
Examples and considerations in the context of national development in VPL

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In Ireland, Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) or Recognition of Prior Learning (VPL) is a process whereby learning that has taken place prior to enrolment on a programme of study is explored, recognised and given value in the context of a destination award. In general terms this includes the recognition, evidencing and valuing of relevant and current formal, non-formal and informal learning. A broad aim of VPL in the Irish context is to encourage people to enter or re-enter formal education and to achieve qualifications through sensitive and accessible pathways. This is very much in keeping with the concept of lifelong learning defined by European Commission (2001), Behringer and Coles (2003), as “learning activity that is undertaken throughout life and improves knowledge, skills and competences within personal, civic, social and /or employment related perspectives. Thus the whole spectrum of learning; formal, non-formal and informal, is included as are active citizenship, personal fulfilment, social inclusions and professional, vocational and employment related aspects.” In considering VPL it is necessary to consider the broader concept of lifelong learning and how it pertains to the development of an individual and society at large.

1. Lifelong learning

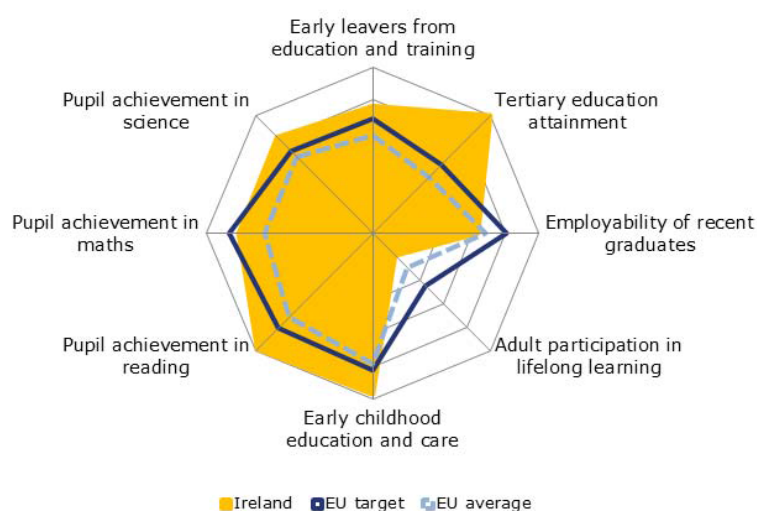
According to the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) lifelong learning should encompass the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal, and informal learning (Werquin, 2010). Individuals learn in many contexts throughout their lives, including work, involvement in social and community activities, or learning through their life experiences. Appropriate value should be given to all these contexts for learning. For an individual, competencies acquired in all aspects of life are essential parts of the overall learning experience.

Learning that takes place outside the formal systems for education and training, can, however, be difficult to identify and value (Werquin, 2010). The focus on lifelong learning policy has slowly shifted from the traditional approach of ‘learning

in the classroom' to incorporate the diversity and richness of other learning environments. One of the distinguishing features of non-formal and informal learning is that the experience of the learner occupies a central place in all considerations of teaching and learning. This experience may comprise earlier events, current life events, or those arising from the learner's participation in the workplace or as a result of activities implemented by teachers and facilitators. It supports a more participative, learner-centred approach, which places an emphasis on direct engagement, rich learning events and the construction of meaning by learners within their individual contexts.

The Education & Training Monitor, 2014 Ireland, finds Ireland performing below the European average in participating in lifelong learning (European Commission, 2014). Only 7.6% of respondents aged 25 to 64 enrolled in formal education. This remains below the Lisbon target of 12.5%, and the EU-15 average of 12% (Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2016).

Figure 1: Education and Training Monitor, 2014



Source: DG Education and Culture calculations, based on data from Eurostat (LFS 2013 and UOE 2012) and OECD (PISA 2012). Note: all scores are set between maximum (the highest performers visualised by the outer ring) and minimum (the lowest performers visualised by the centre of the chart).

