

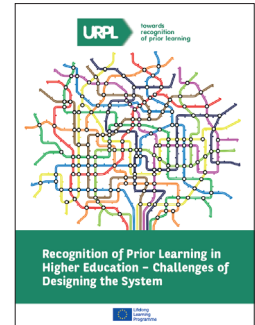


## Book Review Recognition of Prior Learning in Higher Education – Challenges of Designing the System

Prawelska-Skrzypek, G., & Jałocha, B. (Eds.). Institute for the  
Development of Education, Zagreb, Croatia, 2013

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The European Union wishes to make recognised prior learning (RPL) a reality across Europe. By 2018, all member states are expected to have the mechanisms and structures in place to enable anyone to bring forward examples of learning achieved outside of formal educational settings and apply that learning to gain credit or exemption for qualifications to advance their personal and career development. This is much easier said than done as the playing field is far from level, and the fact that this will prove more of a challenge for some member states than for others is a key theme running through *Recognition of prior learning in higher education – challenges of designing the system*, an edited volume recently published by the Institute for the Development of Education, Croatia.

The book introduces the barriers and success factors for effective RPL implementation. It highlights that in meeting the EU's challenge, some countries have significant advantage over others in already having established RPL systems and quality assurance mechanisms in place alongside a culture of support towards the recognition of non-formal and informal learning – whilst in other EU countries, such as Poland or Croatia, RPL in the higher education sector is practically unknown.

Within this vein, this volume offers rich comparative data across different European countries as well as a view as to how these different countries have progressed in developing RPL structures over time; it also explores the various drivers pushing this forward. The book also adopts a comparative approach to considering how RPL models vary in success within the same country. The case-study, Scotland, arguably has a strong tradition in embracing

lifelong learning and possesses the national frameworks to facilitate and quality-assure RPL. It is interesting then, though perhaps not surprising to those who work within the Scottish Higher Education system, as I do, that the provision of RPL in Scotland is reported as patchy and not consistently available across all education providers, particularly for learners seeking recognition for informal or experiential learning.

Addressing these challenges in Scotland is, however, comparatively straightforward when compared to the challenges faced within Poland, where there is no system for the recognition of qualifications obtained in non-formal or informal modes, or Croatia, where the practice of RPL is considered 'very unusual'. A chapter within the book explores the development of the policy, legislative, and qualification frameworks required to open the way for the implementation of RPL and the action undertaken within the Croatian and Polish HE systems since the Bologna-driven reform of programmes.

The book concludes by considering how RPL challenges might be tackled within individual institutions through the exploration of the effectiveness of University-based RPL Centres in place within two HEIs.

*Recognition of prior learning in higher education – challenges of designing the system* is a welcome and timely addition to the lifelong learning literature. This volume would be of particular interest to educational policy-makers, managers, and those responsible for developing and enhancing the systems for the assessment of RPL claims within institutions.