very different assessment methods. So for example, one person may construct a written portfolio to demonstrate knowledge whereas another may require an observation of what they do at work. In contrast, most university policies and procedures work on the principal of dealing with large groups of students in a similar way. This has implications for the infrastructure especially in relation to finance and human resources for example. So in an effort to offer an individualised pathway the complexity of it can make it difficult to manage and to understand for everyone involved – staff and students alike.

In the case study below the University of Pierre and Marie Curie is undertaking research to find out more about how RPL can be delivered more effectively.

**Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning**
**University of Pierre and Marie Curie (FR)**

The university is undertaking research to find out how RPL can be delivered more effectively. They note that the take up of RPL is still very modest because many candidates find the academic nature of the criteria they are expected to demonstrate to be difficult to understand. The procedure for RPL can seem onerous and time-consuming to learners. The language in which the RPL process is expressed is not always easily understood. They are studying the experience of RPL over a five year period so that those responsible for providing the service will be able to make it meet student needs more effectively.

• How can RPL combine flexibility and accessibility with rigour of quality assurance?
• Can you identify innovative procedures by which an institution can deliver an individualised approach for students within the constraints of their large scale operating procedures?
• How can the RPL process be described in a way that is easy for students to understand yet fully expresses the demands and learning outcomes of an academic programme?

There are no right answers to these questions and your responses will depend upon your own experiences of delivering RPL or working with students in LLL. We hope that the responses you come up with will help you in the planning of RPL for your institution if this is what you are planning.
Concluding comments

As we have recognised and identified throughout this section, there is still only a modest provision of RPL at many institutions. To a certain extent Activity 4 may have illustrated why this situation has arisen by highlighting the quite substantial challenges that an institution may face in setting up a procedure. However the case studies highlighted here demonstrate that those universities who have addressed this subject are able to construct approaches which are attractive to individuals and organisations and manageable for their institutions.