



# **Academic Quality Framework**

## **Recognition of Prior Learning Policy**

**Approved by Academic Council**

**22 June 2022**

## Table of Contents

1. Purpose.....	3
2. Context.....	3
3. Definitions.....	4
4. Application.....	5
5. Principles.....	6
6. Operational rules for RPL for Admission and Advanced Entry to Programmes.....	8
7. Operational Rules for RPL for Module Exemption based on APCL.....	9
8. Operational Rules for RPL for Module Exemption Based on APEL.....	11
9. Process for Considering and Approving Module Exemptions .....	12

## Document Control Summary

Area	Document Information
Author	Academic Affairs
Owner	Academic Affairs
Reference number	AQF_ROPLP_01
Version	1
Status	Approved
Approved by / to be approved by	Academic Council
Approval date	22/06/2022
Document Classification	TU Dublin Internal/Wide

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of this policy is to allow the recognition of prior certified and experiential learning for the purposes of allowing students access onto TU Dublin programmes and granting exemptions from modules, while maintaining the academic standards of the University.

## 2. Context

- 2.1. TU Dublin, as part of its remit to widen participation in higher education, is committed to ensuring flexibility and diversity in its provision to provide a range of learning opportunities for students. To this end, it facilitates access, transfer and progression (ATP) opportunities within its academic provision through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).
- 2.2. QQI's Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (April 2016), Section 3.2 on Learner Admission, Progression and Recognition, state that policies and procedures for learner admission, progression and recognition should include:
  - Fit-for-purpose admission, recognition, and completion procedures.
  - Fair recognition of education and training qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.
  - Appropriate recognition procedures. These are in line with the national policies and criteria for ATP and the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and any appropriate European recognition principles, conventions and guidelines including the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

2.3. In addition, the European Standards and Guidelines 2015 require, in relation to Standard 1.4, Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification:

- Fit-for-purpose admission, recognition, and completion procedures.
- Fair recognition of education and training qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.
- Appropriate recognition procedures. These are in line with the national policies and criteria for ATP and the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and any appropriate European recognition principles, conventions and guidelines including the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).
- Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components for ensuring the students' progress in their studies, while promoting mobility.

### 3. Definitions

3.1. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a means by which prior learning is formally identified, assessed and acknowledged. RPL encompasses both the accreditation of prior certificated learning (APCL), i.e. learning that has been achieved through a formal programme and which has been formally assessed, and the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL), i.e. 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.

3.2. Other terms associated with RPL include:

- *Formal learning* which takes place through programmes of study or training that are delivered by education or training providers, and which lead to awards;
- *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 and in community-based learning;
- *Informal learning* that takes place through life and work experience. 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.
- *Prior learning* relates to learning outcomes achieved prior to registration on a TU Dublin programme of study.

## 4. Application

4.1. RPL can be used in TU Dublin to:

- Gain entry to the first year of a programme of study where an applicant may not meet the standard academic requirements for entry;
- Gain advanced entry to a programme of study, e.g. into stage 2, 3 or 4 of a four-year Honours Degree;
- Grant exemptions from a module or modules within a programme of study;
- Assessment for application towards a full award.

- 4.2. Where RPL is used for initial entry or advanced entry, the process is one of 'recognition' for admission to a programme. In instances where RPL is used for exemption from a module or modules, the process is one of 'assessment'.
- 4.3. This Policy applies to all taught undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and modules within TU Dublin. This includes taught modules within MPhil, PhD and other Doctoral programmes.
- 4.4. While this policy applies to all TU Dublin programmes and modules, limitations to RPL may apply at programme level. For example, programmes that are externally regulated or accredited may have specific RPL rules or restrictions. In such cases, information on these rules or restrictions must be approved through the validation or review process, and must be communicated clearly to students.

