



Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) UCD Learner Guide

Welcome Learners!

Welcome to the start of an exciting journey! Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is all about giving you the opportunity to use your relevant experience as a pathway to and through higher education. Whether you've gained skills through formal education, on-the-job training or work, or through everyday life or community work, RPL helps to recognise the learning you have already achieved and can support you to take the next step on your learning journey.

The RPL application process can be used to gain access to academic programmes, even if you do not meet the traditional entry requirements. It can also be used to gain module exemptions for learning that you have already achieved, or for advanced entry to programmes to avoid duplication of learning. In this guide, you will find helpful information about the processes and procedures that support RPL opportunities in UCD. You might be new to the language of higher education, so we've provided descriptions of key words at the end of this publication.



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1 Introduction to RPL

What is RPL?

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is based on the concept that we all learn everywhere and all the time. RPL is when a higher education institution recognises what you already know, understand and can do, helping learners to bridge into programmes and leverage the relevant skills and knowledge they have acquired through work experience, informal training, and life experience.

What is RPL used for?

The RPL process can be used to:

- Gain entry to a programme in higher education.
- Start a programme at an advanced level, like year 2 or 3.
- Once on a programme to gain module exemptions or credit for learning already achieved.

Anyone, regardless of formal qualifications, can apply RPL in higher education.

How much does it cost?

In some cases, in UCD a small fee may apply for processing RPL applications. It is advised to contact the relevant College, School or Programme Office directly for further information.

What are the benefits of RPL?

- RPL helps to recognise and give value to prior learning and relevant skills that people have acquired through previously completed modules, work or other life experiences that may not otherwise be recognised.
- Provides a pathway to and through higher, promoting inclusivity and wider participation.
- RPL may reduce the amount of time and cost required to acquire a qualification.
- Encourages lifelong learning, benefiting learners of all ages, including those pursuing new careers, career changes and continuing professional development.



2 Understanding Different Types of Learning

Applying for RPL usually involves a reflective process, where applicants are asked to think about and explain their relevant prior learning. Because RPL includes all types of learning, applicants are often asked to reflect on the different types of learning they have acquired:

- **Formal learning** takes place through programmes or courses of study that are delivered in an organised and formal way by education providers. Formal learning leads to formal certification, i.e., credits and/or awards. Formal learning is sometimes referred to as certified or accredited learning.
- **Non-formal learning** takes place alongside or outside the mainstream systems of education and training. It may be assessed but does not normally lead to formal certification. Examples of nonformal 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 (e.g. 'on-the-job') experience. It does not lead to certification.

RPL opens doors for learners across a wide range of industries, turning real-world experience into recognised qualifications. From business and science to creative arts, there's something for everyone. Whether you've gained your skills through hands-on work, volunteering, or self-study, RPL allows you to take the next step in formalising your expertise in a field you're experienced in or help you to pivot into a new field.

Concurrent Learning is a distinct type of prior learning as it is learning that has been completed outside of the programme while the student is enrolled in the programme. Concurrent learning may only be sought by graduate research students. Some additional information on concurrent learning can be found in the Graduate Research Student handbook (page 8) [GRS Handbook](#).

3 The RPL process

The RPL process generally involves the five following steps,

- a) **Information** *At this first stage, you are encouraged to find out more about what RPL opportunities are available in UCD. The following links and documents provide a good baseline from which to begin your research*
- The [UCD RPL Webpage](#) contains some very useful information on the RPL policy and procedures in place in the University.
 - The [RPL Applications for Credit/Exemption](#) webpage provides information on the online application systems in place.
 - [Learner Flyer](#) provides a short overview of RPL practices in UCD.
 - *It is also important to make contact with your College or School Office and get advice on whether RPL is available on the programme that you are interested in.*
- b) **Identification** – You are asked to reflect and identify any learning that is relevant to the programme that you are applying for. Prior Learning should be aligned and mapped to the standard programme entry requirements or the defined learning outcomes. This may involve talking to a member of staff in the academic department or the admissions office.
- c) **Documentation** - Once you have identified relevant prior learning you will need to gather evidence to support your application. This may involve talking to someone in the admission office or the head of the programme. Examples of supporting evidence for each type of learning are given below:

Formal Learning

- Transcript of Results
- Module descriptors for previously completed modules

Non-Formal Learning

- Workplace training records
- Professional Body Memberships
- Certificates of professional / third party training delivered in the workplace e.g., Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP), CAD/Plant 3D, Lean Principles & Methodology, Management/Supervisory Training, etc

Informal Learning

- Workplace Documentation: Submit Job Descriptions to provide detailed accounts of roles and responsibilities relevant to your programme.
- Workplace Reports or Project Documents: Submit examples of written reports, completed work projects, or other formal documents created in a professional capacity which may be relevant to your programme.
- Performance Appraisals and Reviews: Submit Letters or testimonials from employers, supervisors, or mentors verifying your experience, skills, and competencies in relevant areas. These should be detailed and reference specific competencies where possible.

