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## RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) Matters in the DIT: Policy and Practice Guide for DIT Staff

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# RPL Matters in the DIT

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

## POLICY and PRACTICE GUIDE for DIT Staff

2010 Edition



**Dr. Anne Murphy**

RPL Policy Officer  
Directorate of Academic Affairs

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*This guide is available in both WORD and Pdf formats on the staff intranet under Academic Affairs.*

*DIT colleagues are welcome to use any parts of the text for academic purposes with standard acknowledgement.*

*Except in relation to the nationally agreed principles and operational guidelines document, and to documents already approved by Academic Council, the text has been generated with the informed support of DIT colleagues in the Directorate of Academic Affairs and across the Institute generally.*

*The CD Rom included as an appendix is a recording of an RPL seminar held in Cathal Brugha Street campus on 12 March 2009. It contains contributions from experts external to the DIT in addition to internal contributions.*

*The generous contribution of DIT staff to the generation of the contents of the book and to the contents of the CD Rom is explicitly acknowledged and appreciated.*

*The contents – except in the cases of documents approved by Academic Council – is intend as guidance for good practice in RPL across several Institute functions and cannot be interpreted as a contract or obligation. Readers are invited to use the guide with that intent in mind.*

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# RPL MATTERS IN THE DIT

## POLICY AND PRACTICE GUIDE FOR DIT STAFF

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 About this Guide

This guide is a compilation of a number of policy and practice documents about recognition of prior learning (RPL). It is intended as a resource for DIT staff who have responsibility for development and management of any aspect of RPL for initial entry to DIT programmes, for advanced entry, for exemption from elements of a programme, or for achievement of a DIT award. It is also intended as a resource for staff who have roles that involve negotiation of RPL with parties external to the DIT such as partnerships, franchise arrangements, progression arrangements, qualifiers, bridging studies, continuing professional development programmes, and access programmes. It may also be useful for staff negotiating syllabi and learning contracts for work-based learning arrangements.

It is likely that each user of the guide will have a particular RPL need and that the contents will offer indicative directions and possibilities for practice. It is anticipated that the revised Quality Enhancement Handbook, due to be approved in the 2010-2011 academic year, will provide a more prescriptive framework for practice than is included here. However, it is expected that over the next few years there will be increasingly more harmony among policies, practices and quality assurance mechanisms with regard to RPL as practices become explicitly described and recorded. From the perspective of this guide, transparency, equity and fairness are the key principles underpinning RPL practices and protecting public confidence in those practices and in the quality of DIT awards.

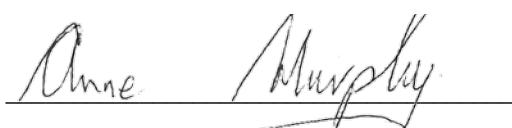
The guide is divided into six parts as detailed in the Contents page.

What is not included is a part devoted exclusively to conceptual and pedagogical aspects of RPL. Colleagues interested in these aspects are welcome to request workshops or CPD sessions and to avail of the resources placed in DIT libraries. Edition 2 of the guide is likely to include theoretical and conceptual aspects of RPL.

Comments and contributions from colleagues are welcome at any time.

#### **Note:**

The Guidance in this book is underpinned by a commitment to the principles of transparency, equity and fairness in all aspects of RPL. It is consistently advised that all RPL models of practice should be appropriate and fit for purpose.



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## 1.2 Glossary of RPL terms

### Extracts from General Assessment Regulations 2009

A **Component** of a module is a separately assessed element of an individual module.

**Component weighting** is where a module is assessed and involves two or more components; the weighting attached to each component will be specified so that an overall mark for the modules can be determined.

An **Element** of a module is a separately assessed component of an individual module.

The **European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)** is a system agreed between the European nations to enable students to transfer credit between institutions within and between countries.

A **Module** is a coherent and identifiable unit of learning and teaching with defined learning outcomes which are assessed and generates a single mark or grade to be recorded on the student's academic transcript.

A module can either be:

- a core module which must be studied and passed in order to gain a particular named award. (Note: a core module may be considered an option or elective module with respect to another programme of study).
- an option module which must be studied in conjunction with core modules and which a student selects from within a prescribed and limited set for a particular named award.
- an elective module which is chosen by the student from the total set available in the Institute, subject to restrictions such as prohibited combinations which may be specified in a Programme Document.

The relationship between modules can be the following:

- a pre-requisite module is one offered by the Institute or elsewhere which a student must have passed before registering to take a particular module. In some cases, a pre-requisite may be one of a group of specified modules.
- a co-requisite module is one which must be studied in addition to and normally simultaneously with a particular module.
- a linked module is one taken over 2 consecutive semesters, with the assessment at the end of the second semester. A linked module may have a credit value of 5, 10, 15 or 20 ECTS credits.

Undergraduate modules can be Basic, Intermediate, Advanced or Honours according to the academic level to which they are allocated.

**Prior Experiential Learning** refers to learning that was the result of experience either at work or in leisure pursuits

**Prior Certificated Learning** refers to learning that has resulted in the achievement of an award or a certificate of credit which demonstrates learning that has occurred at some time in the past.

A **Stage** of a programme normally consists of a set of modules totalling 60 ECTS credits.

For the purpose of these Regulations a **Student** is a person who has been enrolled in the Institute and has registered to take one module or a set of modules.

### Extracts from RPL Policy Document 2008

## 2. Definitions

- 2.1 In the nomenclatures APCL and APEL accreditation refers to the process of identification, assessment and formal acknowledgement of past learning. The term accreditation of prior learning refers to the range of approaches used to formally recognise that learning has taken place. The summative RPL process is concerned only with demonstrated prior learning which can be made available for academic assessment. RPL processes can however be used for formative purposes where academic assessment or award of exemptions/credits is not involved. Summative and formative processes for RPL should ideally identify learning needs as well as learning that has already taken place.
- 2.2 Certificated learning refers to learning which has been achieved through a formal programme and which has been formally assessed.
- 2.3 Experiential learning refers to learning that has been achieved through paid work, through voluntary

work, through life activities or through independent study, and which has not been formally assessed. For the purpose of this policy and procedures document, prior experiential learning refers to learning from work, private study and life activities which is appropriate for submission for academic judgement and for recognition by the DIT in relation to its awards.

#### **Award of RPL Credits**

- 4.1 RPL transfer credits may be awarded within the process of advanced entry to a DIT programme. Such transfer credits may be achieved through DIT or other programmes, or through APEL.
- 4.2 General credits are awarded when an RPL claim has been processed in relation to a stage of the receiving programme or to a set of programme modules but not necessarily in relation to individual module learning outcomes. These types of credits are awarded as exemption from a block of study (stage or named modules).
- 4.3 Specific credits are awarded when an APCL claim has been processed in relation to the module learning outcomes and credits of the receiving programme. Specific credits may be awarded where APEL is used to achieve module exemption/s. In both these cases it is usual to award the same level and number of credits as available for the module where an applicant can provide evidence of learning equivalent to the learning outcomes of the module and where RPL is acceptable for module exemptions in the first instance as outlined in the programme validation document.

#### **Extracts from proposed text in revised Quality Enhancement Handbook 2010**

*(not approved at time of writing)*

**Advanced entry:** entry to a programme of study at any stage other than the initial entry stage

**APCL:** accreditation of prior certificated learning

**APEL:** accreditation of prior experiential learning

**Bologna Process:** a series of reforms to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in three initial dimensions: a three cycle structure (bachelor, master and doctor), a common approach to quality assurance, and a system of recognising qualifications

**Credits:** systems of measuring student learning effort in relation to time/effort spent. The European Credits Transfer System (ECTS) uses a notional schema of 1 credit representing from 20 – 30 hours of learning effort.

*In relation to RPL:*

RPL transfer credits may be awarded within the process of advanced entry to a DIT programme. Such transfer credits may be achieved through DIT or other programmes, or through APEL.

General credits are awarded when an RPL claim has been processed in relation to a stage of the receiving programme or to a set of programme modules but not necessarily in relation to individual module learning outcomes. These types of credits are awarded as exemption from a block of study (stage or named modules).

Specific credits are awarded when an APCL claim has been processed in relation to the module learning outcomes and credits of the receiving programme. Specific credits may be awarded where APEL is used to achieve module exemption/s. In both these cases it is usual to award the same level and number of credits as available for the module where an applicant can provide evidence of learning equivalent to the learning outcomes of the module and where RPL is acceptable for module exemptions in the first instance as outlined in the programme validation document.

**Diploma Supplement:** a document devised by the Council of Europe, UNESCO and the EU for mobility and transparency purposes which is attached to an award certificate and which describes the nature, level, context and status of the award to which it is attached

**EQF:** European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning – a system of relating national frameworks to a common set of reference levels

**Erasmus Mundus:** a higher education co-operation and mobility programme between European and Third countries

**Europass CV:** a common template devised to present skills and qualifications to assist with citizen mobility

**Europass Mobility:** a template to record time spent in education and training in another European country



**Exemption/s:** an element/elements of a programme of study which a student is not required to take but for which credits may be awarded on the basis of prior or concurrent learning

**Experiential learning:** Experiential learning, often called informal learning refers to learning that has been achieved through paid work, through voluntary work, through life activities or through independent study, and which has not been formally assessed which is appropriate for submission for academic judgement and for recognition by the DIT in relation to its awards. Additionally, it is common to define formal and non-formal learning as follows.

- formal learning refers to learning which takes place through programmes of study or training that are delivered by education or training providers, or within companies and organisations, and which attract awards.
- non-formal learning refers to learning that takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training. It may be assessed but does not normally lead to formal certification. Examples of non-formal learning are: learning and training activities undertaken in the workplace, voluntary sector or trade union, and in community-based learning.

**Levels of learning:** systems of describing comparative degrees of complexity and difficulty in relation to awards and qualifications regarding knowledge, skills and competences, by attributing numbers on a scale from 1 to 12 or variation with higher numbers reflecting higher degrees of difficulty.

**RPL:** Recognition of prior learning

**Transfer:** the process of student movement from one programme to a similar programme at a similar level or stage.

### Extract from National Principles and Operational Guidelines for RPL 2005

For the purposes of developing a national approach to the recognition of prior learning, prior learning encompasses:<sup>1</sup>

1. **formal learning** which takes place through programmes of study or training that are delivered by education or training providers, and which attract awards.
2. **non-formal learning** that takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training. It may be assessed but does not normally lead to formal certification. Examples of non-formal learning are: learning and training activities undertaken in the workplace, voluntary sector or trade union and in community-based learning.
3. **informal learning** that takes place through life and work experience. (And is sometimes referred to as experiential learning.) Often, it is learning that is unintentional and the learner may not recognise at the time of the experience that it contributed to his or her knowledge, skills and competences.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from: Commission of European Union, 2000, Memorandum of Lifelong Learning, Commission Staff working Paper, Brussels

### 1.3 NQF, EQF and EHEA major award levels

The relationship among the Irish National Qualifications Framework (NQF), the European Qualification Framework (EQF) and the Framework of the European Higher Education Area/Bologna framework are illustrated in the table below. These frameworks are becoming increasingly significant for mobility of students and workers. As additional frameworks are developed across continents and regions it is likely that RPL will use these framework levels for recognition of accredited/certificated learning initially, and increasingly as a reference for work-related, non-formal and informal experiential learning.

**TABLE 1: NQF, EQF and EHEA**

*The relationship between the Irish National Qualifications Framework (NQF), the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the framework of the Bologna European Higher Education Area (EHEA) with indicative major award types.*

<b>EQF Levels</b>	<b>EHEA Framework (Bologna)</b>	<b>Irish NFQ Levels</b>	<b>Irish NFQ Major Award-types</b>
1		1	Level 1 Certificate
		2	Level 2 Certificate
2		3	Level 3 Certificate, Junior Certificate
3		4	Level 4 Certificate, Leaving Certificate
4		5	Level 5 Certificate, Leaving Certificate
5	Short Cycle within First Cycle	6	Advanced Certificate (FET award)* Higher Certificate (HET award)
6	First Cycle Bachelor	7	Ordinary Bachelor Degree
		8	Honours Bachelor Degree, Higher Diploma
7	Second Cycle Master	9	Master Degree, Post-Graduate Diploma
8	Third Cycle Doctor	10	Doctoral Degree, Higher Doctorate

\*The Advanced Certificate is a further education and training award at Level 6 on the NFQ and is not aligned with the *Bologna Framework*

Source: NQAI, Country Education Profile: Ireland (October 2009)

## 1.4 NQF level descriptors from level 6 to level 10

National qualifications frameworks are intended to provide generic reference points to identify the differences in the learning level expected in awards of different degrees of difficulty.

The Irish NQF has 10 levels, six of which apply to higher education, as illustrated in Table 2 opposite.

The assumption here is that similar major awards or qualifications in Ireland can be placed on a level which makes it possible for them to be compared with each other in relation to broad areas of knowledge, know-how etc.. It should then be possible to recognise the overall qualities in a major award which determines its appropriate placement on the framework.

Likewise it should be possible to devise a system of placing sectoral awards in appropriate relationship with each other.

A further step in this logic is to devise systems to 'place' experiential, non-formal and informal learning on the framework. However, the NQF operates only in relation to awards/qualifications – either existing or future awards/qualifications.

Awards and qualifications are now described in terms of the learning outcomes at a particular level expected of holders of such awards and/or qualifications. In our NQF it is not yet possible to have learning placed other than in relation to awards. This is leading to the scenario where all formal learning which leads to an award is being placed on the NQF and to such learning being described in terms of learning outcomes.

So, it is reasonable to argue, that RPL has moved more towards matching prior learning with the learning outcomes of awards than to its earlier function of recognising learning *per se*. The main result of this shift is that 'technologies' of matching awards/qualifications against each other is now greatly enabled through databases of award descriptors and the arrival of a recognition services industry. Another emerging result is that non-formal and informal experiential learning is now being managed with similar 'technologies' which use learning outcomes of awards/qualifications as the only criteria for validation. The tensions between these new technologies of atomistic competence descriptors and the earlier holistic 'learning' descriptors are becoming more evident as RPL practices become more subjected to oversight often far removed from the site of academic practice. It is likely that these tensions will continue as they do in most aspects of academic assessment. The onus is therefore on the academic programme team to define its RPL stance in this regard and to design RPL management systems appropriate to the context of practice.

**Table 2: HE LEVELS Irish National Framework of Qualifications**

	LEVEL 6	LEVEL 7	LEVEL 8	LEVEL 9	LEVEL 10
<b>Knowledge</b> <i>Breadth</i>	Specialised knowledge in a broad area	Specialised knowledge across a variety of areas	An understanding of theory, concepts and methods pertaining to a field (or fields) of learning	A systematic understanding of knowledge, at, or informed by, the forefront of a field of learning	A systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of a field of learning
<b>Knowledge</b> <i>Kind</i>	Some theoretical concepts and abstract thinking, with significant underpinning theory	Recognition of limitations of current knowledge and familiarity with sources of new knowledge; integration of concepts across a variety of areas	Detailed knowledge and understanding in one or more specialised areas, some of it at the current boundaries of the field(s)	A critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, generally informed by the forefront of a field of learning	The creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research, or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy review by peers
<b>Know-how and Skill</b> <i>Range</i>	Demonstrate comprehensive range of specialised skills and tools	Demonstrate specialised technical, creative or conceptual skills and tools across an area of study	Demonstrate mastery of a complex and specialised area of study skills and tools; use and modify advanced skills and tools to conduct closely guided research, professional or advanced technical activity	Demonstrate a range of standard and specialised research or equivalent tools and techniques of enquiry	Demonstrate a significant range of the principal skills, techniques, tools, practices and/or materials which are associated with a field of learning; develop new skills, techniques, tools, practices and/or materials
<b>Know-how and Skill</b> <i>Selectivity</i>	Formulate responses to well defined abstract problems	Exercise appropriate judgement in planning, design, technical and/or supervisory functions related to products, services, operations or processes	Exercise appropriate judgement in a number of complex planning, design, technical and/or management functions related to products, services operations or processes, including resourcing	Select from complex and advanced skills across a field of learning; develop new skills to a high level, including novel and emerging techniques	Respond to abstract problems that expand and redefine existing procedural knowledge
<b>Competence</b> <i>Context</i>	Act in a range of varied and specific contexts involving creative and non routine activities; transfer and/or technical or creative skills to a range of contexts	Utilise diagnostic and creative skills in a range of functions in a wide variety of contexts	Use advanced skills to conduct research, or advanced technical or professional activity, accepting accountability for all related decision making; transfer and apply diagnostic and creative skills in a range of contexts	Act in a wide and often unpredictable variety of professional levels and ill-defined contexts	Exercise personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent contexts
<b>Competence</b> <i>Role</i>	Exercise substantial personal autonomy and often take responsibility for the work of others and/or for allocation of resources; form, and function within multiple complex and heterogeneous groups	Accept accountability for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes; take significant or supervisory responsibility for the work of others in defined areas of work	Act effectively under guidance in a peer relationship with qualified practitioners; lead multiple, complex and heterogeneous groups	Take significant responsibility for the work of individuals and groups; lead and initiate activity	Communicate results of research and innovation to peers; engage in critical dialogue; lead and originate complex social processes
<b>Competence</b> <i>Learning to Learn</i>	Learn to evaluate own learning and identify needs within a structured learning environment; assist others in identifying learning needs	Take initiative to identify and address learning needs and interact effectively in a learning group	Learn to act in variable and unfamiliar learning contexts; learn to manage learning tasks independently, professionally and ethically	Learn to self-evaluate and take responsibility for continuing academic/professional development	Learn to critique the broader implications of applying knowledge to particular contexts
<b>Competence</b> <i>Insight</i>	Express an internalised, personal world view, reflecting engagement with others	Express an internalised, personal world view, manifesting solidarity with others	Express a comprehensive, internalised personal worldview, manifesting solidarity with others	Scrutinise and reflect on social norms and relationships and act to change them	Scrutinise and reflect on social norms and relationships and lead action to change them

Note: The outcomes at each level include those of all the lower levels in the same sub-strand.

Source: NQAI National Framework of Qualifications

## 1.5 RPL in Institute business

On the next pages are five figures which were developed to illustrate various aspects of RPL in the business of the Institute.

Figure 1 is an overall map, or summary, of RPL and its different purposes. This figure is used in the RPL information booklet for the public, available on the DIT website at:

Figure 2 illustrates the continuum of RPL across all levels of award in the DIT. Seen in this way it is increasingly obvious that forms of RPL have been used in many contexts already and that it has contributed to the flexibility of responses to external needs that have been a hallmark of the DIT over decades. What the figure also does is offer a strategy for provision from apprenticeship to doctorates which is now the vision of most Departments and Schools.

Figure 3 illustrates the linkages between RPL in the DIT and external stakeholders. The arrow sizes are intended to illustrate the significance of the relationship in 2007 when the DIT RPL policy document was being developed. However, the context has changed somewhat since then in some instances, such as the management of the apprenticeship system nationally and the significance of RPL for the labour market as unemployment figures rise and the Labour Market Activation Initiatives become available. Such changes highlight the need for a dynamic RPL policy and a need to integrate RPL into responses to changes in the labour market and in national training provision.

Internally the relationship of RPL to the normal day-to-day business of the DIT changes as priorities change and as structures change, as illustrated in Figure 4.

In relationships with companies and organisations the matter of RPL is increasingly raised. This is probably because of wider awareness of RPL as well as the need to companies to maximise the return on investment from training and professional development. Figure 5 illustrates possible uses of RPL within an Institute-company relationship which was developed for the Facilicode (facilitated work-based learning) Project in 2009.

This set of five figures is intended mainly as information and as a context to provide a rationale for the RPL practice guidelines in this book.