## 5. Principles

- 5.1. TU Dublin is committed to the principles of transparency, equity and fairness in RPL processes.
- 5.2. TU Dublin's RPL policy and related processes shall be made available to current and potential students via the TU Dublin website and in Student Handbooks.
- 5.3. The academic integrity of TU Dublin's programmes and the implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications are supported through TU Dublin's RPL policy and processes.
- 5.4. A module is the smallest unit considered for the purposes of RPL, hence partial exemption from a module shall not be permitted.



- 5.5. RPL shall be fully embedded within TU Dublin's Quality Framework, including student assessment regulations.
- 5.6. An annual report detailing the extent to which RPL has been used across the University will be available through the Student Record Management System and considered at the University Programmes Board.
- 5.7. RPL is based on consideration of learning outcomes achieved through prior certificated or experiential learning. RPL and its assessment, therefore, is a matter of academic judgement and hence an activity that should be conducted primarily at School level.
- 5.8. There shall be no limits placed on the number of modules/ECTS that can be exempted through prior experiential learning where it can be demonstrated that the learning outcomes have been achieved, apart from the restrictions stated in 5.10 below. However, where ECTS have previously been awarded, to avoid double-counting of learning there are restrictions placed on exemptions on the basis of APCL (see Section 7 below).
- 5.9. TU Dublin will consider RPL for the achievement of a full award through prior experiential learning only. Prior certificated learning will only be considered for access to programmes, advanced entry and module exemption(s) in specified circumstances (see Section 7 below).
- 5.10. Prior learning can only be used once for access or module exemptions, i.e. an applicant cannot use prior learning to gain access to a programme and then seek module exemptions on that programme based on the same prior learning.

- 5.11. The process for seeking module exemptions shall be published on TU Dublin's website and links provided within the Student Handbooks. Students should be fully informed on the implications of module exemptions on their overall mark and award classification.
- 5.12. A School may wish to grant entry or advanced entry to a student to a TU Dublin programme who may have prior learning but who also may have learning deficits. In this case the School may negotiate a Learning Pathway for that student that might require the student to undertake bridging modules as well as facilitating module exemptions.

## **6. Operational rules for RPL for Admission and Advanced Entry to Programmes**

- 6.1. For all programmes, programme documentation will clearly state the entry requirements for each programme, including those requirements for applicants who do not meet the standard minimum academic requirements.
- 6.2. For part-time programmes, experiential learning may be a requirement for entry to the programme. Applications, including evidence of experiential learning as set out in the entry requirements, are made directly to the relevant TU Dublin School.
- 6.3. For full-time undergraduate programmes, students apply for advanced entry to the TU Dublin programme through CAO in cases of prior experiential learning.



- 6.4. Students apply for postgraduate taught programmes through the appropriate information system through which they will submit all relevant documentation such as transcripts of prior certificated learning and evidence of experiential learning. Schools may contact applicants to request further information as appropriate.

## **7. Operational Rules for RPL for Module Exemption based on APCL**

- 7.1. ECTS shall not be allocated to modules exempted on the basis of APCL.
- 7.2. Grades/marks shall not be allocated to modules where exemptions are granted on the basis of APCL. Where a module exemption is granted, this module is excluded from the calculation of the GPA/award classification, unless the module in question has already been completed by the student as a stand-alone module or Single Module Certificate within TU Dublin (see 7.4 c) below).
- 7.3. Exemptions from modules on the basis of APCL may only be granted where learning outcomes are equivalent in terms of level and content. Prior learning that was used to achieve an award cannot be used to achieve another award that is equivalent in level and volume. An exception to this would be the Advanced Certificate at Level Six on the National Framework of Qualifications which may be used to gain exemptions from, or Advanced Entry to, a Higher Certificate programme which is also at Level Six on the National Framework of Qualifications.