The Irish economic downturn underscored the need for everyone, particularly those with low skill levels and those in vulnerable positions, to upgrade their skills. The aim is to significantly improve access for unemployed persons to job search, training and education, community and employment programmes, and to maximise opportunities so that people are better placed to avail of new job opportunities, including emerging sectors. The Irish Government's Action Plan for Jobs points to the importance of competitiveness and the alignment of worker

skills with current and emerging enterprise needs (Department of Jobs Enterprise & Innovation, 2014). Increasing people's lifelong learning especially of those in employment was identified as a 'national performance gap' which the Irish National Skills Strategy 2025 is going to address.

The approach adopted by CIT is informed by national, European and international practice. The institute has been involved in and led the latest national research on RPL at higher and further education levels and on Irish higher education and industry collaborative programmes. The following provides some overview and key findings of this research.

2. Background to the study in higher education

The study on VPL in higher education arose from a research call from the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in 2014. The study sought to explore current policies, frameworks and processes for recognition of learning in Irish higher education institutions. It also aimed to see how these might be more coherent and consistent.

The research design for the study took a mixed methods approach which allowed for a comprehensive examination of the complexity of VPL provision in higher education in Ireland. The combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches was designed to capture a macro-picture of the operation of VPL in Ireland in 2015 which was sensitive to the variety of contexts and issues around its provision. The researchers explored the current policies, frameworks and processes presently employed across higher education.

The desk review of practice included the international, European and national contexts in terms of position papers and strategy documents relating to VPL and the validation of learning gained outside of the formal education context

The empirical research phase was designed to capture as diverse as possible a dataset which was representative of the broad range of stakeholders involved with VPL in Ireland. Populations of interest whose perspectives were sought included the higher education institutions connected with the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (NFTL), students, policy makers and employer groups.

3. Overview of the findings of the study

The empirical and deskresearch phases of the study identified some key elements of practice which support effective systems of VPL. The first of which is the importance of having clearly defined learning and programme outcomes to provide the attainment and assessment structure. Such scaffolding enables the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The importance of appropriate collaboration between departments, faculties, and institutions supporting consistency in practice and a coherent experience for the

learner/applicant was also highlighted in the study. Such collaboration builds capacity with the assessment of VPL.

From the student perspective the study found that, having clear points of contact, accessible information and adequate supports for the learner/applicant are critical elements to have in place and provides a much needed structure for arrangements with VPL. Similarly, having clarity of roles with adequate training and supports for staff involved in the VPL process is also important.

The importance of using appropriate tools within VPL provision was apparent. The use of consistent systems to assist in structuring applications such as paper based portfolio templates and e-portfolios. Finally, the collection of data on VPL will build a foundational infrastructure which supports the ongoing development of practice and inform future strategy.

In summary the review of VPL in Higher Education in Ireland made the following conclusions:

1. There are organic developments of practice already in existence which can provide benchmarks and guidance for others with less developed processes.
2. VPL is developing within professional bodies and employer representative organisations nationally, along with developments within higher and further education.
3. There is a general understanding of what constitutes VPL however it must be stated that there is an absence of clarity and a commonly agreed definition of VPL in higher education in Ireland.
4. Records are maintained by some providers however, comparable data and measurable indicators of activity are not currently available across the sector.
5. There are positive developments at a national and institution level, however alignment between national level and individual institution efforts is not clear.
6. Institutions have invested time in developing systems to support VPL internally. In some cases there is a variation between stated policies and actual implementation.
7. In maintaining the quality assurance and assessment systems, staff development for the implementation of VPL is not as proactively supported as it could be.

The study findings provide an insight into enablers and challenges for VPL/RPL for higher education providers in Ireland. The most significant finding is that there isn't one consistent way in which validation is implemented across higher education in Ireland and that institutions invariably develop their own systems which are informed by but not dictated by a central agency.

The following section outlines the research led by CIT into higher education-industry collaborative programmes which incorporates VPL and work based learning.

