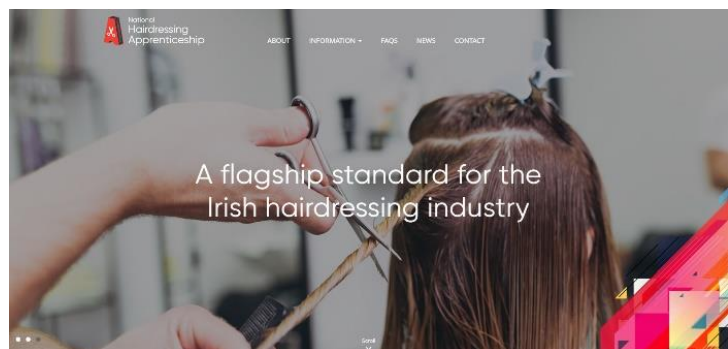


## Recognition of Prior Learning for the Level 6 Advanced Certificate in Hairdressing

Alan Hogan, Patsy Hogan, and Caroline Goode, Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board, Ireland

### Introduction

The focus of this case study is to detail the Recognition of Prior Learning processes which were developed and applied to achieve certification of the Level 6 (EQF Level 5) Advanced Certificate in Hairdressing, and its value in recognizing the lifelong learning and experiences of hairdressers who before this would not have had the opportunity to earn a formal qualification in their field.



The National Hairdressing Apprenticeship program [www.hairdressingapprenticeship.ie](http://www.hairdressingapprenticeship.ie) established the qualification standard of Advanced Certificate in Hairdressing, the first professional hairdressing qualification at this level in Ireland. Without an available RPL process, the only route for applicants to access the qualification would be via completing the entire apprenticeship program itself.

The program was developed by Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board ([www.lcetb.ie](http://www.lcetb.ie) and [www.collegeofFET.ie](http://www.collegeofFET.ie)) as the lead education partner and coordinating provider in association with a consortium of industry representatives. The program, subsequently validated by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), leads to the achievement of a Level 6 (EQF Level 5) Advanced Certificate in Hairdressing.

The national apprenticeship system in Ireland is governed by legislation that sets out the overall structure of the national system and the protections for, as well as the responsibilities of apprentices, employers, and education and training providers. The National Apprenticeship Office is the lead agency responsible for apprenticeship on behalf of the Government, working in close partnership with employers, the Higher Education Authority, Quality and Qualifications Ireland, industry, and education and training providers across further and higher education. The Office was established jointly by SOLAS (the State agency that oversees the Further Education & Training (FET) sector in Ireland) and the Higher Education Authority to implement the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025. For more details please see – [www.apprenticeship.ie](http://www.apprenticeship.ie)

National Apprenticeships are industry-led by a Consortium Steering Group which oversees the development of the apprenticeship program. The Consortium Steering Group comprises an industry chairperson, employer representatives, employee representatives, and an education and training provider as the “coordinating provider” for the apprenticeship, and other key stakeholders in the region/nationally (National Apprenticeship Office, 2017).

Recognition of Prior Learning was established as a priority from the initial stages of program development by the Consortium Steering Group (stages 3 and 4 from figure 1). It was seen as critically important that the extensive prior certified and prior experiential learning of the highly skilled hairdressers could be formally recognized via both an exemption process to advanced stages of the program and also as a route to formally certify experienced hairdressers for the award certification itself. As a result of this core ethos, Recognition of Prior Learning processes has been developed and is available via three discrete and complementary processes for relevant cohort needs: Non-standard entry into Stage 1, Advanced Entry into Stage 2, and Certification of the Major Award.

This Recognition of Prior Learning process is the first of its kind in the Further Education and Training and Apprenticeship sector in Ireland, whereby a process of identifying, documenting, assessing, and certifying prior experiential learning leads to the certification of a major award. Formally validating all forms of an applicant’s prior formal, non-formal, and informal learning, the process outlined makes these learning and skills transparent and creates a means whereby these skills are formally recognized on the National Framework of Qualification (NFQ) purely through a Recognition of Prior Learning process.