- Examples of Your Work -A collection of documents, samples, or artifacts that demonstrate your skills and knowledge, e.g., completed work projects illustrating project outcomes or deliverables, written reports. Provide well-documented examples of your analytical or problem-solving work which could include multimedia evidence if applicable to the field of study.
 - Published Material - Share articles, blogs, or other materials authored.
 - Community or Volunteer Work – Submit documentation to provide evidence of skills gained through volunteering, community service, or non-profit projects. Letters from organisations or clients served can support this, alongside any project outcomes.
- d) **Assessment** - Your application is then assessed by the relevant academic which can be the Programme Director, Module Co-ordinator, Head of Subject or any other suitably qualified person, as designated by the School. A range of assessment mechanisms may be used including a review of a portfolio (collection) of supporting documentation, interviews, essays or examinations.
- e) **Recognition or Certification**- If successful, you will receive formal recognition or certification which can lead to:
- Entry to a programme
 - Credit towards an award or exemption from some programme modules
 - Advanced entry to a programme (generally covered under the transfer policy in UCD) which can be found [here](#).

4 RPL in UCD

4.1 RPL Practices & General Considerations

RPL practices in our University are guided by a policy document which can be found [here](#). All Learners, both current and prospective, should familiarise themselves with this policy prior to making any RPL application whether that be for admission to academic programmes at UCD or for module credit/exemption once accepted onto a programme".

With the recognition of prior learning the University promotes the principles of lifelong learning and widening participation in education.

Details on how to submit RPL applications for Admissions (Taught Graduate) and Credit/Exemption are presented in sections 3.2 and 3.3 respectively. Advanced entry onto UCD programmes is covered in the UCD Transfer Policy which can be found [here](#).

Some useful background information for RPL applicants is summarised below.

- All applications for recognition of prior learning must be initiated by the Learner and preferably at the time of admission to a programme.
- Some Schools (e.g. Computer Science, Veterinary Medicine, Medicine, Nursing Midwifery & Health Systems) proactively inform students of RPL opportunities on their programmes shortly after student registration but in most cases the onus is on the Learner to research RPL activities. In cases where information is provided proactively specific application deadlines may apply.
- RPL for Admission is most relevant to Taught Graduate courses where prior/experiential learning can be used to support an application where the pre-defined "entry requirements" may not be met by the applicant.
- RPL for Admission to Undergraduate Courses is generally through pre-defined routes, e.g. Mature Students which is administered through the CAO process.
- A **module** is the smallest unit considered for RPL. Credit/exemption cannot be awarded for part of a module.
- **Credit/exemption** can be awarded against multiple modules.
- All RPL applications for credit/exemption must be approved by the relevant Governing Board (decision making academic committee) within the following limits:
 - UCD taught programmes - not to exceed 60 credits, and not to exceed 1/2 of the overall programme credits for which they are applying for RPL. Exception to this limit is where previous modules have been completed in UCD and have not already counted towards an award. Some programmes can set lower credit limits, for example, to meet professional accreditation requirements.
 - UCD research programmes - not to exceed 2/3 of the taught credits of the programme (this limit includes prior and concurrent learning).
- Prior learning normally leads to the award of **non-graded credit**. Such non-graded credit can be applied to a module or against multiple modules. **Non-graded credit will not be included in GPA calculations.**

