



RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) PROCEDURE

(FULL-TIME PROVISION)

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2. Definitions

2.1. Glossary

CAS	Common Awards System	CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
EQF	European Qualifications Framework	FETAC	Further education and Training Awards Council
FET	Further Education and Training	NARIC	National Academic Recognition Awards Centre
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications	QBS	QQI Business System
RPCL	Recognition of Prior Certified Learning	QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RPEL	Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning	HEI	Higher education institution
RPL	Recognition of prior Learning		

2.2. Credit

Credit, in terms of recognition of prior experiential learning (RPEL) (i.e. learning which has not previously been academically accredited) may be granted where there is evidence that the required learning outcomes have been achieved. Where such evidence exists, applicants may be entitled to advanced entry to a programme and/or awarded marks/grades for the learning.

2.3. Exemption

Exemptions exist where applicants have been awarded accredited certification for learning by an awarding body such as Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) or other recognised universities, colleges/institutes and awarding bodies. In such cases, the accredited certification has already been graded and, when used as (RPL), is grade neutral. Exemptions may allow applicants advanced entry to a programme and/or may be used for the achievement of the overall award.

2.4. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Recent Irish research suggests that a commonly agreed definition of RPL does not currently exist (QQI, 2017). Hence, for the purpose of this document, the following definition will apply:

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) can “be used by the learner to gain entry to a programme; gain exemptions within a programme; gain credit towards an award: a learner may gain a credit towards an award using previous certification and/or attain an Award: a learner may be awarded

a Major or Minor Award on the basis of previously acquired learning for which they do not have a formal certificate” (CEDEFOP, 2011, p.7).

RPL involves awarding the applicant recognition in the form of initial or advanced admission to a programme, credits within a programme, exemption(s) from element(s) of a programme, or a full award. RPL cannot be claimed for based on the completion of an element of a module. Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board shall ensure that all applicants are made aware of the potential benefits of RPL. Appropriate supports relating to portfolio preparation shall be made available within Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board to interested applicants. RPL can be subdivided into Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL) and Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL).

2.5. Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL)

Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL) is learning that has already been accredited by an awarding body such as (QQI) or other recognised universities, colleges/institutes and awarding bodies. Prior certified learning can also include qualifications awarded by bodies abroad, such as the City & Guilds of London institute.

Prior certified learning may entitle the applicant to exemptions on a programme, not credits. As this certified learning has already been awarded credit, the applicant does not receive credits for it again, but recognition in the form of exemptions. RPCL may be recognised for exemptions on a programme. Exemptions are grade neutral and do not contribute to the overall calculation of the grade of the major award.

2.6. Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)

Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL) (non-certified Learning) is: formal, informal and non-formal learning acquired through life or work experience; learning achieved from non-accredited bodies; or certifying bodies outside of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

CEDEFOP (2011, p.7) provides the following definitions:

Formal Learning	Learning that occurs in an organised and structured environment (in an education or training institution or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources). Formal learning is intentional from the applicant’s point of view. It typically leads to validation and certification.
Informal Learning	Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the applicant’s perspective.
Non-formal Learning	Learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the applicant’s point of view.

3. Principles of Assessment in relation to RPL

Quality assured assessment ensures that, in criterion referenced assessment, “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, Revised 2018, p.5).

Central to quality assured assessment is the assumption that applicants are assessed in a fair and consistent manner in line with the award standard. Quality assured assessment ensures adherence to the principles of assessment.

The following sets forth the principles of assessment which apply to this document: these principles are based on the (QQI, Revised 2018) principles for assessment.

3.1 Principles of Assessments

3.1.1 Validity

Validity is a fundamental assessment principle ensuring that an assessment measures what it is designed to measure: the relevant standard of knowledge, skill or competence required for an award should be assessed.

Validity in assessment occurs when:

- Assessment is fit for purpose (i.e. a practical assessment assesses a practical skill)
- Applicants can produce evidence which can be measured against the award standard
- Assessors can make accurate assessment decisions
- Assessment is accessible to all candidates who are potentially able to achieve it

3.1.2 Reliability

Reliability in assessment ensures that assessment measurement is accurate: the knowledge, skills and competence which the assessment measures should produce reliable and accurate results. Reliability in assessment ensures that results are consistent under similar conditions.

