

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL)

GUIDE FOR STAFF AT UCD



July 2024



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	PURPOSE OF GUIDE	3
2	KEY TERMS	4
3	RPL INFORMATION	5
4	RPL APPLICATION FOR ADMISSIONS	6
4.1	Undergraduate Students	6
4.2	Graduate Students	6
5	RPL PROCESS FOR CREDIT/EXEMPTION	7
5.1	Application Methods	7
5.2	Applying for RPL for Credit/Exemptions	8
5.3	RPL Assessment for Credit/Exemptions	9
5.4	RPL Outcomes	11
6	RPL POLICY CLARIFICATIONS	12
7	APPEALS MECHANISM	14
8	ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES	15
8.1	Governing Board	15
8.2	Colleges/Schools	15
8.3	UCD Registry	16
9	USEFUL RESOURCES	17
10	APPENDIX 1 – PORTFOLIO OF EVIDENCE	18



1 PURPOSE OF GUIDE

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a process by which prior learning is formally valued. It is a means by which prior learning is identified, assessed, and recognised by an educational institution as part of its programmes, courses, and/or modules on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). This allows an individual to build on learning achieved and to be rewarded for it. It provides a process to avoid duplication of learning.

Application of the RPL process can result in:

- Access to programmes for which the entrance criteria are not met by the applicant ***and/or***
- To gain exemption from modules within a programme for which their prior learning fulfils the learning outcomes for that module ***which can result in***
- Advanced entry to a programme.

This guide should be used in conjunction with the UCD Policy on RPL which can be found here [RPL Policy](#).

This guide provides additional information under the following headings:

- Key Terms
- Undergraduate & Graduate RPL Application Systems.
- RPL Application Process & Assessment.
- RPL Policy Clarifications
- Roles and Responsibilities - UCD Teams
- Useful Resources



2 KEY TERMS

Prior Learning	Learning that has taken place prior to entry to a programme, but has not necessarily been assessed, measured, or assigned credits. Prior learning may have been acquired through formal, non-formal, and/or informal routes.
RPL Process	Describes the distinct stages of the RPL application process which are information, identification, documentation, assessment & certification.
Formal learning	Takes place through programmes or courses of study that are delivered in an organised, formal way by education providers and that attract awards or credits. Formal learning is also known as certified or accredited learning.
Non-Formal learning	Takes place alongside or outside the mainstream systems of education and training. It is typically intentional from the learner's perspective, it may be assessed but does not normally lead to formal certification. Examples of non-formal learning are planned learning and training activities undertaken in the workplace, voluntary sector, or in community-based settings.
Informal Learning	Takes place through life and work experience. Typically, it does not lead to certification. Informal learning is sometimes considered to be learning that is unintentional from the learner's point of view, and the learner may not recognise at the time of the experience that it has contributed to their knowledge, skills and competences. This is sometimes referred to as experiential learning. ¹
Concurrent Learning	Concurrent learning refers to learning that has been completed outside of the programme after the student has been admitted to the programme. Concurrent learning applies to graduate research students only.
Occasional Students:	Students who are studying at and are registered to credit-bearing modules which do NOT lead to a UCD award. Examples include, Study Abroad, ERASMUS, credit-bearing Continuous Professional Development (CPD), Pre-Masters programmes.

¹ It has been observed that intentional informal learning frequently takes place across all dimensions of adult life. For example, see D.W. Livingstone, 'Probing the Icebergs of Adult Learning: Comparative Findings and Implications of the 1998, 2004, and 2010 Canadian Surveys of Formal and Informal Learning Practices', *The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, 25:1, November 2012, 47–71.



3 RPL INFORMATION

It is the responsibility of all Colleges/Schools/Programme Leads to ensure that programmes within their remit support the UCD Policy on RPL. More specifically, all programmes must publish the availability of RPL on their programmes preferably alongside the entry requirements. This information should be visible to the learner from course finder webpages.

