

# **State of knowledge on the recognition of prior learning at university**

***Excerpt from a report (2024) prepared for the Bureau de  
coopération interuniversitaire (BCI)***

Authors: Rachel Bélisle, Eddy Supeno, Stéphanie Breton and Evelyne Mottais

Collaborators: Jean Bibeau and Marilou Bélisle

Centre d'études et de recherches sur les transitions et l'apprentissage (CÉRТА),  
Université de Sherbrooke, Québec, Canada

The full version of the report titled [\*État des connaissances sur la reconnaissance des acquis et des compétences à l'université. Rapport préparé pour le Bureau de coopération interuniversitaire \(BCI\)\*](#) presents a review and analysis of a corpus of 75 scientific texts carried out in 2021 and 2022. This translation of pages 98-111 was conducted in-house by CAPLA with authorization from the BCI and the authors. The [BCI](#) is an organization created by and for Québec universities.

To support Québec universities in implementing and improving recognition of prior learning (RPL), the BCI launched a call for proposals in 2020 for research to establish a state of knowledge documenting the impacts of RPL on the training pathway of university students. The report, from which this excerpt is taken, is divided into three chapters. The first (pp. 9-28) briefly presents the context of university RPL as well as the frame of reference. The second (pp. 29-34) focuses on the methodology for reviewing scientific literature. The third (pp. 35-110) presents the state of knowledge regarding the impacts of university RPL on persistence and graduation. The excerpt chosen by CAPLA covers the last pages of this chapter as well as the conclusion of the report. This translation has been authorized by the main author and BCI.

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### 3.3.6 Benefits for candidates

Beyond the analyses indicating that university RPL has an impact on persistence and graduation, some are interested in the benefits of RPL for candidates during and after their studies. We consider here that obtaining a diploma is in itself a benefit of the RPL process (*démarche*).

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#### 3.3.6.1 Benefits during the student's training pathway

RPL has benefits during the process and in the rest of the student's training pathway. The most cited benefits are those of time and money savings (e.g., Adams & Wilder, 2016; Klein-Collins, 2010; Klein-Collins & Hudson, 2017; Klein Collins & Oison 2014; Klein-Collins et al., 2020; Rogers & Forte, 2016). A substantial saving would come from reducing the overall time of completion and cost of a degree (Klein-Collins et al., 2020)<sup>82</sup>. In the United States, where these studies are carried out, all confirm that the cost of assessing extracurricular learning varies according to RPL methods, but that it remains lower than tuition fees (e.g. : Rogers & Forte, 2016).

Thus, RPL could contribute to interest in the training to be completed and the expectancy of its value (*perception de valeur*). It can also play on emotional states that are conducive to persistence. Even if the person must interrupt the training before obtaining the diploma, there can be benefits by responding, for example, to a need for social recognition or personal or professional development. These benefits for candidates, during the RPL process or the training pathway, are not at the heart of the papers of our corpus. However, it has been found that certain modalities of RPL allow candidates to strengthen their motivation, confidence and self-esteem, as well as to develop their reflective skills (e.g., Armsby, 2012; Armsby, 2013; Brinke et al. 2009a; Brown, 2017; Klein-Collins & Hudson, 2017; Klein-Collins & Olson, 2014). While the RPL process itself, like university education in general, can lead to doubts, worries about not succeeding or fear of failing, they seem to be overcome most of the time (Brenner et al., 2021; Brown, 2017; Gordon et al., 2011; Singh, 2011)<sup>83</sup>. Overcoming and succeeding despite difficult emotions can contribute to a sense of accomplishment (Rust & Brinthaup, 2017a; Singh, 2011; Snyman & van den Berg, 2018). Other personal benefits are mentioned, such as the feeling of being recognized and new learning (Lordly, 2007; Sandberg & Andersson, 2011), greater autonomy (Pokomy, 2012) and a sense of institutional inclusion, of being part of the university community (Brenner et al., 2021; Rust & Brinthaup, 2017a; 2017b; Snyman & van den Berg, 2018).