The innovative and ground-breaking nature of this project within the Further Education and Training sector in Ireland is significant. This case is the first of its kind in Ireland, in which an RPL process has been developed and implemented for applicants to achieve certification of a major award. This project demonstrates significant innovation in the approach to certification of major award qualifications, in particular, those leading to apprenticeship qualifications.

Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board has completed this process with a pilot group of eight applicants. The recognition of prior learning applicants, all experienced hairdressers, have completed the validation process in approximately nine months, as distinct from the three years required for the program of education and training.

Figure 1: Critical Path and Implementation Partners



Source: National Apprenticeship Office, 2017



Figure 2: Pilot Group

In September 2021, they began their RPL journey, supported by their mentor, participated in two bridging courses, carried out three skills demonstrations, and compiled a portfolio of evidence.

Following a robust quality-assured assessment process, all applicants have successfully completed the recognition of prior learning process and are certified recipients of the Level 6 [EQF Level 5] Advanced Certificates in Hairdressing from QQI.

### National Hairdressing Apprenticeship Program

The National Hairdressing Apprenticeship program is the validated formal program of study leading to the Advanced Certificate in Hairdressing [EQF Level 5].

National Apprenticeship programs have the following characteristics:

- industry-led – consortia of industry and education partners
- lead to an award at Levels 5 to 10 on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)
- between 2-4 years in duration
- minimum 50% on-the-job learning
- flexible delivery – online, blended, off-the-job learning in increments/blocks
- the State funds off-the-job learning
- apprentices are employed under a formal contract of apprenticeship
- the employer pays the apprentice for the duration of the apprenticeship.

### Minimum Intended Program Learning Outcomes

The National Hairdressing Apprenticeship program is comprised of 11 Minimum Intended Program Learning Outcomes (MIPOs), which explicitly state what an apprentice is expected to know, understand, and/or be able to demonstrate to be successful in the program and achieve certification.

