



ICHAS

Section 5 - Policies and Procedures associated Access, Transfer & Progression

Subject:	Policy on Recognition of Prior Learning		
Applicable QQI Core Standard	Programmes of Education and Training		
Date Approved by Board of Directors:			February 2021
Policy Version	1/2021	Date due for Revision	February 2024

CONTEXT

Under Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 providers are required establish and publish policies and procedures associated with recognition of prior learning. Decisions to grant access through RPL (or otherwise) represent an academic judgment based on available evidence. The following guidelines apply in all instances

- Recognition of prior learning will align with the NFQ and its award system
- RPL may be sought for admission to a programme, advanced entry to a programme or for exemptions from a part of a programme.
- Procedures and processes associated with RPL/APL are incorporated into QA strategies and are accessible, credible and transparent to all stakeholders
- RPL will only be considered in circumstances where it does not negatively impact on the overall programme learning experience for the learner or the cohesion of the programme.
- Applicants will be informed of their personal obligations in engaging in an RPL process and will be informed of time limits or any other restrictions associate with submitting a claim.

The primary responsibility to address competencies and equivalencies of learning rests with the applicant but the College offers advice and relevant support to applicants when making applications.

The applicant must indicate in detail the relevant prior learning and the types and nature of experiences in the case of uncertified learning they believe to have equivalence and will be advised that the will be assessed on learning acquired from experience as opposed to the experience itself. Academic staff involved in the recognition process will be suitably qualified or trained to assess

such applications.

If an applicant is submitting an application relating to recognition of prior learning clear guidelines on RPL criteria are provided - more specifically, applicants are advised of:

- The precise means recognition affects modular workload is indicated (e.g. The fact that exemptions can only be granted for full modules, not components)
- The precise nature of any assessment mechanisms that might be applied in the recognition process is clarified.
- The potential implications for award classification where it is not possible to assign a mark for the exemption.

The following criteria are relevant in this respect.

Rules and Limitations on RPL as defined by QQI

The following excerpt outlining important rules and limitations of prior learning are quoted directly from Section 4.4.2 - Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2013), Assessments and Standards: Revised, 2013.

Recognition of Prior Learning — Uncertified Learning

A learner may be exempted from participating in a module if he/she has already attained the minimum intended module learning outcomes. The demonstrable prior learning should be a sufficiently good match to the minimum intended module learning outcomes to justify exemption from the module in the context of the overall programme.

In the particular case where the relevant prior learning is uncertified (e.g. prior experiential learning), the provider should assess the learner using the regular module assessment instruments and/or by an alternative assessment arrangement. Learners who are assessed to have demonstrated the required learning are granted the available credit for the module and are exempt from the module. Furthermore, a grade (percentage mark or alphabetic grade) should be available in principle. However, providers may choose not to grade if the assessment arrangement might not provide grading which is consistent with the regular assessment instruments.

If the module is one which contributes to the award classification, prior learning achievement must be graded in order for the award to be classified. Otherwise, an unclassified award should be made.

Where the module does not contribute to the award classification, the prior learning achievement does not need to be graded.

When a grade is not assigned, the result for learners who demonstrate the required learning should be returned as Exemption Granted. Where a grade is

awarded, it can be used in compensation etc., as with any regularly passed module.

Where grading is not feasible, there may be circumstances in which a learner might be advantaged by waiving a right to exemption to enable award classification. The provider should foresee and provide for such situations, and should also ensure that learners are aware of any such consequences.

Recognition of Prior Learning — Certified Learning

There are two scenarios of prior certified learning.

Scenario 1 The learning is certified by an awarding body in the form of a major award (e.g. a higher certificate or bachelor's degree) or is included as part of such an award.

Subject to Sectoral Convention 5, an exemption may be granted for a module if the learner demonstrates the minimum intended module learning outcomes. For learners who demonstrate the required learning, the result should be returned as Exemption Granted. The learner should not be granted any ECTS credit because credit has already been granted in the prior qualification.

If the module is one that would normally contribute to the award classification, such exemption should only entitle a learner to an unclassified award unless it is feasible to recognise, or award, a grade. Any grade awarded/recognised should be consistent with the prior award classification and the module grades in the associated Europass Diploma Supplement.