More specifically, following a portfolio course leading to the awarding of credits, Rust and Brinthaup (2017a) report that participants feel that it has improved their technology, writing, and problem-solving skills. Two qualitative studies report that the RPL process allows individuals who are transitioning to higher education to build confidence in themselves and

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<sup>82</sup> It should be noted that the sample and the RPL methods of this study do not allow the same statement to be made in Québec. An investigation among Québec universities would be necessary because of the too many differences in the contexts.

<sup>83</sup> See also the reasons for interruption. An emotion such as the fear of failing does not stand out as a reason for interruption. However, it is possible that the reason of lack of guidance, associated with the procedure, may also relate to not having felt reassured at key moments.

their ability to continue their education (Brenner et al., 2021; Snyman & van den Berg, 2021). For example, in the RPL process studied by Brenner et al. (2021), participants say that it helped them become familiar with the expectations of the program, including academic writing, and with the virtual learning platform, while introducing them to a pace of work that required effort, time, and autonomy (little feedback during the two weeks). According to the authors, their study shows that the process can help demystify higher education and reduce "initial feelings of apprehension, uncertainty and fear." (Brenner et al., 2021, p. 12) among people returning to studies.

### 3.3.6.2 Benefits after the RPL process and obtainment of the diploma

As mentioned above, we consider the diploma to be a benefit of the RPL process. Texts about investigations among people who are still active in their training pathway mention benefits that people can count on once the program is completed (e.g.: Armsby, 2012; 2013; Pegg & Di Paolo, 2013), in relation to the reasons for commitment (*motifs ou logiques d'engagement*). Few texts specify when the data collection took place: the sequence of the RPL or training pathway, or if those pathways had been completed. Four texts in the corpus indicate data obtained once the program has been completed (Jacques, 2011; Lordly, 2007; Pint 2016; Stenlund, 2012)<sup>84</sup>. These are qualitative analyses of interviews with only a few dozen candidates. These studies can give trends on professional and personal benefits. They confirm that most of the interviewees mention, to varying degrees, one or more of their initial reasons for engaging in the RPL process.

As we have seen above (point 3.1.3.3), many people undertake an RPL process or a training process with RPL with a promotion logic. The effective career progression, thanks to university RPL, is for the moment poorly documented and could be relatively discreet (Jacques, 2011). However, in his research, Pinte finds that 4 out of 5 of the people interviewed (n=38) believe that they have experienced changes of a professional nature thanks to the Validation des acquis de l'expérience (VAE, France), whether partial or total. But for half of them, these changes do not translate into better pay, a new position or a promotion. As with continuing education in general, objective changes as a result of RPL can take some time to materialize. For example, interviewees say they do not want to make a change immediately but want to have the diploma to be able to seize opportunities when the time is right (Pinte, 2016). The objective effects (e.g.: salary increase) seem to be mixed in the immediate future and require "information and negotiation work" (Pinte, 2016, para 28) with the employer, that not everyone seems to do<sup>85</sup>.

As for the subjective effects relating in particular to the logic of valorization, they seem to be more significant and rapid (Jacques, 2011; Lordly, 2007; Pinte 2016). These effects do not affect just the position or the job, but also the way of working, and they can be

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<sup>84</sup> There is no mention of when the interviews took place after the RPL process. For example, if the interview takes place one month after the end of the program or two years later, the documented benefits may be different.

<sup>85</sup> Universities may still offer relatively little career guidance support to graduating students, in particular to help them target a professional project and to articulate it to their academic and extracurricular achievements. This concerns young and older adults who are to complete a program in initial education or practitioners in continuing education.

perceived even before the end of the RPL process among the people who do it while working. Awareness of the learning outcomes from a training or education program, and its effects on the quality of work and motivation, is well known to people studying while working in the same field. It is also observed in RPL and Lordly (2007), documenting an experimental RPL project in a master's degree in dietetics, suggests that participation in this project helped prevent premature departure from the profession<sup>86</sup>. However, some do not see any benefit after having completed the VAE (France), which feeds disappointment and frustration (Pinte, 2016).