**Table 1**

*Minimum Intended Program Learning Outcome*

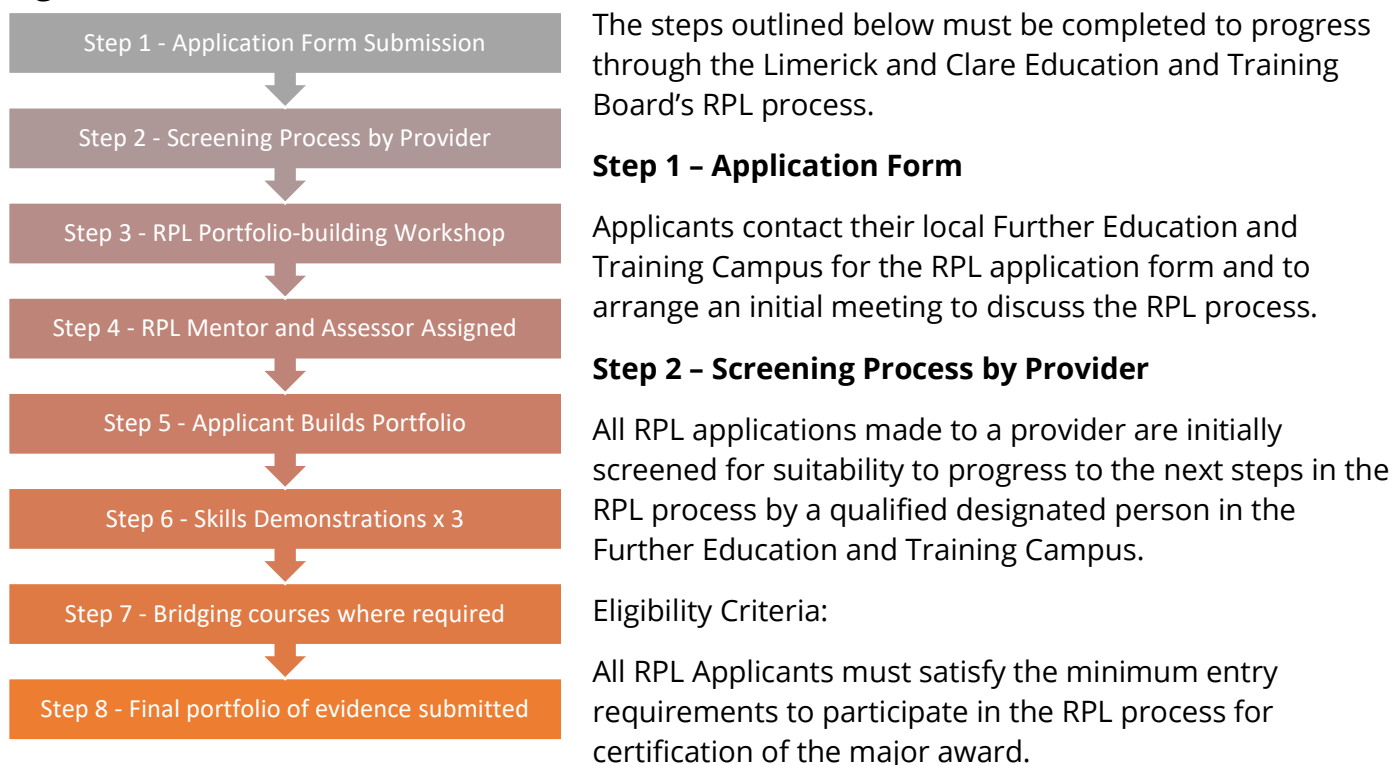
MIPO No.	MIPO Content
1	Have specialized and thorough knowledge of the scientific principles of hairdressing theory and ethos, and its application and integration within the role of a hairdresser.
2	Safely and effectively exercise their hairdressing craft, observing technical and environmental standards and regulations.
3	Demonstrate an understanding of the range of contexts where hairdressers work, including economic, environmental, and social issues, and identify and discuss other disciplines likely to be encountered throughout the hairdressing industry.

MIPL O No.	MIPLO Content
4	Demonstrate an understanding of the range of specialized hairdressing skills, using a range of comprehensive skills, products, and tools to solve problems within the salon environment.
5	Plan and develop evidence-informed creative strategies in order to be able to respond to familiar and unfamiliar contexts they encounter in the hairdressing environment.
6	Communicate and interact effectively and exercise appropriate leadership within the hairdressing industry environment.
7	Exercise independence and judgment in the completion of a wide range of hairdressing work and learning activities.
8	Exercise initiative and self-reliance in the hairdressing workplace, exhibiting accountability for work outputs and decisions made in the learning environment.
9	Demonstrate an ability to work effectively in groups, and exercise supervision and leadership in hairdressing roles, contributing to the development and improvement of the work of others.
10	Exercise personal responsibility for independent learning and provide support to others in identifying their learning needs.
11	Articulate impressions, perceptions, and interpretations from experiences of work and learning, demonstrating an awareness of a range of social, sectorial, and contextual issues as appropriate to the hairdressing industry.

### Recognition of Prior Learning

The RPL applicants for the Major Award evidence achievement of the same 11 MIPLOs, albeit in a different manner to that of NHA apprentices. Each of these MIPLOs must be fully evidenced in an RPL Portfolio of Evidence to achieve certification for the qualification.

### Figure 3: RPL Process Flow for the Level 6 Qualification



### **Step 3 – RPL Portfolio-building Workshop**

Following a successful outcome of the screening process the RPL applicant is required to attend an RPL workshop which will outline the following:

- What is RPL?
- What is an RPL Portfolio and how is it developed?
- What help and support are available to RPL applicants?
- Roles and Responsibilities of:
  - The RPL Applicant, the RPL Mentor, the RPL Assessor, the Further Education and Training Campus
- Timelines for the RPL process including next steps.