4. Collaborative course development

Work-based or situated learning has the potential to make a significant contribution to the development of appropriate work-place skills, robust employability, and enhanced collaboration between education providers and employers. However, there is a danger that it might be viewed as a cost-effective response to a vaguely-defined skills gaps and that the complex relationship between the context for the learning and the content of the learning to be attained might be overlooked in the process. There are many different structures that identify and support work-based learning and also a range of definitions. The term can be used to encompass all kinds of non-formal and informal learning which happen (whether planned or not) in the practice domain as well as structured and planned work-based learning schemes which include carefully considered learning outcomes, supportive contexts for acquisition of knowledge skills and competence and quality assured assessment and validation of the learning. In some contexts the term work-based learning is used predominantly to refer to temporary, paid or unpaid, opportunities to gain workplace experience for students and learners. In others it refers to structured apprenticeship schemes with clear on-the-job and off-the-job elements.

Raelin (2008) suggests that there are three main elements of work-based learning:

- Learning is acquired in the midst of action and dedicated to the task.
- Knowledge creation and utilisation are collective activities.
- Learners demonstrate a learning-to-learn aptitude, which frees them to question underlying assumptions of practice.

The latter point underlines the reflective element which is common in most considerations of work-based learning. Connor (2005) recognised the difficulties associated with a clear definition of work-based learning. The expansion of work-based learning in higher education raises challenges to the traditional understanding of knowledge (Gibbons et al 1994). For the purposes of this paper, work-based learning is considered as learning which is planned, assessed and valued in the context of higher education learning outcomes and awards but is attained through, and at work by employees and with the support of the employer. It is built, therefore, on a tripartite relationship between the learner, the education provider and the employer and there is a clear requirement that the employer and the higher education provider enter into a relationship to plan and support the learning.

While it is widely recognised that learning happens within the workplace there has traditionally been a reluctance on the part of higher education institutions (HEIs) to recognise this learning or to formally offer credit for it through some validation process. In 2008 a study was undertaken of 433 courses in Irish Higher Education Institutions which were offered outside of the central applications system for

school-leavers and predominantly on a parttime basis to people who were in employment. At that time the responses indicated that involvement of employers was not common and that, in the main, the courses were designed and delivered as conventional classroom-type offerings. For instance, 84% were delivered on campus only, for 58% the need for the course was identified by the higher education institution, and in 51% of cases the design was by the HEI only (Linehan, 2008). Clearly there was a reluctance on the part of the academic community to involve employers in course development and design. Long term, sustainable relationships between higher education providers and employers play a key role in ensuring that work-based learning can be more fully embraced by the academic community (Linehan & Sheridan, 2009). The significance of partnership and collaboration between the employer or employer organisations and the education providers in the context for this new form of learning should be stressed (Mumford and Roodhouse, 2010). Many current reports and strategy statements point to the potential benefits for learners, employers and higher education institutions. The second strategic objective of the Irish national skills strategy to 2025 intends for 'employers to participate in skills development through active collaboration with education and training providers'. The strategy identified the demand to develop 'occupational standards' to ensure the 'relevance and currency' of education and training provision (ref). The aim of this approach is to reduce the incidence of graduate skills mismatch. As outlined in the strategy report this can be achieved through 'increased employer participating in curriculum design and review' (ref).

5. National policy context of workplace learning validation

There is much anticipation in Irish government and policy circles about the potential efficiencies and economic benefits that could accrue from the validation of work-based learning activities in higher education and enhanced relationships between education and employers in the formation of the graduate and the ongoing provision of learning opportunities. In 2011 the Department of Education and Skills in Ireland published its forward-looking document 'National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030' (Department of Education and Skills, 2011). That document focused on restructuring the higher education system as a key action in ensuring Ireland's economic development and the creation of an 'Innovation Island'. The difficult economic climate in Ireland brought competitiveness and sustainability of employment and individual employability into sharp focus. This has, in turn, impacted on how industries and organisations are engaging with training and development in terms of planning for the future and having a workforce capable of responding to market changes. It is clear that by working in close partnership with enterprise, higher education institutions can play a significant role in anticipating and responding to learning and development needs. In its statement on education and training the National Competitiveness Council (NCC, 2009) stresses the role of higher education providers as key drivers of

national and regional competitiveness and growth. The need for providers to respond more flexibly to the learning and development needs of the business community is a recurring theme. This view is supported in the Irish National Strategy for HE to 2030 which reflected findings of a 2010 European Commission report 'New skills for new jobs' which stressed the value of education, and in particular higher education for national The NCC-report notes that the possibility of stable career roles is growing less likely with individuals experiencing frequent change in roles during their working lives. This indicates a shorter skills currency window and an increased need for upskilling and reskilling of the workforce. Increasingly, therefore, the Irish higher education system will be called upon to facilitate the education and development needs of those already in the workforce, to ensure ongoing and resilient employability.