Figure 1: A summary of RPL and its different purposes

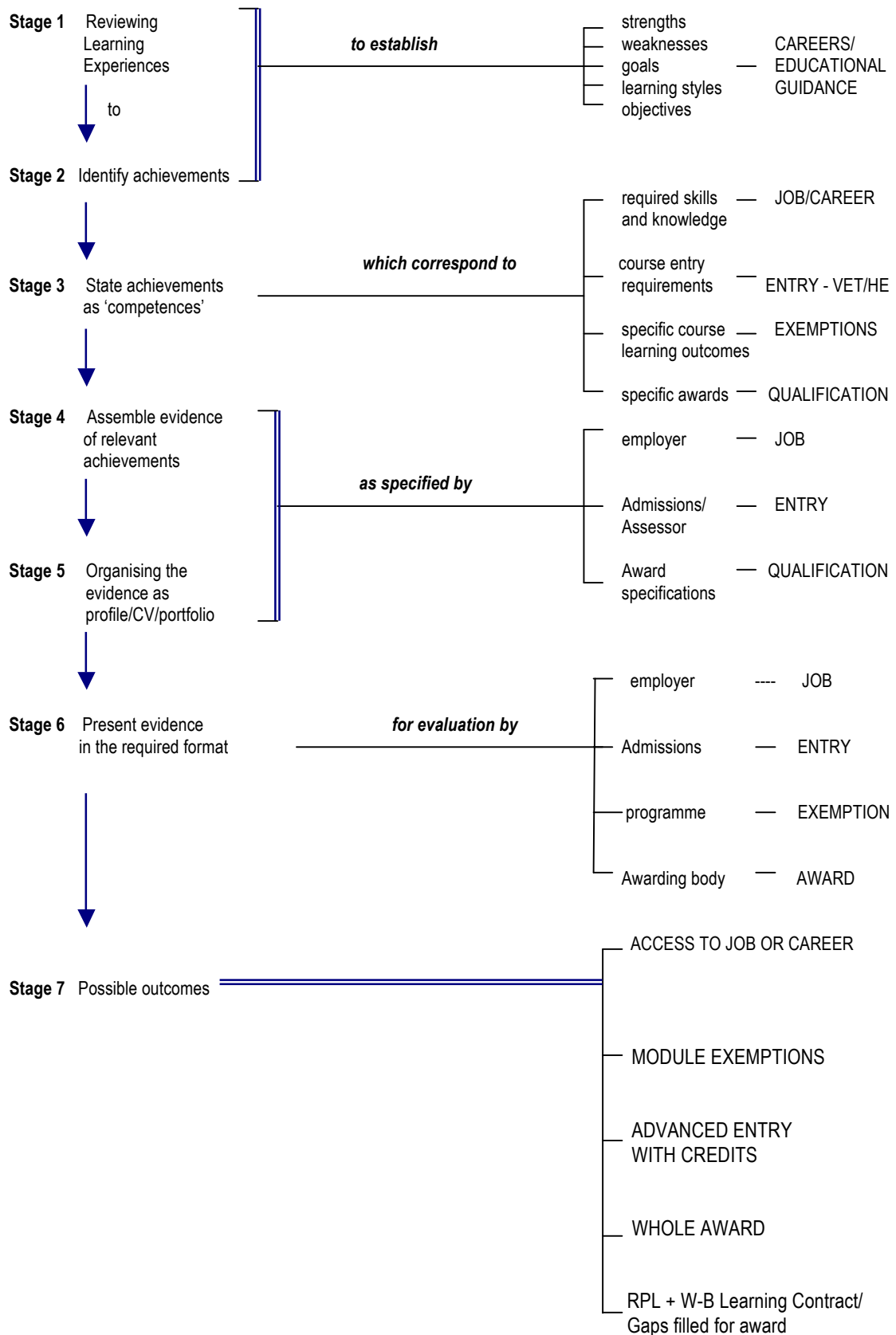
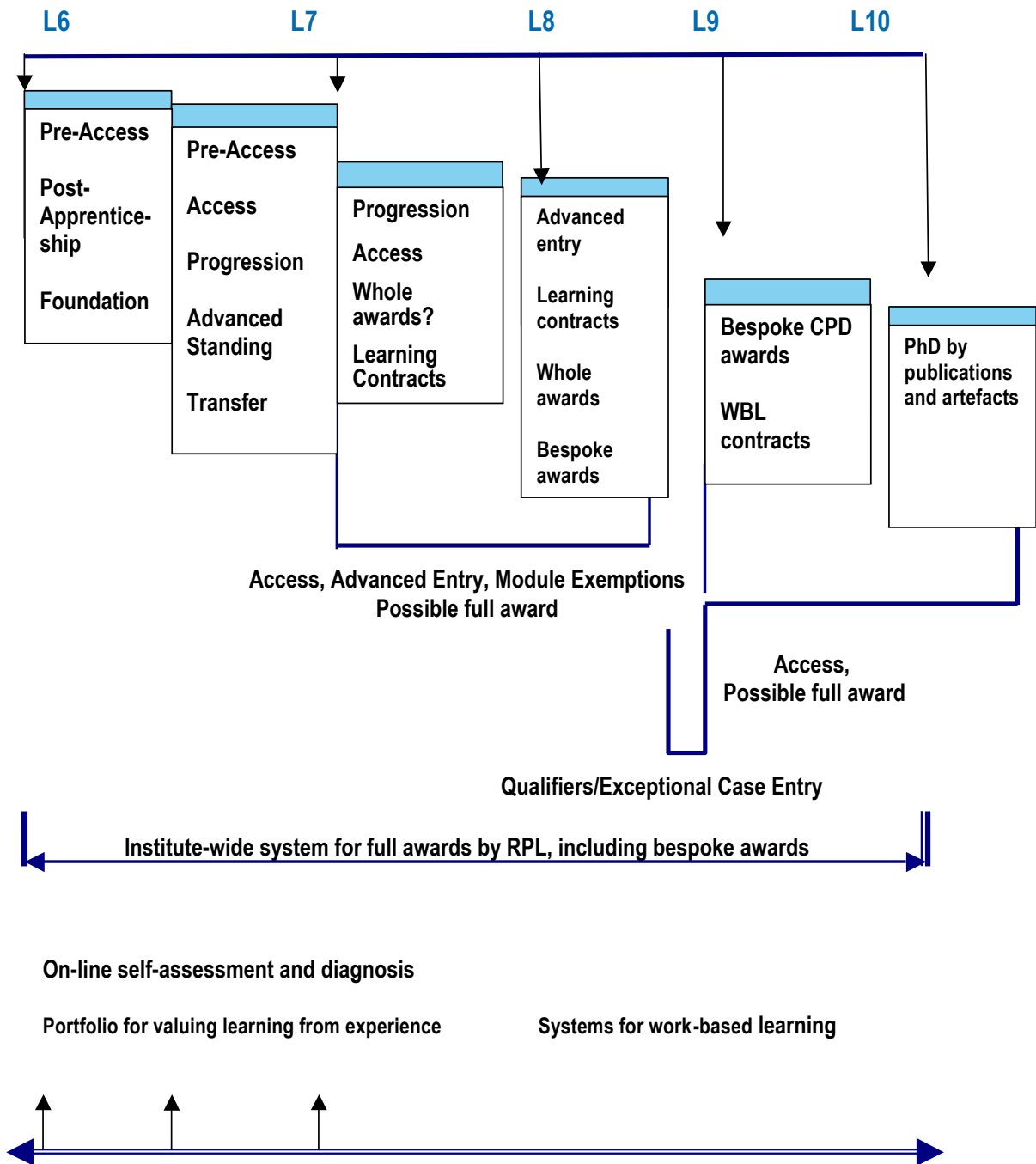
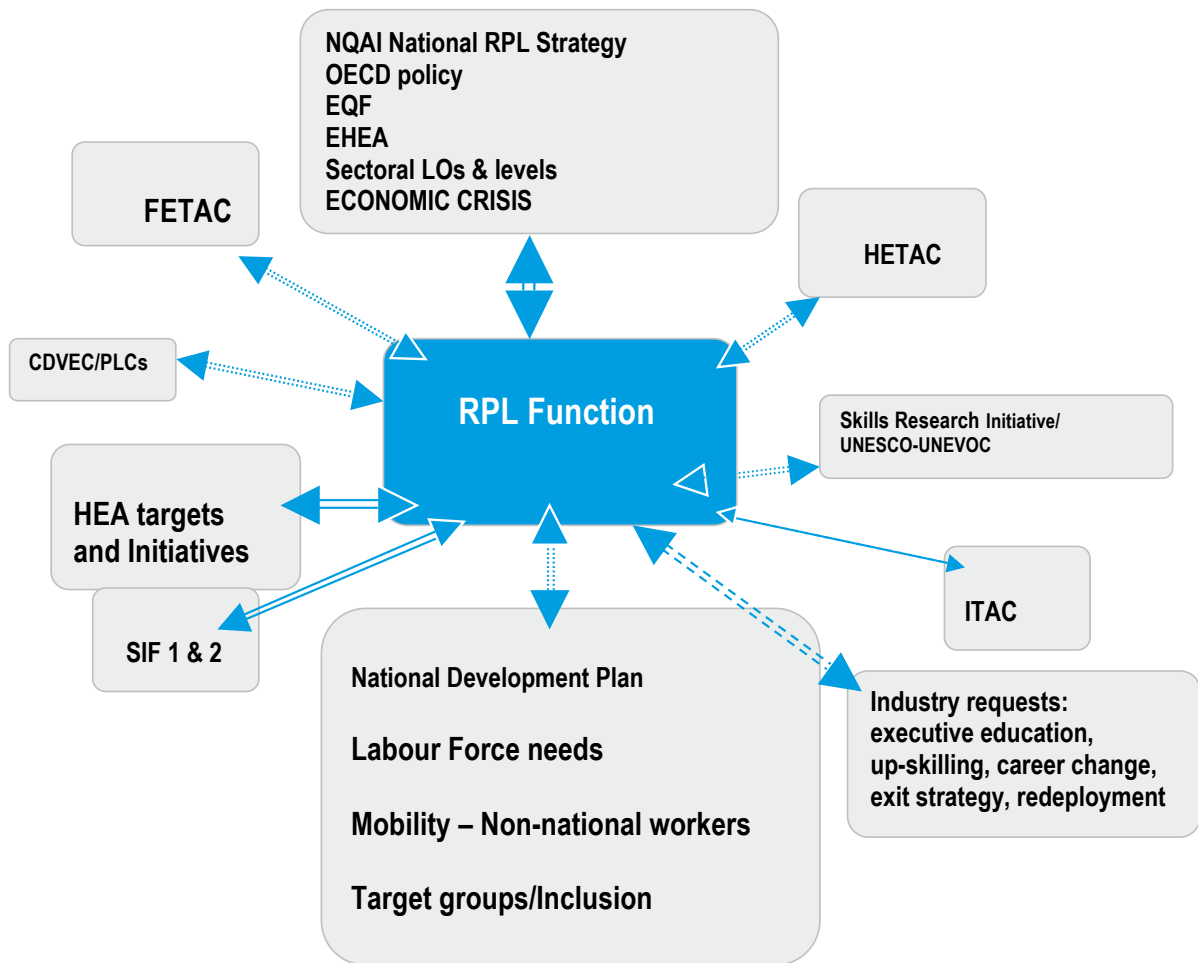


Figure 2: Possible RPL Continuum across Levels 5-10



**Figure 3: External Linkages and Relationships to RPL Function 2009**

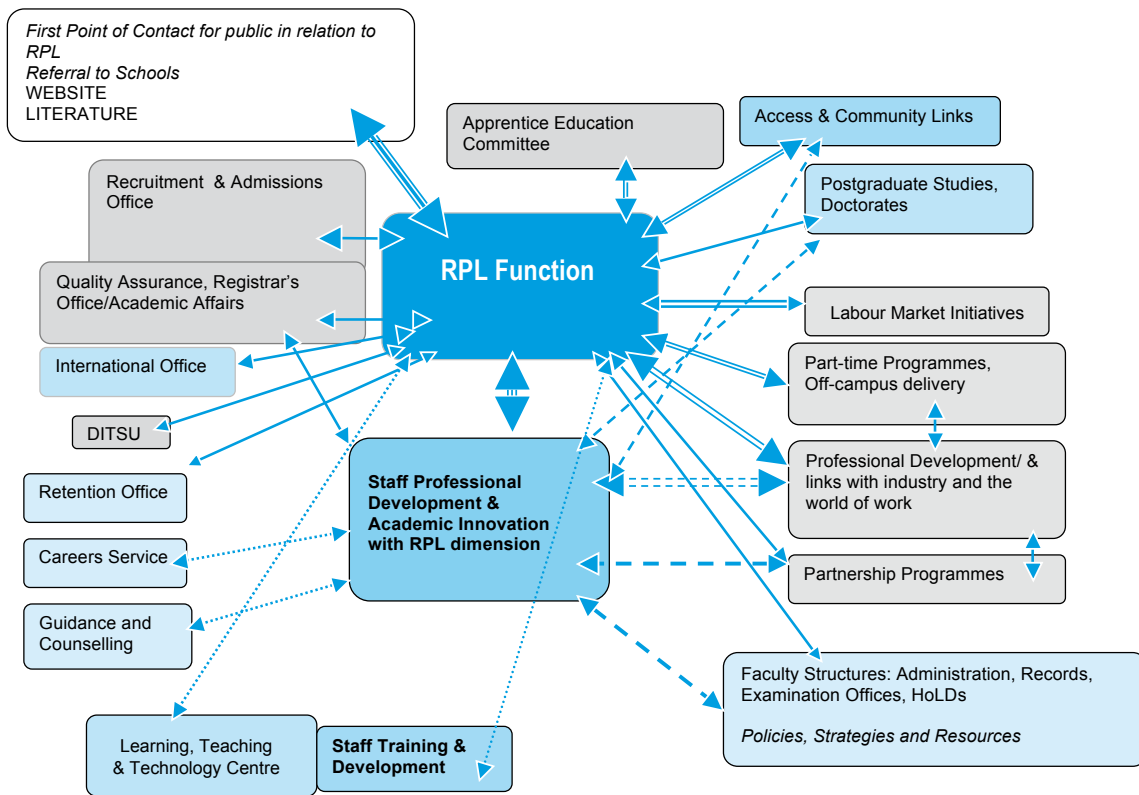
The emphasis is likely to change over time





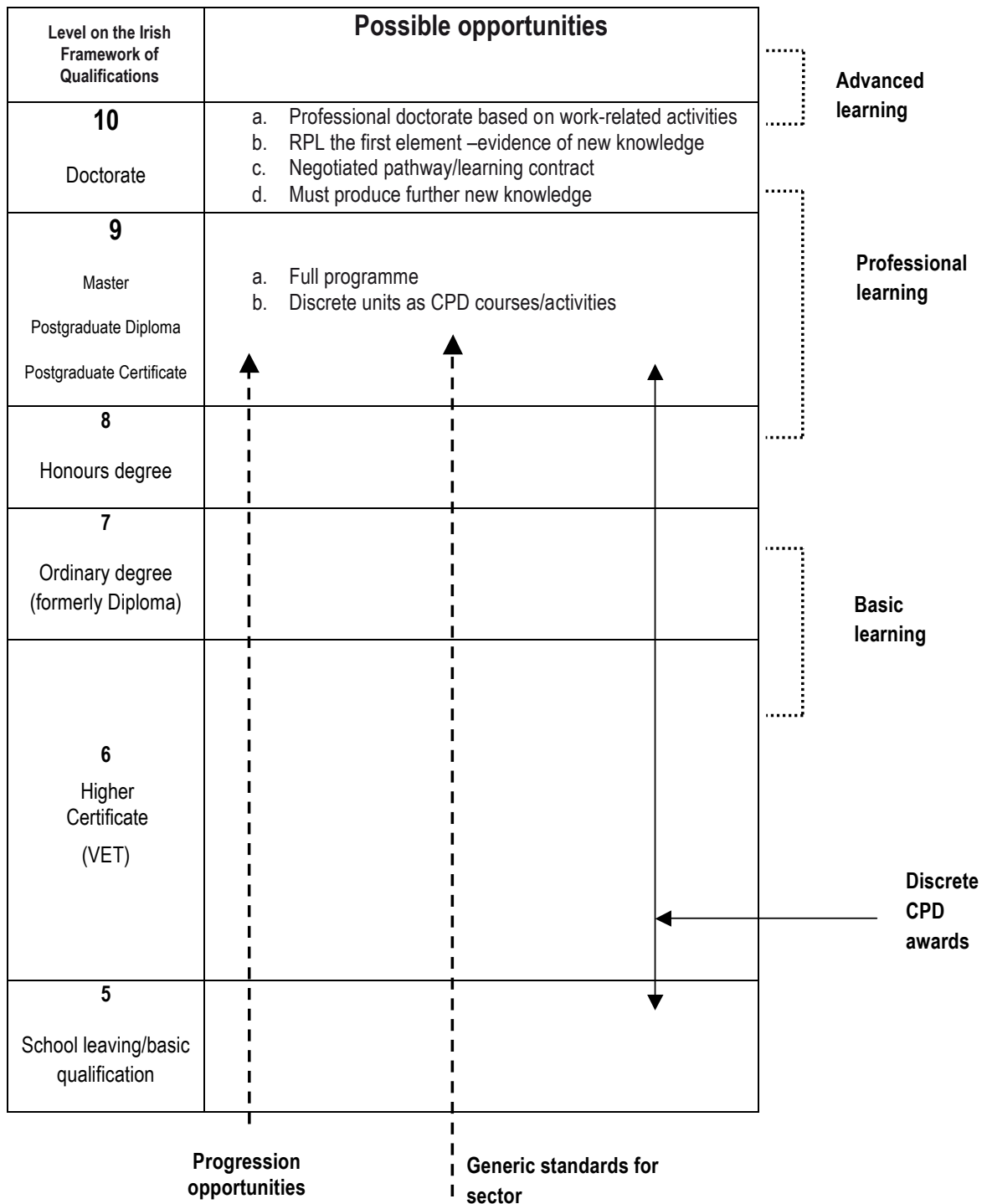
**Figure 4: Current and Potential RPL Internal Linkages and Relationships**

The relative extent of relationships suggested in arrow types



**Figure 5: Facilitate RPL Model for DIT-Company partnerships**

Facilitating individual learning career progression as well as company needs



## 1.6 Who does what about RPL in the DIT?

Non-academic staff	Should know about...
International recruitment staff at fairs, events etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RPL policy</li> <li>RPL in relation to programmes</li> <li>Processes for establishing equivalence of awards</li> <li>FAQs for applicants and staff</li> </ul>
Recruitment staff on school visits, advertising etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specifics of RPL on programmes for initial entry, advanced entry, transfer etc</li> <li>RPL Policy</li> <li>FAQs for applicants and staff</li> </ul>
Admissions staff processing applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RPL policy</li> <li>Programme entry requirements</li> <li>Criteria for APCL and APEL for initial entry and advanced entry</li> <li>FAQs for applicants and staff</li> </ul>
Mature student recruitment staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RPL policy</li> <li>Specifics of mature student status and entitlements</li> <li>Programme RPL information</li> <li>Criteria for APCL and APEL for initial entry and advanced entry</li> <li>FAQs for applicants and staff</li> </ul>
Mature student support staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RPL policy</li> <li>FAQs for applicants and staff</li> </ul>
FE links staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RPL policy</li> <li>RPL for progression and transfer</li> </ul>
Graduate programmes recruitment and admissions staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RPL policy</li> <li>FAQs for applicants and staff</li> <li>Data bases of equivalences</li> <li>Criteria for APCL and APEL</li> </ul>
Fees Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RPL policy</li> <li>FAQs for applicants and staff</li> <li>Specific programme RPL fee arrangements</li> </ul>
Examinations Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RPL policy</li> <li>Procedures for noting RPL in relation to examinations</li> </ul>
Student records office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RPL policy</li> <li>Procedures for noting RPL in relation to student records and Diploma Supplement</li> </ul>
Academic Quality Assurance staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RPL policy</li> <li>RPL in Academic Quality Assurance</li> <li>RPL in programme validation documents</li> <li>RPL in General Assessment Regulations</li> </ul>
Students' Union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RPL policy</li> <li>FAQs for applicants</li> <li>RPL in General Assessment Regulations</li> <li>RPL in programme documents</li> <li>RPL in Student Handbooks</li> </ul>
Links with industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RPL policy</li> <li>FAQs for applicants and staff</li> </ul>
Career Guidance staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RPL policy</li> <li>FAQs for applicants and staff</li> <li>RPL for CVs/Europass</li> </ul>
Community Links/Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RPL policy</li> <li>FAQs for applicants and staff</li> <li>RPL for entry to programmes</li> <li>RPL for CVs/Europass</li> </ul>

Academic Staff	Should know about...
Directors/College Heads/Deans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RPL policy</li> <li>• RPL Implementation strategy</li> <li>• Faculty roles and responsibilities</li> <li>• National and international practice trends</li> <li>• Leadership in RPL matters</li> </ul>
Heads of School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RPL policy</li> <li>• FAQs for applicants and staff</li> <li>• Implementation strategy and School approach</li> <li>• RPL in General Assessment Regulations</li> <li>• RPL in Quality Enhancement Handbook</li> <li>• School RPL roles and responsibilities</li> <li>• Staff familiarisation with RPL</li> <li>• Oversight of RPL practice at School level</li> <li>• Oversight of RPL in design of new programmes</li> <li>• Liaison with RPL Officer</li> </ul>
Heads of Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RPL policy</li> <li>• FAQs for applicants and staff</li> <li>• Implementation strategy: School approach – Department approach</li> <li>• RPL in General Assessment Regulations</li> <li>• RPL in Quality Enhancement Handbook</li> <li>• Department RPL roles and responsibilities</li> <li>• Staff familiarisation with RPL</li> <li>• Oversight of Department RPL practice</li> <li>• Leadership re. RPL in programme design</li> <li>• Liaison with RPL Officer</li> </ul>
Programme Chairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RPL policy</li> <li>• FAQs for applicants and staff</li> <li>• Implementation strategy and School approach</li> <li>• RPL in General Assessment Regulations</li> <li>• RPL in Quality Enhancement Handbook</li> <li>• Programme RPL roles and responsibilities</li> <li>• Staff familiarisation with RPL</li> <li>• Oversight of RPL practice on the programme</li> <li>• Liaison with RPL Officer</li> </ul>
Programme co-ordinators/year tutors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RPL policy</li> <li>• FAQs for applicants and staff</li> <li>• RPL in General Assessment Regulations</li> <li>• RPL in Quality Enhancement Handbook</li> <li>• School/Department/Programme RPL roles and responsibilities</li> </ul>
Programme Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RPL policy</li> <li>• FAQs for applicants and staff</li> <li>• Implementation strategy and School approach</li> <li>• RPL in General Assessment Regulations</li> <li>• RPL in Quality Enhancement Handbook</li> <li>• Programme RPL roles and responsibilities</li> <li>• Oversight of programme RPL practice</li> </ul>
Lecturers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RPL policy</li> <li>• FAQs for applicants and staff</li> <li>• Implementation strategy and School approach</li> <li>• RPL in General Assessment Regulations</li> <li>• RPL in Quality Enhancement Handbook</li> <li>• School RPL roles and responsibilities</li> </ul>

<b>Academic Staff</b>	<b>Should know about...</b>
Part-time lecturers/external staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RPL policy</li> <li>• FAQs for applicants and staff</li> <li>• Implementation strategy and School approach</li> <li>• RPL in General Assessment Regulations</li> <li>• RPL in Quality Enhancement Handbook</li> <li>• School RPL roles and responsibilities</li> </ul>
Internal examiners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RPL policy</li> <li>• FAQs for applicants and staff</li> <li>• Implementation strategy and School approach</li> <li>• RPL in General Assessment Regulations</li> <li>• RPL in Quality Enhancement Handbook</li> <li>• School RPL roles and responsibilities</li> </ul>
External examiners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RPL policy</li> <li>• FAQs for applicants and staff</li> <li>• Implementation strategy and School approach</li> <li>• RPL in General Assessment Regulations</li> <li>• RPL in Quality Enhancement Handbook</li> <li>• School RPL roles and responsibilities</li> </ul>

<b>RPL Policy Officer is engaged in...</b>	
Policy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further development of Institute's RPL policy through GARs and AQE Handbook</li> <li>• Contributing to further development of national and international RPL policy</li> </ul>
Policy implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of generic and specific implementation guidelines for the Institute</li> <li>• Liaison with Schools, Departments and programme teams on policy implementation issues and RPL management at all levels</li> <li>• Supporting academic staff with programme design and pedagogical matters related to RPL and WBL.</li> </ul>
Information provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of online and paper-based information for the public, for potential applicants and for Institute staff</li> </ul>
Staff training and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of workshops, information session and consultancy on demand</li> <li>• Provision of formal CPD programme at Masters level at least twice per semester</li> </ul>
Research and scholarship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging in research projects with colleagues related to aspects of RPL</li> <li>• Publications, seminars and conference</li> </ul>
National and international links	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Representing the Institute on all matters related to RPL at national and international levels.</li> </ul>

## 2. RPL POLICY AND INFORMATION DOCUMENTS

This part of the book contains the following RPL documents already in use across the Institute, as follows:

- 2.1 'Principles and Operational Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education' 2005, NQAI
- 2.2 DIT RPL Policy Document, June 2008
- 2.3 Chapter 8 from revised General Assessment Regulations, June 2009
- 2.4 Draft RPL matters in revised Quality Enhancement Handbook due 2010
- 2.5 RPL in the Module Template
- 2.6 PhD by publication – extract from Postgraduate Research Regulations
- 2.7 FAQs about RPL for DIT staff
- 2.8 FAQs about RPL for applicants

### **Note**

The frequently asked questions for staff and for applicants are not formally approved documents as are the six earlier documents. The FAQs were generated for information purposes only and do not represent a contract. No challenge can be taken to Institute practices on the basis of the responses to the FAQs.

## 2.1 Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education and Training - June 2005

### Principles

#### Introduction

This paper sets out the principles and operational guidelines for the recognition of prior learning in further and higher education and training established by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland following consultation with stakeholders.

#### Background

The National Framework of Qualifications forms the basis of a new, more flexible and integrated system of qualifications. The need for such a system arises in the main from the national objective of moving towards a 'lifelong learning society', in which learners will be enabled to take up learning opportunities at chosen stages throughout their lives.

The National Framework of Qualifications was launched in October 2003 with the publication of three documents setting out policies, criteria, procedures and determinations relating to the Framework and the linked objective of enhancing access, transfer and progression for learners. These documents are as follows:

- Determinations for the Outline National Framework of Qualifications
- Policies and Criteria for the Establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications
- Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners

In addition, an overview of the Framework was published at that time.

