5.8 Policy for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

QA Area (s)	• Programmes of Education and Training
Applies to	☐ Staff only ☐ Learners only ☒ Staff and Learners
Policy Owner	Director of Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programmes

5.8.0 ESG Standard:

ESG Standard 1.4

Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the learner "life cycle", e.g. learner admission, progression, recognition, and certification.

5.8.1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to set out the principles of Recognition of Prior Learning underpinning access and advanced entry, in alignment with the requirements of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance Act (2012), as per QQI's 2015 policy restatement.

5.8.2 Scope

This policy applied to QQI programmes leading to awards recognised in the National Framework of Qualifications.

5.8.3 Policy

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a process that allows learners gain admission to a programme of study, advanced entry to a programme of study or to gain exemptions/credit from part of a programme based on demonstrated learning achieved prior to admission. The College recognises that learners may have gained relevant knowledge, skills and competencies prior to the commencement of a programme of study. The College, through its RPL policy and procedure, recognises appropriate prior learning so that learners do not have to cover topics already mastered, whether this mastery has come through prior study, work or life, or any combination of the three. The College acknowledges that learning can be acquired from a range of learning experiences, including accredited, non-accredited, formal and informal learning. In line with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), the College aims to recognise all learning achievements by facilitating RPL.

5.8.3.0 Definitions

The term RPL incorporates both the Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL) and the Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL).

- **Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL):** This is where an applicant has already been awarded certification for a formal programme taken at another Institution (in Ireland or abroad). This learning may entitle the applicant entry onto a programme, exemptions from some elements of a programme or advanced entry onto a programme of study.
- **Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL):** This involves the awarding of credit for learning gained from experience i.e. learning that has not previously been academically accredited. In this case, the candidate must prove that the required

learning outcomes have been achieved. This evidence can then be used to support a claim for admission onto a programme of study, exemption from some elements of a programme or credit. As a general principle, recognition is given for learning and not for experience per se.

5.8.4 Policy Principles

The following guidelines apply in the implementation of RPL within the College.

- Through its RPL processes the College recognises learning which has occurred before admission onto a programme or to the relevant stage of a programme of study irrespective of mode or place of learning.
- In seeking recognition under RPL, prior learning must be evidenced through a medium that is appropriate to the particular learning outcomes.
- The focus of the College's RPL process will be on the achievement of learning, or the outcome of that learning, rather than the experience of learning.
- Prior certified learning may entitle the candidate to exemptions on a programme, not credits.
- Learning which has been previously accredited is not ascribed credit twice.
- Exemptions or credits for prior experiential (non-certified) learning may be awarded on the basis of demonstrated learning which shows that a candidate has achieved specified learning outcomes relevant to the programme of study.
- Recognition will normally be given for complete modules only and where all of the learning outcomes of a module have been achieved.
- The College must ensure that academic standards comparable to those attained on programmes by traditional mode will be maintained and applied throughout the RPL process.
- Exemptions are granted where prior learning has not previously been awarded credit under the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).
- In the case where a candidate presents with a qualification that was achieved outside of Ireland, the qualification will be assessed using the NARIC Ireland Qualifications Recognition database to establish equivalency.
- Exemptions / advanced entry can only be granted prior to or/at commencement of a module or stage.
- Exemptions are not available on every programme of study available at the College. Where such an exception occurs, clear information with be provided via the programme documentation available to applicants and learners and on the College website.

5.8.5 Assessment of Application for RPL

When considering an application for RPL, the assessor will make an assessment of the evidence of learning against the following criteria:

- authenticity – that the learner actually completed what is claimed in the proposal and that the evidence relates to the applicant's own efforts and achievements;

- sufficiency – that there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate fully the achievement of the learning claimed;
- validity – that there is an appropriate match between the evidence presented and the learning being demonstrated and that the evidence is valid and reliable;
- currency – that learning is sufficiently recent to allow the learner to benefit from the proposed course or the learner has kept up-to-date with recent developments;
- directness – that the learning was specific and can be identified and categorised;
- quality – that learning reached a level to allow the learner to benefit from the proposed course.

5.8.6 RPL Committee

The College shall establish an RPL Committee to consider recommendations from assessors on applications for recognition of prior learning. The Committee shall comprise the following:

i. Chair: Registrar.
ii. Head of Academic Programmes.
iii. Appropriate Programme Lead.
iv. Head of Quality Assurance and Admissions.

The quorum for a valid meeting shall be three members.

5.8.7 Responsibility

- The Academic Council is responsible for approving the RPL opportunities set out in programme specific procedures by Programme Development Teams.
- The Admissions Office, in consultation with the Registrar and Programme Lead has responsibility for reviewing admission standards and procedures, for considering the fairness and consistency of their application, and for overseeing the administration of the College's admissions system on behalf of the Academic Council.
- The Admissions Office makes recommendations to Director of Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programmes on the admission standards and procedures which either approves or amends those recommendations.
- The Admissions Office is responsible for overseeing the admission of learners to programmes under the oversight of the Director of Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programmes.
- The Director of Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programmes is responsible for ensuring that all awarding body entry and enrolment conditions are complied with.
- The Head of Academic Programmes is responsible for evaluating applicants' academic achievements to determine that they have met the academic entry criteria.