### **Step 4 – RPL Mentor and Assessor Assigned**

Each RPL applicant who attends the RPL Workshop is assigned an RPL Mentor. The RPL Mentor is responsible for guiding and supporting the applicant through the RPL process and facilitating the applicant to ensure the evidence they provide is consistent with the award standard. The applicant is responsible for gathering and presenting the evidence required for assessment according to the instructions given by the RPL Mentor.

The RPL Assessor is a suitably qualified, experienced assessor and subject matter expert with the ability to assess both Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL) and Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL). The RPL Assessor is appointed by the Further Education and Training Campus. The RPL Assessor is responsible for assessing and grading submitted assessment materials/portfolios in accordance with Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board's RPL processes and the award standard.

### **Step 5 – Applicant Builds Portfolio**

Under the guidance of the RPL Mentor, the applicant will build an RPL portfolio of evidence using the templates provided.

A range of evidence formats are accumulated by the applicants. These can include written accounts, curriculum vitae, certificates (formal and non-formal), employer references, interviews, skills demonstrations, photos/videos, testimonials, workplace evidence (verified by employer), evidence from home, leisure, and community activities, or voluntary work.

### **Step 6 – Skills Demonstrations**

During the portfolio-building stage, all RPL applicants will complete three (3) practical Skills Demonstrations, which will assess the practical competencies that apprentices participating in the National Hairdressing Apprenticeship in the traditional manner would be assessed on at the end of Stage 3.

These Skills Demonstrations *do not* include a demonstration of practical skills that experienced stylists will have acquired over their many years working in a salon, as this goes beyond the assessable components of the National Hairdressing Apprenticeship. In other words, applicants completing the Skills Demonstrations only demonstrate skills that all other apprentices completing the program via the traditional route should have.

These Skills Demonstrations form part of the evidence presented in the RPL Portfolio under the practical MIPLOs of the program.

### **Step 7 – Bridging courses where required**

If a gap occurs in a portfolio where one full MIPLO or a minor part(s) of a MIPLO(s) cannot be met, then an RPL Assessor/Mentor may decide that an additional piece of work or assessment can be completed to bridge the gap.

For the cohort of RPL applicants for the Advanced Certificate in Hairdressing, these additional bridging courses included the following:

Information Technology Skills Course. The course was designed to address the key IT skills shortfalls identified by the applicants themselves, in consultation with their mentor. The content covered included file management, word processing, spreadsheets, digital marketing tools, the internet, and email.

Perming Course. A short bridging course on Perming took place which was developed to address the skills gaps in this area that were identified during induction. This course covers the theoretical and practical aspects of perming and neutralizing hair.

### **Step 8 – Final Portfolio of Evidence Submitted**

Completed portfolios are submitted by the applicant to the RPL Mentor, who then submits the portfolio to the RPL Assessor for assessing and grading using the supplied RPL Grading Rubrics.

The RPL Assessor will then follow NHA Quality Assured Assessment processes for the submission and authentication of learner evidence within the Further Education and Training Campus.

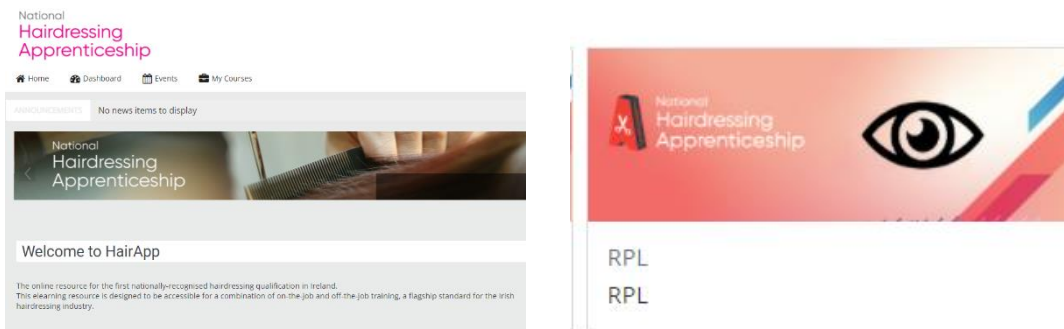
All RPL portfolios go through the authentication stages of:

- internal verification
- external authentication
- results ratified via the NHA Examination Board
- provisional results statements issued to applicants
- appeals process
- final submission of results to QQI
- issue of certificates to applicants by QQI.

