**Developing Recognition for Prior Learning in the context of the National Skills Strategy Upskilling Objectives**

**Response by the Teachers’ Union of Ireland to the Draft Report by The Expert Group on Future Skills (2010)**

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs published a draft document on *Developing Recognition for Prior Learning in the context of the National Skills Strategy Upskilling Objectives* during 2010. The TUI made the following observations.

**1.** The draft document is welcome in that it provides a frank and honest overview of RPL in Ireland drawing attention in particular to the

* early stage of development
* lack of follow up on earlier government commitments
* limited access to resources/funding
* risks of reliance on pilot activity and pilot funding to date
* need for strong quality assurance measures to ensure standards and build trust and confidence
* importance of strong national leadership
* need for sustained commitment by government to the further development and use of RPL if it is to play a realistic and effective role in contributing to the national  objective of enabling access to formal qualifications and providing opportunities for up skilling or re skilling
* significant challenges to be faced if a fair, strong and effective system for RPL is to emerge across institutions and levels of education.

**2.** The overall benefits of RPL are well documented. However, under the sections on the benefits of RPL for governments and individuals the social benefits that emerge from improved qualifications and levels of education should be extended to include areas such greater capacity for civic participation, higher awareness of social responsibility, and higher earnings over lifetime, improved health etc

**3.** The TUI considers that if there is real commitment to the use of RPL it must not evolve only as a response to the ‘market demand’– instead it must be embraced and embedded in the system generally as a reliable, valuable and consistent manner for some individuals to obtain credit and formal recognition/award for learning. Patterns of demand may of course vary from time to time, in terms of field of learning, level of activity within a provider/institution and the number and range of individuals seeking RPL.

**4.** In moving towards a national system for RPL a strong focus on and commitment to developing coherent structures together with accessible, fair and credible processes and procedures to underpin delivery by all institutions/providers across all levels of education will be critical. Some variation will emerge across institutions and among providers but these should be located within an agreed national framework that ensures a reasonable level of consistency in the operating practices. Such an approach will be crucial to build a system that is credible, reliable, and sustainable and that will command the confidence of individuals and the public in general.

**5.** The acknowledgement of unions as among the variety of actors is welcome. However, it is unclear that this is intended to reflect the full suite of unions in relation to their respective roles for example unions representing individual workers/employees who may seek RPL, unions that represent employees and professionals that will be involved in designing, delivering and implementing aspects of RPL. The relevance of wider union community, including teacher unions, should be highlighted in the appropriate sections of a future policy document.

**6.** TUI supports the use of RPL in certain circumstances and environments but such support is contingent on adequate resources to address:

1. The additional demands that RPL processes and procedures will place on the system in general, on institutions, and on individual professionals/practitioners.
2. Training, support and ‘time’ requirements for professionals/practitioners involved in assessing learners’ competences and achievements and or mentoring learners towards achieving a formal qualification.
3. Information, guidance, mentoring and technical needs of  learners at a number of important points during the process for example initial consideration and preparation of case and materials for submission of evidence, tutor support for any additional learning to be undertaken or materials to be prepared and in some cases preparing for formal assessment sessions.  The demands on learners and learner capacity will vary and so also will the level of support they require -a one size fits all would be in contradiction to the key concept of RPL.   Other key scaffolding that will be required will be access to library, digital technology, and sometimes specialist facilities, at times suitable and locations suitable to learners.
4. The implementation of effective quality assurance processes and procedures and rigorous internal and external monitoring of same – otherwise public confidence in the RPL process will not emerge.

***Further clarification on the above can be provided by Bernie Judge, Education and Research Officer at 01 4922588 or bjudge@tui.***