

Recognition of Prior Learning Policy and Procedures

[Version 1.7]

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Policy Approver	QAC	Effective Date	05/10/2017		

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a formalised process through which credit may be awarded for learning undertaken prior to the commencement of a course offered by the Institute for Education (IfE) or learning completed together with, but not a part of the IfE course for which a prospective course participant has applied or is registered.
- 1.2 The appropriate use of RPL procedures avoids the necessity of duplicating previous learning, whilst ensuring that credit is only awarded when strong evidence is presented of successful achievement of the learning outcomes applicable to the level and content of the award for which the learner has applied or is registered. Usually only qualifications and experience acquired within ten years of the date of a RPL claim will be admissible as evidence to support a claim. Certain courses may apply a different time period to reflect professional and other regulatory requirements.

2 Terminology

- 2.1 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is:
 - The recognition of learning that has previously been assessed and certificated by an education provider; and
 - The recognition of prior learning gained through relevant experience which can be evaluated.
- 2.2 **Formal (Certificated) Learning** takes place through a structured programme of learning delivered by a registered education provider, and which leads to the full or partial achievement of an officially accredited qualification.
- 2.3 **Informal (Experiential) Learning** is that gained through work, social, family, hobby or leisure activities and experiences.
- 2.4 **Non-formal learning** takes place through a structured programme of learning, but does not directly lead to full or partial achievement of an officially accredited qualification.
- 2.5 **Credit Transfer** involves the use of ECTS credit received through formal learning for the scope of exemption from module/s forming part of a programme of study where the learning outcomes of the module/s already gained match, in terms of level and depth, the learning outcomes of the new programme of study.

3 Policy Statement

- 3.1 The IfE will establish a transparent, equitable and evidence-based process for the assessment and determination of Prior Learning.
- 3.2 The IfE may, at its discretion, set additional requirements for the Recognition of Prior Learning, including but not limited to testing, interviews, practical demonstrations and submission of portfolio/s of evidence containing samples of work, a reflective narrative and testimony from somebody who can witness that learning took place.
- 3.3 The assessment of Prior Learning for the purposes of admission and/or Credit Transfer will be evidence-based, equitable and academically defensible. The precise nature of the evidence-based assessment may vary from discipline to discipline and assessments will be made on the merit of each individual case.

4 Principles

- 4.1 RPL is a form of assessment and therefore the policy and procedures in place for RPL are compliant with the IfE's principles and procedures for assessment (Refer to [Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy and Procedures](#));
- 4.2 RPL is a judgement about a course participant's ability to study at a particular level taking account of their previous study and experience;
- 4.3 The assessment of an RPL claim will:
 - Involve robust, academic judgement;
 - Take a holistic approach to the course participant's experience, previous study and intended award;
 - Recognise the need for flexible consideration of each aspect of the intended award in the light of previous study or experience.
- 4.4 An RPL claim based on learning completed prior to admission to any IfE's course should be submitted:
 - a. Informal/ Non-Formal RPL: during the process of application for the course so that the claim can be evaluated, and any credit awarded, before the course commences.
 - b. Formal RPL: prior to the commencement of the respective academic year, during which the module for which exemption is being sought, will be delivered.

- 4.5 Claims for formal RPL based on an award/qualification successfully achieved with the IfE, during the pursuit of another IfE course, , can be considered once a course has commenced;
- 4.6 The IfE's Admissions Board reviews RPL claims and provides a moderation process and ensures academic integrity and institutional consistency.

5 General Guidelines

5.1 The award of credit

- 5.1.1 RPL Credit is awarded in specified amounts at an identified level.
- 5.1.2 Specific credit may be awarded where prior learning matches, in terms of level, volume and content, the learning outcomes of a course or module.
- 5.1.3 General credit may be awarded where prior learning is recognised to be of sufficient depth and quality as to be assigned a specific level and amount, but which cannot be matched to the subject content of a chosen award programme.
- 5.1.4 There is no difference between certificated (formal learning) and uncertificated learning (Informal and Non-Formal Learning) in the amount of credit that can be claimed towards an award.
- 5.1.5 Double counting of prior learning for credit must be avoided. Credit, whether gained at the IfE or another institution, can only be accumulated towards one single award at any given level. For example, the credit transfer (through RPL) of an Undergraduate Certificate or Undergraduate Diploma with a view to completing a first degree, would be accepted only where those credits which had not already been counted towards another degree.
- 5.1.6 Where a programme is not credit-rated or modularised, there must be clear identification of the specific elements of the programme against which the prior learning is to be matched.