The concept of lifelong learning indicates that learning should encompass the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Learning occurs in many contexts that include work, involvement in social and community activities, or learning through life experience generally. In order to enable the individual to learn throughout life, equal value should be given to all these forms of learning regardless of source, how it is achieved or when in life it is achieved. A major objective of the National Framework of Qualifications is to recognise all learning achievements. It aims to do this by supporting the development of alternative pathways to qualifications (or awards) and by promoting the recognition of prior learning.<sup>1</sup>

Recognition is a process by which prior learning is given a value. It is a means by which prior learning is formally identified, assessed and acknowledged. This makes it possible for an individual to build on learning achieved and be formally rewarded for it. The term 'prior learning' is learning that has taken place, but not necessarily been assessed or measured, prior to entering a programme or seeking an award. Prior learning may have been acquired through formal, non-formal, or informal routes.

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland has set out the purposes of the recognition of prior learning in the Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners:

- entry to a programme leading to an award
- credit towards an award or exemption from some programme requirements
- eligibility for a full award

In addition, the recognition of prior learning can also be directly relevant in terms of facilitating employment. While there is not necessarily a direct link with qualifications in such recognition, this is a very important dimension to the recognition of prior learning.

For the purposes of developing a national approach to the recognition of prior learning, prior learning encompasses:<sup>2</sup>

1. **formal learning** which takes place through programmes of study or training that are delivered by education or training providers, and which attract awards.
2. **non-formal learning** that takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training. It may be assessed but does not normally lead to formal certification. Examples of non-formal learning are: learning and training activities undertaken in the workplace, voluntary sector or trade union and in community-based learning.
3. **informal learning** that takes place through life and work experience. (And is sometimes referred to as experiential learning.) Often, it is learning that is unintentional and the learner may not recognise at the time of the experience that it contributed to his or her knowledge, skills and competences.

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this paper, RPL is considered as encompassing all types of prior learning: AP(E)L has tended to become a collective term which encompasses, for example, Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL); Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL); Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL); Recognition of prior learning (RPL); Accreditation of Prior Learning and Achievement (APL&A); Recognition of Current Competencies (RCC); and, more recently Learning Outside Formal Teaching (LOFT).

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from: Commission of European Union, 2000, Memorandum of Lifelong Learning, Commission Staff working Paper, Brussels

It is a policy of the Qualifications Authority to promote the co-ordination and harmonisation of processes for the recognition of prior learning on the part of education providers and awarding bodies. It sees the development of national principles and operational guidelines as a first step in this direction. There are a number and a variety of different approaches to the recognition of prior learning on the part of education providers, awarding bodies, in the workplace and elsewhere. In Ireland, a number of universities, the Dublin Institute of Technology, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council the Further Education Training and Awards Council, Institutes of Technology and private providers have policies and procedures, or are in the process of drafting these, on the recognition of prior learning. In European Union, a set of common principles regarding recognition of non-formal and informal learning with the aim of ensuring greater comparability between approaches in different countries and at different levels has been developed.<sup>3</sup> A number of countries have developed principles for the recognition of prior learning, such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada as well as many European states (France, Norway, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands). In addition, states such as France have created individual rights backed by legislation to the recognition of prior learning while others evidence 'bottom-up' approaches where local training centres and workplace initiatives have been developed.

### **Rationale for a national approach to the recognition of prior learning**

The principles are intended to encourage the development and expansion of processes for the recognition of prior learning by education and training providers and awarding bodies so that they may:

- communicate their commitment to the recognition of prior learning
- bring coherence and consistency to the recognition of prior learning
- remove difficulties that may confront an applicant wishing to transfer within and between the different education and training sectors.

A national approach builds on and takes account of developments already taking place both nationally and internationally: many awarding bodies are, or have been, actively developing their own policies and practices, thus there is a need to develop a national approach to ensure coherence and widespread acceptance of the outcomes of recognition. The intention is that these principles will be built on to develop operational guidelines which will be an exemplar of the nature of arrangements that further and higher education and training bodies (the Further Education and Training Awards Council, The Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology) should consider putting in place.

### **Benefits of developing principles for the recognition of prior learning**

Recognition of prior learning should meet the needs of learners. Recognition of prior learning can support the socially inclusive purposes of further and higher education and training, in that it facilitates entry to programmes, gives credit to or exemptions from a programme of study or access to a full award. Recognition of prior learning can address the needs of disadvantaged groups, part-time students and mature students, and can have a positive impact on retention of students. In addition, recognition of prior learning gives opportunities to providers of education and awarding bodies to use their assessment capability to up-skill individuals and meet workforce needs at local and national levels. Recognition of prior learning can bring benefits to the workplace by enhancing worker's employability and a better matching of skills demand and supply.

Recognition of prior learning can assist in supporting staff development within organisations by increasing staff motivation to undertake appropriate education or training. It can reduce the amount of time required to acquire a qualification.

### **Use of the term *Applicant***

In developing these principles, it is recognised that the terms learner and applicant are interchangeable. The term applicant will be used throughout to reflect the fact that an individual is applying to have his or her prior learning assessed or recognised. Learner will be used where it is more specifically appropriate, as in lifelong learner.

### **Principles for the recognition of prior learning**

The principles for the recognition of prior learning are addressed to education and training providers, awarding bodies, and those in the workplace. The principles are available to those who are developing systems of recognition of prior learning and to those who wish to make use of the prior learning that has been recognised by other providers or awarding bodies.

<sup>3</sup> These principles are set out under the following main headings: individual entitlements; obligations of stakeholders; confidence and trust; and, credibility and legitimacy.



### *General*

- The recognition of prior learning will give value to all learning, no matter how that learning is achieved.
- Participation in recognition is a voluntary matter for the individual.
- The recognition of prior learning will be part of an inclusive approach to learning by education and training providers and awarding bodies.
- Recognition of prior learning will provide opportunities for access, transfer and progression to education and training and for the achievement of an award.
- Recognition of prior learning will provide opportunities for learners to participate on an active basis in society in general and within a workplace context.

### *Quality*

- Recognition of prior learning should be fully embedded within the quality assurance procedures of providers and awarding bodies.
- Recognition of prior learning should maintain the standards of the National Framework of Qualifications and its awards.
- Processes for the recognition of prior learning should be credible to all stakeholders.
- The outcomes-based approach of the National Framework of Qualifications supports the attainment of awards through diverse routes, including the recognition of prior learning, and such recognition of prior learning will maintain and support the standards associated with the National Framework of Qualifications and its awards.

### *Communication/documentation*

- A clear statement of the policies, processes and practices of the education and training providers and awarding bodies for the recognition of prior learning should be available to all users.
- Processes and practices for the recognition of prior learning should be clearly documented.
- Processes and practices for the recognition of prior learning should be communicated openly and clearly to all. (Applicants, education and training staff and assessors).

### *Assessment*

- Assessment criteria for the recognition of prior learning should be published, made explicit to applicants, and applied consistently and fairly.
- Assessment criteria should be based on learning outcomes of awards or standards of knowledge, skill and competence set out in the National Framework of Qualifications and by the relevant awarding bodies.
- Assessment and verification mechanisms for the recognition of prior learning should be appropriate and fit for purpose.

### *Process*

- Guidance and support should be available for applicants and all involved in the processes of recognition of prior learning.
- An appropriate appeals mechanism should be in place.
- Recognition of prior learning processes should be easy to understand, fair and transparent, and be conducted in a reasonable time frame.
- The recognition of prior learning processes should be organised in such a way that they do not create barriers for the applicant.
- Appropriate resources to support the processes for the recognition of prior learning should be in place.

## **Operational Guidelines**

### **Introduction**

These operational guidelines build upon the principles above. The Authority considers that in developing a policy and approach to promoting co-ordination and harmonisation of the processes for the Recognition of Prior Learning, it is helpful and appropriate for the Authority to develop operational guidelines for further and higher education and training awarding bodies and providers. The intention is that these guidelines will give an exemplar of the nature

of the arrangements that further and higher education and training awarding bodies and providers (the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology, referred to in these guidelines as the further and higher education and training awarding bodies) should consider putting in place.

In so doing, the Authority is building on the approach set out in the Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners that it published in October 2003.

### **Awards Councils**

In its policies, actions and procedures, the Authority noted the particular role of the awards Councils and set out that:

*“while the Authority has an overall role in developing the policy approach to access, transfer and progression, the Councils have the key facilitatory and, indeed, regulatory role in ensuring that the policies of the Authority are appropriately developed, and that the procedures set by the Authority are implemented by providers (both providers with programmes leading to [or to lead to,] the awards of the Councils and providers with delegated authority to make awards). While the Councils do not have a role in programme provision, in terms of either development or support, it is their role to ensure that the procedures of the Authority in relation to access, transfer and progression are implemented by providers and to do so, in part, through their approaches to performing their functions in relation to validation and delegation.*

*“Arising out of these statutory roles and responsibilities, actions and procedures have been defined to elaborate the part to be played by the awards Councils in implementing each of the policies of the Authority for the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression.”*

The awards Councils have a unique responsibility in relation to the recognition of prior learning in that they have a statutory function to make awards to persons who apply and who, in the opinion of the Council, have achieved the relevant learning outcomes. It is thus possible for a learner to achieve an award without participation in a specific programme. It is open to the Councils to seek the assistance of a provider in confirming that the necessary learning outcomes have been achieved before an award is made in this way. Indeed, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council has now commenced the implementation of this statutory provision.

In the drafting of these guidelines, the Authority is requesting that the Councils would develop policies and procedures for themselves and for the providers with programmes leading to, or to lead to, their awards or delegated authority to make awards in a manner consistent with the national approach set out in these guidelines.

### **Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training**

In its policies, actions and procedures, the Authority noted the particular role of providers of further and higher education and training and set out that:

*“Under the terms of the Qualifications Act and under their own legislation and charters, providers of further and higher education and training generally have their own rights and responsibilities. Providers, such as those who will have programmes validated by either of the two Councils or with authority delegated by either of the two Councils to make awards themselves, as well as other providers with independent awarding powers, such as the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology, all have essential roles to play in meeting the objectives of the Act. It is important that the arrangements put in place in the national framework of qualifications and in related matters facilitate the involvement of all of these providers in attaining the objectives of the Qualifications Act.*

*“A key function of the Authority is to determine procedures for the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression to be implemented by providers of programmes of education or training. Some of the policies set out below require a process of development before the Authority can fully establish procedures through which they will be implemented. However, a range of procedures have been formulated by the Authority at this stage to complement the effectiveness of the framework. These are to be implemented in the short term by providers: they are outlined in the following sections of this document. It should be noted that these procedures may impact on providers to varying extents, as the providers are diverse in nature, in their status as awarding bodies, and in their relationship to the awards Councils.”*

In the drafting of these guidelines, the Authority is requesting that, providers with independent awarding powers, such as the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology would consider these guidelines in the context of the development of their own procedures. In relation to providers who have programmes validated by either of the two Councils, or with authority delegated by either of the two Councils to make awards themselves, it is the intention that the policies and procedures developed by the Councils will be consistent with the guidelines.

In the case of all of these providers it is of note that the procedures established by the Authority for implementation by providers of further and higher education and training set out that:

*The Authority considers that it is appropriate to determine interim procedures for providers prior to the implementation of a national approach to credit. These procedures relate to the specification of arrangements for the recognition of prior learning by providers of education and training programmes leading to [, or to lead to,] awards. These are as follows:*

- *all providers are required to develop a statement of arrangements available in respect of each of their programmes for the recognition of prior learning, for entry, for credit towards an award and for access to a full award. These statements should define the purposes for which recognition of prior learning processes can be used, ie., to enable entry to the programme; to provide exemption from programme requirements or credit towards an award; or to establish eligibility for a full award. Where the recognition of prior learning is used to enable entry to a programme, the statement of arrangements available should indicate to learners the competences needed to succeed on the programme*
- *in relation to providers whose programmes are validated by the Councils or who have been delegated authority by a Council to make awards, this statement of arrangements must be consistent with the policies and procedures of the relevant Council.*

It is a statutory requirement that providers who have programmes validated by either of the two Councils or with authority delegated by either of the two Councils to make awards themselves, as well as the Dublin Institute of Technology, implement the Authority's procedures on access, transfer and progression. In addition, the implementation of these arrangements by the universities is to be reviewed by the Authority.

## **Elements in Guidelines**

It is suggested that further and higher education and training awarding bodies and providers would each develop policies and procedures for recognition of prior learning which would each have the following elements:

- Review and updating
- Operational approaches
- Assessment
- Applicants
- Communications

## **Breakdown of Elements**

### ***Review and updating***

- Each further and higher education and training awarding body will review and update the policies and procedures that it has in place for the recognition of prior learning following the publication of these guidelines and each body will review its policies and procedures on a regular basis in the future.

### ***Operational approaches***

- The units, modules, programmes and awards that can be achieved on the basis of recognition of prior learning should be identified.
- Where any limits are put in place on the proportion of learning that can be recognised as prior learning, these should be explicitly stated. (In the case of direct applicants, the awards Councils cannot put in place any such limits for their awards)
- The roles and responsibilities of those involved in the process should be clearly set out, for example, the applicant, the assessor, and any other persons or boards/committees involved in recognition processes.
- Process should ensure that, where possible, the applicant can complete the recognition process in a shorter time than it would take to achieve the relevant unit, module, programme or award.
- Collaboration across sectors and between awarding bodies, providers and stakeholders should be encouraged.

### **Assessment**

- Assessment of prior learning should be carried out by persons who are competent.
- Assessors and other persons involved in the recognition process should be given training and support

as appropriate.

- The development and use of a range of assessment mechanisms should be encouraged. These should be proportionate to the task and comparable to other assessment processes used to determine whether learning outcomes have been achieved.

### **Applicants**

- Applicants should be fully informed of the application process, the stages within it and the nature and range of evidence that is considered appropriate to support a claim for the recognition of prior learning, including the learning outcomes against which prior learning will be assessed.
- The availability of guidance and support to applicants in the submission of evidence for assessment will be promoted.. There should be contact points for advice and support and they should be clearly signalled.

### **Communications**

- Information for learners/applicants should be clear, accessible and fit for purpose.
- Awarding bodies should promote the availability of the recognition of prior learning.
- Awarding bodies should publish information on a regular basis describing the extent to which their policies on the recognition of prior learning have been implemented and setting out good examples of practice.

### **Implementation**

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland will address issues relating to the implementation of these principles and operational guidelines with further and higher education awarding bodies. These discussions will include the identification and addressing of implementation issues. A key issue in this regard is the resourcing for the implementation of these principles and operational guidelines. The Authority's view is that there needs to be an agreed, shared and equitable basis on which to proceed in this regard.

*National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, June 2005*

END

## 2.2 Policies and Procedures for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

June 2008

Revised document to Academic Council 25 June 2008 for adoption as Institute policy and to be made available in the public domain

### 1. Overarching Principles

- 1.1 The DIT is committed to fully complying with the NQAI document: Principles and Operational Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education and Training, June 2005.  
The principles and guidelines in that document inform the policy and procedures elements following below.
- 1.2 The DIT currently provides opportunities for entry, transfer, progression, advanced entry and module exemptions based on APCL (accreditation of prior certificated learning), facilitates APEL (accreditation of prior experiential learning) for the same purposes, and facilitates combinations of both APCL and APEL when appropriate, other than at the final stage of an award. These practices should continue with enhancement as recommended in this document.
- 1.3 The DIT is committed to the principles of transparency, equity and fairness in RPL and to the principle of valuing all learning regardless of the mode or place of its acquisition. In this regard RPL is fully embedded in Academic Quality Enhancement Procedures and General Assessment Regulations.
- 1.4 The DIT will consider RPL at award stage and possible achievement a full award by RPL in relation only to its own current and legacy awards in the first instance (with the exception of a doctorate by publications and/or artifacts and/or public service) and only where such processes do not compromise the standard of its awards or public confidence in them. Any further provision in this regard will require separate approval by Academic Council.
- 1.5 The DIT accepts the principle that RPL is an academic activity and should only be performed by academic staff competent in the process. External advice and advice from professional/regulatory bodies may be sought when appropriate for specific programmes and fields of practice.
- 1.6 RPL for progression within DIT awards does not require the applicant to relinquish any prior awards on conferral of a higher award.
- 1.7 RPL Principles and Procedures make no significant changes to existing arrangements for access, transfer, entry at advanced standing or progression, or to any existing related arrangements in that regard other than enhancing such arrangements with the inclusion of APEL where appropriate.

### 2. Definitions

- 2.1 In the nomenclatures APCL and APEL accreditation refers to the process of identification, assessment and formal acknowledgement of past learning. The term accreditation of prior learning refers to the range of approaches used to formally recognise that learning has taken place. The summative RPL process is concerned only with demonstrated prior learning which can be made available for academic assessment. RPL processes can however be used for formative purposes where academic assessment or award of exemptions/credits is not involved. Summative and formative processes for RPL should ideally identify learning needs as well as learning that has already taken place.
- 2.2 Certificated learning refers to learning which has been achieved through a formal programme and which has been formally assessed.
- 2.3 Experiential learning refers to learning that has been achieved through paid work, through voluntary work, through life activities or through independent study, and which has not been formally assessed. For the purpose of this policy and procedures document, prior experiential learning refers to learning from work, private study and life activities which is appropriate for submission for academic judgement and for recognition by the DIT in relation to its awards.

### 3. Limitations of RPL

- 3.1 Prior learning - other than as used in internal transfer between DIT programmes - is normally achieved before registration on a DIT programme, but this definition does not exclude the right of a registered student to apply for module exemptions on the basis of concurrent learning achieved either in the DIT or elsewhere as negotiated with, and approved by, the programme team.
- 3.2 RPL credits/module exemptions approved in the DIT apply only to its own programmes and awards. RPL credits awarded by the DIT do not apply to programmes in any other organisation unless previously negotiated, agreed and formally recorded for the purposes of access, transfer or progression.
- 3.3 RPL credits and exemptions apply only to the individual registered on a receiving programme or to a cohort of learners registered on a receiving programme.
- 3.4 The DIT will not engage in negotiation with applicants regarding credits or module exemptions offered by other organisations.
- 3.5 While in principle RPL is available for all modules, each programme validation document should be explicit regarding the amount of RPL offered and about the programme modules against which students may make an RPL claim, with specific outline of APCL and APEL, as well as specifics of RPL on the basis of recognised professional qualifications or membership of professional bodies.
- 3.6 The DIT will normally consider only one RPL application by an individual resulting in access, advanced entry, progression, exemption or award: multiple applications for multiple exemptions/awards drawing upon the same body of evidence of learning will not be permitted. Student records and the Diploma Supplement will facilitate monitoring in this regard.
- 3.7 RPL credits gained for elective modules or for common modules will be accepted only at the discretion of the receiving programme in relation to the cognate relevance of such credits.

### 4. Award of RPL Credits

- 4.1 RPL transfer credits may be awarded within the process of advanced entry to a DIT programme. Such transfer credits may be achieved through DIT or other programmes, or through APEL.
- 4.2 General credits are awarded when an RPL claim has been processed in relation to a stage of the receiving programme or to a set of programme modules but not necessarily in relation to individual module learning outcomes. These types of credits are awarded as exemption from a block of study (stage or named modules).
- 4.3 Specific credits are awarded when an APCL claim has been processed in relation to the module learning outcomes and credits of the receiving programme. Specific credits may be awarded where APEL is used to achieve module exemption/s. In both these cases it is usual to award the same level and number of credits as available for the module where an applicant can provide evidence of learning equivalent to the learning outcomes of the module and where RPL is acceptable for module exemptions in the first instance as outlined in the programme validation document.
- 4.4 Programme validation documents should indicate the nature and extent of RPL available for all modules and module elements. This information should also be available for students.
- 4.5 Documents should be explicit with regard to exemption from registering for a module, exemption from being assessed, and exemption from attendance but not from assessment.
- 4.6 Programme documents should be explicit regarding exemption from module elements as opposed to entire modules. (e.g. exemption from practice element but not from theory). In such cases there should be explicit arrangements for calculation of module marks to be recorded for progression or classification purposes. Recipients of such exemptions should be informed of the consequences of such exemptions for award classification purposes. Programme teams have discretion regarding recommending students towards self-study activities to enable them to achieve credits/exemption from whole modules in cases where they have readily achieved partial exemption.
- 4.7 RPL module exemptions are generally not graded. However, if module exemptions are to be offered at award stage of a programme, a system for calculating a grade may be developed based either on the grade achieved in the prior certificated learning presented in the claim in the case of DIT awards or awards recognised as equivalent, or by setting an assessment assignment in real-time to assess achievement of the module learning outcomes. Such assessment assignments may be similar to a typical assignment for the taught version of the module or synthesised from such assignments with the approval of the Course Committee and External Examiner as usual practice for examination assignment/questions.
- 4.8 Programme documents should be explicit regarding the distinction between RPL module exemption with

credits, RPL modules with grading, and the concept of recording a notional pass mark as an indication of an exemption based on RPL. Recipients of RPL exemptions should be fully informed of the consequences of accepting any such exemptions.

- 4.9 Credit awarded for certificated learning outside the DIT, unless it maps precisely on to the learning on the receiving programme, is not normally considered as contributing to a subsequent DIT award grade/classification though it is considered for credit accumulation purposes.
- 4.10 Prior certificated learning may be considered in calculating the subsequent award grade/classification if the receiving programme is satisfied that the original programme is of sufficient level, quality and cognate similarity to permit it. This principle will apply in the first instance to DIT's own awards. It may apply to external awards with approval of the Faculty/School.

## **5. Roles and Responsibility for the award of RPL exemptions and credits**

- 5.1 The Office of the Academic Registrar is responsible for development of RPL Principles and Procedures in the first instance and thereafter Academic Council is responsible for their approval as DIT practice with delegation to Schools for implementation.
- 5.2 Schools are responsible for implementing the RPL policies and procedures agreed by Academic Council though they may be appropriately contextualised to facilitate award-specific application.
- 5.3 Schools should be explicit regarding the RPL processes used and the roles and responsibilities at all stages including the roles of Advisors and Assessors.
- 5.4 Statements of RPL arrangements at School level should be recorded to the proposed RPL Policy and Practice Office before January 2010. A proforma document will be issued in this regard.
- 5.5 Decisions regarding RPL exemptions and credits are generally the responsibility of a Programme Board/ Course Committee in the first instance with ratification at Department and School levels subsequently, except in cases where the Institute has agreed arrangements for transfer or advanced entry or where the Institute RPL policy framework requires otherwise.

## **6. Right to Apply for RPL**

- 6.1 Eligibility to apply for RPL on a DIT programme does not guarantee admission or transfer or advanced entry or award of credits or module exemptions.
- 6.2 Advanced entry or transfer to a programme may depend on places being available.
- 6.3 Exemption from programme elements may depend on an RPL facility being approved for modules on the receiving programme.

## **7. Responsibility for RPL Applications**

- 7.1 The RPL applicant is responsible for preparing the claim for entry, transfer, advanced entry, or module exemptions, though the Institute may provide guidance as a separate process to assessment of the claim through the RPL Guide for Applicants, through the RPL Policy and Practice Office or through other approved arrangements.
- 7.2 The Institute is generally responsible for processing accepted claims through Institute-wide student data recording systems, with specific responsibility at programme, Faculty, Department/School levels as normal practice for assessment, credit accumulation and award purposes.
- 7.3 The RPL guidance service proposed to be offered by the RPL Policy and Practice Office should subsequently refer the applicant to the appropriate receiving programme for assessment of the claim with agreed protocols observed.
- 7.4 Each RPL application is considered on its own merits though previous cases may be used for reference.
- 7.5 Misleading information on RPL applications leading to the erroneous award of credits may result in sanctions for the applicant.