### 3.3.7 Benefits for universities

As mentioned above (section 3.3.4), the benefits for higher education institutions, documented by several studies, concern the fact that people who obtain credits through RPL persist, succeed and complete the program in significantly higher numbers. Thus, according to Klein-Collins et al. (2020), an institutional benefit of RPL is that the 11% of students who obtained credits through RPL (72 participating institutions) obtain an average of 17.6 more credits than those who did not complete RPL. These additional credits generate additional tuition fees. In addition, several texts include claims that RPL broadens the recruitment base for people who would probably not enrol in a university program at this time in their lives. This seems plausible, but we did not find a study that solidly documented this benefit that RPL could have for institutions.

In a more marginal way, other benefits are highlighted. In Nova Scotia (Canada), Lordly (2007) indicates that a benefit of RPL for universities is that RPL supports innovative programming by valuing experiential learning. In addition, in a context where finding a formal internship is sometimes difficult, RPL can partially compensate for this, thus making the program more attractive for non-traditional students who have previously worked in the field of specialization, in particular those who have practised abroad<sup>87</sup>. For the university, this can also mean better use of resources. Qualitative studies also indicate a few cases of people who, once they have obtained their university degree thanks to RPL, decide to continue their studies in another undergraduate program, or at the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> cycles (Jacques, 2011; Pinte 2016). In France, Pinte notes that about ten people responding to his questionnaire (n=223) have undertaken a second VAE after their success in the first one. This can be seen as a benefit for people and institutions. RPL can also be part of a movement of institutional transformation or of a field of professional practice, as suggested by certain texts (e.g., De Rozario, 2013). It is a form of "organizational positioning" (Allouch & Buisson-Fenet, 2008) that is underway, which contributes to a new form of alliance with organizations in the world of work, which can facilitate certain changes of practice, and which goes beyond RPL within the institution. RPL can thus contribute to improving the institution's positioning in the lifelong learning ecosystem.

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<sup>86</sup> This may be a phenomenon of job retention similar to that observed in RPL practices by self-assessment, such as the competencies audit (*bilan de compétences*) in career guidance of people who are active in the labour market (e.g., Michaud et al., 2011) but who encounter various dissatisfactions. This is one possible path to be explored by Québec universities.

<sup>87</sup> Lordly identifies it as a path, the situation does not seem to have arisen in the system studied.

In Klein-Collins' study (2010, p. 22), a list of 18 reasons for institutional involvement in RPL have been submitted to the representatives of the 48 participating higher education institutions. A respondent could choose several answers. We assume that these reasons are related to observations made, more or less frequently, about the effects and benefits of RPL. At the top of the list, the most popular responses indicate that respondents believe their institution offers RPL services "to provide a time-saving avenue for degree completion" (92%); "to fulfill their mission to serve adult learners" (92%); "to encourage greater student persistence towards a degree" (90%). It can be seen that 65% believe that RPL increases self-knowledge as well as analysis and critical reflection. At the bottom of the list are the motives of contributing "to fulfill our part of our social justice agenda" (29%) and "to augment writing and organizational skills" (29%).

### **3.3.8 Benefits for the world of work**

It seems relevant to draw attention to the fact that professional benefits can be benefits for organizations in the world of work. In the corpus, it is in the context and discussion of their paper that the authors sometimes draw attention to the interest of RPL in addressing the current phenomena of persistent inequalities in employment or of shortage of skilled labour (e.g., Klein-Collins et al., 2020). RPL can be seen as an opportunity for recognition to help retain employees, for professional development or for employee's professional reconversion for a vacant position in the company in a related field. No study in the corpus studies a collective RPL system<sup>88</sup> or collects data from employers. However, there are a few mentions in the testimonies of people who completed the process (Pinte, 2016). For example, having obtained validation for experiential learning from a university can reassure an employer who wants to hire someone who does not yet have the diploma, but who has experience. RPL can also contribute to job retention by allowing people whose expertise is appreciated (and whose departure could weaken the organization) to have their learning outcomes recognized while pursuing training relevant to the employer and challenging to the employee.