5.2 Limitations to the award of credit

- 5.2.1 The minimum claim allowable under the RPL Scheme is equal to the smallest module within any given programme.
- 5.2.2 The maximum credit for RPL which can be offered is one third (33%) of any given programme.

5.3 Instances where RPL credit can and cannot be awarded

- 5.3.1 Prior learning can be awarded credit against required, mandatory and optional modules as defined in the [Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy and Procedures](#).
- 5.3.2 Where claims are made for exemption, they should be against whole modules of a programme. Claims cannot be made against part of modules.
- 5.3.3 RPL credit cannot be awarded for any module which comprises a teaching practice/practice placement/field placement/internship in industry (micro-placement) and a final project or dissertation. RPL credit cannot be awarded where professional or statutory body requirements are not met
- 5.3.4 Should RPL be partially or fully accepted as part of the entry requirements of a programme, this will be indicated in the entry requirements of the said course.

5.4 The timing of a claim

- 5.4.1 Informal / Non-Formal RPL claims should be made at least one (1) month prior to the start of the course.
- 5.4.2 Formal RPL claims should be made at least one (1) month prior to the commencement of the respective academic year, during which the module for which exemption is being sought, will be delivered. This clause does not apply to RPL (formal) claims related to awards completed with the IFE.
- 5.4.3 An RPL application for exemption can be made once a potential course participant has demonstrated that they are likely to meet the admissions criteria for a programme.

5.5 Time limit for process

- 5.5.1 The use of RPL does not alter the admissions process for the programme. Deadlines for acceptance of an offer of a place will not be extended to accommodate the timing of RPL assessment decisions. Once a full application documenting the claim, inclusive of supporting documentation, has been received, the prospective course participant will receive the decision in writing within twenty (20) working days.

6 Formal (Certificated) Learning

6.1 Formal learning is always organised and structured and has learning objectives. It is part of structured programme that leads to the full or partial achievement of an officially accredited qualification undertaken at a tertiary institution (eg; University or private institution). From the prospective course participant's standpoint, it is always intentional: i.e. the prospective course participant's explicit objective is to gain knowledge, skills and/or competences. Typical examples are learning that takes place within the initial education and training system or workplace training arranged by the employer. One can also speak about formal education and/or training or, more accurately speaking, education and/or training in a formal setting. This definition is rather consensual.

6.2 Examples of officially accredited qualifications include:

- Undergraduate Certificates
- Undergraduate Diploma
- Undergraduate Higher Diplomas
- Bachelor's degrees
- Postgraduate Certificate
- Postgraduate Diploma
- Master's Degree

6.3 Evidence of Formal Learning

6.3.1 To be assessed for credit based on formal learning, the prospective course participant will need to supply the following items:

- *Transcripts* - A copy of prospective course participant's official transcripts for all relevant previous studies, including any currently enrolled units they intend to complete prior to commencing the course/module at the IfE. The prospective course participant is advised to contact their previous institution to obtain a copy of the official transcripts.
- *Unit Outlines* - Detailed unit guides or outlines (or course syllabus) must be provided for each unit on the transcript the prospective course participant wishes to have assessed for credit. Unit guides should include information on

the course content covered, learning outcomes, required readings, and assessment methods.

- Note: Supporting documents in a language other than English must be accompanied by a certified English translation.

6.4 RPL assessment criteria

6.4.1 In assessing the prospective course participant's prior learning, consideration is given to the following currency and relevancy criteria:

- *Currency* - Prior formal learning attained within *ten years* of the date of application for credit will generally be considered current;
- *Relevance* - Prior formal learning will be considered relevant where there is evidence to demonstrate that:
 - The prospective course participant has achieved a quality and standard of learning equivalent to tertiary studies at an appropriate level;
 - The prospective course participant has attained the learning outcomes of a specific unit or units and/or stage of the degree programme;
 - The prospective course participant's prior learning is assessed as equivalent in discipline content, depth and breadth.

6.5 Assessment of Overseas Qualifications

6.5.1 Qualifications equivalent to the required MQF Level as recognised by the Malta Qualification Information Centre (MQRIC) may be considered. MQRIC is the competent body within the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA) that recognises qualifications against the [Malta Qualifications Framework](#) (MQF). It provides recognition and comparability of both academic and vocational qualifications, using both the MQF and the [European Qualifications Framework](#) (EQF) to provide recognition advice on both local and international qualifications.