### **NHA RPL Moodle Course**

As for traditional apprentices, RPL applicants and their associated Further Education and Training Campus are able to avail of the customized Virtual Learning Environment Moodle site which was developed for the National Hairdressing Apprenticeship – [www.HairApp.ie](http://www.HairApp.ie)

Figure 4: [Images from RPL Moodle Course](#)

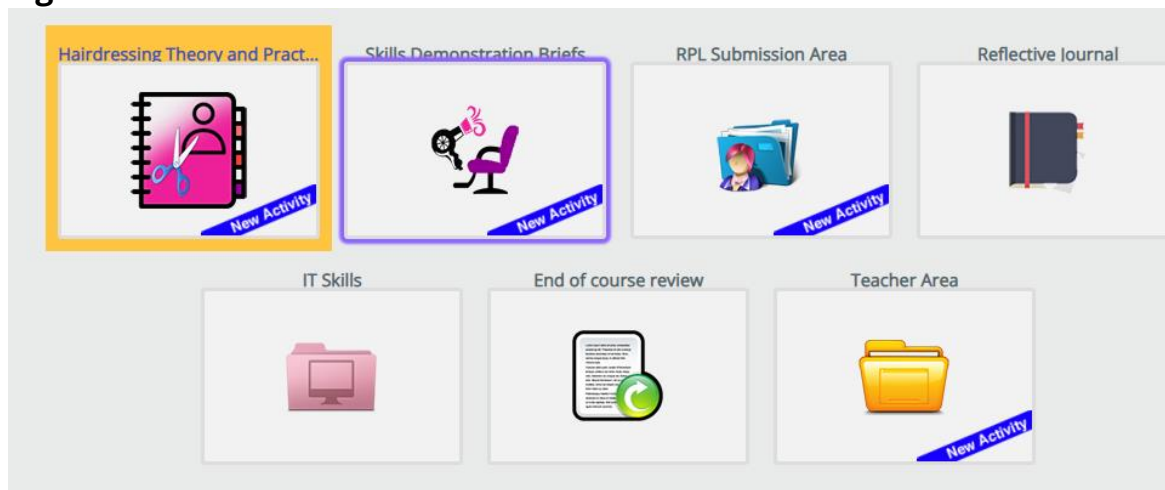


In order to track the progress of all RPL applications, each Further Education and Training Campus maintains an NHA RPL Moodle course within HairApp. The Moodle course is a repository for all RPL applicant's key information and will track such things as:

- evidence/documentation supplied to support RPL applications
- record of key dates (form received, notification of screening outcome sent, Skills Demo dates, etc.) and timelines via customized checklists
- RPL Mentors and Assessors assigned to the applicant
- grades achieved via the Moodle Gradebook
- formative assessments completed by the applicants.

RPL Mentors, Assessors, and key QA staff are assigned roles within Moodle pertinent to their role, while the RPL applicants will use the Moodle assignment upload facility to submit their RPL evidence and interact with the RPL teaching and learning resources provided for them.

Figure 5: **Interactive sections from Moodle Course**



## Pilot Group

A pilot group of eight [8] RPL Hairdressing applicants began their RPL journey with a workshop held on 20th September 2021 where they were formally inducted into the RPL pilot group by the NHA team.

*Each Applicant was:*

- assigned an RPL Mentor who provided 1:1 support and guidance,

- given access to the NHA-customized Moodle site HairApp, and support from the Technology Enhanced Learning Support Service,
- supported with addressing any identified skills gaps through participation in short bridging courses as needed.