### **3.3.9 Cost-benefit analysis**

The relationship between certain costs and benefits of RPL for candidates or universities is often addressed in studies of the corpus (e.g., Adams & Wilder, 2016; Brinke et al., 2008; Cuvillier & Faudière, 2009; Jacques, 2011; Klein-Collins & Hudson, 2017; Klein-Collins & Gosling, 2014; Pinte 2016; Rogers & Forte, 2016), but no one make a formal cost-benefit analysis. Three US studies make estimates of savings/gains by students who obtain recognition of some of their prior learning or of financial benefits for institutions (Boatman et

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<sup>88</sup> Collective RPL could be offered more for upper secondary education and for non-university postsecondary qualifying diplomas (e.g., Bureau & Tuchsirer, 2010). It is based on a prior agreement between an educational institution and a labour organization that wishes to offer professional development while building on the experience of staff; to confirm that staff members who do not have the required tenure degree have the corresponding competencies; or to offer the possibility to obtain the official recognition for competencies required by a new law or public regulation. These situations exist in the world of work and concern several occupations associated with university training, but making an adapted service offer could require a certain institutional agility that current funding methods make more difficult.

al., 2020; Klein-Collins, 2010; Klein-Collins et al., 2020)<sup>89</sup>. Their discussion on this subject is discussed in section 3.2.4. Thus, no study defines what the cost-benefit ratio of university RPL would be and does not make a cost-benefit analysis as such. None of them are based on the expectancy-value model or other publication of this school of thought (see Bourgeois et al., 2009, for a study with adult returners at university) or on Sen's work about the cost-benefit ratio in educational institutions (Section 1.4.4). The following two subsections provide an analysis of the summary of the findings of the review regarding these two models.

### 3.3.9.1 Cost-benefit ratio for RPL candidates

It should be noted that the cost-benefit ratio for candidates focuses on the value of the task and the expectation of success among adults returning to university studies (Bourgeois et al., 2009). From the content reported above, it can be inferred that people who engage in RPL expect to succeed in the process, but we have little information about the expectations of success of the training program itself. The information on the perception of the value of RPL, training and diploma is fragmented, as is the importance of doing well and the interest in the activity to be carried out. Emotional states are addressed especially regarding stress before evaluations and pride after successful ones. The component that seems to be the most worked on to date in RPL is the usefulness of the RPL process and the diploma obtained through it, which is consistent with other studies on adult students (Bourgeois et al., 2009). The perception of usefulness corresponds to the reasons for commitment set out above.

The costs of RPL are beginning to be documented, especially in terms of money (see 3.2.4). The financial investment is higher for people who cannot benefit from certain aids. Overall, it can be concluded that the costs in terms of time and effort to candidates vary according to the modalities (e.g., Ralphs, 2016), but that they would be compensated by the overall shorter duration to obtain the diploma. The time costs discussed in the studies are mainly those of narrative modalities, such as the portfolio or booklets in VAE (e.g., Brinke et al., 2008; Cuvillier & Faudière, 2009). However, few studies specify the time required or establish averages in the same system depending on the program or institution. As mentioned above, the time cost of RPL is offset by the time saved to obtain the diploma, which is then converted into money gains (less study costs, faster entry into the job market, etc.). As for energy or effort, it is a question, especially in qualitative studies, of the cognitive work required to put into words what has been learned that is more often the result of embodied knowledge that we are not used to describe, or of the affective and identity work that the narrative modalities of RPL may require. In the testimonies reported in these texts, and more particularly in the identification/admissibility and evaluation phases, we also notice efforts to understand the expectations, the frame of reference, the subject matter of

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<sup>89</sup> Of note, these are two Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) reports, by CAEL staff (Klein-Collins, 2010; Klein Collins et al., 2020) which, it should be recalled, is a non-profit organization, a leader in RPL in the United States, and with more than 300 members in educational institutions. The other text is an article based on a study by the College Board, a non-profit organization of more than 6,000 training organizations, including several universities in United States. The first author is an academic researcher, and the co-authors have ties to that organization or a member institution.

the evaluators and to regulate their reactions (e.g., Auras, 2013; Cortessis, 2013; Géhin, 2011b; Pinte et al., 2008). Effort in RPL compared to that in a course is not documented in our corpus.