7 Informal (Experiential) and Non-Formal Learning

7.1 *Informal (Experiential) learning* is never organised, has no set objective in terms of learning outcomes and is never intentional from the prospective course participant's standpoint. Often it is referred to as learning by experience or just as experience. The idea is that the simple fact of existing constantly exposes the individual to learning situations, at work, at home or during leisure time for instance. This definition, with a few exceptions also meets with a fair degree of consensus.

7.2 Non-formal learning is the concept on which there is the least consensus, which is not to say that there is consensus on the other two, simply that the wide variety of approaches in this case makes consensus even more difficult. Nevertheless, non-formal learning is rather organised and can have learning objectives. The advantage of the intermediate concept lies in the fact that such learning may occur at the initiative of the individual but also happens as a by-product of more organised activities, whether or not the activities themselves have learning objectives. Non-formal learning gives some flexibility between formal and informal learning, which must be strictly defined to be operational, by being mutually exclusive, and avoid overlap.

7.3 Evidence of Informal / Non-formal Learning

7.3.1 In order to obtain entry or credit at the IfE based on informal or non-formal learning, a statement and documentary evidence must be provided to support the claim.

7.3.2 Evidence needs to document the prior learning and demonstrate either:

- A standard of learning required for admission to prospective course participant's specified degree programme; and/or
- Achievement of the specific learning outcomes of the unit(s) for which credit is sought.

7.3.3 Some examples of documentary evidence for informal and non-formal learning include:

- Non-accredited certificates and statements of attainment from courses sponsored by employers or professional bodies, including information about the course of study;
- Training Records which should include a combination of significant learning forms that can supplement the professional acumen of the prospective course participant. These could include evidence of any of the following; on-the-job

training (while being employed); participation in projects as guided by previous employer; participation in competitions related to the course applied for; attendance of courses related to the course applied for on a voluntary basis; and attendance of information sessions regarding innovative practices;

- Evidence of Quality Performance in a Case Study that can be used for Accreditation purposes and to indicate profound understanding of the selected course;
- Evidence of involvement in workforce or community activities (through informal and non-formal learning that took place aggregately not more than 5 years prior to the commencement of the course) and which are directly related and comparable to the selected course;
- Employment history and employment position descriptions;
- Results from other non-accredited courses from various education and training providers (eg. MOOCs), including outlines of any units studied;
- Letters of reference from employers, including direct supervisors, verifying the prospective course participant's knowledge, skills and experience;
- Letters/documents from clients, verifying work activities;
- Copies of documents you have completed as part of the prospective course participant's work;
- Details of community activities involving significant responsibilities;
- Samples, photographs or videos of the prospective course participant's work that are related to the credit sought and, ideally, these should be accompanied by a description sheet.

7.3.4 In some cases, prospective course participants may be required to perform a challenge task to further demonstrate their prior learning.

7.4 RPL assessment criteria

- *Currency* - Prior formal learning attained within *ten years* of the date of application for credit will generally be considered current;
- *Relevance for admission* - Prior informal/non-formal learning will be considered relevant for admission where:
 - There is evidence to demonstrate that the prospective course participant has achieved a standard of learning which is comparable to the admission requirements of the selected degree

- The prospective course participant demonstrates competency and readiness for tertiary studies.
- *Relevance for credit* - Prior formal learning will be considered relevant where there is evidence to demonstrate that:
 - The prospective course participant has achieved a quality and standard of learning equivalent to tertiary studies at an appropriate level as defined in the MQF [Referencing report](#);
 - The prospective course participant has attained the learning outcomes of a specific unit or units and/or stage of the degree programme;
 - The prospective course participant's prior learning is assessed as equivalent in discipline content, depth and breadth.