The UCD Policy for RPL references the following in relation to the provision of information in relation to RPL opportunities at Programme level:

3.2 'While the policy applies to all UCD Programmes as defined by the Academic Regulations, limitations to RPL may apply at programme level. Professional programmes that are externally accredited may be restricted in the use of RPL. Other programmes may include elements that are not suitable for the purposes of RPL. In such cases information on any limitations or additional criteria for RPL must be made available by the relevant Governing Board'.

Exceptions may apply to this policy for example where professional accreditation prevents the use of RPL. The exclusion of RPL applications on any programmes must be approved by the relevant programme Governing Board.



4 RPL APPLICATION FOR ADMISSIONS

4.1 Undergraduate Students

Prospective undergraduate students who do not meet the required admission criteria as set down for a particular programme of study may consider alternative admission pathways including but not limited to:

- Mature Years
- University Access
- Open Learning

A full list of **alternative** pathways is available here, [UCD Admissions - Alternative routes for UG](#)

RPL is generally not applicable to school leavers to gain access to undergraduate programmes for which they do not meet the published entry requirements.

4.2 Graduate Students

Information relating to the graduate applications which are made directly to UCD can be found here [UCD Graduate Admissions](#).

Potential applicants should:

- Check the published programme information for specific details pertaining to entry requirements for their chosen course. A link to all UCD Programmes can be found here [UCD Programmes](#).
- Contact the relevant college / school for information relating to the RPL application process.
- List of colleges and schools can be found here [Colleges and Schools](#) together with contact details
- Complete the online application form (Admissions) which can be found here [Graduate Online Applications](#) making sure to acknowledge RPL application for admission and to append all documents supporting the RPL claim (e.g., CV, portfolio of evidence, references, etc).

Once an applicant has applied for or has been accepted onto a UCD programme they can then apply for RPL for credit/exemptions using the online RPL application forms (x3). Further information on this process is provided in section 5 below.



5 RPL PROCESS FOR CREDIT/EXEMPTION

5.1 Application Methods

Once an applicant has applied for or has been accepted onto a UCD programme they can then apply for RPL for credit/exemptions.

Some Colleges /Schools utilise the online RPL applications system whereas others employ local systems such as google forms.

Information on which Colleges/ Schools use the online system can be found here [online RPL applications](#).

There are 3 options for the online RPL application process for Credit/exemptions, namely:

- **RPL UCD Students** (*for students applying based on learning accredited at UCD*)
- **RPL Non UCD Students** (*for students applying based on learning accredited outside of UCD*)
- **RPL Experiential Learning** (*for students applying based on Experiential Learning*)

The learner must contact the relevant school directly if online RPL application is not available – link to colleges and schools can be found here [Colleges and Schools](#).

An application for RPL should be made as early as possible and preferably before the learner commences the relevant module (s) but no later than the third week of the trimester in which it is offered. Applications made after this date will only be accepted at the discretion of the Board governing their programme.

If the learner submits an RPL application relating to a particular module(s) after the module(s) has commenced they should register for, attend and participate in the module(s) until they are informed of the decision of the Board governing their programme. If the application is not successful, the applicant is responsible for completing all assigned tasks and assessments associated with the module(s).

The University recommends that students in PhD programmes do not apply for RPL during their first year of study (please see reference to policy item 4.15 below).

Re-admissions:

Where a student is seeking re-admission to the same programme of study following a period of withdrawal, they do not need to make an RPL application relating to the work completed on this programme prior to their withdrawal as this is considered as part of the UCD re-admission application process.



5.2 Applying for RPL for Credit/Exemptions

At this stage the applicant should:

- Locate the [Learning Outcomes](#) for the module (s) for which they wish to apply
- Contact the school or programme office to discuss and confirm the RPL application process for Admissions.
- Review their experience and learning to date with a view to making an RPL application.
- Gather the evidence that forms the basis of their RPL application, e.g. previous Certifications, CVs, Training Records, Job Descriptions etc.
- Digitise evidence so that it can be submitted electronically.
- Submit the [Online RPL Application Form](#) or alternative form with all relevant evidence appended.