- Prior learning will be awarded as ***graded credit and thus contribute towards the programme GPA calculations***, only in cases where the learning:
 - Has been completed in UCD, and
 - Is considered equivalent to the current UCD module(s) in the programme which RPL will be applied to, and
 - Has not already counted towards an award.
- Prior learning ***can only be recognised for credit/exemption once***. However, prior learning ***can be recognised for both admission to a programme and for subsequent credit/exemption against modules*** within the programme so that learning is not duplicated.
- All decisions on recognition of prior and concurrent learning are based on an evaluation by academic staff and the following principles:
 - A claim for prior and concurrent learning must be supported in a way that it can be assessed.
 - Prior learning must align to current knowledge and practice.
 - The academic level of the prior and/or concurrent learning should be in line with the level descriptors for the award.
- In making decisions on RPL, a Governing Board may require an RPL applicant to undertake an assessment activity or activities to ensure that learning achieved is equivalent to the stated module or programme outcomes.
- Applicants are informed of the ***outcome or status*** of their RPL application in a timely manner – normally within 20 working days.
- Applicants should register for all modules for which credit/exemption has been sought until approval is granted by the relevant Governing Board.

4.2 RPL Application Process for Admissions to Taught Graduate Programmes

This is outlined below and described graphically in the process flow map in Appendix 1 to this document.

The **Programme Manager** ensures RPL information is included under the “entry requirements” section on the UCD webpage for their programme and that this information is current and up to date. In cases where RPL does not apply – this must be clearly stated.

The **Learner** researches the programmes of interest on the UCD [Courses](#) webpage. Information on the availability of RPL for a particular course is generally found under the “entry requirements” section.

The **Learner** contacts the relevant Programme/School/College Office using the online form which pops up from the “contact us” button which can be found on every course webpage. This form can be used to seek further information on the RPL activities in the relevant School and to clarify any queries on the application process and what information is required to support their RPL request. It is also a means to get in direct contact with the course Programme Director (Academic Lead for your programme of choice).

If the **Learner** decides to pursue the use of their prior learning to gain admission to a taught graduate course, they should complete the course application form as normal and then append the relevant information to support their RPL application as previously agreed with the College/School.

The course application is directed to the relevant College/School Office Admin team member – usually the **Programme Manager**.

The **Programme Manager** or designee reviews the course application and follows up with the Learner if there are any queries on the RPL supporting documentation. The **Programme Manager** once happy that the information on the course application is complete forwards it together with the RPL supporting documents to the Academic **Assessor** (Programme Director or other designated Academic who is qualified to assess the RPL application).

The **Assessor** reviews & evaluates the applicant’s prior learning against the course entry criteria and course content. They may contact the applicant directly if further information/test/interview etc is required to support their application.

The **Assessor** makes an academic judgement on the RPL application and informs the **College/School/Programme Office Admin team** of their decision.

The **College/School/Programme Office Admin** person informs the student of the decision via email. No further action is required if the application was unsuccessful.

If the Learner has been successful, an offer is made and the decision recorded on the Delegated Authority workflow (official review & approval process) and noted on the Student Record.

4.3 RPL Application Process for Credit/Exemption

Once you have been accepted and/or taken up a place on a UCD Course you can use your prior learning to gain credit or exemption from modules within your programme. Prior or concurrent learning can only be ***recognised once for credit/exemption***.

The application process for module credit/exemption is outlined below and described graphically in the process flow map appended in Appendix 2 to this document.

- i. **Learner** accepts place on programme and registers for all programme modules. It should be noted that learners cannot register for a module which they have previously completed (through another programme etc). Learners must apply for Credit/Exemption for previously completed modules if this has not already been handled by Admissions at time of course registration.
- ii. **Learner** reviews the ***Learning Outcomes*** for relevant modules and decides if an RPL application is warranted.
- iii. The **Learner** maps their prior learning to the learning outcomes. Examples of the types of documents you can submit in support of your RPL application are provided in section 3 above.
- iv. The **Learner** should discuss specific RPL application requirements with your School Office/Programme Director.
- v. The **Learner** completes the RPL Credit/Exemption application form in use at their School. The **School/Programme Office Admin team** can direct you to the correct form.
- vi. The Learner appends all supporting documentation and submits the RPL Credit/Exemption application form.
- vii. The **School/Programme Office** reviews all RPL Credit/Exemption application forms received.
- viii. The **School/Programme Office** staff follows up with the applicant if the form is incomplete and/or supporting information has been omitted.
- ix. The **School/Programme Office** once satisfied that the RPL Credit/Exemption application form has been completed correctly submits the forms and supporting documentation to the relevant Academic Assessor.
- x. The **Academic Assessor** reviews & evaluates the applicant's prior learning against the relevant module Learning Outcomes. The Assessor may contact the applicant directly if further information/test /interview etc is required to support their RPL application.
- xi. The **Assessor** makes an academic judgement on the RPL application and informs the **School/Programme Office Admin team** of their decision.
- xii. The **School/Programme Office Admin team** records the decision on the RPL application form and informs the student of the assessment outcome via email. It must be noted that any decision at this stage is provisional and is contingent on subsequent Governing Board approval.
- xiii. If the application has been declined no further action is required (there are some exceptions to this where the Delegated Authority workflow (official review & approval process) is initiated even for rejected RPL applications e.g., Schools of Law & Medicine)
- xiv. If the application has been supported by the School, the **School/Programme Office Admin team** initiates the relevant Delegated Authority (DA) workflow, i.e., Graded Credit, Non-Graded Credit.