In addressing the difficulties anticipated by the HEIs in responding to the educational needs of those in the workforce, the NCC highlights the need for greater collaboration between education and training providers, employers and the students themselves to ensure currency and relevance of courses. In the 2016 Irish Action Plan for Jobs there was a call for increased support for the numbers of higher education institution – industry collaborations. The need for workplace based training which is fitted around working hours and is flexible in terms of timing and commitment to facilitate participation of workers is also underlined.

Ireland National Skills Strategy states as a key objective that '*Employers will participate actively in the development of skills and make effective use of skills in their organisations to improve productivity and competitiveness.*' (Department of Education and Skills, 2016a:11)

The Action Plan for Education seeks to build stronger bridges between education and the workplace and recognises that:

While in the past, educationalists may have been wary that the narrow repetitive tasks of the workplace should not crowd out the broader agenda of education, now, the demands of the workplace are increasingly focussing on the very characteristics education nurtures – critical thinking, creativity, innovation, adaptability, collaboration. Learners gain experience from placement in real world settings, while organisations and enterprises (public and private) enhance their capacity to innovate and embrace new insights and technologies through interaction with education. (Department of Education and Skills, 2016b:39)

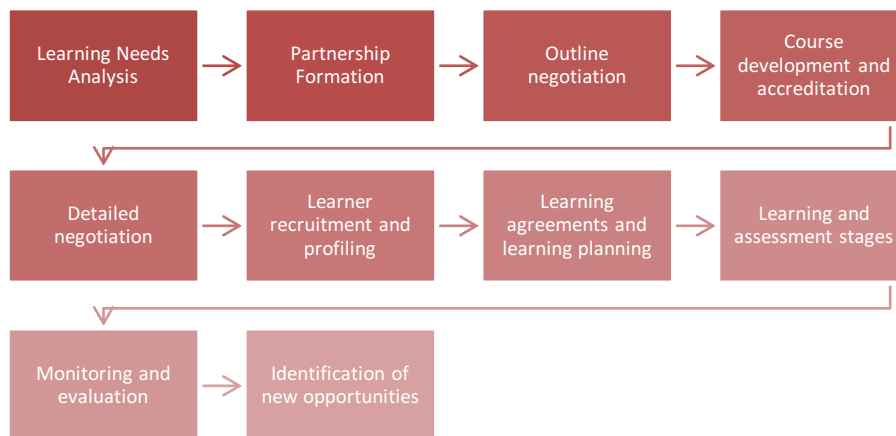
From these reports it is clear that there is a recognition that Ireland is well behind target in terms of participation in lifelong learning and while it is generally anticipated that work-based learning can benefit many of the stakeholders, it is also recognised that this needs to be built on strong relationships and that there is a significant role for the employer in supporting the learning. The following section briefly introduces an exploration of one higher education institutions

collaborations with industry to develop customised learning solutions and in the validation of learning acquired within the context of destination awards on the national framework of qualifications.

6. Work-based and context-sensitive learning

An in-depth review of practice in Ireland in the development of company or sector-specific learning solutions identified a number of exemplars and sought to develop supportive structures for higher education-workplace partnerships. The courses examined range from level 6 to level 9 on the Framework of Qualifications and from 10 to 180 credits. Through this exploration, good practice guidelines were developed for the general stages in customised course development (Sheridan and Murphy, 2012). These stages which are outlined below are not intended to define a rigid process but rather to provide a general approach for those involved in course development in response to specific workplace needs.

Figure 2: Main Steps in Customised Course Development



The report identified the following enablers for customised learning development programmes with industry:

- Existing relationship and good mutual understanding between the higher education institution and the company.
- Clear points of contact and commitment to the vision and the process from both sides.
- Clear decision structures in each organisation with regard to the development of a customised programme so that changes are clearly and easily implemented.