### 3.3.9.2 Cost-benefit ratio for institutions

It should be remembered that the cost-benefit ratio for institutions relates to the economic, sociological and psychological elements in the implementation of RPL services, in particular considering issues of redistribution and social justice (see 1.4.4).

From an economic point of view, among the operating costs established above are the costs of training staff and their remuneration, as well as possible external costs if institutions work by agreement (Browning, 2020; Lakin et al., 2015; St-Pierre et al., 2010; Wihak & Wong, 2011). Expenses associated with the development of RPL are also reported: the work required for the development and adoption of internal policies and instruments, familiarization with what is being done elsewhere, articulation with other activities of the institution, raising awareness and providing community animation to stimulate a greater adherence to RPL practices, as well as the promotion of the RPL service to the university community, the general public and targeted organizations in the world of work (e.g. : Browning, 2020; Lakin et al., 2015). We can also deduce from the corpus that there are costs to find funding and ensuring that the RPL service meets the intended objectives and, in this sense, costs related to the collection and analysis of administrative data on RPL, accountability and evaluative research. However, no study of the corpus establishes a calculation based on or a study of actual expenditures.

Testimonies from institutional staff indicate that there may be hesitancy to engage in RPL given that a significant portion of universities' revenues are based on student enrolment and tuition fees. At least, this is what a fear of potential loss of income suggests (Lordly, 2007). Two other texts mention this reserve in the environment (Boatman et al., 2020; Klein-Collins et al., 2020). While RPL candidates save time and money by integrating this process into their training pathway, the current funding method is perceived as causing a loss of income for universities since they would have fewer tuition fees (Klein-Collins et al., 2020; Lordly, 2007). However, studies testing this perception provide additional nuance. Indeed, doing RPL is associated, at least in the United States, with better retention of students with RPL than without RPL (Boatman et al., 2020; Klein-Collins, 2010; Klein-Collins & Gosling, 2014; Klein-Collins et al., 2020). This retention translates into retention in training and therefore tuition fees until the end of the program, whereas among people who do not do RPL, dropouts are proportionally more numerous. Other studies on persistence also indicate that individuals who have benefited from RPL are more likely to persevere and complete their program of study (e.g., Adams & Wilder, 2016; Klein-Collins, 2010; Klein-Collins et al., 2020). As noted above, some may also decide to continue at the graduate level. In addition, since some universities receive additional funding on the basis of degrees obtained, the fact that candidates in RPL would complete their program is beneficial for the universities (Klein-Collins et al., 2020).

Thus, according to Klein-Collins et al. (2020), universities earn an average of nearly six months (semester) of full-time tuition from RPL candidates.

### 3.4 Action paths to strengthen universities RPL offer

In this section, we establish a summary of paths to action from texts in the corpus, related to the sustainability of university RPL services and their financing. Three main directions have been identified: the consolidation of RPL services, the inclusion of costs of returning to study and of the RPL process in government financial assistance, and the improvement of information in particular to increase the recruitment of potential candidates.

#### 3.4.1 Consolidation of RPL services

Several paths to action by the authors of the texts of our corpus concern the improvement or consolidation of RPL services, so that they are of quality and meet the needs of people. One of the avenues concerns the upstream of services in university institutions, i.e. the preparation, with all the bodies concerned, and the adoption of an **internal RPL policy** articulated in their mission and values (Browning, 2020). Rogers and Forte (2016) recall that RPL must be inclusive and be consistent with Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) policies and pedagogies centered on participants and their development. The authors note the importance of providing a safe environment<sup>90</sup> for RPL candidates, especially those who are marginalized. According to them, this is a critical point, if institutions want RPL to be at the service of people who have hitherto been on the margins of the academic world. In this context, the institutions should commit to practices "being culturally sensitive and understanding the differences between the ways diverse populations learn and acquire knowledge" (p. 9).

