

**Recognition of Prior Learning in  
Dublin City University 2011**

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## **Recognition of Prior Learning**

### **Background and context**

The purpose of the recognition of prior learning is to identify and acknowledge the ongoing nature of education and the value of lifelong learning. It acknowledges the needs of society and the economy for a continually skilled, adaptable and well-educated workforce, as well as the desire of individuals to continue to learn and acquire additional qualifications, change career paths and adapt to changing circumstances.

The recognition of prior learning was discussed at DCU University Standards Committee and a Recognition of Prior Learning Working Group (RPL WG) was established to consider recognition of prior learning in DCU. The initial working group was made up of representation from USC and LIU. The Working group was expanded to include a programme chair, Director of Graduate Studies, Admissions Officer and representation from Education studies and Oscail (see Appendix 1). A draft RPL policy was developed and circulated to Faculties and other relevant parties in September 2010 for consultation with feedback requested by December 2010.

Following receipt of feedback in DCU and considering that and other relevant papers (examples listed in Appendix 2) the RPL WG agreed DCU should have a university wide policy. All programme/awards which permit entry through RPL will be identified. All Schools will be required to have RPL access criteria clearly identified for programmes/awards where RPL can be utilised. The RPL procedure will be based on a University timeline rather than School based timeline.

To support RPL in DCU it will be necessary to have a RPL officer (.5 Whole Time Equivalent) in DCU. This person would be the initial contact for all RPL queries. (A sample job description for this role is included in Appendix 3). The RPL officer will offer feedback to those who apply using RPL process. It is also recommended that each Faculty and Oscail have a named person to contact for RPL general queries associated with that Faculty. The RPL officer would be required to submit a summary RPL activity report to Academic Council each year.

### **Definition of Prior Learning**

Prior learning may be formal accredited learning or experiential/uncertified learning which includes the knowledge, skills and personal qualities acquired through life, work experience and study which are not formally attested.

## **Underlying principles**

### Philosophy of RPL at DCU

*The recognition of prior learning (RPL) is inherent to DCU. RPL supports and facilitates access to DCU by recognising and rewarding prior learning. The DCU RPL policy is fair, transparent and consistently applied and supports and encourages lifelong learning and contributes to the university's overall mission. The purpose of RPL is to support students who will succeed and benefit.*

The intent of this policy is to enable individuals to build on prior learning to achieve additional qualifications including Major, Minor, Supplemental and Special Purpose awards. Recognition of prior learning can be used to access both undergraduate and post graduate awards. This policy focuses primarily on evidence of prior learning through (i) demonstration of achievement of appropriate learning outcomes and (ii) appropriate level of prior qualification(s).

The RPL WG recognise that an applicant may present a wealth of experience that potentially could be equivalent to an undergraduate degree e.g. for access to post graduate study. It is recommended that DCU would not award a degree on this basis and that such experience would be recognised for entry to further study only.

For Joint or Multiple awards approved under a duly constituted and processed Memorandum of Understanding with one or more partner institutions, credit transfer and recognition will be in accordance with the accreditation report approved by Academic Council for those awards.

In general, for major DCU awards, prior learning in the form of ECTS credits achieved, where such learning supports the desired learning outcomes of the award concerned, and where a major award at the same level has not been conferred on the applicant by another institution on foot of those credits, will be recognised, in accordance with DCU's Marks and Standards regulations. (Such DCU credits may be taken at DCU, at its linked colleges, or at an approved partner institution).

For minor, special purpose or supplemental DCU awards, prior learning in the form of ECTS credits achieved, where such learning supports the desired learning outcomes of the DCU award concerned, and where an award at the same level has not been conferred on the applicant by another institution on foot of those credits, will be recognised in accordance with DCU's Marks and Standards regulations. (Such DCU credits may be taken at DCU, at its linked colleges, or at an approved partner institution).

## **Accredited Learning recognised by DCU**

DCU will consider credits awarded by:

- Irish Higher Education and Further Education institutions whose awards have been aligned with the National Framework of Qualification at level 5 or above.
- Credits from European Further and Higher Education Institutions whose National Frameworks have been aligned with the European and Bologna Meta Frameworks.

- Credits from Professional Bodies whose awards have been aligned with the Irish NFQ or other national frameworks which have been aligned with the European or Bologna Frameworks.

## **DCU Recognition of Prior Learning Policy**

Recognition of prior learning can be used to access both undergraduate and post graduate awards.

All Schools will identify what programmes/awards the student access using RPL and at what stage, (entry /access or advanced entry).

There will be University wide final closing dates (*some Schools may utilise an earlier closing date for RPL*), for application to DCU programmes using RPL. This date, for final submission of RPL applications, will be identified in the DCU academic calendar. The submission date for undergraduate RPL applications will differ from the date for post graduate RPL applications.