- Identifiable learning need to motivate both in developing an appropriate solution.
- Flexible approaches to learning and assessment.
- Availability of funding.
- Existing exemplars which show the potential of HEI employer engagements.

These considerations form the backdrop to most higher education interactions with industry partners. There is a particular need to recognise that the provision of flexible and customised learning arrangements is not a simple service interaction but that a commitment of resources and realistic expectations are required by both parties. Much is said about the cultural differences between higher education and industry and the lack of a common language (Mumford & Roodhouse, 2010) but in real terms there are many practical examples of open and positive collaborations which demonstrate that these differences can be overcome. There may well be tensions between the competing priorities of academia and business but a balance can be struck between them. These priorities can be respected through strategic partnerships to develop customised learning pathways that are sensitive both to the learner profile and existing skill set (through recognition/validation of prior learning) and are informed by the unfolding organisational needs and the workplace as a setting for the planned acquisition of knowledge, skill and competence.

A feature of courses which include elements of work-based learning is that some of the learning outcomes are achieved through and at work. This challenges higher education systems by separating the acquisition of the learning from the traditional setting and requires additional consideration at the assessment of the learning. It requires some reflection of the competences that can be gained and the competence frameworks which might be used to validate them. The particular difficulty associated with the assessment of work-based learning resulted in it being viewed as a discrete element of a particular programme and often considered on a 'pass/fail' basis or not subject to assessment (Mumford & Roodhouse, 2010; Murphy & Sheridan, 2013). However, Basit *et al.* (2015) emphasise the need to take a strategic approach to work-based learning and to consider it an integral part of higher education rather than a peripheral activity. In considering how learning that is gained in practice settings is to be assessed and graded, attention needs to be paid to the design of the course or modules. How the learning outcomes of individual course elements and the overall programme outcomes have been written and whether this is sensitive to the variety of contexts in which the learning might be achieved will be important. From an academic quality perspective all parties including the learner and the employer need to be confident that the assessment and validation processes are such as to assure the quality and level of the learning and that the learning is appropriate to attain credit on the national qualifications framework.

7. Role of the employer

Planned work-based learning for employees places an onus on the employer in relation to the provision of appropriate supports and scaffolds for the learning. Greenwood (2011) considers this responsibility on behalf of the employer as a key investment which has significant business benefits. Johnson (2001) includes learning contracts and work place mentors in his definition of work-based learning and explores the barriers from the perspectives of learners, the university and the employer. Johnson identifies the potential issues relation to confidentiality of workplace information and data that may arise and the need for the employer to be directly involved in aspects of the supervision and the assessment of the work, the learning, and the application of the learning within the workplace.

To better support learning and development in the work-placement process in third level courses it is recognised that employers should work closely with higher education institutions in developing tripartite placement agreements to support the learning, develop appropriate job specifications, provide supports for the work-place learning, exploit opportunities to enhance networking and collaboration with higher education and be proactive in communication processes (Sheridan, Linehan, 2011).

The University of South Wales has developed a framework document for learning through employment which details issues facing employers. In responding to these issues they provide a toolkit which addresses some of the concerns that employers report, including resource commitment, commercially sensitive information, mentoring and supporting learners, ethical issues and academic language and structures including levels and credits (CELT, 2014). Employer involvement in the process is described as extending to:

- Involvement in strategic discussion around skills, training and qualification needs in specific sectors.
- Participation in curriculum working groups as subject matter experts.
- Designing and delivering elements of a programme.
- Offering work-based projects, placements or data sets and casestudies.
- Assessment of work and learning.

While the relationship with the employer is seen as critical by most authors, Lester and Costley (2010) point out some inherent dangers where work-based learning partnerships are developed without a clearly thought-out and negotiated structure to underpin the process. This stresses the importance of advance planning and mutual understanding and trust in building the context for the relationship which will support and scaffold the learning. These relationships are central to the examples summarised below.

