

# Recognition of Prior Learning Policy



**Owner: Admissions, Registry**

**Approved by: ACEC 12/12/2024**

## 1. Purpose

The purpose of the policy is to lead the recognition of prior (RPL) and concurrent learning at University College Dublin (UCD) through a fair process that maintains the academic standards of the University. Recognition of prior learning can provide alternative opportunities for admission to academic programmes at UCD while recognition of both prior and concurrent learning may facilitate students' progression on these programmes. With the recognition of prior and concurrent learning the University promotes the principles of lifelong learning and widening participation in education, in line with guidelines established by the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).

## 2. Definition

2.1 Recognition of prior and concurrent learning (RPL<sup>1</sup>) is defined with reference to its purpose and can be a means:

- To gain admission to an academic programme where formal admission requirements may not be met<sup>2</sup>.
- To give ECTS credit on a programme so that learning is not duplicated.

2.2 Recognition of prior and concurrent learning is also defined with reference to its implementation and is a process by which learning is formally identified, assessed and given a value (QQI, 2005). RPL covers different types of learning including:

- Formal, certified learning that occurs via mainstream educational provision, that has been assessed and for which academic credit has been awarded.
- Non-formal learning that occurs outside mainstream educational provision, that nonetheless results from planned activities that may or may not be assessed, is often not certified and is not associated with academic credit.
- Informal or 'experiential learning' that is unplanned and includes skills and competencies attained through life and work experience.

<sup>1</sup> Here, 'RPL' is used to denote both 'prior' and 'concurrent' learning to retain usage of the acronym that is commonly used across the Higher Education sector.

<sup>2</sup> This normally does not apply to Undergraduate Admissions except for established RPL pathways such as Mature Entry.

2.3 Prior learning refers to learning achieved prior to admission to a programme of study.

2.4 Concurrent learning refers to learning that has been completed outside of the programme after the student has been admitted to the programme.

### 3. Scope

3.1 This policy applies to applicants to UCD programmes and to UCD students.

3.2 While this policy applies to all UCD programmes as defined by the Academic Regulations, limitations to RPL may apply at programme level.

3.3 Professional programmes that are externally accredited may be restricted in the use of RPL. Other programmes may include elements that are not suitable for the purposes of RPL. In such cases information on any limitations or additional criteria for RPL must be made available by the relevant Governing Board.

3.4. This policy is concerned solely with applications for RPL from individuals. The following arrangements are outside the scope of the policy:

- Collaborative programmes and pre-established arrangements with other educational institutions, such as outbound mobility.
- Any admission routes that are covered by a policy, procedure or other pre-established arrangement and involve more than one student, including:
  - UCD Access programmes
  - UCD NFQ Level 7 Certificates in Open Learning which can be used as a pathway for progression onto specific UCD programmes
  - Programme transfer at the undergraduate level as established in the UCD Undergraduate Transfer Policy
  - Programme transfer in graduate taught programmes where pre-established arrangements are in place
  - Arrangements for pre-Masters programmes.
  - Micro-credentials: RPL cannot be used to obtain credit /exemption within a Micro-credential<sup>3</sup>.
- UCD graduate pathway programmes as defined in the appropriate procedures.
- Any other pre-established arrangements for admission or credit towards a programme that:
  - Have been set up in admissions criteria, programme specification or any policy or procedure regarding a programme; and
  - Involve more than one applicant/student instead of an individual claim.

<sup>3</sup> Micro-credentials (MC) may in themselves still be used to gain credit/exemption in UCD programmes, reference section 4.3 below.