## Moodle Submissions

The applicants submitted their first piece of RPL evidence to HairApp in November 2021. This submission evidenced the applicant's prior knowledge and experiences of Health and Safety, environmental standards, and regulations within the hairdressing industry. The applicants used a combination of Word documents and video recordings to present evidence.

Figure 6: Skill Demonstrations

## Skills Demonstrations

Next, the RPL applicants participated in two skills demonstrations in January 2022 in the hair salon at the College of Further Education and Training, Ennis Campus. These demonstrations were:

- Colour Change and Cut
- Highlights and Up-style

The applicants completed accompanying briefs for each of their skills demonstrations which provided evidence of their knowledge of hairdressing theory and science. They were supported in the completion of these briefs with resources available to 'traditional' apprentices in their HairApp accounts.



Figure 7: RPL Assessment Brief

### RPL ASSESSMENT BRIEF

Programme	National Hairdressing Apprenticeship
Module Names	For RPL, assessments will cover a wide number of modules and module learning outcomes from all three Stages of the programme. Where appropriate, the module and/or programme learning outcomes (MIMLOs/MIPLOs) will be listed below.
Module Codes	
RPL Mentor Name	Caroline Goode
RPL Assessor Name	

Title	Colour Change, Cut and Blow-dry Skills Demonstration
MIMLOs and/or MIPLOs to be Assessed	MIPLOs 2, 4, 6 and 7
Assessment Duration	4½ hours (after the consultation stage)

Applicant Name	
Date	

General Instructions to Applicant	
Creatively colour hair, using contrasting dimensional highlighting and colouring techniques on previously coloured hair, complementing and enhancing the overall look with advanced cutting and styling techniques	
You are required to do the following:	
1. Carry out an in-depth bespoke consultation for a creative colour change, a graduated haircut and a technically advanced blow-dry on a live model with previously coloured hair, to include aftercare advice at the end of the service	
2. Model's hair length must be chin level or above prior to the skills demonstration	
3. Pre-declare the final result and the processes used to achieve this result	
4. Demonstrate a creative colour change service, that incorporates a combination of pre-lightening and colouring techniques to fashion a multi-dimensional effect	
5. Demonstrate a creative graduated haircut that complements the colour change and personalise the haircut incorporating various texturizing techniques	
6. Apply specific shampoo and conditioner suitable to the service	
7. Adopt technically advanced blow-drying techniques to complement the look, using a variety of styling tools to include radial brushes	

Feedback on completion has been very positive and all applicants reported they gained valuable learning and welcomed the opportunity to showcase their skills in this structured environment alongside their peers.

## Additional Briefs

The final briefs were issued during March/April 2022 with the aim of completing the RPL process for June 2022 Certification. These final briefs focused primarily on the applicant's transversal skills and professional development which has occurred over the span of their careers in the sector.

They were reflective in nature and allowed the applicants to look back on and analyze their careers to date while also giving them the opportunity to reflect on their participation in the RPL process.

## Portfolio of Evidence

The applicants developed their portfolio of evidence and attended regular MS Teams and one-to-one meetings with their Mentor. The applicants stated that they enjoyed this new community of practice

where they shared their knowledge, challenges, and expertise.



Figure 8: Applicants and FET staff



## Pilot Process Review and Implementation

Limerick and Clare ETB engaged an external facilitator to carry out a full review of the process with the RPL graduates, and several recommendations and actions have resulted in a refinement of processes and procedures in advance of the rollout of the process to collaborating providers.

Recommendations identified and actioned included such items as redesigning certain briefs for consistency of language and layout, updating grading rubrics, further development of applicant instruction guides, etc.

Pictured above are seven of the eight applicants, together with the review facilitator, RPL support officer, NHA program officer, and FET manager at the RPL process review event at the College of FET, Raheen Campus.