- 7.6 Schools/Departments/Programme Teams should clearly identify the academic and administrative staff/roles responsible for managing RPL with regard to information, advice, assessment, feedback and recording. It is normal practice that advising on RPL claims is a distinct role from the assessor role: team approaches are best practice in this regard.

## 8. RPL on Student Records

- 8.1 RPL credits awarded and accepted by the applicant are recorded on the student academic record. If the RPL process resulted in a mark/grade this is indicated on the student record with the specification that it was an RPL grade.
- 8.2 Examination broadsheets for Examination Board Meeting and Progression Board Meeting should clearly indicate modules achieved through RPL where marks are not awarded.
- 8.3 BANNER and the EGB should be used to record RPL outcomes and to distinguish them from standard results for the purpose of classification.
- 8.4 The Diploma Supplement should indicate RPL elements.
- 8.5 RPL application information should be sufficient to ensure that credit is not awarded twice for DIT awards.

## 9. RPL Appeals

- 9.1 Appeals to Schools will be permitted only related to the RPL process such as on the grounds of substantial evidence being omitted/unavailable at the time of application but subsequently available.
- 9.2 Unsuccessful applications may be submitted in a second attempt but not subsequently (related to 9.1 above).
- 9.3 An interview/viva voce or other appropriate assessment mechanism may be used to substitute for a second attempt or where a portfolio/practical test was indecisive.
- 9.4 Second appeals against the outcome of an RPL claim will not be permitted following assessment of all evidence and an appeal interview.

## 10. Quality Assurance

- 10.1 RPL decisions at programme level will be subject to quality auditing.
- 10.2 Documents prepared for RPL on a programme may be subject to quality audit by the DIT or where relevant by a professional body.
- 10.3 External Examiners may be involved at award stage.

## 11. Timeframes

- 11.1 Applications for RPL for admission should normally be submitted at least eight weeks before the commencement date of a programme.
- 11.2 RPL claims for module exemptions should normally only be made when a conditional or unconditional offer of a place on the programme is made by the DIT. If the RPL claim is being made for modules in the first semester of the programme then claims should be made in sufficient time to process them before the commencement date. As a principle, RPL applications should be processed and outcomes notified to applicants in a minimum of four weeks after receipt of claim documents from the applicant.
- 11.3 The RPL timeframe should allow for sufficient guidance and advice in relation to applications.
- 11.4 Applicants should confirm in writing their acceptance of RPL awards for module exemptions or block credits. Applicants should not normally defer acceptance of a place subject to RPL assessment decisions.



## 12. Costs/Fees

- 12.1 Currently there is no cost for processing RPL for admission.
- 12.2 The DIT does not normally charge a fee for processing RPL claims for advanced entry or module exemptions/credits but may do so in future.
- 12.3 Fees for processing RPL claims for module exemption should not exceed half the module fee as a principle and in general should reflect the staff effort involved in the assessment process and the capacity of the applicant to afford it.
- 12.4 Payment of fees for processing RPL claims for module exemption may not be interpreted as payment for credits or for admission.

## 13. Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)

- 13.1 Programme teams may work with the RPL Office in supporting APEL claims for module exemptions. A procedure for a DIT-wide system of processing APEL claims may be developed in the future. However, individual programme teams may opt to maintain existing systems, in which case they should record these systems to the RPL Office using the proforma descriptor.
- 13.2 Applicants for credits/module exemptions based on APEL are required to submit relevant evidence of prior learning within the appropriate guidelines within the principle that APEL applies to learning achieved in relation to the learning outcomes of the receiving programme/modules and not to the experience itself.
- 13.3 The type of assessment used for prior experiential learning will be decided by the receiving programme team and may vary from year to year depending on the purpose of the provision and the type of prospective applicants subject to quality assurance approval. In all cases APEL assessments should be appropriate and fit for purpose.
- 13.4 Written guidance on APEL assessments will be available from the RPL Office and from individual programme offices. Where assessments are designed for APEL claims the form of assessment, assessment criteria and marking scheme must be agreed and recorded for quality assurance purposes and made available to applicants in adherence to the principles of transparency and fairness.
- 13.5 APEL applications will normally be required to supply evidence of learning from experience in relation to the learning outcomes of the stage of the programme or the modules concerned. Such evidence may be compiled in the form of a dossier or portfolio of documents as indicated by the RPL guidelines from the receiving programme and generally includes photocopies of original certificates (not internet versions) acquired at the appropriate level, work record and job descriptions, publications, artefacts produced, awards, prizes, testimonials etc.. Applicants are generally expected to write a reflective piece in support of their application to show an awareness of their experiential learning in relation to the receiving programme and to show their capacity to succeed on and benefit from participation in the receiving programme.
- 13.6 APEL applicants are normally interviewed and if appropriate offered a challenge/performance test.
- 13.7 Observation of work practice for APEL purposes should be undertaken only where other assessment methods are unavailable or inappropriate and mindful of the ethical aspects of such observation.
- 13.8 Assessment of APEL claims should be processed by academic staff competent in APEL.
- 13.9 The criteria for APEL assessment should include, inter alia: level, relevance, validity, sufficiency, authenticity, reliability and currency as appropriate to the receiving programme. The criteria of 'level', 'relevance', 'sufficiency' and 'currency' should be articulated in relation to the needs of the receiving programme.
- 13.10 Applicants with certificates of learning which are more than five years old should indicate how they have kept their knowledge, skills and competences up-to-date in the intervening years.
- 13.11 APEL assessments should be conducted in a manner that permits scrutiny by internal and/or external examiners. Dossiers/portfolios of APEL evidence should be maintained for scrutiny at Examination/Progression Boards and for External Examining at the final award stage if required. These documents may be maintained either by the Institute or by the student as agreed in the RPL process for the normal terms for all assessment documents contributing to an award.
- 13.12 Timely feedback on the outcomes of an APEL process should be given to applicants including any additional learning/skills acquisition required: the onus to acquire such learning/skills is on the applicant though the receiving programme may indicate the sources of, and facilitate attendance at, appropriate formal sessions without cost to the applicant, and without any Institute responsibility for successful learning/skills acquisition.

#### **14. Assessment of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL)**

- 14.1 APCL applications generally include copies of relevant certificates, and where requested, transcripts of examination results, copies of course curricula, reading lists, examination papers etc.
- 14.2 NARIC or other appropriate data bases may be used for comparison of awards.
- 14.3 Programme validation document may indicate the types of certificated learning accepted as equivalent for the purpose of RPL. Where such information is not available the Programme Board should make informed decisions and record the decisions as general precedents/cases.
- 14.4 Programme Boards should decide if prior learning through research in the form of dissertations/theses is acceptable for APCL or if exemptions are offered in relation to taught elements of a programme only.

#### **15. RPL for Cohorts**

- 15.1 Where cohorts of APEL applicants are facilitated to submit claims for advanced entry or module exemptions, the validation document of the receiving programme should clearly indicate the process for assessing the claims and for judging the capacity to succeed and benefit of all cohort members.
- 15.2 In cases where cohorts of applicants are afforded access with advanced entry, the receiving programme should indicate the supports available to induct the cohort and its individual members and to provide sufficient transition/bridging studies.
- 15.3 The award of RPL credits for a cohort and for an individual applicant is the responsibility of the receiving programme within the approval and quality assurance procedures of the School and Faculty and within the RPL policy framework of the Institute.

#### **16. Information Provision and Support for Applicants**

- 16.1 The Institute will provide sufficient information on RPL on its website and in its recruitment literature.
- 16.2 The RPL Policy and Practice Office will act as a first point of contact for RPL enquires and for referrals from the Admissions Office or programme where appropriate. A proforma referral document will be used to progress enquires to Admissions Office and to the relevant School/Department/Programme team.
- 16.3 A limited number of workshops on APEL will be available through the RPL Office for prospective applicants at specific stages of the academic year only in relation to Institute programmes and awards and only with the prior agreement of the programmes involved in APEL.
- 16.4 RPL may be integrated into induction sessions and/or timetabled as formal programme modules as decided by programme teams or specific functions with an access remit.
- 16.5 RPL arrangements should be noted in programme handbooks for students.
- 16.6 Online and hardcopy guidance on RPL will be available at Institute level. Information provided to RPL applicants will be sufficiently detailed to offer a realistic profile of the process and what is required for a successful application. This information will include a self-assessment exercise in relation to learning in higher education generally and in relation to the general area of study sought.

#### **17. Supports for academic staff involved with RPL**

- 17.1 The DIT will provide sufficient structured opportunities for staff to be competent in implementing its RPL principles and procedures. In this regard The RPL Policy and Practice Office will provide on-demand workshops and seminars for Schools in addition to consultation services and a formal CPD 5 credit programme in the theory and practice of RPL in higher education. Conceptual and Practice Guides will be available for staff as well as sufficient web-based resources.

## 18. Monitoring and Evaluation

RPL procedures will be subject to monitoring through six main procedures as follows:

1. applicant/student evaluations of the process
2. tracking of student progress
3. compilation of Institute-wide statistics
4. tracking of RPL enquiries
5. as an element in annual programme evaluation
6. as an element in a programme/School review.

## 19. Pedagogical dimensions of RPL

19.1 RPL is essentially a judgement on past learning achieved through formal curricula, through private study or through work activities. Understanding the processes of learning through work is essential for APEL since the types and sites of learning will influence the nature and forms of experiential learning presented for recognition. RPL will inevitably be involved in any work-based learning (WBL) curriculum design since such programmes will inevitably start at the learning needs of the worker-learners. In this regard a CPD 5 credit course which links RPL with WBL will be available on-demand for DIT staff with a remit in these areas, thereby linking the principles and pedagogies of APEL with WBL.

END

## 2.3 RPL in revised General Assessment Regulations, June 2009

### Chapter Eight: Recognition and Assessment of Prior Learning

In instances where RPL is used for initial entry, advanced entry, progression, or transfer, the process is broadly one of 'recognition' for admission to a programme rather than a process of assessment of learning in relation to a programme or award *per se*. In instances where RPL is used for exemption from a programme module, or from an element of a module, or for a whole award, the process is essentially one of assessment. The purpose of assessment in these latter instances is to establish if sufficient and appropriate prior learning, either certificated, or experiential, or in combination, has been acquired to justify the exemption or award sought. RPL for exemption or award, therefore, is subject to General Assessment Regulations of the Institute specifically as follows:

- a. Assessment of prior learning is normally related only to the learning outcomes of the award, programme, modules, or elements of modules, concerned.
- b. Assessment of prior learning should be carried out only by staff who are competent in assessment of the programme or award concerned in an RPL application using normal programme arrangements for internal and external examining.
- c. Assessment methods used for RPL should be appropriate and fit for purpose.
- d. Module exemptions awarded on the basis of RPL should attract the same number of ECTS credits as the module itself.
- e. Programme documents and student handbooks should indicate the extent of RPL permitted in relation to exemption from modules, exemption from elements of modules, or for achievement of a full award.
- f. Programme documents and student handbooks should indicate if modules exemption on the basis of prior learning are graded for award classification purposes or awarded as exemptions with credits only. In cases where graded exemptions are available, the criteria for assessment should be clearly articulated the approved programme Document.
- g. Student handbooks for programmes which permit RPL should indicate the level of support available for preparation of an RPL claim as well as indicating the form/s of assessment used, together with the assessment criteria to be applied.
- h. Where exemption is awarded for an element of a module, programme documents and student handbooks should indicate arrangements for award of marks.
- i. Students who successfully achieve module exemptions on the basis of assessment of prior learning should be fully informed of the consequences for marks and classification purposes.
- j. Students who seek and achieve module exemptions and who subsequently re-consider should have the right to decline module exemptions and to take modules in the taught mode.
- k. Exemptions achieved on the basis of RPL should be entered into the student record through BANNER or other appropriate system using EX. A notional pass mark of 40% should not be used to represent a module exemption based on RPL as it may have consequences for progression, compensation, and/or classification.
- l. Documents/materials/products used for successful RPL exemptions or awards should be available to Examination and Progression Boards in the same way as traditional assessment documents/materials/products.

END

## 2.4 RPL Matters in Handbook for Academic Quality Enhancement, June 2010, *inter alia*

### Summary of Quality Enhancement procedures pages iv-v

#### Recognition of Prior Learning

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a process used in the DIT for the following purposes:

- to achieve entry to a programme of study at initial or advanced stage
- to achieve exemption from an element/s of a programme
- to transfer from one programme to another
- to achieve a full award.

To ensure quality enhanced RPL practices at programme, Department and School levels careful cognisance should be taken in validation and review processes of the following:

- a. DIT policies and procedures for RPL approved by Academic Council in June 2008.
- b. General RPL Implementation Guidelines in line with nationally agreed RPL Principles and Operational Guidelines 2005.
- c. Chapter 8 of General Assessment Regulations, June 2009 in relation to assessment of prior learning.
- d. The RPL-related element of the revised Module Template 2010 (M1).

### 5.7 Assessment by RPL page 45

Assessment by RPL is detailed in Chapter Eight of the General Assessment Regulations, June 2009 and represents Institute policy in this regard. The principles and procedures in that chapter are further elaborated in the text below.

Essentially assessment by RPL involves relating prior learning to the intended learning outcomes of a module or set of modules and granting the appropriate number of credits and/or module exemptions in cases of successful applications. Ideally, module descriptors should indicate arrangements for RPL, both APCL and APEL. Ideally, the sets of criteria for assessment of certified and experiential learning outlined in the RPL Implementation Guidelines for Schools should inform the process of assessment of prior learning at module level. Results of RPL assessments at module level should be noted on the Examination Results Broadsheet using Ex for module exemption and the appropriate marks where a grading system was used. If RPL is used for module exemption at an award classification stage, the arrangements for calculation of the overall classification based on marks should be explicit in programme documents.

### RPL in Student Handbook

G6

page 113

#### ii. Programme details

- a. duration of the programme and minimum and maximum periods of registration
- b. list of those lecturers on the programme together with an outline of their areas of interest
- c. class timetables
- d. list of (a) recommended and (b) reference textbooks
- e. general schedule of examinations and assessments, relative weightings of courses/modules, re-checks and appeals
- f. regulations for progression through the programme
- g. regulations for module exemptions based on RPL
- h. recognition of the programme by appropriate professional bodies.

Dublin Institute of Technology

<i>N Module</i>	<i>Pre-Requisite Modules code(s)</i>	<i>Co-Requisite Modules code(s)</i>	<i>ISCED Code</i>	<i>ECTS Credits</i>	<i>Module Code</i>	<i>Module Title</i>

This Header should be repeated on each page of the Module

**Module author:** Person(s) responsible for writing the module.

**Module Description:**

In this section a brief description of the general subject of the module. Statements about how the module is structured into Knowledge (breadth, kind, range), Know-how and skill (range and selectivity) and Competence (context, role, learning to learn, insight). Structure should map onto the learning outcomes.

**Module aim:**

The aim of this module is to.....

**Learning Outcomes:**

On completion of this module, the learner will be able to.....

**Learning and Teaching Methods:**

When designing the module, tutors should consider the variety of learning methods, which may be used to achieve the module learning outcomes. This section should state these processes for the module. For example: lectures, discussion, role-play, case study, problem-solving exercises, video, film, work-based learning, readings, project work, self-directed learning, dissertation, computer-based learning, ODL, correspondence, or a combination of methods.

**Module content:**

Description of syllabus content covered in module.

**Module Assessment**

Statement on the methods of assessment to be used to measure the stated learning outcomes of the module. Statements on proportion of marks allocated to each element of assessment in the Module (Practical, Theory, Continuous Assessment etc).

Statements on performance requirements in individual elements of Module, if any: e.g.- minimum performance threshold.

**Statement about module assessment based on RPL (APCL and APEL) including the methods of assessment to be used to measure the achievement of the stated learning outcomes of the module.**

**Recommended Reading:** (author, date, title, publisher)

**Web references, journals and other:**

**Further Details:** e.g. class size, contact hours. To be delivered in one semester or year-long.

Date of Academic Council approval:.....

END

## 2.6 PhD by publication – extract from Postgraduate Research Regulations (Edition 5, draft 6)

### **Chapter 4 Regulations for the award of PhD on the basis of publications**

These regulations for the award of PhD on the basis of publications mirror closely those described already for the conventional PhD in the Institute, thus ensuring the same high quality.

#### 4.1 Eligibility criteria for registration

In order to be eligible for registration for a PhD on the basis of publications

- the candidate will normally have at least a 2.1 honours degree (level 8) or equivalent
- the candidate should complete a Preliminary Application form and forward it with the following supporting documentation to the Office of Graduate Studies:
  1. a curriculum vitae
  2. a small number of relevant examples of publications, a detailed list of publications and a brief summary of those publications or any other items which are likely to be included in the final submission for the PhD (on the basis of publications), even if not yet published
  3. a brief critical summary of the publications to be selected for the submission. This summary should be approximately 2000 words in length and should seek to contextualise the selected publications, indicate the methodology(ies) adopted, demonstrate their coherence and identify the contribution(s) to the advancement of knowledge of the research which they report.
  4. the names of two persons who are able to provide academic references relevant to the proposed PhD candidature.
  5. a statement indicating whether or not additional research activity may be required in order to convert the publications to an integrated whole and if so, an outline of the necessary work.
  6. the application fee.

#### 4.2 The preliminary stage - evaluation panel

Applications for registration for a PhD on the basis of publications are evaluated by the Graduate Research School Board. The board appoints an evaluation panel who makes a preliminary evaluation as to the quality and coherence of the publications to be submitted for assessment for a PhD on the basis of publications and of the likelihood of a successful submission.

The evaluation panel comprises

- one external reviewer,
- the relevant Director/Dean of Faculty, Head of School, Head of Faculty Research or appropriate nominees,
- the potential supervisor(s),
- another, independent, member of staff in the relevant discipline,

The panel considers

- (a) the quality and coherence of the publications to be submitted for examination for a PhD (on the basis of publications)
- (b) the likelihood of the proposed submission meeting the criteria for the award of a PhD.
- (c) if provision can be made for adequate supervision

The panel may make one of the following recommendations to the Graduate Research School Board; that the candidate

- (a) be permitted to register for a PhD on the basis of publications
- (b) not be permitted to register for a PhD on the basis of publications
- (c) be advised on the nature of publications which might, at a future date, permit them to register for the PhD on the basis of publications.

Applicants passing this preliminary stage become eligible for registration for a PhD on the basis of publications, once a PGR1C form is approved by the Head of School and forwarded to the Graduate Research School.

The normal duration of registration of part-time study leading to submission of a PhD on the basis of publication is usually up to 1 year from first registration.

Candidates who do not pass the preliminary stage have the right of appeal. The academic appeals procedure is set out in the Institute's General Assessment Regulations.

### 4.3 Supervision

An experienced PhD supervisor is appointed to:

- (i) guide the candidate in the selection of publications for inclusion in the thesis for submission
- (ii) guide the candidate as to whether further publications are needed
- (iii) support and advise on the development of the critical supporting documentation
- (iv) guide the candidate in relation to the coherence of the body of work to be included in the thesis
- (v) advise the candidate in relation to any research training they may require.

### 4.4 Thesis format and submission

The thesis format in the case of a submission for a PhD (on the basis of publications) is substantially as described in chapter 3. However, in this case the main body of the thesis takes the following form:

- (a) A series or set of publications with a supporting and overarching document, which draws the publications together and critically appraises them
- (b) The thesis must be of a standard equivalent to that of a traditional PhD in the relevant academic area and demonstrate the candidate's original contribution to knowledge
- (c) The number of publications will depend on both the academic area and the type of publication included in the thesis, but there should normally be between three and ten peer-reviewed publications included. Such publications may include peer-reviewed papers, book chapters, monographs, books, scholarly editions of a text, technical reports, creative work in relevant areas, or other artefacts.
- (d) The publications included should normally involve work published in the 10 years before the date of submission. These publications should not have been used in submission for another award with the Institute or in any other higher education institution. Normally, the majority of the publications should have been published already, but it will be possible to include publications (some 20% – 30% of the total) which are in press or have been accepted for publication.
- (e) Where a candidate includes jointly-authored publications in their thesis, they should provide a statement declaring the extent to which each publication is their own work and this should be certified by all authors concerned. This statement should be bound within the thesis.
- (f) The overarching critical document, of approximately 10,000 words in length, should set the published work in the context of existing literature, critically describe the candidate's research methodology and evaluate the contribution that the research in the publications makes to the advancement of the discipline area. It should draw out and stress the coherence of these publications, linking them to the methodology adopted.

The process involved in submitting and examining the thesis is set out in chapter 3 of this document.

END



## 2.7 FAQs about RPL for DIT staff

*For general information purposes only*

**1. What is meant by prior learning, prior certificated learning, prior experiential learning, formal learning, non-formal, informal learning etc?**

In the DIT context **prior learning** generally means learning which occurred before applying for, and being accepted on to, a DIT programme.

**Prior certificated learning** generally refers to learning that resulted from structured education and training programmes where assessment and an award were involved. Usually there is a certificate to prove such learning. It should be possible to place such learning in relation to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) with regard to level and size (major, minor, special purpose, supplemental etc.) This is usually regarded as formal learning.

**Prior experiential learning** generally refers to learning achieved through work, voluntary activities or independent study. This kind of learning may have resulted in certificates of various kinds and may, or may not, have involved formal assessment in the academic sense. Sometimes the term non-formal learning is used to describe this learning when it results in a certificate but not one that is easily placed on the NQF. Informal learning generally refers to learning achieved that was not part of a structured event, such as learning from voluntary activities. Higher education practitioners generally distinguish between certificated and non-certificated/experiential learning without necessarily using the terms 'non-formal' and 'informal'.

**2. Does the DIT have an agreed policy position on RPL?**

Yes! The DIT Policies and Procedures document for RPL was approved by Academic Council in June 2008 and is available in the RPL page on the DIT staff intranet.

**3. Does the DIT have a code of practice for RPL?**

The RPL policy document June 2008 indicates the recommended procedures to be followed with regard to quality assurance, recording, equity, etc.. Additional details are included in the RPL Implementation Guide for Schools available on the RPL page on the DIT staff intranet and in the next part of this guide.

**4. What can RPL be used for at undergraduate level?**

At undergraduate level RPL can be used in a number of ways, including the following:

- a. for formative/capacity building and identification of levels and volume of prior learning as well as identifying current and future learning needs. This type of RPL is not usually assessed or awarded credits, though the RPL exercise may be included in a module that is assessed and awarded credits
- b. for the purpose of entry where the standard entry requirements are not met
- c. for the purpose of advanced entry
- d. for the purpose of transfer from one programme to another
- e. for transfer from one providing institution to another
- f. for exemption from programme modules where the applicant can provide evidence of having achieved the learning outcomes already
- g. for achievement of a whole award, usually where there may be an award of a lower level in the same cognate area, such as a holder of a National Diploma which is now placed at level 7 wishing to achieve a level 8 award in the same discipline/subject area and who has significant relevant, work-based learning.

**5. What can RPL be used for at postgraduate level?**

- a. At postgraduate level RPL can be used for non-standard entry purposes.
- b. Some postgraduate programmes may also offer module exemptions on the basis of RPL e.g. where a student with a PhD may be exempted from a research methods module at Postgraduate Diploma or Masters level. Postgraduate applicants with significant, relevant work-based experience may be exempted from programme modules on a case-by-case basis.