- xv. The **School/Programme Office Admin team** submits the RPL application for Governing Board Decision via The DA workflow once all tasks have been completed.
- xvi. The relevant **Governing Board** (academic committee) review and decide on the RPL application. For Graduate Research (GR) students all RPL applications for taught modules must be reviewed and decided on by the Graduate Research Board (GRB)– the process for GRB governance on RPL applications is documented in the process flow in Appendix 3 to this document.
- xvii. The **School/Programme Office Admin team** apply the governing board decision on the DA workflow and inform the Learner of the decision.
- xviii. The Learner may be due a refund for modules credited/exempted. This is College/School dependant, so it is advisable to discuss this point with your own College/School Office.
- xix. Your student record will be updated to reflect the governing board decision. Please remember that award of graded credit will count towards your GPA calculations whereas non-graded does not.
- xx. Non-graded credit awarded for relevant modules usually appears on your transcript as XX or XG.

5 RPL Glossary of Terms

Below you can find a description of some of the key words around RPL which you might find useful.

Recognition: Recognition is the process by which prior learning is given a value by a higher education institution. This 'value' can help you for example, to gain entry to a programme or course, or help you obtain exemptions or credit for parts of the programme.

Prior Learning: This is learning that you have already achieved, including learning that hasn't been assessed before. Prior learning covers all the learning you have, regardless of where it's been acquired.

Formal Learning: certified learning that occurs via mainstream educational provision, that has been assessed and for which academic credit has been awarded.

Non-formal Learning that occurs outside mainstream educational provision, that nonetheless results from planned activities that may or may not be assessed, is often not certified and is not associated with academic credit.

Informal or 'Experiential Learning' that is unplanned and includes skills and competencies attained through life and work experience.

Concurrent Learning is a distinct type of prior learning as it is learning that has been completed outside of the programme while the student is enrolled in the programme. Concurrent learning may only be sought by graduate research students.

Learning Outcome: A learning outcome is a statement of what you should know, understand and be able to demonstrate at the end of a process of learning, e.g. after completing a module. If for example, you are applying for a module exemption or credit, you will need to demonstrate that your prior learning meets the learning outcomes of the module.

Module: This is an individual unit of learning or assessment in a particular subject area.

Micro-credentials: These are small, accredited courses designed to meet the demands of busy learners. Micro-credentials offer a highly flexible, bite-sized and accessible way of upskilling and reskilling.

RPL for Entry: If you have relevant prior learning, you may be able to use it to gain entry to a programme or course. This is most helpful for learners who otherwise wouldn't meet the traditional entry requirements. For example, you may be able to access a Level 9 master's programme, even though you don't have the traditional entry requirement i.e. a level 8 degree. This RPL is also referred to as 'RPL for Access'.

RPL for Exemption(s) and Credits: Learners with relevant prior formal learning may receive recognition of their learning in the form of module credit or exemption. As credit can only be awarded once, prior formal learning can only be awarded as graded credit if the learning was completed in UCD and if it has not already been used to count towards an award. Prior non-formal

and informal learning can lead to the award of non-graded credit where the learning presented satisfactorily meets the learning outcomes of the relevant module. Awarding of exemptions and credit are for complete modules (rather than part of a module).

RPL for Advanced Entry: RPL may be used to gain entry to an advanced stage of a programme (for example year 2) following a process of assessment where the applicant is deemed to have learning equivalent to the overall learning of the previous stage(s).

Programme Director: Lead Academic for defined course or programme.

