

1 Context

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) has been widely discussed in national¹ and international² papers as a significant contributor to successfully achieving ambitions for lifelong learning and widening access by making Higher Education more flexible and accessible.

The Maynooth University Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy aims to provide a transparent and rational framework for the recognition of prior learning in MU by ensuring that an applicant's prior learning is welcomed, assessed and recognised in an equitable and transparent manner consistent with the University's principles of RPL.

2 What is Recognition of Prior Learning?

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a process by which prior learning is identified, assessed, and formally recognised by an educational institution as part of their modules and programmes on the National Framework of Qualifications. This makes it possible for an individual to build on learning achieved and have this recognised.³ Such learning can be broadly described as certified or experiential.

Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL) is the process of acknowledging an individual's prior *formal* learning which refers to certified learning in a programme which has learning outcomes against which learning can be assessed, credited and can result in a recognised award

Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL) is the recognition of prior *non-formal* and *informal* learning. Non-formal learning refers to learning such as online learning or short extramural courses taken outside of traditional formal education environments. Informal learning or 'experiential' learning refers to the knowledge, skills and competencies that an individual attains through life and work experiences.

3 What can RPL be used for?

This policy, in conjunction with Maynooth University RPL Guidelines and Process, provides the framework and principles for recognising and placing a value on an individual's prior learning for the purpose of gaining:

1. **admission** to programmes where a learner may not have obtained the standard entry requirements
2. **module exemptions** within a programme which duplicate an individual's prior learning. RPL is normally used to recognise learning attained before a learner commences a programme. In exceptional circumstances, 'concurrent' learning (learning undertaken after an applicant is admitted to their programme of study) may also be considered for the purpose of module exemptions.
3. **advanced entry** to years other than year 1 may, in some cases, be permitted⁴

¹ National Strategy to Higher Education 2030; NQAI (2005), *Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education and Training*; Ilona Murphy (2019), *European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Ireland*; National Access Plan: A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-2028

² UNESCO (2012), *Guidelines for the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of the Outcomes of Non-formal and Informal Learning*; Council of the European Union (2012), *Council Recommendation of 20th December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012/c 398/01)*;

³ RPL Framework, 2022

⁴ Note that programme transfers are managed through existing mechanisms within University Admissions

4 Scope

Whilst RPL can apply to all programmes approved by the University, there are some programmes where the use of RPL is either not permitted or has limited usage, such as:

- programmes which are subject to the requirements of a professional, statutory or regulatory body
- research programmes which have an alternative mechanism for processing applications for module exemptions. RPL applications for admission to research programmes are however included in this policy.
- access programmes

The above list is indicative only and it should be noted that there may be other programmes where RPL will not be appropriate.

5 Policy Principles

The following principles will apply to the operation of RPL within the University.

- 5.1 Programmes are composed of modules with stated learning outcomes which describe the kinds of skills, competencies and knowledge a graduate of a particular programme of study is expected to have acquired. Credit will be awarded for full modules only and will not be granted for part(s) of a module.
- 5.2 The exemptions provided in recognition of prior learning may not exceed 35% of a programme's total credit count. This restriction may be waived where students are transferring from equivalent programmes at the same level in the University or other institutions.
- 5.3 The University does not make full awards on the basis of RPL.
- 5.4 Exemption applications should be submitted prospective to a student undertaking and being assessed in a module. RPL may not be used to gain an exemption from a module that has been attempted and not passed.
- 5.5 Where exemptions are granted, only the exempted modules' credit value (and not previously acquired marks) will be included in the students academic record at Maynooth University.
- 5.6 Exemptions will be granted where the assessor can make a clear judgement that learning outcomes have been achieved. Only in exceptional circumstances will module exemptions be granted on the basis of experiential learning.
- 5.7 RPL applications for admission to a programme must be aligned to the expected pre-requisite knowledge and skills required to complete the programme.
- 5.8 Students are not normally allowed to use the same credits to contribute to more than one award. There are two main exceptions to this principle:
 - i. The two awards are of a different level OR they are awards that are nested or form a progression pathway (e.g. from a Postgraduate Diploma to a Masters programme) OR
 - ii. The exemption is a minor part of the course (<35% of taught modules) and there is a clear duplication of content.
- 5.9 RPL assessment utilises quality assured assessment methods which ensure that 'learners are assessed and the assessment judgment is made based on whether the learner has reached the required national standards of knowledge, skill and competence for the award'. (QQI, 2013). The following criteria will be employed by the University in the appraisal of RPL applications:

- i. **Validity:** The presented prior learning must be relevant to the intended programme of study and correspond to the learning outcomes of the module(s) and/or to the broader programme-level outcomes.
 - ii. **Sufficiency:** There should be sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the learning outcomes have been achieved and they are appropriate to the level and award. In assessing credit bearing modules, the University should consider:
 - The module content and the achievement of learning outcomes
 - The credit weight of the module
 - The NFQ level (or equivalent) and the stage/year of the module in programmes of more than one years duration. It is assumed that there is a progression in the learning level between the first and final year of a programme.
 - iii. **Currency:** Prior learning should be up to date with current knowledge, skills and practice in the relevant discipline. Modules taken more than five years previously will not normally be permitted as the basis for exemptions unless there is a reasonable indication that the knowledge has been sustained in the interim. In assessing modules taken more than two years previously, the assessment will consider whether there have been substantial changes in the content since the module was taken
 - iv. **Reliability:** The evidence of prior learning will be reliable and it will be possible to verify that it is the learning of the applicant in question. In principle, a module that is passed remains passed in perpetuity. However for the purposes of exemption, the result achieved should be considered, particularly when considering modules taken more than two years previously
- 5.10 At any point during the assessment process, the applicant may be required to supply further details on prior learning via an assessment activity such as an interview, practical exam, demonstration or written examination. This academic department will select a mode of assessment best fitting the particular discipline.
- 5.11 Decisions regarding RRL are a matter of academic judgement and applications are assessed by the University within the framework and principles of this policy.
- 5.12 Appeals against judgements on RPL applications will be managed in line with the Appeals Process as per <weblink>.

6 Quality Assurance

This policy has been devised on the basis of best current practice alongside the guidance documents of RPL National Framework (2022), National University of Ireland (2013) and NQAI (2005).

The policy and procedure governing RPL is embedded within Maynooth University’s quality assurance procedures.

Document Reference	Policy ASR-P01
Purpose	Policy document for the practice of RPL at Maynooth University
Approval Date	Approved by Maynooth University Academic Council on 11 th March 2024
Policy Authors	Maynooth University Admissions and Student Recruitment