

1. Introduction

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is the term used to describe the system for recognising a range of relevant learning that a student may have gained prior to entry onto a particular programme of study.

This guide is designed to help you as an applicant understand the RPL process at Maynooth University and how to prepare an RPL application. All applicants should consult the *Maynooth University Recognition of Prior Learning Policy* before commencing an application.

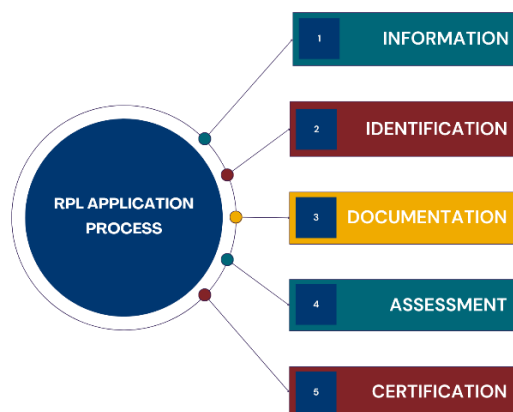
2. What can RPL be used for?

The *Maynooth University Policy for the Recognition of Prior Learning* notes that RPL may be used three purposes:

1. **admission** to programmes where you may not have obtained the standard entry requirements.
2. **module exemptions** within a programme which duplicate your prior learning. RPL is normally used to recognise learning attained before you commence a programme. In exceptional circumstances, 'concurrent' learning (learning undertaken after you are admitted to their programme of study) may also be considered for the purpose of module exemptions.
3. **advanced entry** to years other than year 1 may, in some cases, be permitted¹

3. RPL Process

The RPL process typically covers five stages as follows:



3.1 Information

3.1.1 The University displays RPL information on the Maynooth University website including programme descriptors. Where RPL is not permissible, this is usually clearly stated.

3.1.2 You, the applicant, will need to identify the purpose of your RPL application and then complete one of two forms depending on your need.

a) RPL Programme Admission

¹ Note that programme transfers are managed through mechanisms within University Admissions

If you do not meet the standard entry criteria for a programme, you may be eligible to apply for admission based on your prior learning. Such applications are made via the ***Maynooth University RPL Application for Admission to a Programme***. Entry criteria for undergraduate programmes are usually articulated in terms of high school exit exams whereas postgraduate entry requirements are expressed in terms of the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) as per Appendix A.

Please note that applicants using this form will also be required to complete any other necessary application forms such as those on the Postgraduate application system (PAC) or the Springboard application platform.

b) Exemptions from a module

If you have previously and extensively covered content on your new programme of study, you may be eligible to apply for module exemptions. Such applications are made via the ***Maynooth University RPL Exemption Application form***.

- 3.1.3 Enquiries and guidance on the preparation and submission of prior learning documentation can be arranged through the University Admissions Office.

3.2 Identification

- 3.2.1 You are required to explore your prior learning with a view to making an application for formal recognition.
- 3.2.2 At this point, you will identify whether your claim will be made on the basis of *formal* or *certified learning* (RPCL) and/or experiential learning (RPEL).

3.3 Documentation

- 3.3.1 In making an application for RPL, you will be required to present evidence of your learning and demonstrate how you have, in the case of module exemptions, achieved the learning outcomes of a particular module within a programme or, for admissions applications, how you meet the entry requirements for a programme of study.

Both RPL application forms have two distinct sections. The first section refers to your personal background and *formal* or *certified learning* and the second section refers to your *experiential learning*.


Section A- Personal Background and Prior Formal/Certified Learning

To make an application based on prior certified learning, you are requested to provide the transcript of results, the award certificate, module syllabus and any other relevant course documentation for each course listed. This is the evidence of your prior certified learning and is one of the foundations for assessing your application.

Section B- Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning

In some cases, you may hold other qualifications and experience as may be acceptable to the University for the purposes of programme admission or module exemption. This section will ask you to document in detail any relevant prior working history, training undertaken and voluntary or community experience and outline how it supports the learning claims made in your application. Evidence of such learning may include (but not may not be limited to):

- References
- CV

- Job descriptions and outline of work tasks and successes
- Personal statements
- Details of any training completed (including certificates where available)
- Sample work (e.g. drawings, minutes from meetings, business plan, etc.) 
- Published work
- Certificates of registrations or membership of professional bodies
- Video/audio recordings
- Relevant recreational activities or hobbies

This list is not exhaustive and submission requirements may vary between programmes. You are welcome to submit any other evidence which you feel supports your learning claims. Please only provide copies of evidence rather than original documentation as these will not be returned to you.

- 3.3.2 The relevant application form along with your documentation should then be submitted to the RPL Office for assessment. Depending on the type of application (RPL for exemption or for admission) and the programme to which the application pertains, the mechanism for submitting an application will vary. Applicants should refer to the application process diagram illustrated in Appendix A.