8. The practice

The response of Cork Institute of Technology (CIT) to customised learning needs is not one which has developed accidentally but is indicative of an institution which has invested time, money and resources in facilitating all learners whilst maintaining academic quality and standards. The institution has invested in staff development, cross discipline and functional teams, institutional learning which are underpinned by an open and flexible system. In 2011, CIT Extended Campus was established to stimulate and support interactions between CIT and its external partners. As part of this unit CIT has established the 'Learning Clinic' service which informs staff about CPD opportunities and how workplace learning can be valued within the context of formal qualifications. It also provides CIT with the opportunity of identifying upskilling or reskilling requirements of employees.

In responding to the needs of the workplace in a considered way CIT has adopted a flexible approach informed by existing relationships with the employer organisation and the needs of the learners. Increased negotiation with workplaces to keep pace with enterprise changes and challenges which will have an impact on graduate skill requirements in the future is also a factor of which HEIs have to be mindful, however the challenge is in striking the balance between education and industry priorities. These priorities can be achieved through strategic partnerships to develop customised learning pathways that are sensitive both to the learner profile and existing skill set and are informed by the unfolding organisational needs.

Recognition or validation of learning which ensures that the learning pathway builds on existing formal and experiential knowledge forms an important element of the approach. Work-based learning which can plan for the acquisition of requisite knowledge, skills and competence within the practice domain is part of the evolutions processes for customised courses. Programme development encompasses both full award and short special purpose learning at levels from six to nine on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications. Examples of programmes developed in this partnership mode extend across the institution and span disciplines and departments. The added value element for organisations in getting involved in these practices spans beyond the individual worker, and into broader benefits such as informing curriculum and transforming the broader industrial partner into a learning organisation.

The following examples are intended to demonstrate the diversity and flexibility of interactions between industry and CIT in validating learning from the workplace setting within the context of destination modules and awards. The flexibility of approach extends beyond content and assessment methods to future learning development opportunities which is in keeping with the objectives of the National Skills Strategy to 2025 and the 2016 Irish Action Plan for Jobs.

This first case study outlines how CIT responded to a gap in graduate skills which enabled them to secure employment as identified and supported by the employers and representative bodies.

An analysis of the skills needs of the US multinationals in Ireland conducted in 2012 by the American Chamber of Commerce identified a structural gap in the pathway of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) graduates out of education and into a career. Ensuring that graduates are supported in making this transition protects the State's investment in educational outcomes and ensures that an appropriate talent pool is available to attract mobile foreign direct investment. Combining the knowledge that the graduate from the higher education process can gain significant and valuable learning within their first year in a workplace setting with the reality that many of the work opportunities created are for graduates with a combination of knowledge and experience, a programme was developed to provide a framework for higher education graduates to gain a recognised and validated award through a structured work-based learning internship within a partner organisation. This was a broader project with national reach and the partners in the process included:

- Higher Education Authority.
- American Chamber of Commerce.
- Department of Education & Skills.
- Department of Social Protection.
- Higher Education Institutions.
- American Multinational Corporations.

Over the course of a year a programme structure was agreed which resulted in the proposal to launch a national programme which would be implemented through partnerships between industry and higher education institutions. In order to develop an informed view of the existing graduate development activities, supports and employer expectations, a series of interviews with participating employer companies was undertaken. This research found that employers place a significant emphasis on the development of key workplace skills in their newly hired graduates. While the structure and the duration of the various programmes differ widely, all respondents considered that the learning experiences in the first six to twelve months after graduation are of significant importance.

All companies surveyed expressed the desire for graduates to achieve transferable soft skills such as:

- The ability to communicate, to build networks and ask questions.
- The ability to navigate their way around the company and an awareness of the roles and responsibilities of employees and project teams.
- A professional attitude.
- The ability to 'impress from a distance' was mentioned by one company as being an important soft skill. In this instance graduates worked with overseas

client on a continual basis, so, being able to impress that client through their non-face-to-face dealings was an important criterion.

One employer participant stated that their programmes hoped to help graduates 'take risks, make mistakes and know when to ask questions'. It was clear from the collaboration on the project that policy makers, employers and academics all considered the learning that new graduates gain in the workplace setting vital to their formation and future career. The programme sought to analyse and support that learning and to apply appropriate credit to it at a postgraduate level. CIT worked with a number of industry partners to offer this programme to graduates and while a cohort of graduates successfully completed the course, the Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice which was developed through this collaboration did not gain the success or scale that had been anticipated (Fallon, et al. 2016). However, the process of the development of this and other work-based learning opportunities underscored the importance of the role of the employer in supporting work-based learning and the importance of the planning and development stages to support work-based learning.

