



Recognition of Prior Learning Policy and Procedures

Version 1.5

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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.

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 testing, interviews, practical demonstrations and submission

portfolio 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 during the process of applying for the course so that the claim can be judged, and any credit awarded, before the course commences;
- 4.5 Only RPL claims based on learning completed whilst undertaking an IfE's course, but that is not a part of that course, will be considered once a course has commenced;
- 4.6 The IfE's Academic 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 should be 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 this 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 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 normally one third 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 or components 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 practicum/practice placement, internship in industry (microplacement) and a final project or dissertation.

RPL credit cannot be awarded where professional or statutory body requirements are not met.

- 5.3.4 The entry requirements of each course will specify whether it will accept RPL as an entry requirement or whether part of the entry requirements can be fulfilled through RPL.

5.4 The timing of a claim

- 5.4.1 RPL claims should be made at least one (1) month prior to the start of the course. This clause does not apply to RPL (formal) claims related to stand-alone modules completed with the IFE.
- 5.4.2 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.

5.4 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 has been received, the prospective course participant will normally receive the decision within fifteen (15) 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 he/she intends to complete prior to commencing the course/module at the IfE. The prospective course participant is advised to contact his/her 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 normally 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;
- *Relevancy* - 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 recognized by the Malta Qualification Information Centre (MQRIC) may be considered. The Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre (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 Malta Qualifications Framework (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 your 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:

- 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 test 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;
- *Relevancy 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.
- *Relevancy 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;
 - 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 Head of Admissions. Prospective course participants are encouraged to discuss any prior learning they may have with the above-mentioned manager who can provide further guidance if needed in relation to the process shown below.
- 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 \(Certificated\) 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 upload 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.
 - Note: It is expected that applications will occur at the time of admission, or before commencement of the course. If it is necessary to apply after commencement of the subject, it should be no later than the end of the first week of that course.
- 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, contact will be made with the Head of Admissions 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. After this assessment procedure, the IfE will provide written notification within two (2) weeks explaining the units for which credit has been granted, and those which have been declined and why.
- 8.11. If the prospective course participant is dissatisfied with the outcome, he/she has the option to appeal against the decision but must do so within twenty (20) working days of the date nominated on the written notification. Alternatively, additional evidence can be supplied by a specified date.
- 8.12. The outcomes of the application will be recorded within the IfE's database, and a copy of the submission documents retained within the candidate's file as evidence of the assessment process.

9 Time Limits

- 9.1. Applications for credit against previous Formal learning will normally be assessed within ten (10) working days providing all necessary documents have been submitted. A longer period may be required where full assessment is required.

9.2. Applications for Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning will normally be assessed within twenty (20) working days. A longer period may be required where full assessment is required.

10 Quality Assurance

10.1. The IfE will safeguard the quality of its awards by ensuring that:

- The assessment of Prior Learning for admission to an Award 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 successful completion 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 Academic Board.

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.

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

12 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