3.4 Assessment

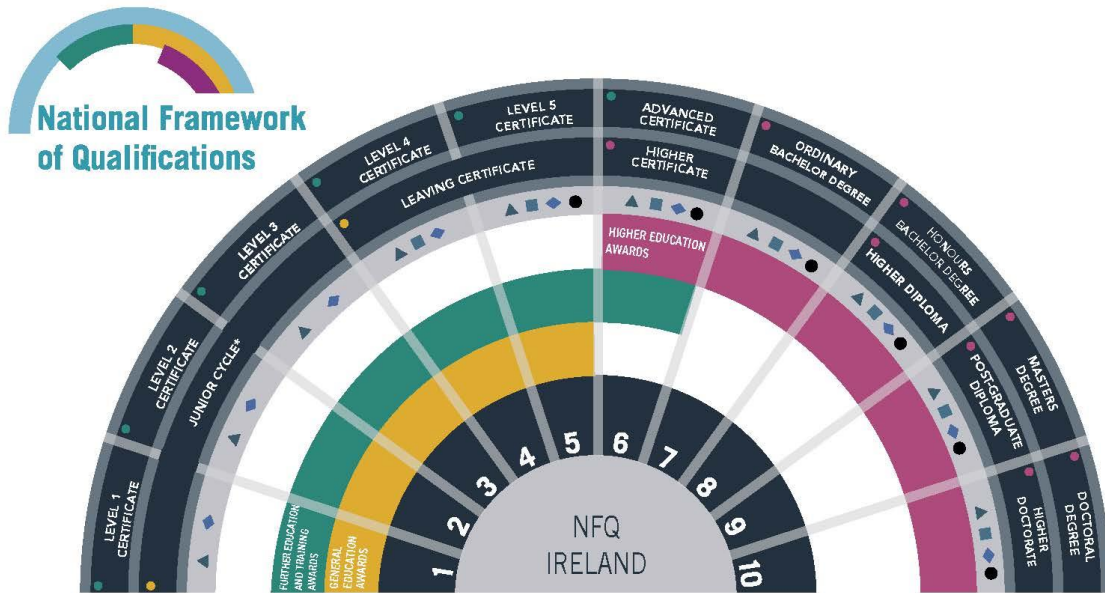
- 3.4.1 The focus of RPL shall be the achievement of learning outcomes relevant to a programme or module rather than the experience of the prior learning.

At any point during the assessment process, you may be required to supply further details on prior learning via an assessment activity such as an interview, practical exam, demonstration or written examination. This academic department will select a mode of assessment best fitting the particular discipline.

3.5 Recognition

- 3.5.1 The assessor will make an informed recommendation based on the evidence you provide. Successful outcomes are approved by the relevant Head of Department and/or Faculty Dean.
- 3.5.2 Exemptions will be granted where the assessor can make a clear judgement that learning outcomes have been achieved. Only in exceptional circumstances will module exemptions be granted on the basis of experiential learning.
- 3.5.3 If your application is successful, it will lead to one or more of the following outcomes:
- Admission to a programme
 - Module exemptions
 - Advanced entry to a programme
- 3.5.4 Where the application is successful, you will be informed in writing and your University record will be amended to reflect the outcome. The Admissions Office will inform, as appropriate, Student Registration, the Fees Office and the Examinations Office.
- 3.5.5 Appeals against judgements on applications for RPL will be reviewed in line with the University's appeals policy.

Appendix A National Framework of Qualifications



CLASSES OF AWARD

- Major Awards: named in the outer rings, are the principal class of awards made at a level
 - Minor Awards: are for partial completion of the outcomes for a Major Award
 - Supplemental Awards: are for learning that is additional to a Major Award
 - Special Purpose Awards: are for relatively narrow or purpose-specific achievement
 - Professional Awards: are for occupation-oriented qualifications including apprenticeships
- *Please refer to NCCA website, ncca.ie/en/junior-cycle/

IRISH REGISTER OF QUALIFICATIONS

- For more information on
- Qualifications
 - Providers
 - Courses
- visit www.irqi.ie

Appendix C Commonly Used Terms

Access is a process by which applicants enter a programme of study. RPL can be used as a mechanism to secure admission to a programme where the applicant does not meet the standard entry criteria.

APL or Accreditation of Prior Learning is simply another term for Recognition of Prior learning and refers to how an individuals prior learning is identified, assessed and recognised for the purpose of developing their formal education.

ECTS or European Credit Transfer System is an academic credit system based on the estimated student workload required to achieve the objectives and learning outcomes of a module or programme of study. It is designed to enable academic recognition for periods of study, to facilitate student mobility and credit accumulation and transfer. The ECTS is the recommended credit system for higher education in Ireland and across the European Higher Education Area

Formal Learning refers to certified learning in a programme which has learning outcomes against which learning can be assessed, credited and can result in a recognised award.

Informal Learning or ‘experiential’ learning refers to the knowledge, skills and competencies that an individual attains through life and work experiences.

Module or subject refers to a self-contained unit of a student's workload. Modules are typically delivered and assessed within a semester and the ‘module descriptor’ sets out what the objectives and learning outcomes of the module are, how many credits attach to the modules, how it will be assessed etc.

NFQ or National Framework of Qualifications is a ten-level system of education and training awards standards. Each fan diagram (see Figure 1) depicts the levels on the NFQ, awarding bodies and major types of qualifications.

Non-Formal Learning occurs through planned learning activities which are often not certified and do not result in academic credit (e.g. Online learning, short extramural courses)

Programme (or Course). The terms ‘Programme’ and ‘Course’ are used interchangeably at Maynooth University.

Progression refers to how a student, upon successful completion of a year or programme, can respectively progress to the subsequent year or another programme.

RPCL or Recognition of Prior Certified Learning. This is often referred to as Accreditation of Prior Certified Learning (APCL)

RPEL or Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning refers to non-formal and informal learning acquired through experience or learning achieved from non-accredited bodies. This often also referred to as Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)

Transfer is a process allowing a student transfer from one programme to another by being awarded general credit to recognise learning outcomes already achieved in the previous programme. All transfers at Maynooth University are managed through the central Admissions Office.