

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

1.0 Introduction

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the generic term for learning assessment mechanisms such as Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) or Advanced Academic Standing, which are used within Higher Education to describe the awarding of credit / exemptions to learners on the basis of demonstrated learning that has occurred prior to admission.

RPL involves awarding the learner recognition in the form of admission to a programme, credits, exemptions or an award for the Prior Learning.

The Prior learning can be certified or experiential (non-certified).

Prior Certified Learning is learning that has already been accredited by an awarding body such as HETAC, FETAC or other state recognised colleges/institutes. Prior certified learning also can also include qualifications received abroad.

Prior Non Certified Learning / Prior Experiential Learning is learning acquired from experience or learning achieved from non accredited bodies e.g. learning acquired in the workplace.

1.1 Why RPL?

Recognition of Prior Learning (*RPL*) is an important element of EU policy for widening access to qualifications, and supporting lifelong learning. In common with its European partners, the Irish government has made a commitment to support RPL.

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 established the right for a learner to get recognition for prior learning. The Act reflects a national commitment to widening participation to education and is supported by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (**NQAI**) guidelines. A major objective of the NQAI is to give equal recognition to all learning. The philosophy underlying RPL is to enable and encourage people to enter or re-enter formal education, leading to qualifications recognised by the National Framework of Qualifications.

1.2 Principles of RPL

- Prior Learning refers to learning which has occurred before admission to a course or to the relevant stage of a course.
- Prior learning should encompass all forms of learning – certified and uncertified.
- Participation is a voluntary matter for the individual.
- Recognition of prior learning should provide opportunities for access, transfer and progression to education and training and for the achievement of an award.

- The process of recognising prior learning should maintain the standards of the National Framework of Qualifications and its awards.
- The policies, processes and practices for the recognition of prior learning should be clearly stated and documented and are available to all potential applicants.
- Guidance and support should be made available for applicants and all involved in the processes of recognition of prior learning.
- An appropriate appeals mechanism should be in place.
- Recognition of Prior Learning will normally be given for complete modules only.
- RPL will normally only be given for a maximum of **50%** of credits in Non Award stage and **35%** of credits in Award stage. (Different restrictions may be placed on Minor, Special purpose and Supplement awards).
- Learners that gain exemptions through RPL cannot avail of standard compensation rules.
- Learners that gain exemptions through **Recognition of Prior Certified Learning** in award year are entitled to an ungraded award only.
- Learners that gain exemptions through **Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning** in award year will receive a grade and are therefore eligible to receive a classified award.
- An RPL Validation board comprising of representatives from the various departments will meet each semester (date to be determined by the Registrar). The purpose of this board is to validate the decisions made by the RPL assessors.

2.0 Recognition for Prior Certified Learning (RPCL)

Prior Certified Learning is where an applicant has already been awarded a qualification for a formal programme taken at an institution or training organisation. This prior learning can be **recognised** on the National Framework of Qualifications and may entitle the applicant to:

- Admission to a programme or course of study.
- The award of advanced academic standing.
- The award of **exemptions** from some parts of a programme.

Where prior certificated learning is the basis for RPL, the applicant is required to provide the relevant syllabus and a transcript of results.

2.1 Assessing Prior Certified Learning

When a learner presents prior certified learning in order to gain an admission, advanced academic standing or exemption(s), the assessor (appointed by Head Of Department) will base his/her decision to grant this exemption or advanced academic standing on the following:

- Level of Prior Award in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

The NFQ was introduced in 2003 as a system of 10 Levels. The 10 Levels capture all learning, from the very initial stages of level 1 to the most advanced learning of level 10. The Prior Certified Learning which the applicant is basing his/her exemption/advanced academic standing on must be at the same level or at a higher level in the framework that the level the learner is seeking the exemption in. The process of recognising prior learning should maintain the standards of the National Framework of Qualifications and its awards.

- Comparison of learning outcomes

The assessor should compare the learning outcomes of the prior certified learning to the learning outcomes of the module(s)/programme the learner is seeking the exemption(s) in.

If the assessor believes the learning outcomes are sufficiently similar, then an exemption may be awarded. It is at the discretion of the assessor to decide what is sufficiently similar.