At this stage University staff responsible for handling RPL applications (usually School Programme Managers or Administrators) should:

- Provide advice on how students can demonstrate their competence.
- Indicate what documentary evidence students should be presented to support their application.

The following should be considered when offering this guidance:

- **Learning Outcomes?** The learner should be requested to provide a narrative that explains how each piece of evidence demonstrates their competence. This narrative should be clear, concise, and specific to each of the relevant learning outcomes.
- **Time limits for evidence?** There is no definitive answer to how recent the prior learning should be for RPL purposes. It may vary according to discipline and should be determined by its relevance to the current learning outcomes and should be supported by evidence of continuous learning and updating since it was gained.
- **Authenticity of the evidence?** The learner should be requested to provide original transcripts, awards, references and contact numbers etc to support the authenticity of their portfolio of evidence.
- **Are there any limitations to the awarding of RPL, i.e. Professional Programmes?** Inform the applicant if there are any restrictions in relation to the application of the RPL process within their programme of choice e.g. CORU accredited courses.

Please see Appendix one for an indicative list that may be considered for the portfolio of evidence.



5.3 RPL Assessment for Credit/Exemptions

The RPL application is assessed by a relevant staff member in UCD (usually the academic acting as module coordinator for the modules for which credit/exemption is sought. Assessment is performed against the relevant programme entry requirements (RPL for admission) or the module learning outcomes (RPL for exemptions /credit).

The portfolio of evidence may contain a mix of formal, informal and non-formal learning.

The use of a range of assessment mechanisms including portfolios, interviews, essays or examination is encouraged. These should be informed by Universal Design for Learning principles, allowing applicants to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways.

The RPL application should be processed/completed in a reasonable timeframe. The UCD RPL Policy states 20 working days from receipt of application by the University to the applicant being informed of the decision.

5.3.1 Assessing Formal Learning

In assessing applications relating to *learning previously accredited at UCD*, the following information should be considered:

- The official UCD transcript.
- Module/Course title, code and credit value.
- Grade/Mark awarded on completion of the module/course.
- Time elapsed since prior learning was achieved.
- Advances in the relevant field(s) of study.
- Does the learning relate to specific UCD modules in the new programme?

In assessing learning accredited at *another Higher Education Institute*, the following information should be considered:

- Knowledge of the former institution.
- The previous academic record/transcript, including the name of the course or programme of study and NQAI level.
- Syllabus and course description, learning outcomes, number of contact hours, form of assessment(s). Does the learning relate to specific UCD modules? This information should be assessed for each module on the RPL application.
- Time elapsed since prior learning was achieved.
- Advances in the relevant field(s) of study.



5.3.2 Assessing Non-Formal Learning

- How much experience does the applicant have and in what roles?
- What is their identified skill set?
- What evidence is provided? What information is provided through references?
- What training have they attended and when?
- What learning outcomes have been met based on their prior learning?
- How relevant is their experience to the UCD programme of study (including specific modules)?
- To what extent do their learning outcomes apply to the current UCD programme of study (including specific modules on the current curriculum)?
- Does the learning relate to specific UCD core/option/elective modules?
- What period of time has elapsed since the prior learning was achieved?
- What advances have been made in the relevant field(s) of study?

At the ASSESSMENT stage the following steps are completed:

- Receive and register the RPL Application depending on the process in place at the relevant College/School/Programme office (through use of the RPL online application system or other process/format). Direct the application to the relevant academic assessor (***College Office/School/Programme Office Administrator***).
- Assess the RPL application versus learning outcomes or other relevant criteria. Liaise with the applicant during this phase if clarifications /interviews required (***Academic Staff***).
- Make a recommendation to the relevant Governing Board with respect to, approving /declining RPL application (***Academic Staff***).
- Submit the RPL application for Governing Board review (***College Office/School Office Administrator***).
- Approve / Deny RPL Application (***Relevant University Governing Board***)
- Document the decision from the Governing Board using the process in place at the relevant College/School (***College/School/ Programme Office Administrator***).