Programme Manager Each programme has an assigned Programme Manager who will communicate with and support current and prospective students on programme applications and onboarding.

A more comprehensive [glossary of terms](#) is available.

6 RPL Useful resources

RPL for **Admissions** is through the standard UCD application process see [UCD applications](#) for further information.

RPL for **Credit/Exemption** is through the online tool see [RPL for C/E](#). Note some Colleges/Schools use an alternative application form – these are identified in the link above.

RPL for **Advanced Entry** is through the standard UCD application process see [UCD applications](#) for further information.

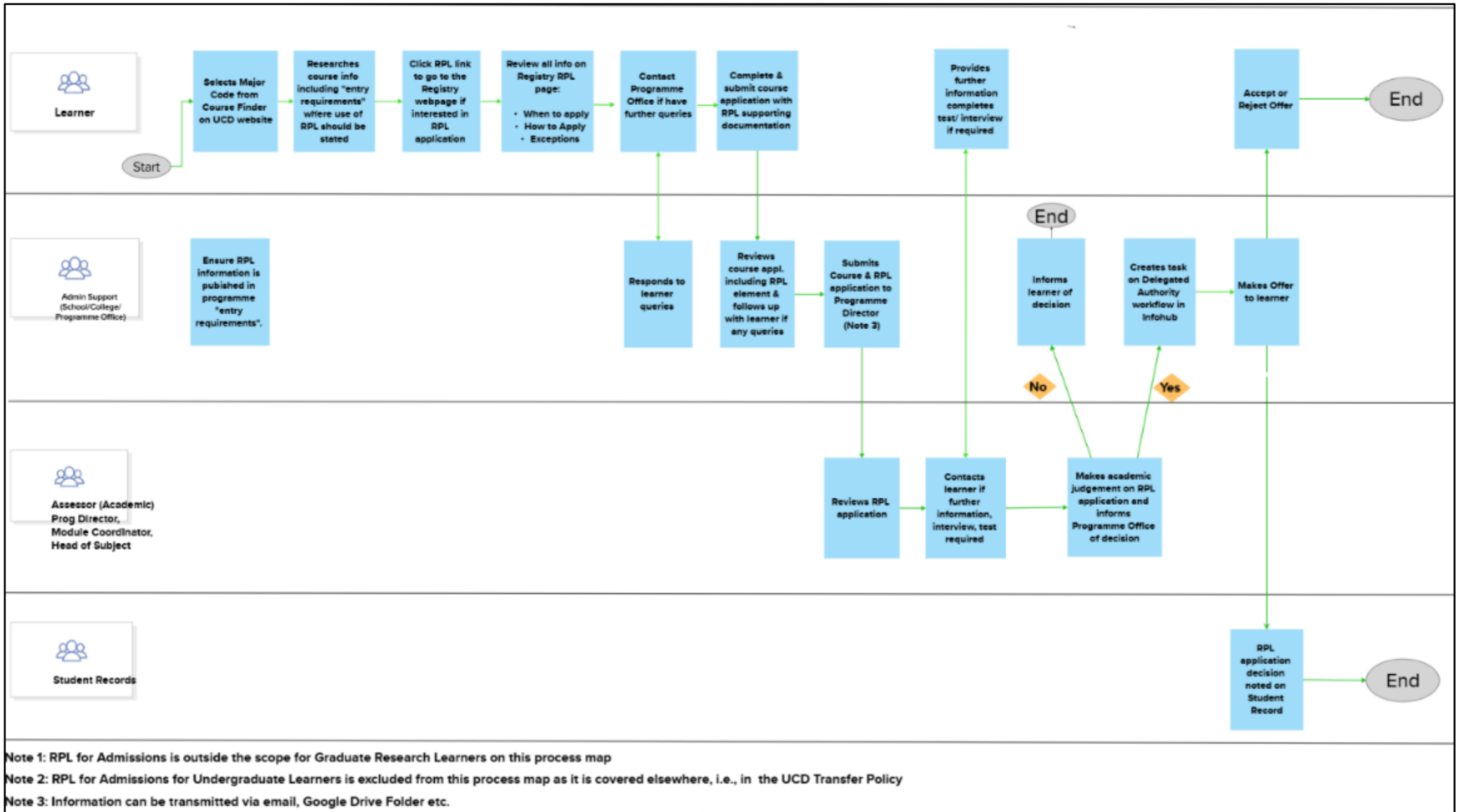
Research your options in UCD – link to [UCD Course finder](#).