- c. A PhD by publications could be said to constitute an RPL award.
- 6. How would we organise RPL information sessions or training sessions?**  
 Contact the RPL Policy Officer: Dr Anne Murphy  
 Phone: 01 402 7507  
 Email: [anne.murphy@dit.ie](mailto:anne.murphy@dit.ie)  
 There are several levels of information and training available, from general introductory information, to workshops, to a 5 Credit CPD course in RPL.  
 Individual DIT staff, programme teams, Departments or Schools may request RPL support at any time.
- 7. What is available on-line about RPL?**  
 The DIT website has information related to RPL for the public.  
<http://www.dit.ie/services/academic/recognitionofpriorlearningrpl/>  
 Additional information will be made available as appropriate.  
 Information for staff is available on the staff intranet.
- 8. Who is the first point of contact for enquiries to the DIT?**  
 It is likely that enquiries about RPL will be received by a number of individuals, services and functions, including the Recruitment and Admissions Office, Office of Graduate Studies, Access Office, Mature Student Recruitment Office, Careers Service, Students' Union etc.. It is also likely that academic staff whose names and contact details are in recruitment and publicity material for programmes may be contacted by the public.  
 The RPL Policy Officer will be noted on the website as a first point of direct contact.  
 Enquiries to the RPL Officer are normally re-directed to the relevant DIT staff and may be logged for quality assurance and evaluation purposes.
- 9. How do RPL applicants know about RPL in DIT programme?**
- The DIT website has a webpage about RPL under the heading:  
*Studying at the DIT*  
<http://www.dit.ie/services/academic/recognitionofpriorlearningrpl/>
  - The Admissions and Recruitment Office mentions RPL in its FAQs section.
  - The Mature Student Access Office may have information about RPL in addition to general access information.
  - Brochures for Faculties indicate entry requirements that include RPL.
  - On-line information for Schools may also indicate RPL.
  - New students may be informed about RPL for module exemptions, at induction sessions.
- 10. How would a potential applicants self-assess themselves before considering an RPL application?**  
 The RPL page on the DIT website will eventually include a simple exercise in self-assessment in relation to prior learning. However, this exercise will be for information and formative purposes only and will not represent an assessment activity in relation to any specific programme.  
 An e-portfolio system is also planned.
- 11. How is an enquiry referred to staff at programme level?**  
 The Recruitments and Admission Office, Mature Student Access office, and RPL Policy Office have established procedures for referrals of enquiries to the relevant Departments/Schools/Programme Co-ordinators.
- 12. How should we deal with RPL enquiries?**
- It is likely that programme documents will indicate management systems for RPL.
  - If programme teams are interested in developing procedures to deal with RPL enquiries the RPL Officer will assist.

- c. A generic flowchart indicating the stages in processing an RPL application is included in this Guide.

**13. What are the roles and responsibilities in relation to RPL in the Department and School?**

- a. It is usual for advanced entry and module exemptions to be managed at programme level with oversight at Department and School levels.
- b. The RPL Implementation Guidelines, in part 3 of this Guide, provide some direction in relation to describing RPL processes and management issues at programme, Department and School levels.

**14. How are RPL submissions/assessments managed electronically for recording purposes?**

There is not yet an agreed Institute-wide system of electronically recording RPL decisions for assessment and award classification purposes. However, good current practice in this regard is likely to inform future agreed decisions.

**15. Ideally, how are RPL decisions recorded before an Institute-wide system is agreed?**

- a. RPL decisions to refuse or award RPL for any purpose should ideally be recorded at Programme level initially and thereafter at Department and School levels.
- b. Ideally statistical information regarding RPL decisions should be easily accessible.

**16. How does the appeal system work?**

The ground for appeal of an RPL decision are outlined in the RPL Policy Document June 2008 based on the principle that relevant information not available at the time of application may be presented at appeal, once only.

**17. What are the risks for staff in implementing RPL?**

- a. There are no greater risks in implementing RPL than in any other process for admission or for assessment, provided there is transparency, good practice in implementation and clear recording.
- b. A perceived risk might be where RPL exemptions without grading may impact less than favourably on final award classification. Students should be appropriately informed of any such risks.
- c. The key principles of never disadvantaging a student, and of using RPL assessment methods that are appropriate and fit-for-purpose, are likely to guard against perceived or real risks.

**18. How is quality maintained?**

- a. The RPL Policy and Implementation Guidelines outline good practice to ensure quality.
- b. The revised Quality Enhancement Handbook contains information of quality aspects of RPL .

**19. How does a full award by RPL work?**

- a. A possible instance for applying for a full award on the basis of RPL might be in cases where a former DIT student was unable for *bona fide* reasons to complete a programme of study but wishes to do so by RPL. It may be the case that no exit award was issued but that considerable assessment results were recorded. It would be feasible in such a case to arrange for assessment of subsequent formal learning and work-related learning to satisfy the learning outcomes of the 'missed' element/s of the award, and possibly to relate the entire learning to any new appropriate award in a similar cognate area. Discretion in this regard rests essentially at Programme/Department and School levels.
- b. The DIT has provision for the award of a PhD by Publications and societal contribution. This is essentially RPL. The process also has a formative dimension in that it indicates to applicants the levels and types of evidence required but not yet acquired.
- c. Technically it is possible for an applicant to challenge the programme learning outcomes of a full award on the basis of RPL. In such a case the DIT as an awarding body is initially responsible for management of the application and for assessment of the claim, though the onus is always on the applicant to prove that he/she has met the learning outcomes of the programme.

- 20. What are RPL trends nationally and internationally?**
- The trend nationally is to standardise RPL Practice within the document agreed by the national RPL Advisory Group: Principles and Operational Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education, NQAI, June 2005 included in this part of the guide.
  - The trend internationally is to make comparability of systems easier through sharing of principles and practices within the Bologna and Copenhagen frameworks, the European Qualifications Framework and the European Higher Education Area as illustrated in the first part of this guide.
  - The current trend is for levels of awards related to discipline areas and work sectors, which will inevitably influence how RPL is used in the near future internationally.
- 21. Where might I get scholarly information about RPL?**
- There is considerable scholarly information available from the RPL Policy Officer on request.  
A library repository is planned for 2009-2010.  
There are also structured opportunities to consider the scholarly dimensions of RPL in the CPD course for staff.
- 22. How much of a programme can be available through RPL?**
- There is no explicit regulation in this regard as Institute-wide policy as each programme document specifies its arrangements. As RPL is considered an academic activity, it is presumed that academic judgement is appropriately exercised at programme level with appropriate levels of oversight.
- 23. Are module exemptions graded?**
- It is possible to grade module exemptions based on RPL, both certificated and experiential. Grading criteria and marking schemes should be agreed, explicit and fairly applied.  
RPL candidates who seek graded exemptions based on previous award results should be informed of the risks for overall classification.
- 24. How are RPL credits managed in the award classification process?**
- Again, at award classification stage systems of grading RPL exemptions should be explicit and fairly applied. Applicants may withdraw an application following academic advice and take the taught mode.
- 25. Can marks from previous certificated learning be used again for award classification purposes?**
- In principle this is possible. In practice it is also possible. However, good academic judgement and explicit advice are important in such instances.
- 26. How can we combine RPL and learning contracts where an applicant has most of the learning outcomes achieved for a programme or module?**
- There is increasing use of partial RPL exemption combined with appropriate learning contracts. The benefit here is that the student achieves all the learning outcomes of the module and 'revisits' earlier learning.  
It is also possible to grade such arrangements in the normal way for classification purposes.
- 27. How can we prevent an applicant using the same RPL evidence for multiple awards?**
- An applicant's record of awards should be available on application to a programme.  
Good academic judgement at admissions stage will prevent multiple awards.
- 28. Do we facilitate applicants who want to agree RPL exemptions and credits before applying?**
- The DIT admissions procedure requires a formal application before consideration of advanced entry, credits or module exemptions. However, advice may be sought in this regard before application which does not constitute an offer or formal agreement. Advanced entry is obviously offered at the point of admission. Module exemptions on a programme are normally considered when an applicant has accepted a place and is due to commence the programme or at the start of the programme.
- 29. Who explains the RPL process to enquiries from the general public?**
- Enquiries can come from a number of sources. The DIT website has information for the public with

regard to advanced entry.

Enquiries of a precise nature are frequently referred to the programme co-ordinator concerned.

**30. Can we refer enquires that come directly to us... if so what happens to them?**

If the enquiry is for admission purpose it is usual to refer it to the Admissions Office or Graduate Admissions.

Enquiries about module exemptions are usually dealt with by the programme team, and with the advice of the RPL Officer where appropriate.

**31. How are RPL exemptions dealt with on BANNER?**

Module exemptions gained through RPL without grading are recorded as EX on BANNER.

Graded RPL can be recorded in the usual way.

Final arrangements for recording RPL on the Diploma Supplement are not yet issued.

**32. Where would I get examples of RPL practice at programme level in the DIT?**

A set of recorded presentations about DIT RPL practices is available on CDROM from each School and Faculty Head of Learning Development. Additional CDROMs may be requested from the RPL Policy Officer. A CDROM is included in this Guide.

## 2.8 FAQs about RPL for applicants

**1. What precisely is RPL and what is its purpose?**

RPL stands for 'recognition of prior learning'. Its purpose is to give formal acknowledgement to past, or prior, learning. Past learning may contribute to further learning by using it to gain entry to a DIT programme at the first stage or at an advanced stage. Past learning may also be used to gain exemptions from parts of programmes (modules) on some DIT programmes, but not on all. It may also be used to transfer from one programme to another.

**2. Where would I get detailed information about RPL in the DIT?**

You will get detailed information on the DIT website at:

<http://www.dit.ie/services/academic/recognitionofpriorlearningrpl/>

**3. Who could I contact in the DIT to discuss RPL?**

The first place to contact for general information is The Recruitment and Admissions Office:

Phone – + 353 1 402 3445

Email – [admissions@dit.ie](mailto:admissions@dit.ie)

OR [anne.murphy@dit.ie](mailto:anne.murphy@dit.ie)

Your enquiry may be referred onwards to the Mature Student Recruitment Officer: [cathy.mccartney@dit.ie](mailto:cathy.mccartney@dit.ie)

However, detailed information about RPL on individual programmes may only be available from the Department offering the programme. The DIT website usually provides information about the contact numbers and email addresses for individual programme enquiries.

SEE:

<http://www.dit.ie/study/> AND <http://www.dit.ie/study/parttime/az/>

**4. What precisely is prior certificated learning?**

Prior certificated learning is formal learning which was assessed and for which a certificate was issued on completion.

**5. What is accreditation of prior certificated learning (APCL)?**

APCL is the term used to describe the process of using awards gained through formal training or education - prior certificated learning - to gain entry to a programme, to transfer to another programme, or to gain module exemptions.

**6. What is prior experiential learning?**

Prior experiential learning is learning you have acquired through work, voluntary activities or private study. It is sometimes called non-formal or informal learning.

**7. What is accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL)?**

APEL is the process of using experiential learning in support of an application for the purpose of entry to a DIT programme or application for module exemption.

**8. How could I use my prior certificated learning in the DIT?**

In general, prior certificated learning may be used for entry purposes, for entry at an advanced stage, for module exemptions, or for transfer into a DIT programme. However, the use of prior learning may vary from programme to programme.

**9. What are levels of learning as used in RPL?**

RPL processes use the same levels of learning as described in the National Framework of Qualifications (NQF). Level 6 through to Level 10 apply to higher education.

**10. How would I know the level of my prior certificated learning?**

All certificated learning/awards are now being placed on the National Qualifications Framework.  
<http://www.nqai.ie/>

**11. What are ECTS credits and RPL credits?**

ECTS credits refer to a system of describing volumes of student work on higher education programmes across Europe (European Credit Transfer System = ECTS).

The system now represents one credit as being roughly equivalent to twenty (20) learning hours, or

hours of student effort. So a module that is worth 5 credits would demand at least one hundred hours learning effort on the part of the student.

Modules may be small as in a 5 credit module, or very large as in a 30 credit module.

A year's programme would generally be designed to involve 60 or 90 or 120 credits depending on whether it is full-time or part-time.

RPL credits are credits towards a DIT award that are approved on the basis of an RPL application. It is common for programmes to have limits on the amount of RPL credits allowed. Some programmes allow no RPL credits. Others may permit RPL credits only on the basis of specific prior certificated learning.

**12. What is meant by RPL transfer credits, general RPL credits and specific RPL credits?**

The DIT policy for RPL distinguishes among three types of RPL credits – transfer, general and specific - as follows:

RPL transfer credits may be awarded within the process of advanced entry to a DIT programme. Such transfer credits may be achieved through DIT or other programmes, or through APEL.

General credits are awarded when an RPL claim has been processed in relation to a stage of the receiving programme or to a set of programme modules but not necessarily in relation to individual module learning outcomes. These types of credits are awarded as exemption from a block of study (stage or named modules).

Specific credits are awarded when an APCL claim has been processed in relation to the module learning outcomes and credits of the receiving programme. Specific credits may be awarded where APEL is used to achieve module exemption/s. In both these cases it is usual to award the same level and number of credits as available for the module where an applicant can provide evidence of learning equivalent to the learning outcomes of the module and where RPL is acceptable for module exemptions in the first instance as outlined in the programme validation document.

**13. How would I know the credit value of my prior certificated learning?**

Most certificates/awards are now related to the National Qualifications Framework. Awards on the Framework are allocated a range of ECTS credits at the different levels. For example, what is now described as a National Certificate at Level 6 may have from 60 to 90 credits attached to it.

However, you should be aware that you may not get the same number of RPL credits as your original programme credits.

**14. How would I know if my prior certificated learning could be used to gain entry to a DIT programme?**

In general, school-leavers use the CAO application system to gain a place on a full-time DIT programme.

Adults/mature students may use the mature student access scheme to gain entry to full-time, undergraduate programmes.

There are many part-time programmes which have direct entry procedures. Some programmes accept only prior certificated learning for entry purposes, others do not require a certificate and will consider prior experiential learning or a mix of both. The specific entry requirements for any DIT programme are clearly stated in recruitment literature.

**15. How would I assess myself for the value of my certificated learning?**

Some programme documents state clearly how much prior learning may be used for entry and/or for module exemptions. Sometimes lists of possible certificates are mentioned: sometimes not. It is probably best to read the recruitment literature carefully before you contact the particular course co-ordinator to get further information.

**16. How would I know if my prior certificated learning could be used to get into a DIT programme at an advanced stage?**

The DIT has a specific procedure for advanced entry to undergraduate programmes by advanced

entry : SEE <http://www.dit.ie/study/undergraduate/advancedentry/>

AND <http://www.dit.ie/study/undergraduate/advancedentry/>

AND <http://www.dit.ie/study/mature/>

Some programmes offer applicants an opportunity to apply for module exemptions based on particular prior certificated learning, other do not.

It is best to check with the particular programme you have in mind.

**17. How would I know if I could use my prior certificated learning to transfer into a DIT programme from another DIT programme?**

There are procedures for transfer available at : <http://www.dit.ie/study/undergraduate/fetac/>

**18. How would I know if I could use my prior certificated learning to get exemptions from programme modules?**

Some programmes have arrangements in place for application for module exemptions and these arrangements are generally included in the students' Programme Handbook.

It is best to enquire directly with the particular programme co-ordinator when you start your programme.

**19. When does my prior certificated learning go out of date?**

It depends: some learning, such as latin, or algebra, stay in date for a long time. Other learning, such as software design goes out of date very quickly. Applications for RPL are usually judged for their 'currency' or 'recency' of learning as well as other qualities. If your learning is quite old and you have not kept it up-to-date it might be wise not to look for module exemptions!

**20. Would I need certificates to prove my prior learning?**

Generally Yes! If you have lost your certificate you might be able to get transcripts of examination results, or a formal letter from the awarding body instead. However, it is best to check the requirements of the receiving programme in this regard.

**21. Would I need examination results as evidence?**

Frequently Yes! Especially if you are seeking advanced entry or transfer. In general you need to show your capacity to succeed and benefit from being offered a place at advanced entry or through transfer.

**22. Would I need detailed information about the courses I have successfully completed such as a syllabus or handbook?**

Frequently Yes!

**23. If I have no certificates would a letter do and whose letters might be acceptable?**

Sometimes, as 20 above.

**24. If I got my certificates in another country how could I use RPL?**

Certificates from other countries are generally measured against data bases of known awards such as the NARIC system or Qualifications Recognition. Other countries may not use similar descriptions of awards as we do, so do not be surprised if a foreign qualification seems more or less valuable than a similar Irish award.

**25. Will I get the same number of credits for RPL as I got for my prior course?**

It depends. If you are using RPL for transfer within DIT programmes you may get the same number of RPL transfer credits but this may vary from programme to programme.

You may also get the same number if there are arrangements between the DIT and other institutions for this precise purpose.

However, it may be the case that very little of your prior learning is of relevance to the new programme, and in such a case, you may get very few, or perhaps no, RPL credits.

**26. Who decides the number of RPL credits I get for my prior certificated learning?**

Each DIT programme decides about RPL credits separately, and generally keeps a record of past decisions to guide current and future decisions



- 27. Can I appeal a decision about RPL credits and apply again?**  
You can appeal an RPL decision on the ground that you did not have all the necessary documentation required at the time of application but you now have them.
- 28. Would I have to be examined again for RPL if I have certificates?**  
Unlikely! But you may be required to attend an interview or to make a case in writing.
- 29. How is RPL recorded on my examination record?**  
In general RPL does not result in grades, but this may change. If you accept RPL credits or module exemptions you should understand the impact it might make on your final assessment results and award classification.  
It is best to discuss this with the programme Co-ordinator.  
It may be the case that your academic record will show that you accepted RPL credits and/or module exemptions.
- 30. How is RPL graded for classification of awards?**  
Generally prior certificated learning is not re-graded for RPL or award classification purposes, but may be in the future.  
Generally RPL on the basis of prior experiential learning is not graded either, but it may be in the future.  
This kind of information should be in your Programme Handbook. If not, ask your programme Co-ordinator.
- 31. Would I be better off taking a module instead of accepting RPL if it affects my final grade or award classification?**  
It is best to fully consider the implications of RPL for award classification before accepting any exemptions.
- 32. Is there a cost for RPL by certificated learning?**  
At present the cost is subsumed in the cost of processing your application. But this may change in the future. However, payment for an RPL process cannot in any way be interpreted as payment for credits or exemptions.
- 33. How long might an RPL process take for a module exemption based on certificated learning?**  
This is generally a very quick process taking days rather than weeks. Be prepared to attend an interview if required.
- 34. What is my responsibility in making an RPL claim through certificated learning?**  
You, as applicant, are generally responsible for the entire application, including supplying the correct certificates, letters, exam results etc. though you may be given directions regarding what is required.
- 35. How would I prove that I have learned from work and life experience in an RPL claim?**  
The particular programme applications procedure/RPL procedure should indicate what is involved for you to prove your prior experiential learning. You may be required to make a written application only, or a mix of written application, interview, presentation, etc.. In some cases you may be offered a challenge test.
- 36. What kinds of APEL evidence might I offer as proof of appropriate learning?**  
You are likely to be required to provide authentic documents, letter of support etc.. You should be given specific advice on the size and content of the application required.
- 37. Who might guide me through the APEL process?**  
It is likely that you will receive sufficient guidance from the programme co-ordinator.

- 38. How long would it take from application to decision?**  
Applications are generally processed in good time for start dates of programmes and modules.  
The more time you give yourself to prepare your application the better for yourself. So apply in good time.
- 39. How much does an RPL application cost?**  
Currently there is no separate fee for an RPL application other than any normal application fee. This may change in the future.
- 40. What are the risks and benefits of accepting APEL credits or module exemptions?**  
There are generally two risks as follows:  
Risk 1: If you accept module exemptions you may miss out on important learning.  
Risk 2: If you accept module exemptions at award stage you may not have them included in calculation of your final award classification.  
The main benefits are:  
Benefit 1: You do not need to learn again what you already know  
Benefit 2: You get more time to devote to other parts of the programme  
Benefit 3: You may not need to attend class so often  
Benefit 4: If you are paying fees per module, you could have a smaller overall fee for your programme.
- 41. What is the difference between entry by RPL and non-standard entry?**  
RPL is the process of making a judgement on the value of prior learning.  
Non-standard entry is the process of applying for a place on a programme where the applicant does not have the usual prior qualifications/certificates required as 'standard'.
- 42. Can I use RPL to gain entry to post-graduate programmes?**  
Prior learning can be used in this way in what is called 'exceptional case' entry. It may be the case that the applicant has a Diploma but may not have had the opportunity to gain a degree - perhaps there was no degree at the time of award – and has significant work-based learning since graduating.  
It may be the case that an applicant has a pass degree but not the honours degree required for 'normal' entry and has gained valuable work-related learning since graduating.  
In both these cases a combination of APCL and APEL may be used to decide if an applicant gains entry. However, it is up to the receiving programme team to decide the entry requirements.  
Non-standard applicants may be required to demonstrate their capacity to succeed and benefit from being offered a place on a post-graduate programme, usually through an interview.  
Each postgraduate programme has its own specified entry requirements.
- 43. Can I apply for RPL at postgraduate level?**  
It is not usual for RPL module exemptions to be offered at postgraduate level, though it may be the case that an applicant has a doctoral level qualification that would justify an exemption.  
Generally, it is not usual for APEL to be used for exemptions at post-graduate level but it may occur where the specific programme/s permit it.
- 44. Can I apply for RPL at an award stage?**  
This will depend on the specific regulations and conditions for each programme or award.
- 45. Can I apply for a whole DIT award by RPL?**  
Theoretically, an application for a whole award is possible, but rare. There is an existing arrangement for a PhD by Publications, which could be described as RPL.
- 46. How might I self-assess myself for my prior certificated learning?**  
The DIT is currently developing an on-line exercise which should assist applicants in preparing an RPL claim.

**47. Where might I see a sample of APEL evidence for a DIT module?**

Programmes which offer advanced entry usually indicate the type of prior learning evidence they require in an applications. If you are applying for a module exemption on your programme you will be given sufficient information to put together a set of appropriate evidence. The type of evidence required will vary from module to module.

**48. What assessment criteria are used for APEL assessment activities?**

It is general practice that there are common RPL criteria such as: authenticity, sufficiency, relevance, currency, validity.

Additionally a programme team may use other assessment criteria specific to the particular module or stage. It is best to request these criteria directly from the programme team as criteria are likely to vary from programme to programme.

**49. What happens at an RPL interview?**

If you are applying for module exemptions the RPL interview team will probably use the opportunity to discuss your evidence of learning with you in relation to your RPL claim.

If you are using RPL for entry or transfer purposes the interview team will wish to establish that your evidence is sufficient, relevant and valid, and that you have the capacity to succeed on the programme and to benefit from being offered a place.

**50. How is RPL shown on the Diploma Supplement?**

The DIT is developing its Diploma Supplement and RPL exemptions may be indicated on it together with other standard information.

Note: The responses to the frequently asked questions above are for general information only and do not represent a contract.

END

### 3. RPL IMPLEMENTATION DOCUMENTS

#### **RPL Policy Implementation Guidelines for Departments and Schools in relation to 'Principles and Operational Guidelines for RPL 2005 and in relation to DIT RPL policy 2008**

The purpose of the working document following is to indicate to DIT staff the augmentations to current practices generally required to ensure compliance with DIT RPL policy and procedures approved by Academic Council in June 2008, with revised General Assessment Regulations 2009, and with the nationally agreed document: *Principles and Operational Guidelines for RPL 2005* (full text of the NQAI document below in white spaces). No directive has yet been agreed at Institute level regarding the timescale of such compliance, but is likely to be incremental as Faculty/School Reviews and programme validation/revalidation processes are scheduled and as the Academic Quality Enhancement Handbook is revised in the 2010-2011 academic year.