Reference Section 5 below for further details on Roles & Responsibilities within the institution



5.4 RPL Outcomes

The possible outcomes of an RPL application are:

- Prior learning recognised for the purposes of admission to a programme.
- Prior or concurrent learning recognised for the purposes of having credit transferred towards the requirements of the UCD programme of study.
- RPL application is unsuccessful or RPL credit received is less than that for which you applied.

The **amount of credit based on prior or concurrent learning** that you may have recognised towards your UCD programme is determined by the Board governing your programme.

At this final stage the applicant should:

- If the application is successful, the student should deregister from the relevant module(s). If online registration has closed, it is their responsibility to contact the School/College Office to have the module(s) deregistered.
- If the application is unsuccessful, the student is responsible for all assessments associated with the modules on your programme and therefore should register for, attend and complete the relevant modules.

At this stage the University should:

- Initiate the relevant Delegated Authority (DA) workflow for approved RPL applications. This is an automated process once a decision is documented on the online RPL application. It is a manual process for RPL applications made using local forms/processes. Specific Credit DA workflow is used for RPL applications based on previous UCD modules completed. General Credit DA workflow is used for RPL applications based on learning or programmes previously completed outside of UCD (***College Office/School/Programme Administrator***).
- Action Infohub tasks generated from DA workflow. Update the Student Record System with relevant information based on the RPL decision (e.g., modules exempted, fee adjustment etc. (***SRS Team***)). A fee adjustment does not normally apply for Graduate Research (GR) programmes as GR students are normally required to achieve a minimum number of credits (30) over the lifetime of their GR programme – i.e. modules are taken ad hoc and not at set timelines.
- Action Infohub tasks generated from DA workflow. Update Academic Record (***Assessment Team***).
- Notify the applicant of the outcome of their RPL application (***College Office/School/Programme Administrator***).



6 RPL POLICY CLARIFICATIONS

All recognition of prior learning decisions are made on the basis of academic assessment against documented criteria (usually Learning Outcomes) within a particular programme subject area. All decisions are based on an evaluation of the evidence an applicant provides to determine whether the prior learning demonstrated is equivalent to the learning, which would have been achieved by fulfilling all requirements of the UCD programme of study.

Some specific policy elements are referenced below with additional explanatory text.

4.2 'Learning can be recognised and credit awarded against a module or against multiple modules'.

There is no provision within the UCD RPL policy to request the applicant to complete alternative modules in place of the awarding of RPL².

4.3 'UCD Research Programmes- RPL award not to exceed 2/3 of the taught credits of the Programme'

This limit applies to prior and concurrent learning combined. Please refer to the Academic Regulations for the taught credit requirement of Graduate Research Programmes (section 7.6).

4.6 'Prior or concurrent³ learning will be applied directly to the new programme, where it carries a grade and contributes to stage and/or award GPA, only in cases where the learning:

- ***Has not already been counted towards an award'.***

Credit may not be earned twice for the same learning achievement; however, such prior learning may be acknowledged (e.g. through an ungraded exemption).

Note: Certification of Open Learning is exempt from the above.

Graded Credit (Specific credit) is granted when the learning outcomes of the prior learning are equivalent to the learning outcomes of a current UCD module(s), the prior learning has been completed in UCD, and where the prior learning has not already been counted towards an award.

² A school may sometimes negotiate a learning pathway for a student for whom they feel have learning deficits from their post primary education and may require the student to undertake additional learning (referred to as conditional modules). In addition, some schools may request a successful RPL applicant to undertake alternative module (s) in place of the module (s) for which RPL exemption was received.

³ Concurrent learning only applies to Graduate Research Students



Non-graded credit (General credit) is granted when the learning outcomes of the prior learning are relevant but not directly equivalent to modules in the relevant UCD programme and/or where credit associated with the learning outcomes has already counted towards an award.