Work to support the **development of the adherence** of the university communities is to be planned in order to ensure a better understanding of what RPL is, its relevance for each university community and its collectivity and the meaning given to it by the key actors. Knowledge and understanding of the RPL system are necessary for adherence and collaboration of actors such as faculty and department directions, professors and other teaching staff, people who play a role in guidance and management (Brinke et al., 2008; Klein-Collins et al., 2020; Wihak & Wang, 2011).

The **coordination of the implementation** of RPL and the **coordination of each RPL process** is also source of paths to action in order to better support the commitment of candidates and advisors. Among the paths mentioned in the corpus, Singh recommends reducing hierarchical levels so that there are fewer people to consult before the final decision is made (Singh, 2011). Texts insist on the importance of respecting the timelines announced, of ensuring consistency in the vocabulary used and of ensuring that it is the same among all the actors concerned in the institution. This **common vocabulary** in RPL is seen as a key factor to ensure candidates and staff members understanding (Gossemaume & Foucher, 2015; Lakin et al., 2015; Singh, 2011).

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<sup>90</sup> The authors explicitly refer to culturally-inclusive pedagogy, cultural safety, transformations in higher education, and EDI policies, although they do not use this term. They call for institutional coherence in the implementation of RPL and the work with populations that have been marginalized until now.

**RPL training** and the **development of instruments** are other key factors in ensuring the sustainability of RPL services, and several texts recommend training, equipping and making resources available to the people involved in the process, those providing guidance (*accompagnement*) to the candidates and those who assess extracurricular learning being the most often mentioned (Armsby, 2012; Brinke et al. 2009a; Browning, 2020; Cazals-Ferré & Croity-Belz, 2009; Klein-Collins et al., 2020; Sherron et al., 2021; Singh, 2011). For example, to support consistent, transparent and fair judgment, instrument development and the adoption of **evaluation criteria**, and training on these criteria are put forward (Armsby, 2012; Brinke et al. 2009a; Browning, 2020; Cazals-Ferré & Croity-Belz, 2009; Di Paolo & Pegg, 2013; Klein-Collins et al., 2020; Sherron et al., 2021). Instruments could include those used, at the phase of welcoming (*accueil*), to identify the specific needs of candidates (Rogers & Forte, 2016).

Given its importance in certain RPL systems as the ones needing more time (e.g. narrative modalities), **individual guidance** (*accompagnement individualisé*) should be given throughout the RPL process and, if necessary, during the additional training so that candidates could complete the program. This guidance will have to be provided by staff **sensitive to the situations and characteristics** of RPL candidates (Bernaud et al., 2009; Cazals-Ferré & Croity-Belz, 2009; Gosseaume & Foucher, 2015; Havet et al., 2021; Forte, 2016; Rust & Brinthaup 2017b; Snyman & van den Berg, 2018; Wihak & Wong, 2011). Based on their results, Klein-Collins et al. (2020) suggest that institutions should **have more than one RPL modalities** to reach more people.

Some paths of action also refer to **the evaluation of RPL services** with recommendations regarding the collection of administrative data in the RPL process and then in the rest of the program, in particular the identification of persons admitted according to one or other of the RPL modalities offered by the institution, and if applicable, the number of credits awarded, and other information in order to better understand who are the persons who use RPL and who do not use RPL and their background (Gosseaume & Foucher, 2015; Klein-Collins & Gosling, 2014; Klein-Collins et al., 2020; Lakin et al. 2015). These are indications referring back to the recommendations of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation (CSE) as early as 2000 (see 1.1.1.1).

Finally, to ensure the development and sustainability of services, it is recommended to develop **RPL partnerships** with various organizations. This can include other universities, for example by setting up a system of cooperation and sharing of experiences (e.g.: regular symposia, joint RPL training) to harmonize RPL understanding and practice (Opheim & Helland, 2006; Stenlund, 2013). These partnerships can include external bodies, such as employers who may be aware of and be involved in the RPL process (Klein-Collins et al., 2020; Pinte 2016).

### **3.4.2 Provide financial assistance for RPL and continuing education**

As few studies in university RPL have so far focused on its financial framework, few texts in the corpus include ways to improve funding, whether in terms of subsidies or financial assistance from the State or income from individuals as tuition or RPL fees.