5.8.8 Related Legislation, Regulation or Guidelines

Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines 2016 (QQI).
Sector Specific (Independent/Private) Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines 2016 (QQI).
Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training 2017 (QQI)
Policy and Criteria for Making Awards 2014 (QQI)

Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015).
Assessment and Standards, Revised 2013 (QQI).
Policy for Determining Awards Standards – QQI, 2014
NFQ Awards Standards
European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) User Guide –2015
International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) – UNESCO, 2011.
Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education and Training 2005 (QQI)
QQI Policy Restatement: Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in Relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training 2015.

5.9 Procedure for Operation of RPL Policy

QA Area (s)	• Programmes of Education and Training • Governance and Management of Quality • Documented Approach to QA
Applies to	☐ Staff only ☐ Learners only ☒ Staff and Learners
Policies this Procedure relates to	Policy for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

5.9.0 Procedure

Responsibility for submitting applications for the Recognition of Prior Learning rests with individual applicants. Potential RPL applicants seeking to access a programme in the College, through RPL, are invited to a preliminary meeting with the relevant Programme Lead to discuss the requirements for RPL entry. The Head of QA and Admissions will advise the applicant of the minimum standards that must be evidenced and explain the RPL process to the applicant. Should the applicant wish to proceed, they must complete a detailed RPL application. The completed RPL application form must be accompanied by details and evidence of prior learning.

5.9.1 Prior Certified Learning

Evidence of learning must be presented by the applicant in the form of official transcripts of results and the associated syllabi accompanied by relevant supporting documentation. Recognition of prior certified learning is evaluated by the Registrar or (Programme Lead), who will take into account the learner's academic record, course/programme of study, syllabus, course description, learning outcomes, number of contact hours, forms of assessment(s), NFQ level of qualification awarded (or equivalency).

5.9.2 Prior Experiential Learning

Where experiential learning is involved applicants need to present evidence of learning that demonstrates the achievement of learning outcomes of the relevant programme module(s). Candidates must demonstrate the appropriate academic level of learning as determined by the Registrar. This will normally involve candidates demonstrating that they understand the theory as well as the practical learning elements of a module.

5.9.3 The Process of RPL

- Information regarding RPL shall be available on the College website and learner handbook.
- The applicant contacts the Admissions Office with their intention to apply for RPL. Learner completes relevant application form which provided through the Admissions Office. Application forms for RPL should be completed and submitted to the Admissions Office at least 4 weeks before the commencement of the programme/module.
- For Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL), applicants must submit a copy of their certificate that documents the prior learning and also a description of the

module(s) / programme(s) already completed (i.e. learning outcomes, assessment techniques, duration of study etc). This should be included with their initial application.

- For Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL), applicants must prepare a portfolio of evidence based on the learning outcomes of the module they seek RPL for. The College will provide advice on the preparation of the Portfolio, through its RPL mentoring support system.
- In both RPCL and RPEL applications, the assessor should make a recommendation on the application within 10 working days and forward a report to the Programme Lead. The Programme Lead will consult with the Registrar and prepare a recommendation for consideration by the College's RPL Committee. The RPL Committee will make a final decision on the application.
- The decision of the RPL Committee will be communicated in writing to the applicant. The applicant has the right to appeal the decision. The appeal must be made within 5 working days of receiving the outcome.
- A maximum of 50% of credits may be exempted for non-award stages of programmes. No credit exemptions may be awarded for Award stages.

5.9.4 Recognition for Prior Certified Learning (RPCL)

Prior Certified Learning is where an applicant has already been awarded a qualification for a formal programme taken at an institution or training organisation. This prior learning may be recognised on the National Framework of Qualifications and may entitle the applicant to:

- Admission to a programme.
- The award of advanced academic standing.
- The award of exemptions from some parts of a programme.

The applicant is required to provide the relevant syllabus and a transcript of results. The assessor, appointed by the Admissions Office, in consultation with the Programme Lead, will have regard to the criteria listed under '*Assessment of Application for RPL*' in the Policy Statement. They will base their decision to grant this exemption or advanced academic standing on the following:

- Comparison of learning outcomes: The assessor should compare the learning outcomes of the prior certified learning to the learning outcomes of the module(s)/programme the applicant is seeking the exemption(s) in. If the assessor believes the learning outcomes are sufficiently similar, then an exemption may be awarded. It is at the discretion of the assessor to decide what is sufficiently similar.
- Currency of Prior Certified Learning: The Prior Certified Learning must have been achieved in a comparatively appropriate time frame (in some instances this may be in the last 3 years, 5 years or 10 years – dependent on the learning achieved) i.e. computing learning 10 years ago is of limited benefit today on a current programme– psychology outcomes may be more timeless.
- Foreign Qualifications: Applicants seeking RPCL for foreign qualifications should contact QQI to have their qualifications aligned with the appropriate Irish qualification.