Review module descriptors and Learning outcomes [UCD Learning Outcomes](#)

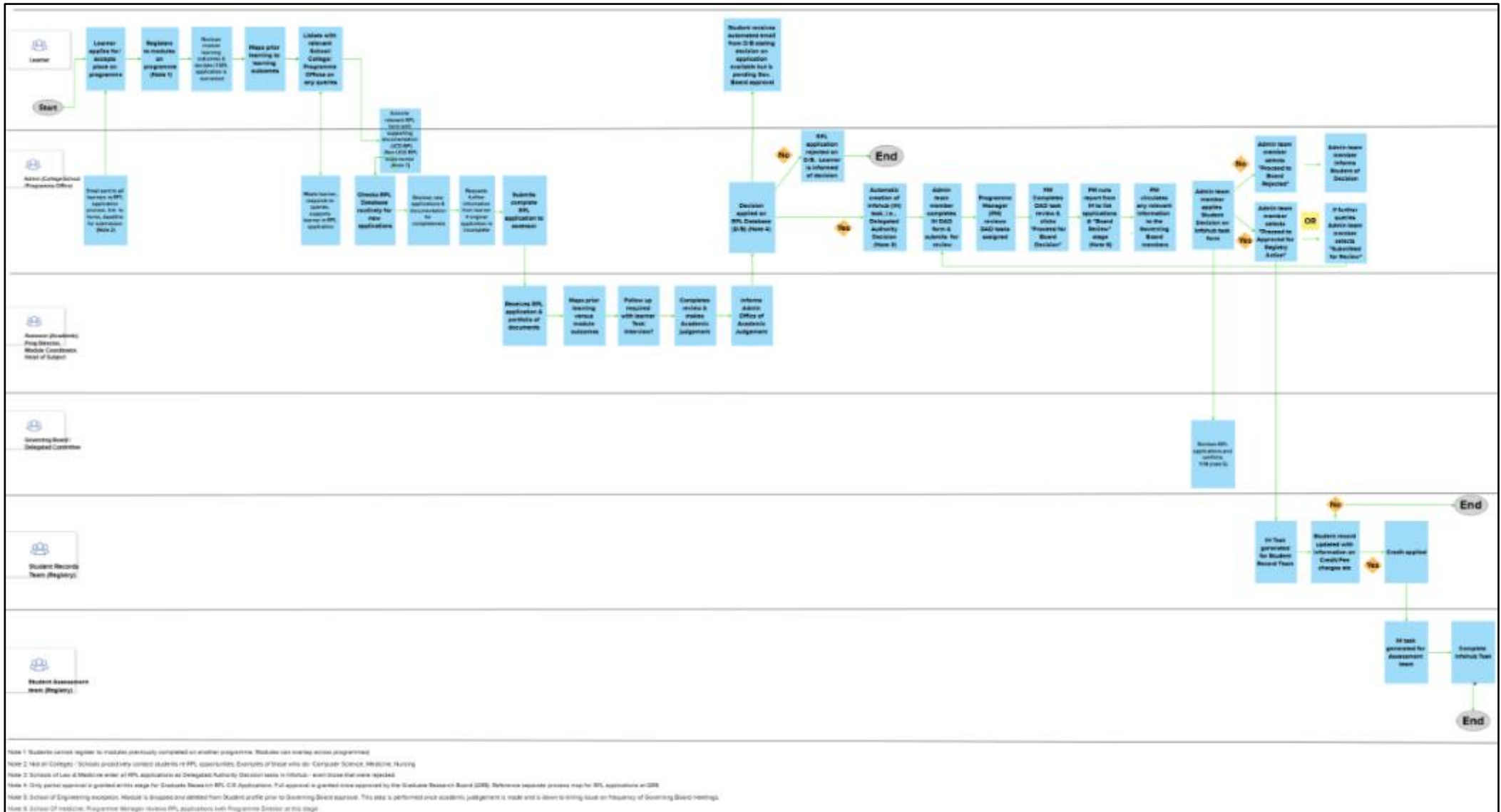
RPL project webpage [ucd rpl webpage](#).