Reliability in assessment occurs when:

- The assessment is based on valid assessment techniques
- Assessment conditions are consistent
- Applicant evidence is reliable
- Results are consistent over time across various assessors, contexts, conditions and applicants

3.1.3 Fair

Fairness in assessment supports the validity and reliability principles and provides equal opportunity to all applicants. Fairness in assessment ensures applicants have access to appropriate resources/equipment in assessment; assessment design and implementation are fair to all applicants; and policies and procedures exist to ensure fair assessment of applicants.

3.1.4 Quality

Quality in assessment ensures that all assessment processes are quality assured.

3.1.5 Transparency

Transparency in assessment ensures that assessment policy and process provide clarity to all relevant stakeholders.

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 sets out the statutory basis for Quality and Qualifications Ireland's (QQI) engagement with recognition of prior learning (RPL), QQI have responsibility for policy of access, transfer and progression of applicants (QQI, 2017). Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board is responsible for having a consistent approach to RPL and implementation must be in accordance with Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board's policy on access, transfer and progression. Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board's Quality Assurance System overarches these principles and ensures applicant achievement is assessed in a fair and consistent manner in line with the award standard.

Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board is committed to utilising RPL as an instrument for: (i) determining standard access equivalences; (ii) for the award of credit; (iii) exemptions for applicants with qualifications or prior experience in the area. The complexity of RPL practices in the Further Education and Training (FET) sector is acknowledged (QQI, 2017). This document should thus be viewed as a guiding document for RPL in order to aid Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board in developing their own RPL procedures.

4. RPL Roles and Responsibilities

4.1. The Provision Co-ordinator

The Provision Co-ordinator must ensure that all staff and applicants are made aware of:

- the existence of an RPL policy and RPL requirements
- the potential benefits of RPL
- the appropriate support relating to portfolio preparation (RPEL only)
- the appropriate support relating to mapping of outcomes to assessment standards (RPCL only)

The Provision Co-ordinator must inform the applicant of the outcome of the RPL decision.

The Provision Co-ordinator must also submit any appeals application to the External Appeals Office and inform the applicant of the outcome of the appeals application.

4.2. The Applicant

Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL)

It is the applicant's responsibility to apply for the RPCL. Applicants must submit their application on the [RPL Application Form](#) to their Provision Co-ordinator within a reasonable timeframe **recommended ten (10) working days** of the module commencement.

Applicants should also include original certificates, results, programme details and, where possible, learning outcomes of certified modules completed. Applicants should be advised to participate in the module(s) until a decision has been made (and written confirmation received) on whether to grant the exemption or not.

Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)

It is the applicant's responsibility to apply for the RPEL. Applicants must submit their claim on the [RPL Application Form](#) to their Provision Co-ordinator within a reasonable timeframe **recommended ten (10) working days** of the module commencement.

It is the applicant's responsibility to gather and present the evidence required for assessment according to the instructions given by the RPL Mentor. Evidence may include, but is not limited to: CV, references, certificates or testimonials, products or samples, job descriptions and/ or evaluations, evidence of attendance at training courses or workplace assessments. Evidence for assessment may be presented in a portfolio of evidence and mapped to the requirements of the award for which the exemption is being sought.

4.3. The RPL Mentor

The RPL mentor is responsible for guiding and supporting the applicant through the RPL process and facilitating the applicant to ensure the evidence is consistent with the award standard.

4.4. The RPL Assessor

The RPL assessor will be a suitably qualified, experienced assessor and subject matter expert with ability to assess both Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL) and Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL). The RPL assessor is appointed by the Provision.

The RPL assessor is responsible for assessing submitted assessment materials/portfolio in accordance with RPL process and the award standard.

4.5. External Appeals Office

The External Appeals Office must:

- Examine the applicant appeal on RPL application outcome
- Investigate whether relevant assessment procedures were followed
- Make a decision on the appeal

5. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Process

As outlined in Figure 1, the RPL process can follow the:

Recognition of Prior CERTIFIED Learning (RPCL) process (See Section 2.5 for definition and Section 6 for process)

and/or

Recognition of Prior EXPERIENTIAL Learning (RPEL) process (See Section 2.6 for definition and Section 7 for process)

Figure 1 Recognition of Prior Learning



6. Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL) Process

6.1. About RPCL

RPCL is learning that has already been accredited by an awarding body such as QQI or other recognised universities, colleges/institutes and awarding bodies. Prior certified learning can also include qualifications awarded by bodies abroad, such as the City & Guilds of London institute.