Interestingly, the texts that mention financial costs for candidates for taking tests or other RPL modalities do not suggest abolishing or reducing them, but to ensure that the government **financial assistance for returning to studies** applies to these modalities also, and that financial assistance programs take into account the costs of RPL for candidates. We note here the particular importance of these precautions with regard to subgroups targeted by equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) policies, in which we find several people with low incomes (Klein-Collins et al. 2020; Klein, 2017; Singh, 2011).

In VAE, where financial support is embedded in various state policies and policies from joint organizations supporting continuing education, Gosseaume & Foucher (2015) report that people lacked information on the financing of the process and that this may have led to significant hesitation or even interruption. No other study in the corpus points to difficulties relating to financial arrangement<sup>91</sup>, although it is mentioned as a step in the process. The issue of income from candidates is directly related to recruitment and information on RPL services, which is the next item.

### 3.4.3 Increasing the attractiveness of programs through better RPL information

Several studies in our corpus recommend that institutions **develop or improve their RPL information strategy** in order to recruit more candidates (Adams & Wilder, 2016; Brinke et al., 2008; Browning, 2020; Klein-Collins & Gosling, 2014; Klein-Collins et al., 2020; Singh, 2011). Upstream, an important action is to target staff members (e.g., admissions advisors, educational advisors, program directors) who will be responsible for informing potential candidates (Lakin et al., 2015; Rust & Brinthaup, 2017b). There is literature that insists that information on RPL should be easy to understand, accurate, complete, and specific about who to contact (Lakin et al., 2015; Singh, 2011). Also, it is recommended to talk about RPL very broadly, so that all people considering applying for admission as well as those already registered are aware of it. Interviewees felt that RPL was not well known and that adults who had dismissed the idea of returning to studies could reconsider it if they knew that RPL was offered (Rust & Brinthaup, 2017a).

The promotion of RPL involves the quality of the information that is disseminated, but also strategies to **better reach the so-called non-traditional populations and practitioners**, highlighting different arguments depending on the context of each (Klein-Collins et al., 2020; Rogers and Forte, 2016).

## CONCLUSION

Based on a review of 75 scientific texts, this research report documents the impacts of university recognition of prior learning (RPL) on persistence and graduation. It provides a state of knowledge as of 2022 on RPL support services offered by universities, highlighting the results of studies on persistence and graduation. This report has limitations and should

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<sup>91</sup> This is not to say that there are none, but that our criteria did not allow us to identify any text relating to it. In addition to France, other countries would offer public coverage of RPL costs, such as Norway (Faulkner & Noack, 2020), but these details are not in the corpus texts.

be seen as a milestone in the work to be continued. Two types of limits are important to remember: those of the review itself and those of the studies reviewed.

For the first type of limitations, let us recall the few available texts related to the transfer of credits: one may wonder whether this result can be attributed to the keywords used or to the fact that for many research teams, the transfer of credits is not RPL (although it is articulated to it). Another limitation of this review is the selection of texts: studies in university RPL where either the impact of RPL on persistence and success, or the question of its benefits and costs for candidates or for institutions, are omitted, were not included. For example, studies on topics such as university websites or the judgement of the evaluators were not included in the corpus.

The second type of limitation concerns the studies of our corpus. In this regard, it should be noted that some of the key studies, such as the CAEL reports, do not distinguish between postsecondary institutions (those that offer only non-university programs, and those with university programs). Some results could thus be influenced by the importance of RPL in programs leading to the associate degree, level 5 in the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 2011), which could be similar to some technical programs at the Québec college level. Other limitations related to studies of the corpus: they are very localized; they are descriptive or associative in nature; few texts are based on a methodological design that allows solid associations to be made. In addition, it should also be remembered that the texts establishing associations between RPL and persistence are the result of studies by educational organizations (CAEL & College Board) that may have a bias in favor of RPL. Despite these limitations, this report provides a comprehensive picture of RPL and confirms that it can, in the future, under certain conditions, support persistence and success in university studies.

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The reference list can be found in the original report at the [following link](#).