



University of
Chester

**'Identifying barriers to the adoption of
Certificated and Experiential
Accreditation/Recognition of Prior Learning: A
global perspective'**

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Purposes

- Expedite learning
- Recognise wider forms of knowledge
- Close the gap between formal learning and practice
- Social justice/ widening participation
- Lifelong learning/ economic development
- Especially useful on vocational programmes aimed at adults (often part time)

Global policy context

- UNESCO
- OECD
- European Union
- QAA
- Legislation?

Terminology

- QAA guidance used APL; RPL in 2013 reflecting ‘the terminology in many European countries’
- Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) (US)
- Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) Canada, Validation des Acquis de l’Experience (VAE),
- Recognition Validation and Accreditation (RVA)
- Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (VNIL)
- Validering (Sweden)

Origins of UK practice

- 1980s creation of CATS- credit transfer
- 1980s/1990s Learning from Experience Trust (LETs) and MSC funding

Functions

- Admissions
- Specific credit
- Generic credit

Varieties of practice

- R/A Prior Certificated Learning (Credit Transfer)- formal learning
- R/PEL Prior Experiential Learning- non-formal and informal learning
- Assessment via the Credit exchange v Developmental model (Butterworth 1992)

Surveys of practice

- Merrifield, MacIntyre and Osaigbovo (2000) England; Atlay, Bridges and Finn (2011) and Atlay and Turnbull (2017) UK; Whittaker et. al. (2011) Scotland.
- NIACE (2013) Non- HE.

Very low usage of procedures, few attempts to record volume

Low awareness and understanding by academic tutors, administrators and students, a lack of staff time,

Institutional commitment

Complexity and concerns in respect of quality assurance

International surveys

Largely reinforce the picture in the UK of fragmented practice, low levels of adoption despite in many countries a legal framework to encourage its use

Annen 2013; CEDEFOP 2004, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2014 and 2016; Corradi, Evans and Valk 2006; Harris, Wihak and Breier 2011; OECD (undated); Weber 2013; Werquin 2010

Institutional barriers: international research

- Little publicity on university websites (Hawley 2010)
- Institutional mission (Hoffman et al. (2009); Pitman and Vidovich (2013). Concentrated in teaching rather than research oriented universities
- Subject (Travers 2011). Less in 'pure' subjects, more in applied.

Curriculum design

- Procrustean v Trojan Horse (Anderson, Fejes and Ahn 2004)
- Inflexible learning outcomes and curricula , complex administrative procedures (Whittaker et. al. 2011; Hurlimann, March and Robins 2013; Sin 2014)
- Narrow conception of knowledge (subject discipline only) (Cooper and Harris 2013)

What facilitates practice? Two case studies

- France and the US have the longest history and (probably) the most practice
- Both have a long tradition of supporting adult education.
- Very different institutional context: institutions in the US diverse, highly autonomous, no universal credit system.

PLA in the US

- From the 1930s, mostly for admission
- Big boost after WW11, Federal legislation to enable GIs to enter formal programmes
- Second boost in the 1960s/70s, Civil rights movement etc.
- Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) to promote practice

Thomas Edison State University, New Jersey

Dedicated adult specialist, approx. 17000
UG, 1000 PG, all part time

All students are able to complete PLA
portfolios before finish their studies by
conventional means or transfer credit from
other programmes

<https://www.tesu.edu/>

France

- Early start (1930s), as in the US
- Legislative framework giving all citizens with more than three years experience the right to make claims for an award. Employers required to allow time for making claims. Universities all required to consider claims
- No national organisation to promote practice, no short cycle awards

Universite de Bretagne Occidentale

- Conventional university approx. 20,000 students, range of subjects, ranked 12th out of 76 French universities
- Specialist advisors help candidates compile a portfolio. Awards issued on this basis plus a dialogistic assessment by a panel of senior members of the university and practitioner
- About 120 full awards pa.- mostly in HRM.

Conclusions...

Practice most likely to thrive where there is a cultural pre-disposition (US and French Enlightenment attitudes?) resulting in legislation and/or a supporting body.

UK practice has probably stalled since the demise of LETs

Practice appears to be concentrated in WBL, Nursing and Engineering