Programme teams, Departments, Schools and Faculties may decide to implement agreed DIT RPL policies and procedures and the Principles and Operational Guidelines prior to review or validation events.

Briefing sessions, workshops and/or formal training sessions may be arranged with the RPL Policy Development Officer.

A formal CPD course of 5 ECTS credits at Level 9 is also available for staff groups on request from the RPL Policy Development Officer.

#### **COLOUR CODE:**

GREY = highlighted text in the original NQAI document of high interest to the DIT

BLUE = suggested approaches to implementation of RPL Principles and Operational Guidelines in the DIT with DIT RPL policy taken into consideration.

# Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education and Training

NQAI

June 2005

*Principles*

## Introduction

This paper sets out the principles and operational guidelines for the recognition of prior learning in further and higher education and training established by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland following consultation with stakeholders.

## Background

The National Framework of Qualifications forms the basis of a new, more flexible and integrated system of qualifications. The need for such a system arises in the main from the national objective of moving towards a 'lifelong learning society', in which learners will be enabled to take up learning opportunities at chosen stages throughout their lives.

The National Framework of Qualifications was launched in October 2003 with the publication of three documents setting out policies, criteria, procedures and determinations relating to the Framework and the linked objective of enhancing access, transfer and progression for learners. These documents are as follows:

- Determinations for the Outline National Framework of Qualifications
- Policies and Criteria for the Establishment of the National Framework of Qualifications
- Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners

In addition, an overview of the Framework was published at that time.

The concept of lifelong learning indicates that learning should encompass the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Learning occurs in many contexts that include work, involvement in social and community activities, or learning through life experience generally. In order to enable the individual to learn throughout life, equal value should be given to all these forms of learning regardless of source, how it is achieved or when in life it is achieved. A major objective of the National Framework of Qualifications is to recognise all learning achievements. It aims to do this by supporting the development of alternative pathways to qualifications (or awards) and by promoting the recognition of prior learning.<sup>2</sup>

Recognition is a process by which prior learning is given a value. It is a means by which prior learning is formally identified, assessed and acknowledged. This makes it possible for an individual to build on learning achieved and be formally rewarded for it. The term 'prior learning' is learning that has taken place, but not necessarily been assessed or measured, prior to entering a programme or seeking an award. Prior learning may have been acquired through formal, non-formal, or informal routes.

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland has set out the purposes of the recognition of prior learning in the Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners:

- entry to a programme leading to an award
- credit towards an award or exemption from some programme requirements
- eligibility for a full award

In addition, the recognition of prior learning can also be directly relevant in terms of facilitating employment. While there is not necessarily a direct link with qualifications in such recognition, this is a very important dimension to the recognition of prior learning.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this paper, RPL is considered as encompassing all types of prior learning: AP(E)L has tended to become a collective term which encompasses, for example, Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL); Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL); Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL); Recognition of prior learning (RPL); Accreditation of Prior Learning and Achievement (APL&A); Recognition of Current Competencies (RCC); and, more recently Learning Outside Formal Teaching (LOFT).

For the purposes of developing a national approach to the recognition of prior learning, prior learning encompasses:<sup>3</sup>

1. formal learning which takes place through programmes of study or training that are delivered by education or training providers, and which attract awards.
2. non-formal learning that takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training. It may be assessed but does not normally lead to formal certification. Examples of non-formal learning are: learning and training activities undertaken in the workplace, voluntary sector or trade union and in community-based learning.
3. informal learning that takes place through life and work experience. (And is sometimes referred to as experiential learning.) Often, it is learning that is unintentional and the learner may not recognise at the time of the experience that it contributed to his or her knowledge, skills and competences.

It is a policy of the Qualifications Authority to promote the co-ordination and harmonisation of processes for the recognition of prior learning on the part of education providers and awarding bodies. It sees the development of national principles and operational guidelines as a first step in this direction. There are a number and a variety of different approaches to the recognition of prior learning on the part of education providers, awarding bodies, in the workplace and elsewhere. In Ireland, a number of universities, the Dublin Institute of Technology, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council the Further Education Training and Awards Council, Institutes of Technology and private providers have policies and procedures, or are in the process of drafting these, on the recognition of prior learning. In European Union, a set of common principles regarding recognition of non-formal and informal learning with the aim of ensuring greater comparability between approaches in different countries and at different levels has been developed.<sup>4</sup> A number of countries have developed principles for the recognition of prior learning, such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada as well as many European states (France, Norway, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands). In addition, states such as France have created individual rights backed by legislation to the recognition of prior learning while others evidence 'bottom-up' approaches where local training centres and workplace initiatives have been developed.

### **Rationale for a national approach to the recognition of prior learning**

The principles are intended to encourage the development and expansion of processes for the recognition of prior learning by education and training providers and awarding bodies so that they may:

- communicate their commitment to the recognition of prior learning
- bring coherence and consistency to the recognition of prior learning
- remove difficulties that may confront an applicant wishing to transfer within and between the different education and training sectors.

A national approach builds on and takes account of developments already taking place both nationally and internationally: many awarding bodies are, or have been, actively developing their own policies and practices, thus there is a need to develop a national approach to ensure coherence and widespread acceptance of the outcomes of recognition. The intention is that these principles will be built on to develop operational guidelines which will be an exemplar of the nature of arrangements that further and higher education and training bodies (the Further Education and Training Awards Council, The Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology) should consider putting in place.

### **Benefits of developing principles for the recognition of prior learning**

Recognition of prior learning should meet the needs of learners. Recognition of prior learning can support the socially inclusive purposes of further and higher education and training, in that it facilitates entry to programmes, gives credit to or exemptions from a programme of study or access to a full award. Recognition of prior learning can address the needs of disadvantaged groups, part-time students and mature students, and can have a positive impact on retention of students. In addition, recognition of prior learning gives opportunities to providers of education and awarding bodies to use their assessment capability to up-skill individuals and meet workforce needs at local and national levels. Recognition of prior learning can bring benefits to the workplace by enhancing worker's employability and a better matching of skills demand and supply.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from: Commission of European Union, 2000, *Memorandum of Lifelong Learning, Commission Staff working Paper, Brussels*

<sup>4</sup> These principles are set out under the following main headings: individual entitlements; obligations of stakeholders; confidence and trust; and, credibility and legitimacy.

Recognition of prior learning can assist in supporting staff development within organisations by increasing staff motivation to undertake appropriate education or training. It can reduce the amount of time required to acquire a qualification.

### **Use of the term *Applicant***

In developing these principles, it is recognised that the terms learner and applicant are interchangeable. The term applicant will be used throughout to reflect the fact that an individual is applying to have his or her prior learning assessed or recognised. Learner will be used where it is more specifically appropriate, as in lifelong learner.

### **Principles for the recognition of prior learning**

The principles for the recognition of prior learning are addressed to education and training providers, awarding bodies, and those in the workplace. The principles are available to those who are developing systems of recognition of prior learning and to those who wish to make use of the prior learning that has been recognised by other providers or awarding bodies.

#### **1. General**

- The recognition of prior learning will give value to all learning, no matter how that learning is achieved.
- Participation in recognition is a voluntary matter for the individual.
- The recognition of prior learning will be part of an inclusive approach to learning by education and training providers and awarding bodies.
- Recognition of prior learning will provide opportunities for access, transfer and progression to education and training and for the achievement of an award.
- Recognition of prior learning will provide opportunities for learners to participate on an active basis in society in general and within a workplace context.

#### *Quality*

- Recognition of prior learning should be fully embedded within the quality assurance procedures of providers and awarding bodies.
- Recognition of prior learning should maintain the standards of the National Framework of Qualifications and its awards.
- Processes for the recognition of prior learning should be credible to all stakeholders.
- The outcomes-based approach of the National Framework of Qualifications supports the attainment of awards through diverse routes, including the recognition of prior learning, and such recognition of prior learning will maintain and support the standards associated with the National Framework of Qualifications and its awards.

#### *Communication/documentation*

- A clear statement of the policies, processes and practices of the education and training providers and awarding bodies for the recognition of prior learning should be available to all users.

**Please generate an overall statement from the School/Department/Programme in relation to its position on 'communication/documentation' above and to earlier matters as appropriate.**

- **Processes and practices** for the recognition of prior learning should be **clearly documented**.

**Please generate flow charts and accompanying text to show RPL process and practice steps:**

1. Application steps

2. Assessment steps

3. Recording steps

- Processes and practices for the recognition of prior learning should be **communicated openly and clearly** to all. (Applicants, education and training staff and assessors).

**Please describe where and how information will be available (website, brochures, leaflets...) at Faculty/School/Department/programme levels**



## 2. Assessment

- Assessment criteria for the recognition of prior learning should be published, made explicit to applicants, and applied consistently and fairly.

Please generate appropriate Assessment Criteria and text below that explains what the criteria mean in the context of a programme/Department/School level programmes, for experiential learning particularly.

### Criteria for Assessing Prior Experiential Learning

Some generally used Assessment Criteria for prior experiential learning	What they mean in the context of the programme/School
<b>Authenticity:</b> it is genuinely the learning of the applicant	
<b>Relevance:</b> to the programme/programmes	
<b>Currency:</b> prior learning is not out of date	
<b>Level:</b> related to NQF levels	
<b>Sufficiency:</b> no significant gaps	
<b>Capacity of applicant to succeed and benefit if RPL is granted</b>	

### Criteria and Process for Assessing Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) for initial entry, advanced entry or module exemption

#### Criteria

The criteria for assessing prior certificated learning – whether it is from formal learning or structured non-formal learning - in relation to a receiving programme, generally seek to establish a good match between the prior learning and the learning in the receiving programme.

In considering a good match the following 10 criteria or features have been found to be useful:

1a	<b>Volume/Years</b>	Volume of prior learning in terms of years/duration of the previous award/s: less than one year full-time, one-year full-time, two years full-time, three years full time, four years full-time, years of part-time.
1b	<b>Volume/Credits</b>	Numbers and types of credits.
2.	<b>Depth/Level</b>	Depth/level of learning in terms of its placement e.g. stage of undergraduate award (CPD, certificate, diploma or degree) or postgraduate award (CPD, certificate, diploma, taught masters, research masters, taught doctorate, research doctorate).
3.	<b>Learning outcomes</b>	Learning outcomes/learning achieved – the precise knowledge, skills, competences etc the holder of the award achieved on successful completion
4.	<b>Content</b>	Syllabus content –areas/subjects covered in the teaching process
5.	<b>Readings</b>	Key readings
6.	<b>Research component products</b>	Individual products such as thesis, models, designs, projects etc.
7.	<b>Practice</b>	Supervised practice or placement

8.	<b>Internship</b>	Internship with planned learning and responsibility
9.	<b>Currency</b>	Currency/Recency in relation to changes in the UNKNOWN field
10.	<b>Exam. papers</b>	Examination papers from at least the final stage

### Process for APCL

The process of considering prior certificated learning for entry, advanced entry or module exemptions generally includes an application form or template which makes presentation of information efficient and explicit. Below is a worked exemplar form which an applicant may be required to complete and submit with copies of certificates and other supporting documentation.

Stage 1 Programme Modules for RPL purposes Title and Code	Applicant's Prior Certificated Learning for the purpose of module exemptions This information should include the name of the awarding body and if possible the result ( honours, pass, distinction, merit, not graded etc)	Year Achieved
<b>Introduction to Spreadsheets</b> (DT008)		
<b>Preparing Balance Sheets</b> (DT009)		
<b>HRM 1</b> (DT011)		
<b>Organisational Behaviour 1</b> (DT014)		

- The applicant may be required to attach information in support of the claim, especially in areas where there are multiple types and levels of award available.
- It is likely, however, that an applicant will have a combination of certificated and experiential learning upon which they will draw to support a claim.
- The onus is always on the applicant to provide supporting information. The receiving programme is responsible only for evaluating the claim for entry, advanced entry or module exemption.

- Assessment criteria should be based on learning outcomes of awards or standards of knowledge, skill and competence set out in the National Framework of Qualifications and by the relevant awarding bodies.
- Assessment and verification mechanisms for the recognition of prior learning should be appropriate and fit for purpose.

#### Possible assessment methods for prior experiential learning

Types of assessment	Suitability for particular programme/School
<b>Assessment on demand:</b> using similar assessment methods/exam papers as the taught programme. This could permit grading.	
<b>Challenge tests in observed conditions</b> – this could permit grading	
<b>Short learning contract/structured project</b> in relation to module learning outcomes, usually with a written report – this could permit grading	
<b>Presentation of appropriate artefacts produced by the applicant with interview</b>	
<b>Extended CV with interview, possible with supplied template (available on-line with application form)</b>	
<b><i>Observation of applicant at work in real situation</i></b>	
<b>Simulation or role play</b>	
<b>Portfolio of evidence of appropriate learning that may be in format of supplied template, and may include electronic methods</b>	
<b>A Qualifier activity with Level 8 learning demonstrated, as well as demonstrating capacity to succeed and benefit, could be used for exceptional case entry to postgraduate programmes – as is current practice</b>	
<b>Other</b>	
<b>Other</b>	

### 3. Process

- Guidance and support should be available for applicants and all involved in the processes of recognition of prior learning.

**Generate a statement of arrangements of Bridging Studies/Topping-UP for gaps in experiential learning**

- An appropriate appeals mechanism should be in place.

**Generate a statement of arrangement for appeals in line with approved assessment policy**

- Recognition of prior learning processes should be easy to understand, fair and transparent, and be conducted in a reasonable time frame.

**Please generate a statement of the timeframe of processing RPL requests**

- The recognition of prior learning processes should be organised in such a way that they do not create barriers for the applicant.
- Appropriate resources to support the processes for the recognition of prior learning should be in place.

## Operational Guidelines

### Introduction

These operational guidelines build upon the principles above. The Authority considers that in developing a policy and approach to promoting co-ordination and harmonisation of the processes for the Recognition of Prior Learning, it is helpful and appropriate for the Authority to develop operational guidelines for further and higher education and training awarding bodies and providers. The intention is that these guidelines will give an exemplar of the nature of the arrangements that further and higher education and training awarding bodies and providers (the Further Education and Training Awards Council, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology, referred to in these guidelines as the further and higher education and training awarding bodies) should consider putting in place.

In so doing, the Authority is building on the approach set out in the Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners that it published in October 2003.

### Awards Councils

In its policies, actions and procedures, the Authority noted the particular role of the awards Councils and set out that:

*“while the Authority has an overall role in developing the policy approach to access, transfer and progression, the Councils have the key facilitatory and, indeed, regulatory role in ensuring that the policies of the Authority are appropriately developed, and that the procedures set by the Authority are implemented by providers (both providers with programmes leading to [or to lead to,] the awards of the Councils and providers with delegated authority to make awards). While the Councils do not have a role in programme provision, in terms of either development or support, it is their role to ensure that the procedures of the Authority in relation to access, transfer and progression are implemented by providers and to do so, in part, through their approaches to performing their functions in relation to validation and delegation.*”

*“Arising out of these statutory roles and responsibilities, actions and procedures have been defined to elaborate the part to be played by the awards Councils in implementing each of the policies of the Authority for the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression.”*

The awards Councils have a unique responsibility in relation to the recognition of prior learning in that they have a statutory function to make awards to persons who apply and who, in the opinion of the Council, have achieved the relevant learning outcomes. It is thus possible for a learner to achieve an award without participation in a specific programme. It is open to the Councils to seek the assistance of a provider in confirming that the necessary learning outcomes have been achieved before an award is made in this way. Indeed, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council has now commenced the implementation of this statutory provision.

In the drafting of these guidelines, the Authority is requesting that the Councils would develop policies and procedures for themselves and for the providers with programmes leading to, or to lead to, their awards or delegated authority to make awards in a manner consistent with the national approach set out in these guidelines.

### Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training

In its policies, actions and procedures, the Authority noted the particular role of providers of further and higher education and training and set out that:

*“Under the terms of the Qualifications Act and under their own legislation and charters, providers of further and higher education and training generally have their own rights and responsibilities. Providers, such as those who will have programmes validated by either of the two Councils or with authority delegated by either of the two Councils to make awards themselves, as well as other providers with independent awarding powers, such as the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology, all have essential roles to play in meeting the objectives of the Act. It is important that the arrangements put in place in the national framework of qualifications and in related matters facilitate the involvement of all of these providers in attaining the objectives of the Qualifications Act.*”

*A key function of the Authority is to determine procedures for the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression to be implemented by providers of programmes of education or training. Some of the policies set out below require a process of development before the Authority can fully establish procedures through which they will be implemented. However, a range of procedures have been formulated by the*

*Authority at this stage to complement the effectiveness of the framework. These are to be implemented in the short term by providers: they are outlined in the following sections of this document. It should be noted that these procedures may impact on providers to varying extents, as the providers are diverse in nature, in their status as awarding bodies, and in their relationship to the awards Councils.”*

In the drafting of these guidelines, the Authority is requesting that, providers with independent awarding powers, such as the universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology would consider these guidelines in the context of the development of their own procedures. In relation to providers who have programmes validated by either of the two Councils, or with authority delegated by either of the two Councils to make awards themselves, it is the intention that the policies and procedures developed by the Councils will be consistent with the guidelines.

In the case of all of these providers it is of note that the procedures established by the Authority for implementation by providers of further and higher education and training set out that:

*The Authority considers that it is appropriate to determine interim procedures for providers prior to the implementation of a national approach to credit. These procedures relate to the specification of arrangements for the recognition of prior learning by providers of education and training programmes leading to [, or to lead to,] awards. These are as follows:*

- *all providers are required to develop a statement of arrangements available in respect of each of their programmes for the recognition of prior learning, for entry, for credit towards an award and for access to a full award. These statements should define the purposes for which recognition of prior learning processes can be used, ie., to enable entry to the programme; to provide exemption from programme requirements or credit towards an award; or to establish eligibility for a full award. Where the recognition of prior learning is used to enable entry to a programme, the statement of arrangements available should indicate to learners the competences needed to succeed on the programme*
- *in relation to providers whose programmes are validated by the Councils or who have been delegated authority by a Council to make awards, this statement of arrangements must be consistent with the policies and procedures of the relevant Council.*

It is a statutory requirement that providers who have programmes validated by either of the two Councils or with authority delegated by either of the two Councils to make awards themselves, as well as the Dublin Institute of Technology, implement the Authority's procedures on access, transfer and progression. In addition, the implementation of these arrangements by the universities is to be reviewed by the Authority.

### **3.1 Elements in Guidelines**

It is suggested that further and higher education and training awarding bodies and providers would each develop policies and procedures for recognition of prior learning which would each have the following elements:

- Review and updating
- Operational approaches
- Assessment
- Applicants
- Communications

#### **Breakdown of Elements**

##### **Review and updating**

- Each further and higher education and training awarding body will review and update the policies and procedures that it has in place for the recognition of prior learning following the publication of these guidelines and each body will review its policies and procedures on a regular basis in the future.

##### **Operational approaches**

- The units, modules, programmes and awards that can be achieved on the basis of recognition of prior learning should be identified.

**Please list of RPL-able modules at programme, Department and School level, or generate an appropriate statement in this regard.**

- Where **any limits** are put in place on the proportion of learning that can be recognised as prior learning, these should be **explicitly stated**. (In the case of direct applicants, the awards Councils cannot put in place any such limits for their awards).

**Statement of limit on ECTS credits by RPL**

- The **roles and responsibilities** of those involved in the process should be clearly set out, for example, the applicant, the assessor, and any other persons or boards/committees involved in recognition processes.
- Process should ensure that, where possible, the applicant can complete the recognition process in a shorter time than it would take to achieve the relevant unit, module, programme or award.
- **Collaboration** across sectors and between awarding bodies, providers and stakeholders should be encouraged.

### **Assessment**

Assessment of prior learning should be carried out by persons who are **competent**.

**Generate a statement of personnel involved in RPL assessment**

- Assessors and other persons involved in the recognition process should be given **training and support** as appropriate.
- The development and use of a **range of assessment mechanisms** should be encouraged. These should be **proportionate** to the task and **comparable** to other assessment processes used to determine whether learning outcomes have been achieved.

**Check that these principles concur with statements generated earlier**

Please generate flow charts of roles at Programme/Department/School/Faculty levels.

### 3.2 Applicants

- Applicants should be fully informed of the application process, the stages within it and the nature and range of evidence that is considered appropriate to support a claim for the recognition of prior learning, including the learning outcomes against which prior learning will be assessed.

**Check that these principles concur with statements generated earlier**

- The availability of guidance and support to applicants in the submission of evidence for assessment will be promoted. There should be contact points for advice and support and they should be clearly signalled.

**Check that these principles concur with statements generated earlier**

### Communications

- Information for learners/applicants should be clear, accessible and fit for purpose.

**Check that these principles concur with statements generated earlier**

- Awarding bodies should promote the availability of the recognition of prior learning.
- Awarding bodies should publish information on a regular basis describing the extent to which their policies on the recognition of prior learning have been implemented and setting out good examples of practice.

**Check that these principles concur with statements generated earlier**

**Please decide a mechanism to record RPL decisions and cases for coherence and consistency – not necessarily for precedent – since each case is on an individual level.**



Where grading is offered for either prior certificated or prior experiential learning, there may be a case for additional assessment and 'normal' procedures of recording. Please consider how such a process might be appropriately accommodated at programme level.

### **Implementation**

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland will address issues relating to the implementation of these principles and operational guidelines with further and higher education awarding bodies. These discussions will include the identification and addressing of implementation issues. A key issue in this regard is the resourcing for the implementation of these principles and operational guidelines. The Authority's view is that there needs to be an agreed, shared and equitable basis on which to proceed in this regard.

*National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, June 2005*

END

## 4 Exemplar RPL Documents and cases of practice

### 4.1 RPL applied to a Module Exemption Assessment Template

In the box below is a worked example for applying RPL guidelines to an existing module.

RPL Initial Self-Assessment Exercise in relation to a level 6 module (example only)

DIT Programme award type	Higher Certificate
Module Title	Introduction to Business Finance
Module Level	6
ECTS credits (5 credits = 100 hours notional learning effort)	5

Select the responses and tick the boxes that best match your prior learning in relation to the 7 module learning outcome below.

Module Learning Outcomes	I have learned this through my working career and can provide paper evidence/documents/certificates	I know most of this but I have no paper evidence	I am willing to complete a task/ assignment to show I have learned this (see example below)	I really need to take this module
1. Explain the importance of financial management within a business environment				
2. Record basis business transactions and produce final accounts				
3. Evaluate accounts within the context of performance evaluation				
4. Describe the relationship between costing, pricing, cash and profit				
5. Prepare basic budgets and budget projections, and carry out simple variance analysis				
6. Carry out bank reconciliation and stock variation exercises				
7. Discuss the underlying principles of investment appraisal				

*Types of RPL evidence you might consider for this module:* your CV, job descriptions, work responsibilities in relation to the outcomes, training courses attended, certificates gained, awards, reports you produced yourself or with others, letters of commendation, examples of documents produced/completed, etc.