This second case study outlines how a professional sporting club were interested in supporting the professional development of their players through building and developing their business competence.

IRUPA (Irish Rugby Union Players Association) and Munster Rugby aim to promote and protect the welfare of their members by endeavouring to safeguard their futures both on and off the pitch. With this in mind, IRUPA worked with CIT School of Business to develop an enterprise and business focused course for players. The partnership resulted in the development of a Special Purpose Award entitled 'Certificate in Enterprise Potential'. The course provides participants with the skills to understand how an enterprise operates and explores the steps involved in turning an idea into a business opportunity. The content and structure of the course was designed specifically around the needs of the players and the development process ensured that the course was flexible enough to work around the players' availability and scheduling constraints. This course allows participants to develop their own individual skills and to understand their own strengths. A key element of the course is the network of both entrepreneurs and business support contacts facilitated through the integration of elements of the learning with the on-campus incubation centre and the entrepreneurial and business community.

The final case study relates to a special purpose award at honours degree level for newly appointed supervisors in a manufacturing environment. The case outlines the process adopted and the benefit to the company in seeking validation for workplace skills. CIT has a long established relationship with the manufacturing company Boston Scientific Ireland in areas such as research, student placement, learning clinics and professional development. They identified a need for newly appointed supervisors in the area of product manufacturing who generally would have an ordinary degree in engineering but would not have knowledge or experience in the people management area. The company had completed a skills

audit to identify the gaps in the knowledge of the supervisors, they also had developed an outline training course based on the company culture, role requirements and the skills audit. The company saw an opportunity to develop a programme that integrated the knowledge and skills the supervisors were gaining in the workplace into a formal academic award and approached CIT. The company are familiar with the concept of RPL/ VPL and were interested in integrating that into the process where possible. A programme has been developed which comprises of three five credit modules for supervisory staff of Boston Scientific. Initially it was intended for those recently promoted but has been extended to multi-sections within the Cork office with discussions to make it multi-site CPD offering. In keeping with the structure of customised programmes developed by CIT it is intended that these honours degree level modules may be integrated into the many offerings of the faculty of Business.

9. Conclusion

This paper concludes that VPL-validation of prior learning is a critical element within higher education in Ireland, supporting the individual, employers and society generally in accessing education and training and allowing for all forms of learning to be valued. The future for VPL in Ireland is likely to bring many timely and significant developments.

The interaction of higher education institutions with enterprises and communities offers significant potential for scientific, social and civic innovation as well as for job-creation and economic development. There has been an evolution in thinking which has seen a progression from the concept of knowledge-transfer from higher education institutions to the idea of knowledge-exchange or knowledge co-creation. Partnership and reciprocity are central to these interactions, recognising that learning happens, and knowledge is both created and applied, outside of academia. Recognising the workplace as a valid and valuable centre for learning presents some challenges for higher education institutions. Identifying, recognising and assessing prior experiential learning presents a real challenge as the evidence of learning is provided out of the normal context within which the learning takes place and it separates the attainment of the learning outcomes from the assessment of the learning. Equally work-based learning requires the higher education institution to plan for the attainment of learning outcomes outside of the more traditional learning environment and relies heavily on the employer to provide the context for the learning and on the learner as part of the negotiated learning process.

The process of negotiation of learning pathways within the workplace has been very useful in assisting the development of enhanced mutual understanding between the academic and the practice setting and has laid the groundwork for

further collaboration in many of the cases summarised here. Experience in this process has led to the development of some guidelines and frameworks which contribute to the planning stages and ensure that all partners to the tripartite arrangements have realistic expectations and understand their responsibilities within the process.

The strong research and practice of CIT in the areas of Recognition/ Validation of prior learning and situated learning have assisted in ensuring that the practices adopted by the institution are informed by national, European and international perspectives, approaches and strategies. The approaches are in keeping with the ethos of education and the institution.

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