7.4 Module exemptions may be considered where:

- a) Modules/awards, on which basis exemptions are sought, were achieved through a special purpose or supplemental award(s) and the programme to which the module exemption applies is a major or minor award.
- b) Module(s)/awards, on which basis exemptions are sought, were achieved through a minor award and the programme to which the module exemption applies is a related major award.
- c) Where a student has not registered on a major programme of study but has completed a number of modules on a stand-alone basis within TU Dublin, or been awarded a Single Module Certificate within TU Dublin, the student may be eligible for consideration for module exemptions or a full award at a level on the National Framework of Qualifications no higher than the level of prior certificated learning. In this case any marks/grades obtained through this prior learning within TU Dublin may carry forward and be included in the calculation of the GPA/award classification for the award sought.

7.5 The following should be considered when evaluating applications for module exemptions:

- Is there evidence that all learning outcomes are met through prior learning?
- Is the prior learning at the appropriate level?
- When was the learning achieved, i.e. is the learning still relevant?

Students who are granted module exemptions based on APCL and who subsequently reconsider shall have the right to decline module exemptions and to take modules in the taught mode, within the timelines indicated in Section 9 below.

## 8. Operational Rules for RPL for Module Exemption Based on APEL

- 8.1 ECTS shall be allocated to modules exempted on the basis of APEL.
- 8.2 Grades/marks shall not be allocated to modules where exemptions are granted, and the exempted module is omitted from the calculation of the GPA/award classification. Where a full award is achieved through RPL, this award shall be unclassified.
- 8.3 The following should be considered when evaluating applications for module exemptions:
- Is there evidence that all learning outcomes are met through prior learning?
  - Is the prior learning at the appropriate level?
  - When was the learning achieved, i.e. is the learning still current?
- 8.4 Applicants seeking module exemptions on the basis of prior experiential learning may be interviewed, and alternative assessments may be set.
- 8.5 Students who are granted module exemptions based on APEL and who subsequently reconsider shall have the right to decline module exemptions and to take modules in the taught mode, within the timelines indicated in Section 9 below.

## 9. Process for Considering and Approving Module Exemptions

**Note:** Applicants for module exemption(s) must be registered on the programme where exemption is sought. Applicants are advised to attend all module delivery until the outcome of the application is communicated and accepted.

By APCL/APEL	Process	Documentation to be submitted	Responsibility
By APCL (applicable only where the level of the prior learning is at a lower level on the NFQ than the current award being sought, or where the prior award was a supplemental or SPA)	<p>Application submitted to School as soon as possible following acceptance of offer onto programme and prior to the commencement of the delivery of relevant module(s).</p> <p>School reviews application and grants / refuses exemption by end of week two of module delivery.</p> <p>Applicant must accept or otherwise the exemption by the end of week three of module delivery. Once accepted, the student may not take the module at that sitting.</p> <p>No ECTS or mark awarded, unless prior learning was TU Dublin stand-alone module(s) or Single Module Certificate(s)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Module exemption application form</li> <li>• Certificate/award parchment</li> <li>• Transcript(s)</li> <li>• Module detail including: indicative syllabus/content</li> <li>• Learning outcomes</li> <li>• Assessments completed</li> </ul>	<p>Consideration of eligibility of exemptions undertaken by appropriate module coordinator/lecturer. Approved by Head of School or nominee.</p> <p>Exemption(s) ratified by Assessment Board.</p>
By APEL	<p>Application submitted to School by end of week two of module delivery.</p> <p>School reviews application and all documentation submitted and grants/refuses exemption by end of week four.</p> <p>Applicant must accept or otherwise the exemption by the end of week five of module delivery. Once accepted, the student may not take the module at that sitting.</p> <p>ECTS are awarded. Module is recorded as Pass and excluded from award classification, where applicable.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Module exemption application form</li> <li>• CV</li> <li>• Relevant job description(s)</li> <li>• Employer References, if applicable.</li> <li>• Personal statement from applicant on how learning outcomes have been met.</li> <li>• Portfolio of evidence supporting statements on learning outcomes including, for example, projects, reports, that clearly identify the applicant's contribution.</li> </ul>	<p>Consideration of eligibility of exemptions undertaken by appropriate module coordinator/lecturer. Approved by Head of School.</p> <p>Exemption(s) ratified by Assessment Board.</p>