*Continued on next page*

If you do not have actual evidence you may be given the opportunity to write a report in which you show that you have learned what is required to be exempted from this module. An example of such a report might be as follows:

**Sample task/assignment to show prior learning in relation to the 7 learning outcomes for the module.**

Write and submit a 1,000 word report under the following headings within the timescale agreed:

**Title:** *The Key Elements of Business Finance*

**Headings:**

1. The importance of good financial management in a small/medium enterprise
2. How best to manage cash flow, overheads and investment of profits
3. How best to monitor finances on a day-to-day basis
4. How best to maintain competitiveness through knowledge of investment opportunities.

**Format of the Report:**

*Font:* Times New Roman

*Spacing:* 1.5 line spacing

*Pagination:* Page numbers at foot and centred

*Printing:* One side only

*Cover page:* Author's name, Date, Programme and Module concerned for RPL purposes

*Page header:* In line with the details on the cover page

*Paper:* White

*Binding:* No binding required: Staple at top left-hand corner only

*Time allowed:* Two weeks

END

## 4.2 Exemplar RPL self-assessment template for a module

The document in the box below is a working example of a RPL self assessment exercise which could be included in a programme handbook with appropriate localisation

### Using your prior learning towards a DIT award (DRAFT ONLY)

#### RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL)

##### Self-Assessment Activities – 10 steps to a decision

**Step 1:** Select the top three DIT awards/programmes that most interest you. [CLICK here](#) for a list of DIT awards

**Step 2:** List your top three award preferences below adding codes, levels and whether they are part-time or full-time.

Choice	Code	Title	Level	Part-time	Full-time
1st Choice					
2nd Choice					
3rd Choice					

**Step 3:** Read the details of your 1st choice award/programme

**Step 4:** List the modules from the programme that best match your prior learning.

	Module Title	ECTS Credits	Stage of the programme (early, middle, end)
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			

**Step 5:** List the Learning Outcomes from the first module in your list by copying them from the module descriptor/ template

Module Title	Module Learning Outcomes
	On successful completion of this module the learner should be able to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a.</li> <li>b.</li> <li>c.</li> <li>d.</li> <li>e.</li> <li>f.</li> </ol>

*Continued on next page*

**Step 6:** If you are considering an application for exemption from your first choice module you should think about how you might provide evidence of your prior learning to match the learning outcomes for the module. Types of evidence might include some of the following:

- Formal courses you attended
- Workplace training sessions
- Job descriptions
- Roles in voluntary organisations
- Licences
- Awards
- Prizes
- Letters of commendation
- Reports you produced
- Publications
- Inventions
- Inspection reports
- Appraisal reports
- Events you organised

**Step 7:** Use the table below to help you narrow down the types of evidence of prior learning you might use to seek exemption from the modules you listed in Step 4 above.

Of course you may use the same evidence for more than one learning outcome.

Types of RPL evidence	Explanation	Examples of evidence
Formal learning	Courses which were formally organised and assessed.	Certificates Transcripts of results Syllabi Research reports/thesis
Non-formal learning	Training events which were organised but did not necessarily have assessment.	Descriptions of courses Certificates of attendance Samples of materials
Informal learning/self managed learning	Learning you achieved that was not organised by others	Voluntary activities Self-study schemes
Work history and job descriptions	Aspects of your paid and voluntary work that are relevant to the module	Job descriptions Responsibilities
Samples of work	If there is physical evidence of your prior learning other than certificates etc	Reports Project plans Designs Photographs Completed documents
Reports from employers/managers	If there is no tangible evidence of your learning it may be possible to arrange verification from third parties/employers/managers	Letters of verification References Records from HR Departments

*Continued on next page*

**Step 8:** having carefully thought again about the list of programme modules in Step 4 it might be helpful now for you to consider if you have sufficient and relevant prior learning from work and life activities to apply for RPL exemptions.

Use the checklist below to self-assess yourself.

Self-assessment questions	My response is YES	My response is NO	Comments to self
My current and past work records are relevant to the modules			
I could provide evidence to show that I have gained the learning outcomes already			
I have no direct evidence but I could get a letter of verification from employers/manages			
I can locate the required certificates, course descriptions and results			
I would be willing to undertake the necessary studies to fill any gaps in my prior learning			
My prior learning is sufficiently related to the modules			
My prior learning has been kept up-to-date			
I am willing to demonstrate my prior learning in relation to some or all of the learning outcomes by completing set activities or doing a presentation			

**Step 9:** Use the worked example of RPL applied to a Level 6 (DIT Higher Certificate) module to plan your own application for RPL module exemptions.

<b>Award/Programme Title</b>	
<b>Module Title</b>	Introduction to Business Finance
<b>Module Code</b>	TFAC1005
<b>Level</b>	6
<b>ECTS credits</b>	5
<b>Learning Outcome</b>	<p>On successful completion of this module the learner should be able to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>explain the importance of financial management within a business environment</li> <li>record basic business transactions and produce a set of final accounts</li> <li>evaluate accounts within the context of performance evaluation</li> <li>describe the relationships between costing, pricing, cash and profit</li> <li>prepare basic budgets and budget projections, and carry out simple variance analysis</li> <li>carry out banking reconciliation and stock valuation exercises</li> <li>discuss the underlying principles of investment appraisal.</li> </ol>

*Continued on next page*

Module Learning Outcomes	Possible RPL Evidence identified by the module teaching team	What evidence you can provide
a. explain the importance of financial management within a business environment		
b. record basic business transactions and produce a set of final accounts		
c. evaluate accounts within the context of performance evaluation		
d. describe the relationships between costing, pricing, cash and profit		
e. prepare basic budgets and budget projections, and carry out simple variance analysis		
f. carry out banking reconciliation and stock valuation exercises		
g. discuss the underlying principles of investment appraisal		

### Step 10:

Find out **how many** modules on your programme of choice can be achieved through RPL

and

Find out what **assessment criteria** are used for the RPL modules you select. Your evidence will be judged against these criteria.

Generally, assessment criteria for **prior non-formal and informal learning** from work and life experiences include the following:

- **Relevance** to the programme or module
- **Currency** and **recency** of the learning – is it up-to-date?
- **Sufficiency** for the programme/module
- **Level** of the prior learning relative to the level of the programme/module
- **Authenticity** – Is it really your learning? Can it be verified?

Generally, prior certificated learning/formal learning is evaluated under the criteria of:

- **Volume/years** to achieve the award
- **Volume/credits** in the full award
- **Depth/level** on the national framework of qualifications (1 – 10 levels)
- **Learning outcomes**
- **Syllabus** content

*Continued on next page*

- Key **readings**
- **Research projects**, thesis, dissertation
- Supervised **placement** or work experience
- How **recently** the award was gained
- The types of **examinations** and the questions on examination papers.

Now make your decision by ticking the appropriate boxes below:

Modules you selected and which allow claims for RPL exemption	I have sufficient prior learning to apply for an exemption and I can present the evidence without great effort or with a little more study.	I have some prior learning but probably not sufficient to apply for a module exemption. <b>I really should register for the full module!</b>
1.		
2.		
3.		

END



### 4.3 RPL assessment criteria for APCL

Prior certificated learning is evaluated or assessed at undergraduate level for a number of reasons, including the following:

1. For initial entry – to check that the applicant meets the entry criteria
2. For advanced entry – to check that the applicant has achieved the required learning to meet the criteria for advanced entry and estimate the applicant's capacity to succeed if offered an advanced entry place
3. For module exemption
4. For progression after a gap from formal learning on a particular programme or similar programme.

At postgraduate level prior certificated learning is always evaluated to check that the applicant meets the minimum entry requirements. This evaluation process frequently involves referencing an award to a database of awards. The most frequently used databases are Qualifax, ENIC-NARIC.

Expert knowledge of awards and awarding bodies is sometimes sought to ensure fairness and accuracy.

Records of previous decisions may be used as guidance.

Evaluators of applications normally consider the following criteria in relation to postgraduate applications:

- The **title** of the award in its original language
- The findings from **databases of equivalence** such as ENIC-NARIC or Qualifax
- **Placement** of the award on the NQF, the EQF or the EHEA or other frameworks
- **Volume/years** to achieve the award
- **Volume/credits** in the full award
- **Depth/level** on the national framework of qualifications (1 – 10 levels)
- **Learning outcomes**
- **Syllabus** content
- **Key readings**
- **Research projects**, thesis, dissertation
- Supervised **placement** or work experience
- How **recently** the award was gained
- The types of **examinations** and the questions on examination papers
- The grade achieved as a **classification** of the award
- A **transcript** of assessment results
- A **Diploma Supplement**
- **Professional** recognition.
- **Institution** recognition in the state of award

### Non-standard but equivalent in learning

In cases where the minimum entry requirements are not met through certificated learning, an application may be evaluated as a **non-standard but equivalent** application if the capacity to succeed and benefit is demonstrated by means of a qualifier activity, an interview, a portfolio of evidence of learning, or by a combination of any of these.

#### 4.4 Assessment criteria for APEL for entry to a programme

It is rare for an RPL application in higher education to be made on the basis of informal learning alone.

It is more likely that an application will contain a combination of formal certificated learning and non-formal learning from work, as well as learning from self-employment, from voluntary activities and from private study.

In evaluating applications for entry to a programme at the initial stage with combinations of prior learning, it is usual for academic assessors to consider the applicant's capacity to succeed on the programme as key. An applicant is normally required to provide such evidence and to attend an entry interview. A qualifier activity may be required to satisfy the programme team that the applicant has achieved equivalent competence to succeed as standard entrants.

In considering prior non-formal and informal learning the following criteria are normally applied to the applicant's evidence of learning:

- **Relevance** to the programme or module
- **Currency** and **recency** of the learning – is it up-to-date?
- **Sufficiency** to succeed on the programme
- **Level** of the prior learning relative to the level of the programme
- **Authenticity** – Can it be verified?

Research evidence suggests that applicants who enter a postgraduate programme through a non-standard entry route perform as well and perhaps marginally better than the standard entrant.

#### 4.5 RPL for module exemption

Ideally programme documents should indicate if a module can be achieved through RPL or not.

RPL is used for module exemption where a registered student can provide evidence of having achieved the learning outcomes of the module already to the volume and level that is required.

Such exemptions may be graded if an RPL grading scheme is approved for the programme, or if the grade achieved in the prior award can be transferred with transparency and appropriateness. This is easier in cases where the prior award was a DIT award. But grading of exempted modules is rare. Normally, the grade for classification purposes is achieved on taught modules only. There is no great merit in allocating grades to exemptions that do not contribute to classification of an award.

Module exemptions achieved through RPL should be noted on examination reports with an EX as outlined in the DIT RPL policy document 2008.

#### 4.5 Exemplar statement of RPL arrangements on a programme with process flowchart

The text below may be extended and localised for use in programme documents.

##### **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in the DIT**

###### *Meaning of the term*

*Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the term used to describe the processes and practices of enabling learning that had taken place prior to registration on a DIT programme to be assessed/accredited and possibly used for the purposes of access, advanced entry, progression, module exemption or achievement of a full award.*

*The term RPL includes accreditation of both prior certificated learning (APCL) and accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL). It is possible to have both certificated learning and experiential learning considered together in an application for access, advanced entry, progression, module exemption or full award.*

##### **RPL in the School of ....**

The School fully supports the DIT policy adopted by Academic Council, June 2008 and the revised GARs 2009, and is enhancing its traditional RPL procedures accordingly.

###### **RPL roles and responsibilities**

Requests for consideration of prior learning for initial entry, advanced entry or module exemption on the basis of prior certificated learning (APCL) are normally made to the Programme Co-ordinator. Subsequently the request/application is processed and approved by ..... within a timeframe of .....days/weeks. RPL decisions are recorded....

###### **RPL processes**

RPL requests on the basis of experiential learning (APEL) or a combination of certificated and experiential learning are referred to ....

Assessment of such claims uses the following criteria:.....

No grading is allocated where RPL credits are awarded.....

The School allows module exemption by RPL with award of equivalent ECTS credits but with no grade attached....

###### **Recording of RPL decisions**

RPL decisions are recorded on BANNER as...

###### **Limits of RPL**

The limit of RPL exemptions/credits on ... programme is determined by.... and normally the limit is in the region of .....

###### **Information provision**

Newly registered students are informed of the possibility of RPL through.....

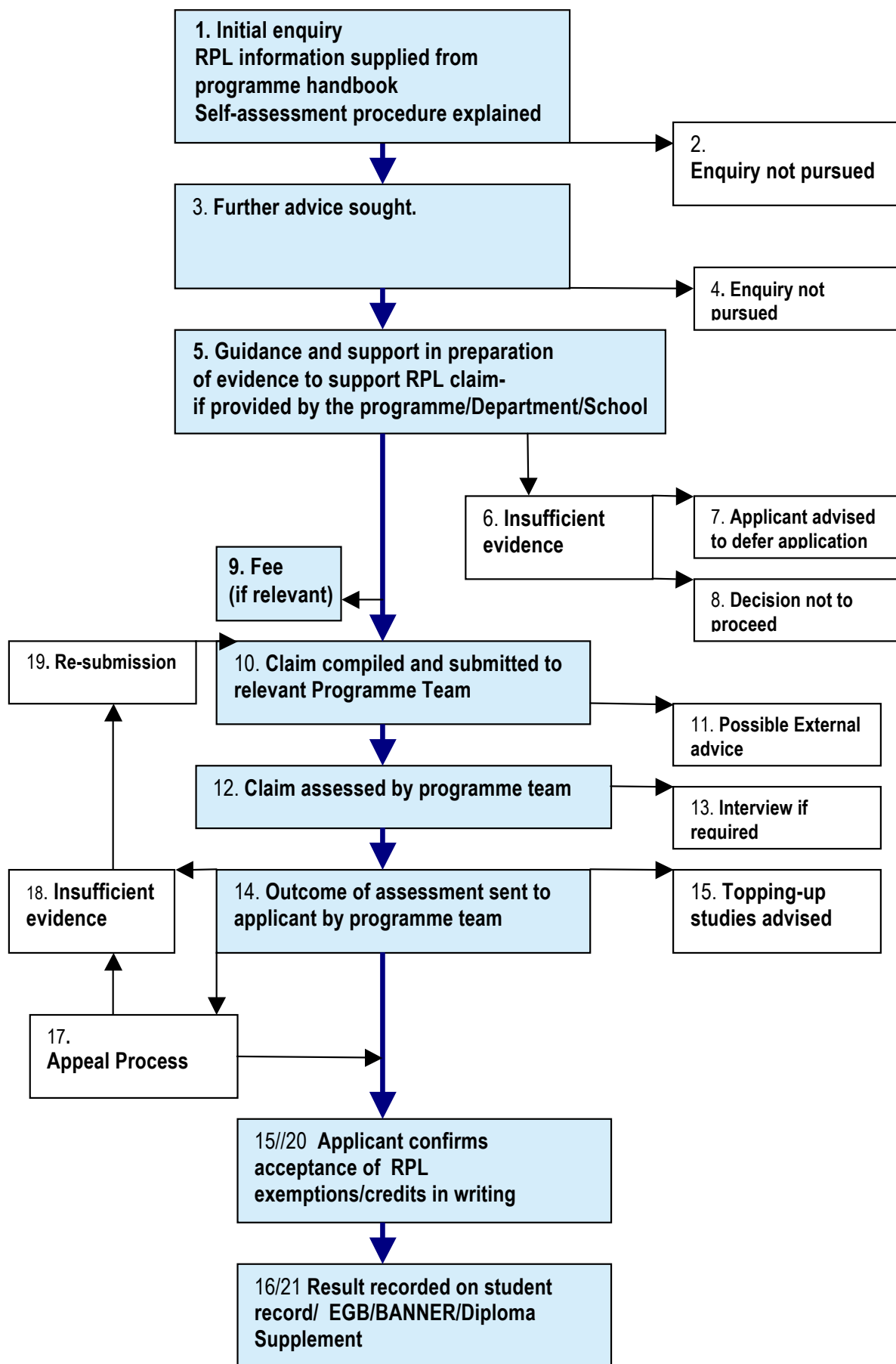
###### **Whole awards**

The School will consider RPL for full award at degree, Masters and PhD levels in accordance with DIT policy and welcomes enquiries in this regard from suitably experienced applicants.

FLOWchart of School APCL procedure

FLOWchart of School APEL procedure

EXAMPLE below



#### 4.6 The portfolio approach to RPL for advanced entry or non-standard entry based on the Europass CV

There is as yet no commonly agreed template for RPL portfolios across the DIT. It is usual for programme teams to design a RPL portfolio that is appropriate and fit for purpose.

However, there have recently been developments to use the Europass CV as the basis for RPL applications in contexts where there are supporting workshops for applicants. The rationale here is that the data collected for the Europass CV can be used by applicants for multiple purposes without having to re-generate the data repeatedly. Additionally, the Europass CV is increasingly requested by employers as standard way to capture information about a person's education, training and work experience record.

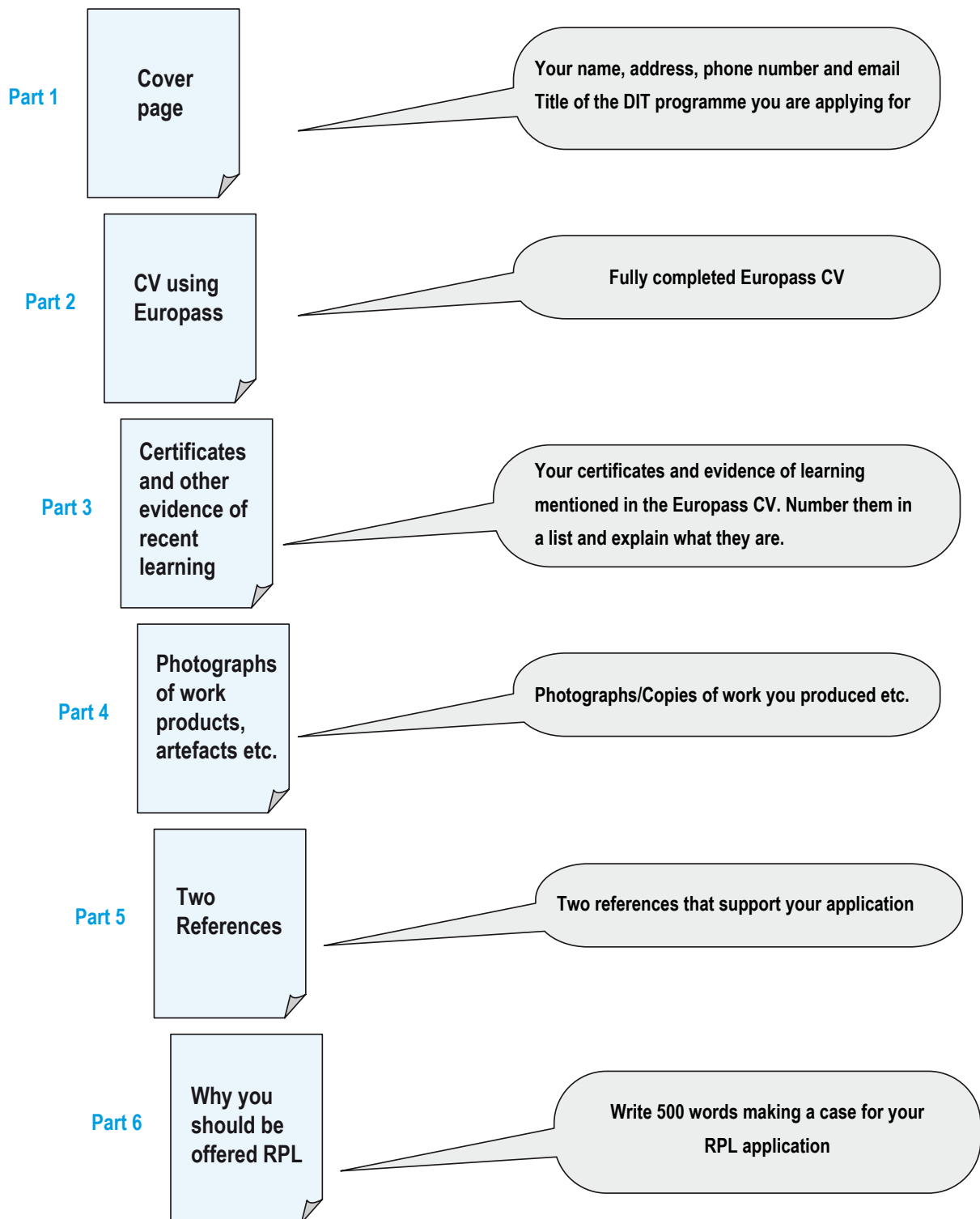
In this guide, the basic Europass CV has been extended into a more traditional RPL portfolio which is likely to contain the kinds of information required for non-standard entry to a programme or entry at advanced standing.

It is formatted in WORD and designed for completion in handwriting as well as electronically.

DIT colleagues are welcome to adapt this portfolio template to particular RPL purposes at programme, Department or School level.

Colleagues are also welcome to use it as the basis for career workshops and study guidance.

## RPL Portfolio Parts based on the Europass CV Template



## Part 1: Cover Page

# PORTFOLIO TEMPLATE to support an application for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

DIT Programme to which this e-portfolio applies

Name of Applicant

Address

Phone Number

Email


*Please use this portfolio template to provide general information in support of your application for recognition of prior learning for entry to a DIT programme, for advanced entry, or for module exemption. You may be asked to supply additional information or to complete a 'qualifier' activity such as taking a practical test or writing a particular type of academic paper. You may also be invited to an interview with staff of the programme.*

*Please use good common sense in relation to the amount and types of personal information you provide in this e-portfolio.*

*Please organise your portfolio into a file or folder. Include colour copies of certificates and parchments NOT originals.*

*As applicant you are responsible for the accuracy of the information you provide.*

## Your Curriculum Vitae using the Europass CV template

	<p>Place a passport size <b>photograph</b> of yourself here</p>
<b>Personal Information</b>	
First name(s)	
Surname	
Postal address	
Phone numbers	
Fax number	
Email address	
LinkedIn	
Facebook	
Nationality	
Date of birth	
Gender	
<b>DIT Programme concerned in this RPL application</b>	<b>Title:</b>
<b>Purpose of this application</b>	a. Initial entry      Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>





3.	<p>Start Date: _____ Finish date: _____</p> <p>Name and address of employer:</p> <p>Type of industry/sector:</p> <p>Position/s held:</p> <p>Main responsibilities:</p>
4.	<p>Start Date: _____ Finish date: _____</p> <p>Name and address of employer:</p> <p>Type of industry/sector:</p> <p>Position/s held:</p> <p>Main responsibilities:</p>
<b>Education and Training</b>	<b><i>Start with the most recent</i></b>
1.	<p>Date Achieved:</p> <p>Title of the award:</p> <p>Level of the award on the NQF (5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10):</p> <p>Months/years of study involved:</p> <p>Awarding body:</p>
2.	<p>Date Achieved:</p> <p>Title of the award:</p>

	<p>Level of the award on the NQF (5, 6, 7, 8, 9,10)</p> <p>Months/years of study involved:</p> <p>Awarding body:</p>
3.	<p>Date Achieved:</p> <p>Title of the award:</p> <p>Level of the award on the NQF (5,6,7,8,9,10)</p> <p>Months/years of study involved:</p> <p>Awarding body:</p>
4.	<p>Date Achieved:</p> <p>Title of the award:</p> <p>Level of the award on the NQF (5,6,7,8,9,10)</p> <p>Months/years of study involved:</p> <p>Awarding body:</p>
<b>Type of driving licence</b>	
<b>Language skills</b>	
First language	
Language 2	<p>Language: .....</p> <p><b>Level of competence (tick ✓ which word/s apply)</b></p> <p><i>Listening only      Reading      Spoken      Writing</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/>                      <input type="checkbox"/>                      <input type="checkbox"/>                      <input type="checkbox"/></p>
Language 3	<p>Language: .....</p> <p><b>Level of competence (tick ✓ which word/s apply)</b></p> <p><i>Listening only      Reading      Spoken      Writing</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/>                      <input type="checkbox"/>                      <input type="checkbox"/>                      <input type="checkbox"/></p>

<b>IT/computer skills</b>	
List any formal IT training and/or qualification/s	a. b. c.
Other IT skills	a. b. c.
<b>Organisational and Management competences</b>	
Formal training	a. b. c.
Informal learning and voluntary activities	a. b. c.
Projects managed	a. b. c.
<b>Other skills and competences</b>	
Describe any other relevant skills and competences not mentioned earlier	

**Part 3**

**CERTIFICATES, TRANSCRIPTS, SYLLABI etc.**  
(for qualifications and awards mentioned in your Europass CV)

**List of documents provided**

	<b>Title of document</b>	<b>Year achieved</b>
<b>1</b>		
<b>2</b>		
<b>3</b>		
<b>4</b>		
<b>5</b>		

## Part 4

Images/photographs/scanned copies of work products, publications, awards etc with title for each explaining its relevance to your application

### List of items provided

	Title of item	Relevance to your application
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		

## *Part 5*

**Names and email addresses of 2 referees who are willing to support your application for entry to the programme.**

## ***PART 6***

**Make a case in support of your application for entry, advanced entry or module exemption. Use formal writing style. Do not exceed 500 words.**  
You may handwrite or type. Use additional pages if necessary.