Scenario 2 The learning is certified by an awarding body in the form of a minor, special purpose or supplemental award or it is certified in respect of a period of study, and²⁴ the relevant credit has not already been used to meet the credit requirements for a major award. This case of prior certified learning can be handled in the same way as prior uncertified learning with one exception: the provider should not require the learner to undergo assessment provided that the attainment of the minimum intended module learning outcomes can be demonstrated. However, where there is a need for a grade to be assigned — e.g. where it contributes to an award classification — assessment may be necessary. The learner may transfer his/her credit. A grade is available in principle, but providers may choose not to grade if ²⁴ If the credit has been used then Scenario 1 applies. consistency with the grading in regular assessment instruments cannot be assured.

For learners who demonstrate the required learning but are not graded, the result should be returned as Exemption Granted.

POLICY STATEMENT

The College is committed to ensuring relevant access to study and in that regard recognises that learning can be achieved in formal (e.g. certified qualifications), non-formal (e.g. workplace training) and informal (experiential) ways and is

open to considering applications for Recognition of Prior Learning for entry to programmes. The policy in relation to RPL (in its broadest sense) is designed to communicate the College's commitment to RPL but as importantly to convey a clear and consistent process that facilitates learner mobility both from domains of professional practice and prior educational and training engagement. Prior Learning may be recognised either to facilitate access to a higher education programme or to allow an award of credit as in the case of allowing exemption from a module.

SCOPE

Applies To	Staff	Students	Both	
			✓	
Responsible for Implementation	Registrar			
Responsible for Monitoring & Review	Vice President (Corporate Affairs)	Vice President (Academic Affairs)	Registrar	Quality Assurance & Enhancement Officer
		✓		

DEFINITIONS

QQI clearly defines its understanding of RPL within the context of Educational Programmes as follows:

“The recognition of prior learning (RPL) describes a process used to evaluate skills and knowledge gained through life outside of formal education and training, for the purpose of recognising life achievements against a given set of standards or learning outcomes.” (QQI, 2018)¹.

The following elaboration on this definition by European Commission is quoted directly from QQI’s (2005) Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education and Training:

1. **Formal learning** which takes place through programmes of study or training that are delivered by education or training providers, and which attract awards.
2. **Non-formal learning** that takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training. It may be assessed but does not normally lead to formal certification. Examples of non-formal learning are: learning and training activities undertaken in the workplace, voluntary sector or trade union and in community-based learning.
3. **Informal learning** that takes place through life and work experience (and is sometimes referred to as experiential learning.) Often, it is learning that is unintentional and the learner may not recognise at the time of the experience that it contributed to his or her knowledge, skills and competences.

Two further definitions applied by QQI (2013) are noteworthy.

Certified Learning

Where a learner has obtained an award from QQI or another equivalent

¹ Available at <https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/recognition-of-Prior-Learning-RPL.aspx> (Accessed June 06 2019)

designated educational awarding body, an applicant may gain access to the programme on the basis that he/she has already attained the prerequisite learning as part of another award.

Uncertified Learning

Where a learner may be allowed access to a programme if he/she has already achieved pre-requisite knowledge, skill and competence gained from experience that has been specified in the validation documentation.

This policy equates Certified Learning with Formal Learning and equates Uncertified Learning with Non-formal and Informal Learning.

RELEVANT GUIDELINES/ POLICIES INFORMING THIS POLICY

- QQI (2014a) Re-engagement with QQI: Overarching Policy for all Providers.
- QQI (2014b) Re-Engagement with QQI; Policy and Criteria for Renewed Access to QQI Validation for Voluntary Providers of Higher Education and Training.
- Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (QQI, 2016)
- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) et al (2015) Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2016) Sector Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines Developed By QQI For Independent/Private Providers Coming To QQI On A Voluntary Basis
- Government of Ireland (2012) Qualifications & Quality Assurance (Education and Training Act

Linked Policies & Procedures

Linked Policies	Policy on Transfer and Progression Policy on Access, Applications and Admissions
Linked Procedures	Procedures associated with Access, Applications and Admissions Procedures associated with Recognition of Prior Learning