- Currency of Prior Certified Learning

The Prior Certified Learning must have been achieved in a comparatively appropriate time frame (in some instances this may be in the last 3 years, 5 years or 10 years – dependent on the learning achieved) i.e. computing learning 10 years ago is of limited benefit today on a current programme– psychology outcomes may be more timeless.

2.2 Foreign Qualifications

Applicants seeking RPCL for foreign qualifications should contact the NQAI to have their qualifications aligned with the appropriate Irish qualification.

2.3 Guidelines for Prior Certified Learning

- It is the Learner's responsibility to apply for the RPCL. Learners must submit their claim on the relevant form (available on the LYIT website and from the RPL Facilitator). This form must be submitted to the relevant Head of Department (HOD) on or before October 1st for semester 1 and on or before February 1st for semester 2. Learners must also include certificates, results, programme details and where possible learning outcomes of modules completed.
- Learners must continue to attend class until a decision has been made (and written confirmation received) on whether to grant the exemption or not. The learner may be expected to attend an interview.
- Prior certified learning may entitle the candidate to exemptions on a programme, not credits. As this certified learning has already received credit at another institution, the applicant does not receive credits for it again, but recognition in the form of exemptions. **No grade will be awarded to the learner for the certified learning.** The learner receives an exemption.
- The Assessor should be a person qualified to deliver the module. The Head of Department will appoint a suitably qualified assessor.
- The assessor should make a decision regarding the RPL application within 10 working days of application. Assessors have the right to recommend that exemptions be granted with conditions (e.g. certain research is carried out, attendance at certain workshops etc...).
- The Learner has a right to apply for a recheck or review. The appeal for a recheck / review should be made in writing to the registrar within 5 working days of the initial decision. There will be a cost associated with the appeal. The appeal will be considered by the HOD along with a qualified assessor not involved in the initial assessment. Their decision is final.
- The Documentation submitted by the learner (RPL Application form, photocopies of certificates, learning outcomes, examination result etc...) together with the recommendation of the assessor must be kept for 2 years for quality assurance purposes and in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act.

- When Prior certified Learning is accepted as the basis for granting an exemption on a programme of study, further application using the same learning for the granting of further exemptions in the same programme will not be considered.

2.4 Limitations for Prior Certified Learning

Some programmes may require a limitation on the volume of exemptions or on the type of learning that may be exempt due to implications from third party or other state or professional bodies.

3.0 Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)

This involves the awarding of credit for learning from experience. In this case, the candidate must demonstrate that the learning experience has occurred by producing a **Portfolio of Evidence** to support the claim for access, exemption or credit (in some instances the assessor may decide to use an alternative method of assessment, e.g. project or examination). As a general principle, credit is given for learning, not for experience per se. The portfolio of evidence must be written in such a way that the matching of the knowledge, skills and competencies of the module learning outcomes to the prior learning is clearly demonstrated.

The portfolio the learner has to submit will be based on the learning outcomes of the module(s)/ programme he/she seeks credits for.

Evidence contained in the portfolio may include:

- References
- CV (e.g. Europass CV)
- Job Descriptions and experiences
- Details of any training completed
- Certificates for qualifications, training courses etc...
- Sample work (e.g. drawings, minutes from meetings, business plan etc...)
- Evidence from the learner's personal life
- Published work
- Professional licenses/registrations or membership of professional organisations
- Acknowledged accomplishments
- Relevant recreational activities or hobbies

The applicant may be required to provide verification from previous or current employers that the experience stated has been achieved by the learner.

3.1 Learning Outcomes for Prior Experiential Learning

Learning outcomes should facilitate the RPL assessment process. They must be written in a format that allows the learner to provide evidence that he/she possesses the relevant knowledge, skills and competencies associated with the module/programme.

3.2 Assessing Portfolios

- The HOD will appoint a suitably qualified assessor to assess the portfolio of evidence prepared by the RPL applicant.
- Assessors must satisfy themselves that the learning gained matches the minimum standard of the learning outcomes on the module for which the credits is being sought.
- The assessor responsible must have received training on RPL before he/she can assess the portfolio.

As part of the assessment, the assessor may also interview the applicant.