5.9.5 Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Certified Learning

- It is the applicant's responsibility to apply for the RPCL. Applicants must submit their claim on the relevant form. This form must be submitted to the Admissions Office at least 4 weeks before the commencement of the programme/module. Applicants must also include certificates, results, programme details and where possible learning outcomes of modules completed.
- The applicant may be required to attend an interview with the assessor.
- Prior certified learning may entitle the candidate to exemptions on a programme, not credits. As this certified learning has already received credit at another institution, the applicant does not receive credits for it again, but recognition in the form of exemptions. No grade will be awarded to the applicant for the certified learning.
- The assessor should make a recommendation to the Programme Lead regarding the RPL application within 10 working days of application. Assessors have the right to recommend that exemptions be granted with conditions (e.g. certain research is carried out, attendance at certain workshops etc.).
- The Programme Lead will consult with the Registrar and prepare a recommendation for consideration by the College's RPL Committee. The RPL Committee will make a final decision on the application.
- The decision of the RPL Committee will be communicated in writing to the applicant. The Applicant has a right to appeal this decision, in accordance with the procedure in Section 5.8.9 Appeal below.
- When Prior Certified Learning is accepted as the basis for granting an exemption on a programme of study, further application using the same learning for the granting of further exemptions in the same programme will not be considered.
- Some programmes may require a limitation on the volume of exemptions or on the type of learning that may be exempt due to requirements of state or professional bodies.

5.9.6 Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)

This involves the awarding of credit for learning from experience. In this case, the candidate must demonstrate that the learning experience has occurred by producing a Portfolio of Evidence to support the claim for access, exemption or credit (in some instances the assessor may decide to use an alternative method of assessment, e.g. project or examination). The College will provide advice on the preparation of the Portfolio, through its RPL mentoring support system. It should be pointed out to the applicant that this may prove to be an onerous and time-consuming procedure.

As a general principle, credit is given for learning, not for experience per se. The portfolio of evidence must be written in such a way that the matching of the knowledge, skills and competencies of the module learning outcomes to the prior learning is clearly demonstrated. The portfolio which the applicant presents will be based on the learning outcomes of the module(s)/ programme he/she seeks credits for. Evidence contained in the portfolio may include:

- References
- CV (e.g. Europass CV)

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

5.9.7 Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning

- It is the learner's responsibility to apply for RPEL. Applications are made to the Admissions Office. Applicants must submit their claim on the relevant form. This form must be submitted at least 4 weeks before the commencement of the programme/module.
- The Admissions Office, in consultation with the Registrar will appoint a suitably qualified assessor to assess the portfolio of evidence prepared by the RPL applicant. Assessors must satisfy themselves that the learning gained matches the minimum standard of the learning outcomes on the module for which the credits is being sought. The assessor responsible must have received training on RPL before he/she can assess the portfolio. When assessing portfolios, it is important to consider the currency of the prior learning. It must be achieved within a suitable time frame – for example within the last 3-5 years, in the case of IT related programmes.
- The applicant may be required to provide verification from previous or current employers that the experience stated has been achieved by the applicant. Learning outcomes should facilitate the RPL assessment process. They must be written in a format that allows the applicant to provide evidence that he/she possesses the relevant knowledge, skills and competencies associated with the module/programme.
- As part of the assessment, applicants may also be interviewed by the assessor.
- Applicants should receive a grade for their portfolio of evidence which carries equal weight to modules taken in the conventional method. Assessors must satisfy themselves that the assessment methods used to determine the standard of the experiential learning gained be equivalent to assessment methods applied to conventional applicants. Assessors have the right to recommend that credits be granted with conditions e.g. certain research is carried out, attendance at certain workshops etc.
- The assessor should make a recommendation to the Programme Lead regarding the RPL application within 10 working days of application. Assessors have the right to recommend that exemptions be granted with conditions (e.g. certain research is carried out, attendance at certain workshops etc.).

- The Programme Lead will consult with the Registrar and prepare a recommendation for consideration by the College's RPL Committee. The RPL Committee will make a final decision on the application.
- The decision of the RPL Committee will be communicated in writing to the applicant. The Applicant has a right to appeal this decision, in accordance with the procedure in Section 5.8.9 Appeal below.

5.9.8 Review and Appeal

The applicant has the right to seek a review of the RPL Committee's decision, if they are not satisfied.
An applicant may only seek this review on the following grounds:

3. Incorrect process. Specific evidence of irregularity in the College's application assessment process must be provided.
4. Specified/stated grounds where the College's decision was based on misinterpretation of data or information provided as part of the application process.

False or vexatious appeals will not be considered.
Requests for a review must be made in writing to the Director of Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programmes Office within 10 days of the decision being communicated. The request must be accompanied by all relevant and supporting documentation and a fee of €50, to be refunded only if the review is successful.
The grounds for review will be considered by the Director of Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programmes and evaluated by the Director of Academic Affairs and Undergraduate Programmes or another qualified assessor, who is not involved in the original decision. The outcome of the review will be communicated in writing to the applicant normally within 10 days of receipt.
If the applicant remains dissatisfied, they may seek to appeal through the College's formal Appeals Procedure in Section 3.8. The fee for such an appeal is €100, refundable only if the appeal is successful.

5.9.9 Validation

All RPL recommendations and decisions are subject to audit by the Admissions Office.