

RPL for Access in Europe, Country Examples & Breakout rooms

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European RPL Network

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Session overview

- Introduction to RPL for access to higher education in Europe
- RPL for access in practice: country examples from Scotland, Sweden, Malta, Ireland
- Breakout rooms for participants to discuss challenges, practice and success factors in RPL for access

RPL for Access: What are we talking about?

- **Recognition of prior learning (RPL)** = “validation of learning outcomes, namely knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning” (2012 Council Recommendation) -> nobody should be required to study something they already know
- **RPL for access** = alternative route to enter higher education through recognition of prior skills and knowledge gained through a combination of formal, non-formal and informal learning
 - BUT: access ≠ admission
- RPL for **access** to higher education ≠ RPL for **progression/credits**

What do we know about RPL for access in the EHEA?

- Potential **benefits** of RPL for access at the individual, institutional, system, societal and economic level
- Longstanding **Bologna Process commitment** (since 2005 Bergen Communiqué)
- Nevertheless, there are **substantial gaps** in its implementation:
 - [2024 Bologna Process Implementation Report](#): 21 higher education systems allow for RPL for access
 - [2024 Bologna With Students Eyes Report](#): only 17 higher education systems in Europe allow for the use of RPL for enrolling in higher education (as opposed to 22 systems which allow for RPL to progress)
 - Common barriers to RPL in general: lack of trust in the quality/validation of non-formal and informal outcomes qualifications; lack of top-level coordination from the national authority; limited information/lack of trust from HEIs towards other HEI or education providers
 - [Trends 2024](#): only 21% of 489 surveyed institutions allow RPL for admission to higher education

RPL for Access in practice in Scotland, Sweden, Malta, Ireland

How is RPL for access understood in your context?

How is RPL for access implemented in your country?

What are your main challenges and success factors for implementing RPL for access?



RPL for Access in Scotland

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RPL for Access in Scotland

- Embedded in lifelong learning and widening access practice, with a range of projects and resources developed in recent years.
- Guided by QAA Scotland's Framework for RPL and the SCQF Partnership's RPL Principles.
- Institutions design own policies aligned to the framework and principles.

Success factors

- Well established articulation pathways between colleges and universities.
- The SCQF is the common language of Scottish education, allowing for parity of esteem between pathways and greater recognition of diverse learning journeys.
- A variety of high quality guidance and case studies available online at SCQFP's RPL Hub.

Challenges

- Variation in practice across institutions.
- Institutions lack sufficient resource.
- Low awareness amongst learners.
- Need for greater consistency.
- Work is ongoing towards a coordinated national system.

RPL for Access in Sweden

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RPL for Access in Sweden

- RPL for access to higher education is regulated in the Higher Education Ordinance
- Swedish Rectors' Conference (SUHF) issued a Recommendation (2023) to use RPL in line with the Council Recommendation, Cedefop Guidelines and the Lisbon Recognition Convention

Success factors

- Legislation is in place
- RPL for access is generally less complicated than RPL for credits

Challenges

- No nationally defined process for RPL for access
- Different process in different HEIs, sometimes even within the same HEI makes RPL difficult for students
- RPL doesn't render any grade or merit rating for competition (numerus clausus)
- Funding

More information on RPL for Access available at <https://www.studera.nu/startpage/road-to-studies/admission/prior-learning/>



RPL for Access in Malta

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RPL for Access in Malta

- Nationally coordinated through formal applications to MFHEA
- Guidelines, principles and practices provided for all FEI & HEIs
- RPL used to access specific courses and gain exemption from certain units
- Institutions must submit a formal application to MFHEA before offering RPL
- HEIs have discretion in practical implementation, but must follow MFHEA guidelines

Success factors

- RPL Guidelines (2nd edition launched in June 2025)

Challenges

- Cultural resistance
- Communication gaps between institutions and stakeholders



RPL for Access in Ireland

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RPL for Access in Ireland

- National policies & frameworks
- Institutional RPL policies & practices well established
- NFQ
- Non-formal & informal learning
- Institutional quality assurance
- Lifelong Learning

Success factors

- High level commitment
- Institutional RPL policy and procedures
- Curriculum design
- Support for applicants

Challenges

- Awareness raising
- Staff capacity
- Data & systems
- Funding

Toolkit & Exemplars of RPL for Access available at www.priorlearning.ie/resources-tools



Breakout rooms (25 minutes)

Discuss challenges, good practice and success factors for RPL for access to higher education in participants' countries:

- How is RPL used for access to higher education in your country?
- What works and what doesn't?
- How can the implementation of RPL for access be improved?
- What are key success factors to enable an impactful implementation of RPL for access to higher education?