## 4. Principles

### Units & credit levels

- 4.1. A module is the smallest unit considered under RPL. Credit cannot be awarded for part of a module.
- 4.2. Learning can be recognised, and credit awarded against a module or against multiple modules.
- 4.3. A Governing Board may approve recognition of prior or concurrent learning within the following limits:
  - UCD taught programmes:
    - Not to exceed 60 credits, and
    - Not to exceed 1/2 of the overall programme credits<sup>4</sup>.
  - UCD research programmes:
    - Not to exceed 2/3 of the taught credits of the programme.
- 4.4. Granting of RPL above the maximum limits set in the Policy should be considered exceptional and requires the recommendation of the relevant Governing Board and the approval of the University Programmes Board.
- 4.5. As established in principle 3.2 above, programmes can set lower credit limits, for example, to meet professional accreditation requirements. Information on any such limits must be made available by the relevant Governing Board.
- 4.6. Prior or concurrent learning normally leads to the award of non-graded credit. Such non-graded credit can be applied to a module or split against multiple modules.
- 4.7. Non-graded credit will not be included in GPA calculations.
- 4.8. Prior or concurrent learning will be awarded as graded credit and thus contribute towards the programme GPA calculations, only in cases where the learning:
  - Has been completed in UCD, and
  - Is considered equivalent to the current UCD module(s) in the programme which RPL will be applied to, and
  - Has not already counted towards an award.
- 4.9. Prior or concurrent learning can only be recognised once for credit/exemption. However, prior learning can be recognised for both admission to a programme **and** for subsequent credit/exemption against modules within the programme so that learning is not duplicated.

<sup>4</sup>This limitation of 50% of overall programme credits does not apply when credits are taken from modules previously completed in UCD and which have not already counted towards an award.

## Assessment of RPL claims

- 4.10. An effective process for recognition of prior and concurrent learning requires an in-depth consideration of programme curriculum. The prior or concurrent learning must be in line with programme curriculum and learning outcomes.
- 4.11. All decisions on recognition of prior and concurrent learning should be based on academic judgement and the following principles:
- A claim for prior and concurrent learning must be substantiated in a way that it can be assessed.
  - Prior learning must align to current knowledge and practice.
  - The academic level of the prior and/or concurrent learning should be in line with the level descriptors for the award, equivalent to the standard expected of other students and the standards associated with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and its awards.
- 4.12. In making decisions on RPL, a Governing Board may require an RPL applicant to undertake an assessment activity or activities to ensure that learning achieved is equivalent to the stated module or programme outcomes.

## Process and RPL decisions

- 4.13. All applications for recognition of prior or concurrent learning must be initiated by an applicant or a student.
- 4.14. Recognition of prior learning should be sought as part of the admission process to a programme. However, where appropriate, programmes can set their own criteria regarding the timing of RPL applications.
- 4.15. The University recommends that students in PhD programmes do not apply for RPL during their first year of study and that an RPL application should be reviewed by the student's Research Studies Panel (RSP) in advance of the application.
- 4.16. Governing Boards ensure that applicants are informed of the outcome or status of their RPL application in a timely manner – normally 20 working days.
- 4.17. Governing Boards are responsible for making final decisions on recognition of prior and concurrent learning applications.

## Monitoring and quality assurance

- 4.18. Governing Boards must have mechanisms in place to ensure and enhance the quality of RPL decisions.
- 4.19. It is the responsibility of the University Programmes Board to ensure procedures are in place to monitor trends and audit decision-making regarding recognition of prior and concurrent learning.
- 4.20. Governing Boards are required to report to the University Programmes Boards annually on RPL claims received, granted and refused.

## 5. Related documents

- Admissions Policy
- Academic Regulations
- Assessment Policies and Regulations
- Undergraduate Programme Transfer Policy
- Procedures in place for UCD graduate pathway programmes
- The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) <https://www.qqi.ie/>

All UCD Policies can be found in the [online document library](#)<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> All policies and policy related documents and forms are subject to amendment. Please refer to the UCD Governance Document Library website for the official, most recent version.

## 6. Version history

Committee	Date	Action
UPB	11 Apr 2012	Recommended to AC
AC	25 Apr 2012	Approved
UPB	19 Mar 2015	Recommended to AC
AC	7 May 2015	Approved
UPB	7 Apr 2016	Recommended to AC
AC	5 May 2016	Approved
University Secretariat	19 Jun 2019	Editorial amendments
University Secretariat	2 Sept 2019	Editorial amendments
UPB	8 Apr 2020	Recommended to ACEC
ACEC	18 May 2020	Approved by ACEC
UPB	October 2024	Recommended to ACEC
ACEC	12 December 2024	Approved by ACEC