4.11 'All decisions on recognition of prior and concurrent learning should be based on academic judgement and the following principles:

- ***The academic level of the prior and/or concurrent learning should be in line with the level descriptors for the award, equivalent to the standard expected of other students and the standards associated with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and its awards.***

The following links provide some useful information when comparing external qualifications to UCD awards and for authenticating an applicant's claims.

[NFQ Grid Level of Indicators](#) provides a useful guide for the different National Framework Qualification (NFQ) levels. The NFQ is a system of 10 levels used to describe qualifications in the Irish education and training system.

[NARIC Ireland](#) provides a database of foreign qualifications & comparison of these qualifications where possible, to a major award type and level on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

[UCD/NFQ Level Table Comparison - UCD Academic Regulations](#)

ECCTIS (Education Counselling and Credit Transfer Information Service) is a UK service which can perform a qualification check on international qualifications [ECCTIS](#).

4.15 'The University recommends that students in PhD programmes do not apply for RPL during their first year of study'

However, the Graduate Research Board will consider applications for recognition of prior learning from students in the first year of their Graduate Research programme if: they have had both of their RSP meetings for that year.

- They have the approval of their Research Studies Panel (RSP) and
- They have had both of their RSP meetings for that year.⁴

Requests that reference RSP meetings held in the first trimester of the first year will not be accepted. Recommendations for concurrent learning can be considered during the first year of a graduate research programme.

⁴ The second RSP of the academic year is the more substantial meeting of the first academic year for the research graduate student. A completed signed (by the chair of the RSP) Research Professional Development Plan for the student is a required output of the second RSP meeting.



4.18 'A fee may be charged to the applicant to cover the costs of processing an RPL application.'

Most schools in UCD do not apply a fee for assessing RPL applications (online and/ or paper-based).

However, there may be a need to levy a charge for RPL applications to cover the costs of conducting the assessment particularly in the case of prior experiential learning. This amount will be specified in advance of the assessment taking place and cannot be construed in any way as payment for exemption or admission to a programme. The fees charged may vary from programme to programme, particularly where additional resources are required to comprehensively and fairly assess the application.

Fees to cover an RPL application, if charged, are generally not refundable in the event of an unsuccessful application. The fee is charged for the processing and administration of the application which is required regardless of outcome.

7 APPEALS MECHANISM

Applicants with concerns about the outcome of their application, should contact the relevant decision-making authority in the first instance to query the grounds on which the decision was based.

Following initial enquiry, the applicant is entitled to appeal a decision where s/he feels that the assessment has, in his/her individual case, not complied with the published policies and procedures. Submission of an appeal does not mean that an appeal will be granted and during the appeal process the application status remains unchanged. Appeals may be submitted only by the applicant.

The grounds for appeal that may be considered are:

- Incorrect process; specific evidence of irregularity in the University RPL Applications assessment process
- Specified/stated grounds where the University's decision was based on misinterpretation of data or information provided as part of the application process



8 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

8.1 Governing Board

The Governing Board acting on delegated authority are responsible for the following:

- Deciding on all RPL applications submitted by the Schools whilst taking the recommendation of the School and the amount & type of credit to be awarded into consideration.
- Assuring the academic integrity of its programme(s), consider what modules, if any, to which the student should be exempt and whether grades or equivalencies should transfer for prior non-UCD credit and pre-modular UCD credit and whether such grades should be included in relevant GPA calculations.