#### 4.7 The portfolio approach to RPL for exemption from a module at Level 9

To achieve a module exemption at postgraduate level it is usual for the applicant to be asked to provide evidence of having achieved the module learning outcome already to the appropriate level and to the appropriate volume/number of credits.

Examples of assessment assignments may be requested together with a transcript of results in prior formal learning programmes.

It is not usual to consider prior undergraduate learning in relation to exemptions on level 9 programmes. More often than not the applicant holds a masters award or doctorate already and is re-training in a different field of study. It is likely that an exemption will be sought in a research methods module or similar standard learning subject.

The decision to request a portfolio to match the learning outcomes of a module or to simply accept evidence of certificated learning is a matter for the programme team. The value of a portfolio in this instance is that the applicant is obliged to re-visit the original learning experience and to make a case for an exemption.

Below is an example of a template for exemption from a level 9 research methods module devised by the author which includes an assessment scoring scheme in relation to the assessment criteria for the programmes (pass/fail only).

Colleagues are welcome to adapt this template for local usage.

# PORTFOLIO OF PRIOR LEARNING

APPLICATION FOR EXEPTION FROM

## *The* **RESEARCH METHODS MODULE**

*Postgraduate Diploma in .....*

Applicant .....

Date .....



## TABLE OF PORTFOLIO CONTENTS

1.	Postgraduate Diploma Module Exemption Form	Part A
2.	Supports and procedures	Part B
3.	Module Learning Outcomes	
4.	Inventory of Portfolio Evidence	Part C
5.	Evidence of Prior Learning Related to the Learning Outcomes for the Research Methods Module	Parts D
6.	Annotated Bibliography of Recent Relevant Reading	Part E
7.	Assessment Criteria & Result	Part F

**PORTFOLIO PART A**  
**APPLICATION FORM**

Name as recorded in DIT

Phone:

E-mail:

Post:

**Brief outline of case for exemption from the Research Methods Module:** (max. 250 words).

## SUPPORTS AND PROCEDURES

1. All applicants for module exemption/s on the Diploma in ... should discuss the application with the Diploma Co-ordinator in the first instance.
2. All applicants will be offered advice on the RPL process.
3. All applicants will be offered advice on the process of portfolio compilation.
4. All portfolios will be assessed against the Diploma assessment criteria (as appropriate).
5. All assessment results will be subject to assessment regulations for the Diploma.
6. Unsuccessful applicants have a right of appeal.
7. The number of repeat applications allowable will generally be in line with DIT regulations on repeat assessments.
8. Applicants may be required to attend an RPL interview.
9. RPL portfolios are generally retained by the DIT and should not contain valuable original documents.

## PORTFOLIO PART B

*Specific Learning Outcomes of the RESEARCH METHODS MODULE Postgraduate Diploma in .....*

### **Module Aim**

This module aims to provide an overview of a range of approaches and methods used in researching in higher education. It introduces participants to the skills and knowledge required to undertake original research in aspects of learning and teaching, write research reports, and supervise the research of others at postgraduate level.

### **4. Module Learning Outcomes**

After completing this module, participants will be able to:

1. define research in higher education and the aims of research;
2. articulate an understanding of the ideas underpinning approaches to research;
3. show understanding of and an ability to critically evaluate the research literature within their chosen research area;
4. develop existing skills in summarising research literature;
5. apply the findings of relevant educational research to their own professional context;
6. identify issues and problems which are of professional concern and which are capable of further exploration and research;
7. search out and use research findings relevant to their own professional development;
8. formulate research objectives and questions;
9. use quantitative and qualitative approaches to research;
10. critically appraise a range of different methods and methodologies used in research in higher education;
11. show knowledge of the strengths and limitations of the various approaches to educational research and circumstances in which they may appropriately be used;
12. formulate/draw up an acceptable research proposal suitable for a dissertation topic at postgraduate level;
13. develop skills in writing research reports;
14. develop and support a research ethos within their own classroom practice;
15. improve methods of measurement and analysis leading to sound decision making in learning and teaching;
16. develop research supervision skills;
17. develop their effective and efficient self-directed study skills;
18. develop their teamwork skills.



## PORTFOLIO PART D

### EVIDENCE OF PRIOR LEARNING FOR SPECIFIC LEARNING OUTCOMES

*Learning Outcome No. 1: define research in higher education and the aims of research*

Experience/Event/Activity	Evidence Provided	Reflective Comment/ Analytical Rationale	Page No.

*Learning Outcome No. 2: articulate an understanding of the ideas underpinning approaches to research*

Experience/Event/Activity	Evidence Provided	Reflective Comment/ Analytical Rationale	Page No.

*Learning Outcome No. 3: show understanding of and an ability to critically evaluate the research literature within their chosen research area*

Experience/Event/Activity	Evidence Provided	Reflective Comment/ Analytical Rationale	Page No.

*Learning Outcome No. 4: develop existing skills in summarising research literature*

Experience/Event/Activity	Evidence Provided	Reflective Comment/ Analytical Rationale	Page No.

*Learning Outcome No. 5: apply the findings of relevant educational research to their own professional context*

Experience/Event/Activity	Evidence Provided	Reflective Comment/ Analytical Rationale	Page No.

*Learning Outcome No.6: identify issues and problems which are of professional concern and which are capable of further exploration and research*

Experience/Event/Activity	Evidence Provided	Reflective Comment/ Analytical Rationale	Page No.



*Learning Outcome No. 7: search out and use research findings relevant to their own professional development*

Experience/Event/Activity	Evidence Provided	Reflective Comment/ Analytical Rationale	Page No.

*Learning Outcome No. 8: formulate research objectives and questions*

Experience/Event/Activity	Evidence Provided	Reflective Comment/ Analytical Rationale	Page No.

*Learning Outcome No. 9: use quantitative and qualitative approaches to research*

Experience/Event/Activity	Evidence Provided	Reflective Comment/ Analytical Rationale	Page No.

*Learning Outcome No. 10: critically appraise a range of different methods and methodologies used in research in higher education*

Experience/Event/Activity	Evidence Provided	Reflective Comment/ Analytical Rationale	Page No.

*Learning Outcome No. 11: formulate/draw up an acceptable research proposal suitable for a dissertation topic at postgraduate level*

Experience/Event/Activity	Evidence Provided	Reflective Comment/ Analytical Rationale	Page No.

*Learning Outcome No. 12: formulate/draw up an acceptable research proposal suitable for a dissertation topic at postgraduate level*

Experience/Event/Activity	Evidence Provided	Reflective Comment/ Analytical Rationale	Page No.

*Learning Outcome No. 13: develop skills in writing research reports*

Experience/Event/Activity	Evidence Provided	Reflective Comment/ Analytical Rationale	Page No.

*Learning Outcome No. 14: develop and support a research ethos within their own classroom practice*

Experience/Event/Activity	Evidence Provided	Reflective Comment/ Analytical Rationale	Page No.

*Learning Outcome No. 15: improve methods of measurement and analysis leading to sound decision making in learning and teaching*

Experience/Event/Activity	Evidence Provided	Reflective Comment/ Analytical Rationale	Page No.

*Learning Outcome No. 16: develop research supervision skills*

Experience/Event/Activity	Evidence Provided	Reflective Comment/ Analytical Rationale	Page No.

*Learning Outcome No. 17: develop their effective and efficient self-directed study skills*

Experience/Event/Activity	Evidence Provided	Reflective Comment/ Analytical Rationale	Page No.

*Learning Outcome No. 18: develop their teamwork skills*

Experience/Event/Activity	Evidence Provided	Reflective Comment/ Analytical Rationale	Page No.

## PORTFOLIO PART E

### Annotated BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RECENT RELEVANT READING

**PORTFOLIO PART F**  
**Research Methods Module**  
**ASSESSMENT CRITERIA & RESULT**

**Participant:**

	<b>Self-directed study skills</b>	<b>Result</b>
PASS	evidence of taking responsibility for the self-evaluation and development of personal study skills	
FAIL	little evidence of self -evaluation or development of personal study skills	
Assessor Comment		

	<b>Higher level cognitive skills</b>	<b>Result</b>
PASS	demonstrate originality of approach and evidence of creative and critical thinking	
FAIL	Little evidence of an innovative approach and level of critical thought and analysis inappropriate for postgraduate work	
Assessor Comment		

	<b>Practice relevance</b>	<b>Result</b>
PASS	application of an appropriate theoretical framework within their own teaching practice	
FAIL	Little evidence of links made between theory and practice	
Assessor Comment		

	<b>Personal and Career Progression</b>	<b>Result</b>
PASS	demonstrate originality of approach and evidence of creative and critical thinking	
FAIL	No obvious link to personal or career progression	
Assessor Comment		

A pass must be achieved on all criteria

OVERALL RESULT: .....

Assessor 1: .....

Assessor 2:.....

Date: .....

## 5. OTHER RPL MATTERS

### 5.1 The RPL Qualifier

The qualifier is essentially that: it is an exercise an applicant is required to undertake in order to qualify under the entry criteria for a programme. It is invariably required where the academic team is not fully satisfied that the applicant has the capacity to succeed on the receiving programme with his/her current level of knowledge, skills and competences.

The qualifier may be as formal as a full year's registration and assessment at a level just below the receiving programme, or level of advanced entry.

Occasionally a qualifier for entry to a Masters programme may require completion, submission and successful examination of a minor research exercise such as an extensive literature review.

A qualifier for advanced entry at undergraduate level may require the applicant to provide a portfolio of evidence of prior learning which is a good fit with the modules in the early stage of the receiving programme.

The qualifier may be the requirement to achieve technical competence in IT or computer-aided design, for instance, before an application can be considered.

Some programmes prefer a practical test as a qualifier.

The key principle in all cases is that the qualifier should be appropriate and fit for purpose.

### 5.2 RPL and the Learning Contract

It is now becoming more acceptable to combine RPL with a learning contract as a pedagogical design in particular programme modules. For instance, it is not unusual for an RPL applicant to meet most of the module learning outcomes from prior learning. However, the programme team may not be satisfied that partial satisfaction of learning will enable the student to progress to full achievement of the award.

In such a case the academic team may identify the gaps in the applicant's prior learning and negotiate with the applicant how she/he is to achieve the required additional learning to achieve the full module.

This pedagogical design has a number of advantages for the student and the team.

For the student it requires revisiting of prior learning and providing evidence in relation to the learning outcomes of the module. This process involves self-assessment of learning gaps and options to achieve the required new learning.

For the academic team it ensures that the module learning outcomes are being met through a combination of RPL and current learning. That current learning may be a work-related project, thus combining the best pedagogies of RPL and WBL in a single portfolio of learning.

It also means that a grade can be awarded to the module with careful assessment criteria applied that is appropriate and fit-for-purpose.

For both parties it provides options for advanced entry and flexible learning than could not be achieved in a traditional pedagogical design model.

It also means that students who are at a distance from the college can work at a different pace without compromise of standards or of confidence in the award.

Figure 5.2.1 illustrate a combination of RPL and WBL in pedagogical design.

Figure 5.2.2 illustrates the journey of an RPL plus WBL contract through an academic department.

It is increasingly obvious that progression and professional development programmes and minor awards are using a combination of APCL, APEL and WBL in programme design, delivery and assessment. The CD-ROM included as an appendix has examples of such pedagogical design.

**Figure 5.2.1: A combined RPL and WBL Process**

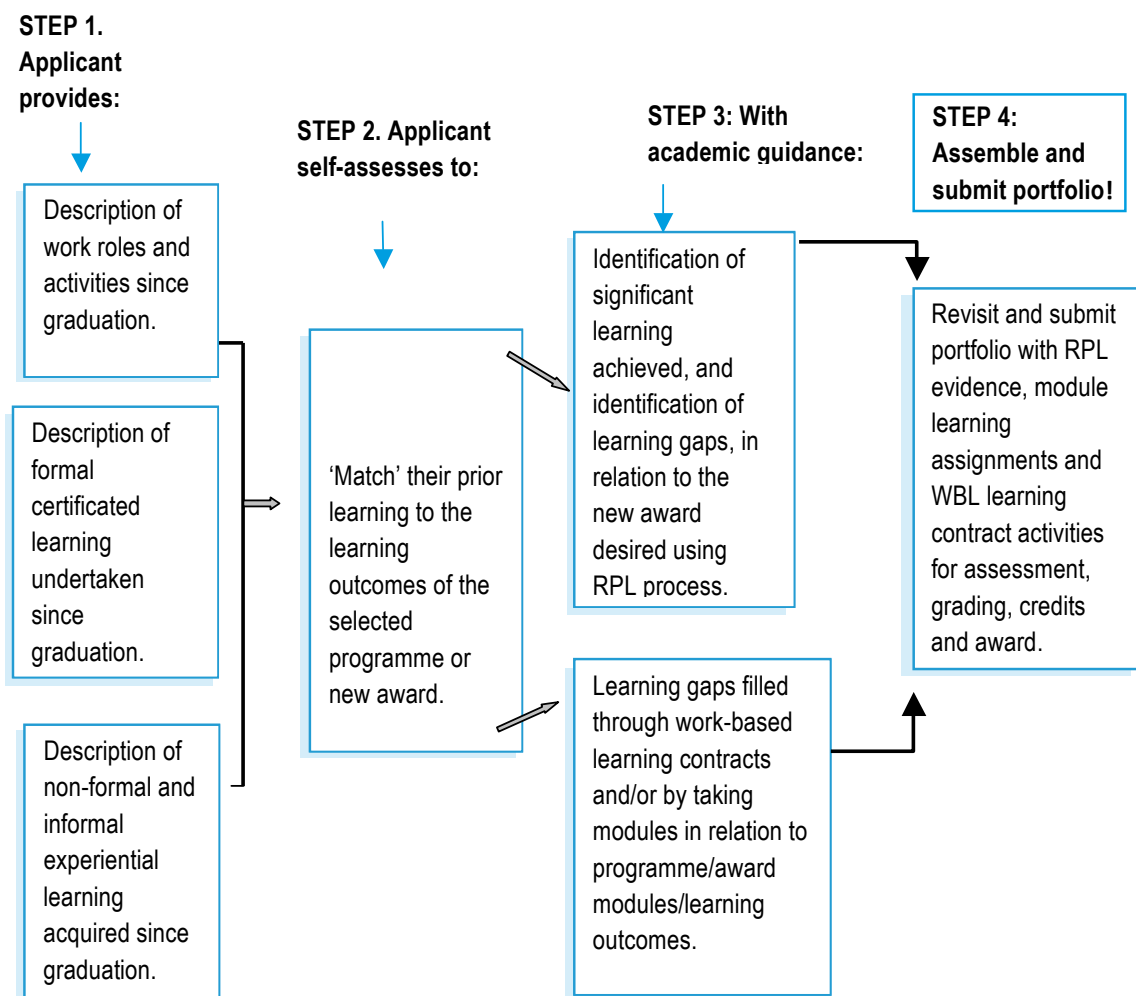
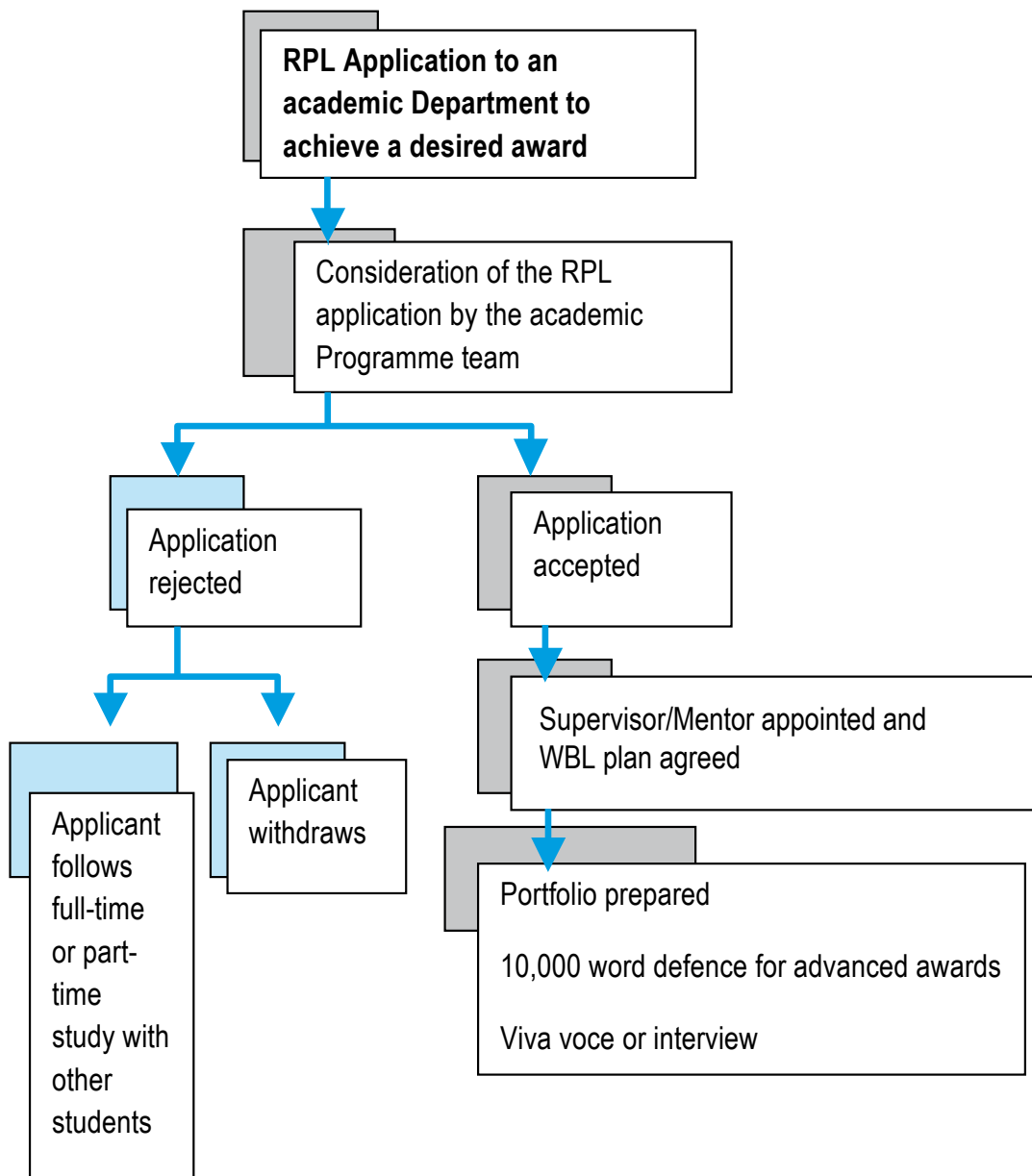


Figure 5.2.2: A general RPL and WBL contract 'journey' in an academic Department



## 6. RPL consultancy and CPD training support

DIT staff are offered opportunities for briefing sessions, consultancy and training on all aspects of RPL.

Sessions are generally tailored for the personnel involved. It is normal that staff with administrative, policy development and management roles will have needs quite different to academic staff responsible for programme design, assessment and pedagogical matter.

Individuals and staff groups are welcome to request the type of supports appropriate to their needs.

A 5 ECTS credits CPD programme at Level 9 is available through the College of Arts and Tourism for staff who prefer a formal approach to policy, procedural and pedagogical aspects of RPL. This programme can be offered on an accredited or attendance basis at any time of the academic year as negotiated with the RPL Officer.

Academic staff are also invited to request assistance with RPL aspects of programme documents, validation event and School reviews.

END





## Regional Seminar

For **HEA SIF 1 project: Education in Employment – RPL strand**  
Dublin Institute of Technology and Dundalk Institute of Technology

### THE POTENTIAL OF RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) IN A CHANGING ECONOMIC AND EMPLOYMENT LANDSCAPE

Thursday 12 March 2009

DIT Cathal Brugha Street Campus

**Time:** 9.30 – 12.30/12.45 (arrival and refreshments 9.00- 9.30)

**Chair:** Dr Tom Duff, Academic Registrar, DIT

#### Part 1: National and EU policy aspects of RPL

- a. **NQAI:** RPL policy position and qualifications recognition: *Carmel Kelly*
- b. **HETAC provider:** Letterkenny IT: Providing a regional RPL service to industry: *Oran Doherty*
- c. **Irish Universities Association:** The university perspective on RPL: *Lewis Purser*
- d. **HEA:** Apprentice Progression Matters: *Michael Murphy*

#### Part 2: DIT perspectives on RPL

- a. **RPL Policy:** *Anne Murphy*
- b. **Services to Industry through CPD:** *Robert Murphy*
- c. **Recruitment and Admissions perspective:** *Frank Costello*

#### Part 3: DIT cases of RPL for work sectors

1. **Built Environment:** Whole-Department strategy for RPL - *Cormac Allen, Architectural Technology*
2. **Tourism and Food:** Whole-department strategy for RPL - *Joe Erraught/Frank Cullen, Culinary Arts*
3. **Journalism** – alumni progression at degree level - *Nora French and Michael Foley*
4. **Design** – postgraduate level professional development - *John O'Connor, Art & Design*
5. **Progression Model in Electrical Engineering** - *Kevin O'Connell*

#### Responses from the floor to the question: **Where do we all go from here with RPL?**

**Forfas EGFSN:** *Gerald Walker, Senior Policy Analyst (observer)*

**Skillnets:** *Tracey Donnery and Donal O'Donovan*

**IBEC:** *Tony Donohoe, Education Officer*

**CIF:** *Noelle O'Connell, Head of Training and Development*

**HETAC:** *Ian McKenna, RPL Policy Expert*

**HEA:** *Peter Brown, Acting Head, National Office for Equity of Access to HE, HEA*

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