When assessing portfolios, it is important to consider the currency of the prior learning. It must be achieved within a suitable time frame – for example within the last five years (depending on the nature of the learning achieved).

3.3 Guidelines for Prior Non Certified/Experiential Learning

- It is the Learner's responsibility to apply for RPEL. Applications are made to the HOD. Learners must submit their claim on the relevant form (available on the LYIT website and from the RPL Facilitator). This form must be submitted on or before October 1st for semester 1 and on or before February 1st for semester 2. Completed RPL assessments must be submitted to the HOD on or before October 15th for semester 1 and on or before February 15th for semester 2.
- The assessor should make a decision regarding the RPL application within 10 working days. Learners are expected to attend class until they receive written verification from the Head of Department.
- The portfolio is assessed and graded by an assessor appointed by the HOD.
- **Learners should receive a grade for their portfolio of evidence which carries equal weight to modules taken in the conventional method.** Assessors must satisfy themselves that the assessment methods used to determine the standard of the experiential learning gained be equivalent to assessment methods applied to conventional learners.
- Assessors have the right to recommend that credits be granted with conditions e.g. certain research is carried out, attendance at certain workshops etc..
- The cost to the applicant for applying for recognition of prior uncertified learning will be determined by the Registrar on an annual basis.
- The Learner has a right to apply for a recheck or review. The appeal for a recheck / review should be made in writing to the registrar within 5 working days of the initial decision. There will be a cost associated with the appeal. The appeal will be considered by the HOD along with a qualified assessor not involved in the initial assessment. Their decision is final.
- The Documentation submitted by the learner (RPL Application form, portfolio, CV etc...) together with the completed assessment form must be kept for 2 Years for quality assurance purposes and in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act .
- Portfolios of evidence should go through the same quality control procedures as exams/assignments submitted by learners completing the programme in the conventional manner.
- Submission of a portfolio does not guarantee that the applicant gains credits.