8 Application Procedure

- 8.1 Applications for Recognition of Prior Learning are administered by the Admissions Department. All information about the RPL process is provided on the IfE Prospectus, ife.edu.mt, within the student handbook disseminated in the letter of acceptance issued to enrolled qualification participants, as well as the Frequently Asked Questions section on the IfE Website. Prospective course participants are encouraged to discuss any prior learning they may have and for which they may benefit from Recognition of Prior Learning. Queries may be directed to the respective course coordinator or the Manager Student Affairs within the Admissions Department on ife.admissions@ilearn.edu.mt for guidance.
- 8.2 Prospective course participants should think carefully about what expertise has been acquired over time, in particular whether they have 'depth' of knowledge and/or strong skills in specific areas.
- 8.3 Prospective course participants requesting for Recognition of Prior Learning (Certified) and Recognition of Prior Learning (Non-formal/Informal) can apply through the following forms by accessing the following links: [RPL \(Formal\) Application Form](#); [RPL \(Non-Formal/Informal\) Application Form](#). The IfE will also provide additional guidance if needed.

- 8.4 Prospective course participants will be required to provide evidence of prior learning as part of the application – They are advised to read the information which details the required documentation for formal and non-formal/informal learning.
- 8.5 All evidence must be in the English language.
- 8.6 The RPL assessment will include the verification of the currency, relevance, and authenticity of the documents submitted. Overseas and domestic academic qualifications presented for an application for course credit will be authenticated:
- Original documents (i.e. award and transcript of results) being provided by the applicant to the authorised IfE representative;
 - Copies of the original documents (i.e. award and transcript of results) being provided by the applicant which have been verified as a true copy of the original documents by an authorised IfE representative.
- 8.7 Should the assessor suspect that the academic document presented has been altered or fraudulently created, the necessary action will be taken to validate the claims of the candidate.
- 8.8 All claimed work experience must be relevant to the qualification and should be within the last ten years of the date of application. Statements of Service provided must be on official company letterhead, providing contact details of the employer. Past and current employers are contacted to verify applicable work experience on a case-by-case basis.
- 8.9 This evidence will be assessed, and if necessary, an interview will be held at which the candidate may provide additional evidence of the relevant competencies or demonstrate the relevant skills. For overseas candidates or others not living within reasonable travel distance to the IfE, this interview may be conducted by telephone and/or demonstration given after arrival. In such circumstances, the applicant must have provided the IfE with certified copies of the supportive evidence prior to the telephone interview commencing.
- 8.10 The possible outcomes following a request for RPL include:
- Full acceptance of the claim as entry requirements onto a programme of study;
 - Full acceptance of a claim for advanced entry (exemption) to a programme of study;

- Partial acceptance of the claim for exemption;
- A request for resubmission of a claim including further evidence/supporting documentation;
- Rejection of claim with recommendations for alternative paths
- Rejection of the claim.

8.11 After this assessment procedure, the IfE will provide written notification within twenty (20) working days explaining the units for which credit has been granted, and those which have been declined providing adequate justification for the adverse decision. Applicants may also contact the Head of Admissions requesting further clarification on ife.admissions@ilearn.edu.mt.

8.12 The units for which credit is being acknowledged through the recognition of prior learning will be indicated on the academic record and Europass diploma supplement through an 'EX' under the grade.

8.13 If the prospective course participant is dissatisfied with the outcome, they have the option to appeal against the decision but must do so within ten (10) working days of the date nominated on the written notification in line with the [Appeals Policy and Procedures](#) of the IfE. The timeframe for the duration of the applicable appeals period is bound by the [Appeals Policy and Procedures](#) of the IfE. The appeals process is free of charge.

8.14 The outcomes of the application will be recorded within the IfE's database, and a copy of the submission documents will be retained as evidence of the assessment process. The IfE collects and processes personal data required in the process of carrying out its functions. All personal data is collected and processed limitedly for processing in accordance with the Data Protection Act Chapter 586, the Education Act, Chapter 327 of the Laws of Malta and subsidiary legislation as well as the [Course Participants' Records Policy of the IfE](#). Applicants will be requested to provide consent to the IfE to process and record personal data within the Application Form for RPL. Applicants are also to be informed that the Data Controller is the CEO of the IfE.

9 Tuition Fees and Charges

9.1 The applicable tuition fees shall remain unchanged and will not be discounted following a favourable outcome of a request for RPL.