This prior learning can be recognised on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and may entitle the applicant to:

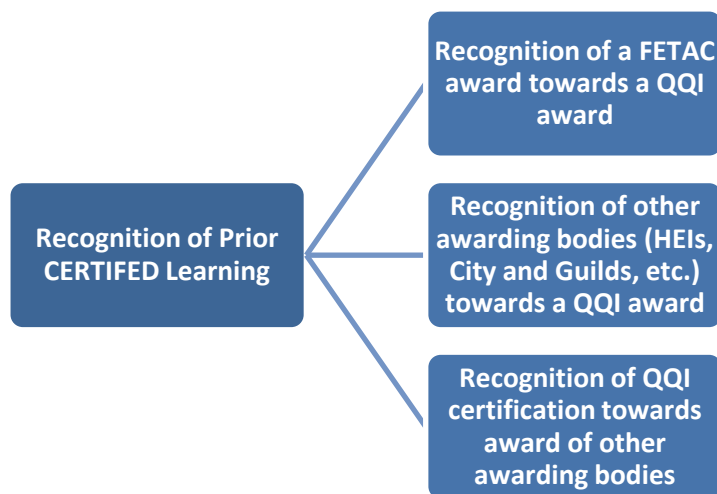
- Admission to a programme or programme of study
- Advanced entry on the programme
- Exemptions from some parts of a programme

QQI (2015) provide details regarding exemptions for the purpose of a Compound (Major/Special Purpose/Supplemental) Award.

6.2. Types of RPCL

There are 3 types of RPCL considered in this process (see Figure 2)

Figure 2 Types of RPCL



6.2.1 Recognition of a Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) award towards a QQI award

“Where a FETAC component is not mapped to a CAS (Common Award System) component, then direct exemption using that FETAC component is not possible” (QQI, 2015, p.1). In this instance, **RPCL will apply**.

Where a Further education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) component is mapped to a CAS component, but is more than 5 years old, then an exemption is not possible, and **RPCL will apply**.

Where a FETAC component is mapped to a CAS component and is less than 5 years old, then an exemption is possible, and **RPCL will not apply**.

Where an applicant has achieved a CAS award, and has thus met the learning outcomes for that award as currently published on the QQI website, then the applicant has achieved that award, regardless of the age of the certificate. In this instance, the 5-year rule does not apply: the applicant's award will be recognised by the QQI Business System (QBS), and it is not necessary to apply for either an exemption or RPCL. If the learning, for which recognition is sought for a QQI award, is certified outside of CAS, **RPCL will apply**.

The following must be considered as part of this process (see Table 1).

Table 1: Considerations of RPCL

Comparison of Learning Outcomes	It is recommended that the RPL assessor compares the learning outcomes of the prior certified learning to the learning outcomes of the module(s)/programme in which the applicant is seeking the exemption(s): this must be completed in line with Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board's RPL policy while adhering to the award standard and principles of assessment. Gaps in learning may be identified and supports put in place to address these gaps.
Currency of RPCL	It is recommended that the RPCL must have been achieved in an appropriate timeframe (timeframe dependent on discipline) and in line with Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board's RPL policy. For example, ICT of ten years ago is of limited benefit today on a current programme, while some culinary training outcomes or communication skills may be more timeless.

6.2.2 Recognition of other awarding bodies (Higher Education Institution (HEI), City & Guilds, etc.) towards a QQI award

QQI recognises the value of awards made by another awarding body where the awarding body is:

- nationally recognised in its own country
- operating a quality assured awarding process (QQI, 2018)

QQI has identified a listing of awards to which RPCL may be applied (QQI, 2018). Where an award is not on the published list, the applicant is required to provide the relevant learning programme and original transcript of results, with their application, in order to apply for RPCL.

Applicants seeking *Statements of Equivalence* for foreign qualifications may be referred to the National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) (<http://qsearch.qqi.ie/Webpart/Search?searchtype=recognitions>) to have their qualifications aligned with the appropriate Irish qualification. *Qualifications Recognition* is the QQI body responsible for the recognition of foreign qualifications.

6.2.3 Recognition of QQI certification towards award of other awarding bodies

The recognition of QQI certification towards an award of any other awarding body is dealt with in line with the procedures of the specific awarding body.