4.0 The Process

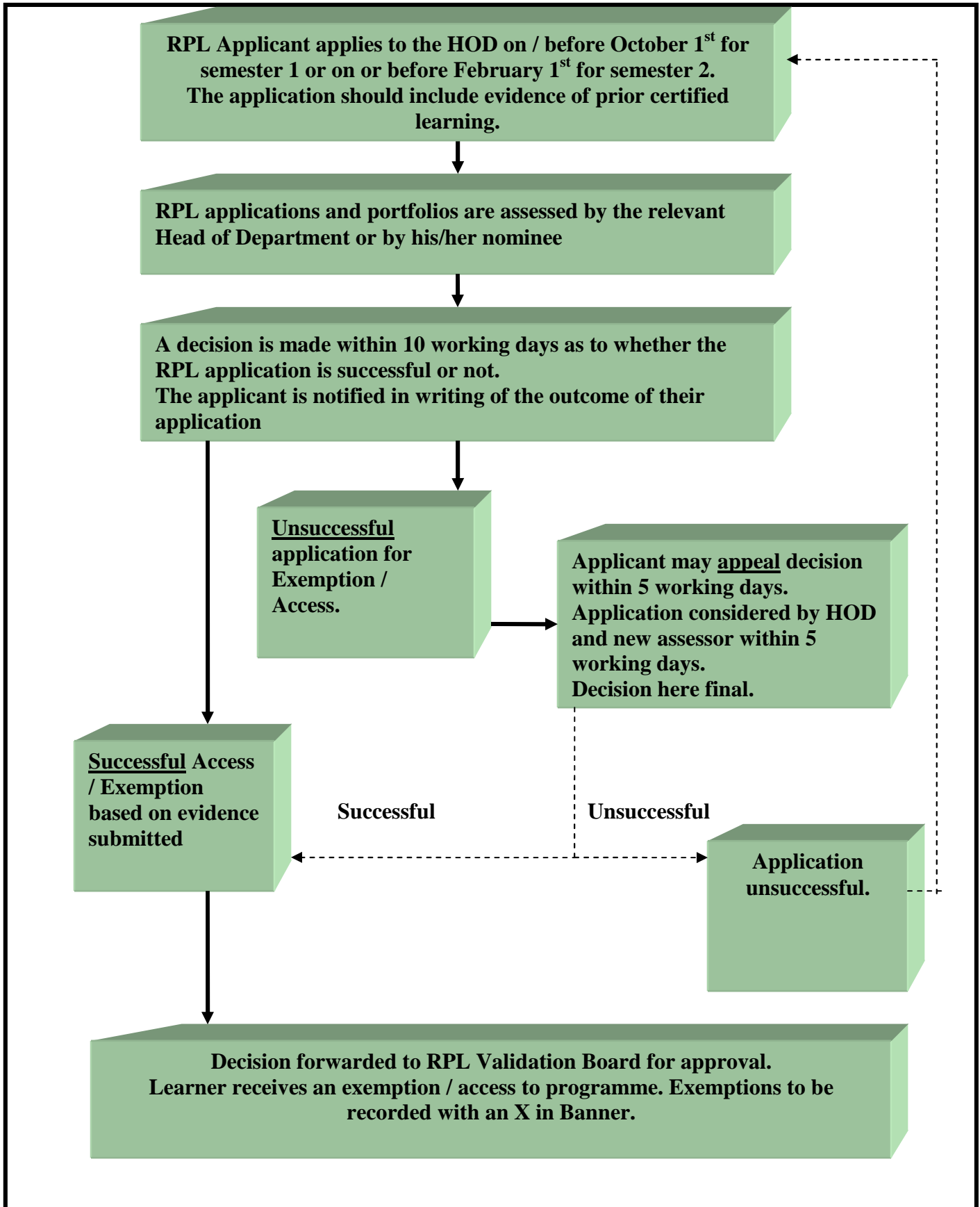
1. Information regarding RPL should be available on the institute website and student handbook.
2. The learner contacts the relevant HOD with his/her intention to apply for RPL. Learner completes relevant application form which is downloadable from institute website. Application forms for RPL should be completed and submitted to the HOD on or before October 1st for semester 1 and on or before February 1st for semester 2.
3. The HOD forwards the RPL facilitator with the name and contact details of the applicant and with the relevant module learning outcomes. The RPL Facilitator provides mentoring to the applicant.
4. For Recognition of Prior certified learning, applicants submit a copy of their certificate that documents the prior learning and also a description of the module(s) / programme(s) already completed (i.e. learning outcomes, assessment techniques, duration of study etc...). This should be included with their initial application.
5. For Recognition of Prior Experiential learning, learners must prepare a portfolio of evidence based on the learning outcomes of the module they seek RPL for. This must be submitted on or before October 15th for semester 1 and on or before February 15th for semester 2. As part of the assessment, learners may also be interviewed by the assessor
6. The assessor makes a decision on the RPL application within 10 working days and forwards the results of the assessment to the HOD. The outcome of the assessment is also communicated in writing to the learner. This outcome is provisional as it is subject to the RPL Validation Board approval. The learner has the right to appeal the decision. The appeal must be made within 5 working days of receiving the outcome.
7. The RPL Validation Board reviews the application and communicates the outcome to the Registry. The RPL Validation board will be comprised of representatives from all departments.
8. The outcome of the RPL assessment is communicated in writing to the learner within 5 working days of the RPL Validation board.

Summary of terms and conditions associated with RPL

	Prior Certified Learning	Prior Experiential Learning
Cost associated with RPL	Please contact the RPL Facilitator	Please contact the RPL Facilitator
Closing date for RPL application	October 1 st Semester 1 February 1 st Semester 2	October 1 st Semester 1 February 1 st Semester 2
Evidence Submission date (E.g. Portfolio / copies of certificates)	October 1 st Semester 1 February 1 st Semester 2 <i>Applicant includes evidence of prior certified learning with application</i>	October 15 th Semester 1 February 15 th Semester 2
Maximum credits / exemptions allowed for RPL for Non Award stages	50%	50%
Maximum credits / exemptions allowed for RPL in Award Year	35%	35%

Please note, the maximum credits a learner can achieve combined through Recognition of Prior Certified and Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning in Non Award year is 50% and 35% in Awards Year. (In other words a learner can not achieve RPL for 50% of modules through Experiential learning and a further 50% for certified learning).

Recognition for Prior Certified Learning for Access and Exemptions



Recognition for Prior Experiential Learning for Access and Credits