UCD RPL Policy [UCD RPL Policy](#)

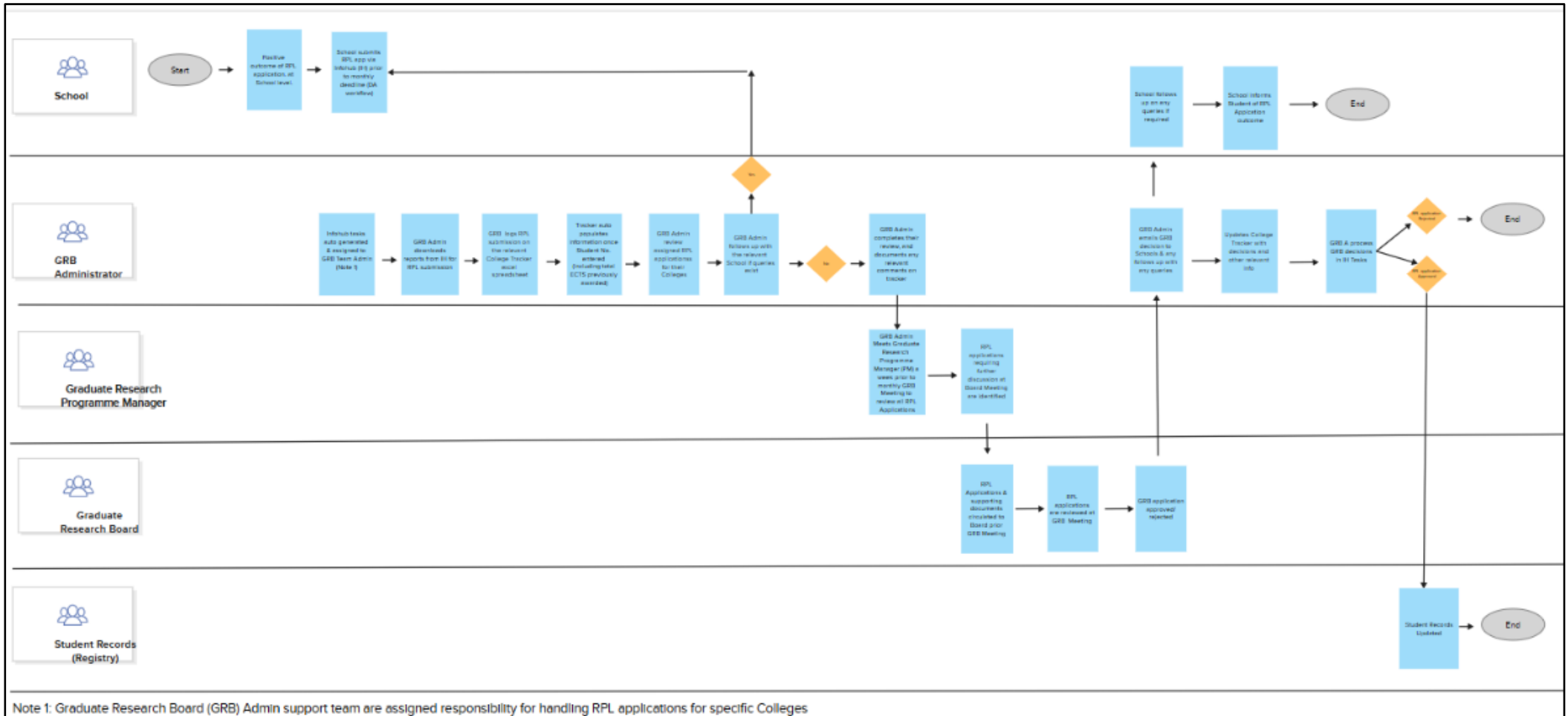
RPL application process for Admissions (Taught Graduate only). RPL applications for admissions at Undergraduate level is generally covered under other defined pathway programmes e.g. Open Learning..... RPL applications for admissions at graduate research level are covered under the Academic regulations (3.17).



RPL Applications for Credit/Exemption generally follow the process described below. If Colleges /Schools do not use the [online system](#) for credit/exemption applications please substitute all references to the online system with the appropriate form in use at your College/School of choice.



RPL Applications for Credit/Exemption for Graduate Research students are dealt with in 2 stages, firstly at School level (as per the process described on the previous page) and secondly if supported by the School at Graduate Research Board (GRB) level which is described below:



RPL Applications for **Advanced Entry** are generally covered under the UCD Transfer Policy