6.3. RPCL Application Process

In the case of exemption applications, the prior certified learning, which the applicant is basing his/her exemption on, should be at the same (or higher) NFQ level than the level the applicant is seeking the exemption in recognition of other awarding bodies (Higher Education Institution (HEI), City of Guilds, etc.) towards a QQI award.

1. Applicant reviews **Types of RPCL** and identifies which type applies (see Section 6.2)

WHERE RPCL APPLIES - APPLICANT PROCEEDS WITH RPCL APPLICATION

2. Applicant completes [RPL Application Form](#)
3. The Provision Co-ordinator appoints an RPL mentor
4. The RPL mentor supports the applicant in portfolio preparation
5. The Provision Co-ordinator nominates two RPL assessors to assess the portfolio. The RPL assessors shall consider the application and agree a decision regarding it within a reasonable timeframe (recommended timeframe: **ten (10) working days**) of receipt of the application in line with Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board's RPL policy (see Table 1 for considerations in this process)
6. The Provision Co-ordinator informs the applicant of the outcome. The assessment evidence is presented at the next assessment period
7. The applicant can appeal the decision (see Section 8).

7. Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL) Process

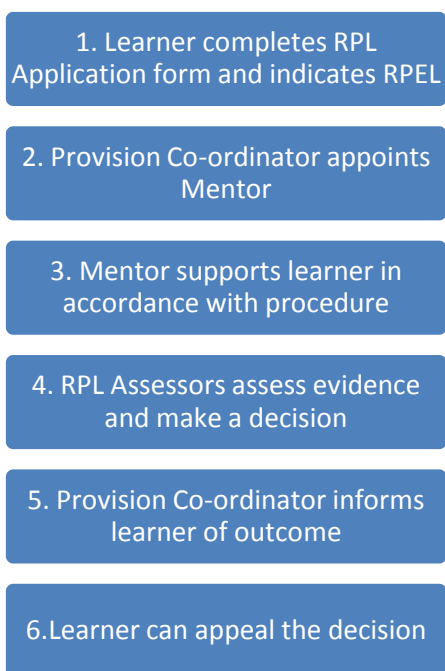
7.1. About RPEL

RPEL is non-formal and informal learning acquired through experience or learning achieved from non-accredited bodies e.g. learning acquired in the workplace.

7.2. RPEL Process

The RPEL Application process follows the steps outlined in Figure 3

Figure 3: RPEL Process



1. The applicant completes an [RPL Application Form](#) and indicates the RPEL being applied for. This should be in line with the award being applied for/learning outcomes of the award.
2. The Provision Co-ordinator assigns an RPL mentor to support the applicant through the RPEL process. This involves the awarding of credit for non-formal learning gained from experience. In this case, the applicant must demonstrate that the required equivalent learning has been achieved by producing a portfolio of evidence to support the claim for access or credit (Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board will have a support service (RPL mentor) in place to help applicants with the production of the portfolio).

The portfolio of evidence must be presented 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. Other assessment tools such as examination, assignment, interview or observation can also be used to assess prior experiential learning.

The evidence the applicant has to submit will be based on the learning outcomes of the module(s)/programme he/she seeks credits for. Evidence may include (but are not limited to):

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

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

3. The Provision Co-ordinator appoints two RPL assessors to consider the portfolio of evidence. The assessors should examine the submitted portfolio and agree a decision within a reasonable timeframe (**recommended timeframe: ten (10) working days**). The portfolio is assessed and an agreed grade is assigned by the assessors.

Applicants 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 techniques used to determine the standard of the experiential learning gained be equivalent to assessment methods applied to the module.

Portfolios of Evidence should go through the same quality assurance procedures as other assessment evidence (e.g. examinations/assignments) submitted by applicants completing the programme in the conventional manner. Portfolios must demonstrate evidence of the required standard, albeit using an alternative method.

Submission of a portfolio does not guarantee that the applicant gains credits.

4. The Provision co-ordinator informs the applicant of the outcome.
5. The applicant can appeal the decision (see Section 8).

8. RPL Appeals

The applicant has the right to appeal the decision in relation to RPL (can appeal decision on application or grade awarded). Appeals must be made within a recommended timeframe **(five (5) working days of the decision)**. In exceptional circumstances, the Provision co-ordinator may extend this time limit. All appeals must be made in writing using the [RPL Appeals Application Form](#).

All Appeals will be processed by the External Appeals Office located in the Quality Assurance Support Office.

Decisions on appeals are final.

References

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