9.2 The RPL process is subject to administrative charges as outlined in the [Administrative Charges](#) of the IfE.

10 Monitoring and Quality Assurance Arrangements

- 10.1 The Head Quality Assurance (QA) is responsible for reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of the [Recognition of Prior Learning Policy and Procedures](#). As part of its internal quality assurance (IQA) procedures outlined in the IfE's [Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement](#), the Head QA monitors various aspects of the RPL process.
- 10.2 The Head QA oversees the assessment procedures integral to the RPL process. During the [Internal Review](#) the methods employed to evaluate prior learning experiences are scrutinised. This guarantees that assessments adhere to established standards of validity, reliability, and fairness. By maintaining a keen eye on assessment practices, the Head QA maintains the integrity of RPL outcomes, ensuring that they accurately reflect learners' knowledge and skills.
- 10.3 The Head QA is also involved in monitoring documentation practices associated with RPL assessments which are carried out by the Admissions Board. This encompasses reviewing the completeness, accuracy, and consistency of documentation submitted by candidates to substantiate their prior learning. This ensures transparency and accountability within the RPL process, facilitating comprehensive reviews and assessments.
- 10.4 Additionally, the Head QA together with the Head of Admissions, oversees training initiatives for RPL assessors and members of the Admissions Board. This training aims to equip assessors and members of the Admissions Board with the requisite knowledge, skills, and competencies to conduct RPL assessments effectively.
- 10.5 The Head QA also obtains feedback from stakeholders regarding RPL procedures. This involves obtaining input from various stakeholders, including course participants, educators and employers to gather insights on the efficacy and impact of RPL processes.
- 10.6 Any recommendations related to RPL procedures put forward by the Head QA in the internal review report, are addressed by the Admissions Department through an action plan. Progress on the implementation of the recommendations is monitored and reviewed triannually through follow-up meetings.
- 10.7 Through all its QA processes the IfE ensures that:

- The assessment of Prior Learning for admission is evidence-based and questions the applicant's competency and readiness for tertiary study;
- The assessment of Prior Learning for Credit Transfer is evidence-based, and ensures that the learning outcomes have been met;
- Credit granted on the basis of learning completed outside of the IfE is not recorded with a grade, and does not contribute to any grade point average;
- Credit on the basis of prior Formal Learning is only granted for completed units where the final grade is a Pass, or equivalent grade, and higher;
- Grades of 'concessional pass', 'terminating pass' or equivalent, from another higher education institution, will not be deemed to be successfully completed for the purpose of credit, unless supported by additional information and approved on a case-by-case basis;
- Credit granted by another institution on the basis of Prior Learning is not transferable to the IfE;
- Standards for the assessment of Prior Learning are regularly reviewed and monitored by the IfE's Admissions Board.

10.8 All the procedures indicated under Article 10 are further reviewed through external quality reviews within the IfE's IQA structure and through External Quality Assurance (EQA) audits carried out by the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority. These external reviews serve as a vital mechanism for ensuring that RPL practices align with MFHEA standards and best practices.

11 Appeals

11.1 A prospective course participant may appeal a decision regarding the assessment of Prior Learning for the purpose of admission and/or Credit Transfer.

11.2 Grounds for an appeal are limited to procedural error or breach of procedural fairness. An appeal following an RPL decision is considered as a non-academic appeal in terms of the [Appeals Policy and Procedures](#).

11.3 Appeals will be managed through the Appeals Board, and are to be made in accordance with the [Appeals Policy and Procedures](#).

11.4 The applicable duration of the appeals process is in accordance with the [Appeals Policy and Procedures](#).

11.5 The Appeals process is free of charge.

12 Relevant Documents

- [Administrative Charges](#)
- [Appeals Policy and Procedures](#)
- [Internal Review Policy](#)
- [Malta Qualifications Framework](#)
- [Policy for Quality Assurance and Enhancement](#)
- [Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy and Procedures](#)
- [The European Qualifications Framework](#)
- [Recognition of Prior Learning \(RPL\) \(Formal\) - Application Form](#)
- [Recognition of Prior Learning \(RPL\) \(Informal/Non-formal\) - Application Form](#)

13 Version history

Originator	Version	Date	Changes Done
QA Dept.	1.0	05/10/2017	Initial Release
QA Dept.	1.1	10/12/2018	Updated articles 5.3, 8 and 11.
QA Dept.	1.2	01/10/2019	Updated articles 5.3, and 5.4.
QA Dept.	1.3	23/02/2021	Updated articles 5.3, and 5.4.
Admissions Dept.	1.4	18/06/2021	Updated article 5.3
QA Dept	1.5	26/04/2024	Updated links
Admissions Dept	1.6	21/02/2024	Updated articles 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11. Replaced article 9
QA Dept.	1.7	25/01/2025	Updated in line with re-branding guidelines