## RPL Graduation Ceremony

Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board held a ceremony on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> November 2022 to mark the conferral of the first eight graduates of the new QQI award 'Advanced Certificate in Hairdressing'. These graduates are the first nationally-recognized, qualified hairdressers in the country.

Figure 9: Graduation Ceremony



During the conferral, the eight graduates, all experienced hairdressers, employers, salon owners, mentors, and teachers, expressed their delight in receiving their certification and spoke positively of their experience of RPL. Catherine Finn, salon owner and graduate, said: "This award completes all I strived for during my career as a hairdresser. I am humbled and delighted to have achieved this recognized qualification. Thank you to Limerick and Clare ETB for believing in our industry and making it all possible."

Figure 10: Chief Executive with Graduates



George O'Callaghan, the ETB's Chief Executive, congratulated both the graduates and staff who were involved in the RPL process, and in his address, Pádraig Wash, Chief Executive, Quality and Qualifications Ireland, said: "There is enormous value in being able to recognize the lifelong learning acquired by experienced hairdressers with a formal qualification. QQI sees the potential for this innovative and pathfinding process to be extended further

within the wider Further Education and Training sector. I look forward to the learning from the Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board process and the RPL toolkit that has been developed being made available to all the other ETB collaborating partners, so that the National Hairdressing Apprenticeship through RPL can be rolled out countrywide.”

## Conclusion

The strength of close collaboration between education and industry partners during program development is most transparent in the outcome of this case study. The industry need for a Recognition of Prior Learning process was identified early in the development of the program curriculum, and the subsequent collaborative development of processes has resulted in a successful outcome, appropriate for both parties.

Expertise in Recognition of Prior learning has increased exponentially in the Further Education and Training sector in Ireland in recent years. Collaborative initiatives such as TOBAR (pilot project between ETBs and Defence Forces); VCCSE (Validating Competencies of Care Sector Employees RPL project between Limerick and Clare ETB and Donegal ETB); the publication of the RPL Toolkit; and the access to ETB staff to certified and uncertified RPL professional learning and development in the area has vastly improved organizational competence in delivering on RPL projects.

Limerick and Clare ETB are providing a comprehensive suite of professional learning and development opportunities for staff to upskill in RPL and are actively embedding Recognition of Prior learning processes across the College of FET campuses.

Having successfully completed the RPL project as a pilot project within Limerick and Clare ETB, the National Hairdressing Apprenticeship office has engaged with collaborating providers to implement an initial rollout of the process, with several collaborating providers currently enrolling applicants.

## Acknowledgments

We wish to acknowledge the very significant and innovative contribution of Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board’s Innovation, Development, and Quality Support Services in the development and implementation of this process, particularly Patsy Hogan, Quality Assurance Officer, and Caroline Goode, Recognition of Prior Learning Support Officer.

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## About the Authors



**Alan Hogan** is a Further Education and Training Manager with Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board, the state education and training authority for the Limerick and Clare region in the mid-west of Ireland.

Alan manages the Further Education and Training Support Service function of Innovation, Development and Quality within the College of Further Education and Training, with responsibilities for such areas as Quality Assurance, Curriculum Development, Professional Learning and Development, Technology Enhanced Learning, Monitoring and Evaluation, and the development and management of consortium-led apprenticeship programmes.



**Patsy Hogan** is a Quality Assurance Officer with Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board. Patsy has been actively involved in the RPL space for a number of years. She has been instrumental in placing Limerick and Clare ETB at the forefront of RPL practice in Ireland. Patsy has developed a RPL professional development course which is run internally in her ETB and which has also been attended by colleagues from other ETBs in Ireland. She has also taken a lead role in RPL policy development, promotion, support and awareness in her own ETB and also in national and European projects.



**Caroline Goode** is an RPL Support Officer with Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board and supports Patsy Hogan with RPL quality assurance policies, procedures function, developing, and establishing RPL processes across curriculum and provision. Caroline mentored a pilot group of eight hairdressers that successfully completed an RPL process and achieved a Level 6 Advanced Certificate in Hairdressing Qualification.