8.2 Colleges/Schools

The Colleges/Schools acting on delegated authority are responsible for the following:

- Documenting receipt of the official application form.
- Assessing the RPL application.
- Submitting the RPL application together with a recommendation to the relevant Governing Board.
- Initiating the Delegation Authority (DA) workflow.
- Updating the DA workflow with the decision from the Governing Board.
- Informing UCD Registry of the decision of the Governing Board (via DA Workflow and automatically generated Infohub task).
- Ensuring that applicants are informed of the RPL outcome/status of their application within 20 working days of submission. A 20 day turn around may not always be possible, e.g., Student Applications Committee meeting only convenes every 4-6 weeks.
- Completing the section on the DA Workflow to indicate if a fee reduction is applicable or not. The fee adjustment if relevant is made by the Registry team (Student Records). If a student is on a per credit fee (e.g. in the case of most UG Programmes), no fee adjustment is required as students are only charged for the credits they are taking in any given trimester. Where students are on a fixed programme fee (e.g. Graduate Taught) and a reduction is required, the fee reduction box is ticked on the DA form clearly stating percentage reduction and the term for which reduction applies (e.g., reduce charges for 202300 by 15%).
- Maintaining a local record of all RPL applications and decisions to capture precedence and ensure consistency and fairness across its programme(s) and to support annual reporting



requirements to the University Programme Board (UPB) via the Academic Secretariat.

- Submitting an annual report documenting all recognition of prior learning applications and status of same (approved/rejected/in progress) during the previous academic year to the Academic Secretariat by submission deadline for the second meeting of the UPB in an academic session.
- Specify how students registered to programmes that are run collaboratively with other institutions, professional, statutory or regulatory bodies can apply for recognition of prior learning and ensure a clear means of communicating decisions between institutions and other bodies.

8.3 UCD Registry

The Registry Department acting on delegated authority are responsible for the following:

- Advising prospective applicants of application procedures and their eligibility to meet admissions requirements.
- Providing feedback (Admissions) to applicants where RPL is considered for Admissions for any established entry route to Undergraduate programmes (e.g., Mature entry). Applicants will be made aware of an offer via the CAO process and can seek feedback on their application from Registry Admissions.
- Updating and amending individual student records according to the decisions received from the Governing Boards which are documented on the DA workflow.
- Updating and amending individual student academic records according to the decisions received from the Governing Boards which are documented on the DA workflow.



9 USEFUL RESOURCES

[UCD RPL Policy](#)

[UCD RPL Website](#)

[UCD Programmes.](#)

[UCD Learning Outcomes](#)

[Online RPL Application Form](#)

[Assessment Workload Equivalences -UCD T&L](#)

[Matching Learning Outcomes to Assessment Methods-UCD T&L](#)

[Programme Outcomes - UCD T&L](#)

[Rubrics](#)

[QQI Award Level Indicators](#)

[ECCTIS Database of Qualification](#)

[NARIC Ireland Foreign Qualifications](#)

[NFQ Referencing Report](#)

[European Education Area -Bologna Process](#)

[National Access Plan](#)

10 APPENDIX 1 – PORTFOLIO OF EVIDENCE

Appendix 1 – Portfolio of Evidence-Indicative List		
Area	Type	Suggested Evidence
CV		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Current CV that provides as full picture as possible of activities that are relevant to the claim.
Education	Education -Accredited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Official Transcripts-relating to officially accredited study. ● This will include the Level, Credit Value and Grade Awarded. ● Official Syllabus ● NFQ & NARIC for further detail on accreditation levels.
	Other (Non-Accredited) Education may be included where relevant to the subject where RPL is claimed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Curriculum ● Certificates of Attendance ● Certificates of Completion <p>These may be useful but cannot be used as evidence on their own.</p>
<p>Commentary is required to present an insight into the learning and to demonstrate how they are currently using/applying or have recently used or applied that learning.</p>		
Volunteering	Unpaid Work (Volunteering)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Roles & Responsibilities that are applicable to the RPL being sought
Employment	Employment History List all relevant employment (Role, Responsibility & Achievements)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Job Descriptions ● Training Records ● Statements from supervisors or managers in relation to experience & responsibilities ● References from colleagues, employees, voluntary organisations, professional bodies
Other	Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Awards/Prizes ● Practice-based documents ● Video/audio recording, with commentary and analysis related to achievement of learning outcomes ● Samples, photographs ● Professional Development-Informal Learning ● Any other evidence that is valid, sufficient, authentic and current
	Published Articles and Manuscripts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Links/References where available