Schools would outline the RPL requirements for these programmes/awards including;

- Learning outcomes required, these may have been achieved through:
  - Formal learning and/or
  - Experiential learning which will be demonstrated/captured in a portfolio.
- Assessment criteria for portfolio if used
- Interview process, e.g. competencies required, who interviews, etc (see Appendix 4 for further interview information)

## **Recognition of Prior Learning Application Process**

An applicant will be responsible for demonstrating achievement of required learning outcomes at the required level. The applicant must align prior qualifications with the relevant DCU Award Outcomes, especially where their prior qualification(s) predate the NFQ.

Responsibility for RPL applications will be organised as follows:

- Contact made with RPL officer (optional)
- Applications for RPL made to the RPL Officer
- RPL Officer will liaise with Registry the validity of documentation – transcripts etc
- Applications will be sent to the relevant Faculty/School.
- Faculties/Schools will follow RPL process, make decisions and notify RPL Officer of result and forward documentation supporting decision (e.g interview data).
- RPL Officer will notify applicant and relevant people/departments of result.
- RPL Officer will offer feedback/advice to applicants.

**Exemptions:**

The RPL WG recommend that exemptions are only permitted against academic sessions (years of study) completed and not individual modules, as it has proven too difficult to map modules against a syllabus to ensure that all programme learning outcomes required have been addressed. This represents the opinion of the majority of the RPL WG but further discussion may be required on this matter.

When allowing advanced standing (exemptions) for entry to a programme, the maximum credit exemption would available will be in accordance with the regulations laid down by DCU's Marks and Standards.

Double accreditation will not be permitted.

**Implementation**

It is proposed that the DCU Recognition of Prior Learning policy will be finalised/adopted by early 2011. Schools RPL details would be completed and follow the School academic structures approval routes, i.e. discussed and approved at School Teaching Meeting, the Faculty Teaching Meeting etc. Following appointment of a DCU RPL Officer the post graduate RPL process could commence, ideally in time for student entry through RPL in September 2011

**Quality Assurance and Audit**

Programme RPL details should be incorporated into the Programme information for each programme. This information should be published and available. Details of a programmes RPL activity will be captured in the programme review. The RPL officer would be required to submit a summary RPL activity report to Academic Council each year.

*(Further input from the DCU Quality Director will be sought on this matter but it is unlikely to be available before this paper has to be submitted to USC)*

## Appendices

### **Appendix 1** Membership of Recognition of Prior Learning Working Group:

- Ms. Orla Conlan
- Ms. Valerie Cooke (Recording Secretary)
- Dr. Jean Hughes
- Ms Celine Jameson
- Mr Billy Kelly
- Ms Phyl McMorrow
- Ms Morag Munro
- Prof Gary Murphy
- Mr Justin Rami
- Ms Elaine Walsh
- Dr Sheelagh Wickham (Chair)

**Appendix 2** Examples of resources reviewed and used together with the feedback for Schools, Faculties and other DCU departments when developing this policy:

FIN: The University Framework Implementation Network established jointly by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland and the Irish Universities Association and is comprised of representatives from the universities and their associated colleges and is currently developing guidelines for the recognition of prior learning. Some details available at: [http://www.nfqnetwork.ie/RPL\\_Case\\_Studies/Default.158.html](http://www.nfqnetwork.ie/RPL_Case_Studies/Default.158.html)

National Strategy for Higher Education in Ireland to 2030 (2011) available at : [http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/he\\_national\\_strategy\\_2030\\_report.pdf](http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/he_national_strategy_2030_report.pdf)

Murphy, Anne (2008), *APEL Matters in Higher Education* Red Lion Press Kilkenny.

OECD “*Thematic Review and Collaborative Policy Analysis recognition of non-formal and informal learning Ireland*” (2008) available at: <http://www.nqai.ie/documents/finalcountrynote1.pdf>

“*Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of a National Approach to Credit in Irish Higher Education and Training*” (2005) available at (<http://www.nqai.ie/docs/framework/policies/principles%20and%20oper%20guidelines%20green.pdf>)

“*Recognition of Prior Learning A Focus on Practice*” available at: <http://eine.ie/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/recognition-of-prior-learning-a-focus-on-practice.pdf>

Ram, J & Lalor, J - Dublin City University In R. Tuschner, W. Wittig and J. Rami (Eds.) *Accreditation of Vocational Learning Outcomes: Perspectives for a European Transfer*. 2009. ITB. Forschungsberichte.

## **Appendix 3 Draft RPL Officer Role/duties**

### **Recognition of Prior Learning Officer**

The aim of this post is to provide advice and guidance to prospective students and young adults, who wish to utilise recognition of prior learning to access University. The incumbent will hold specific responsibility for delivery of the University's policy on Recognition Prior Learning.

Candidates for the post should have excellent interpersonal, communication and administrative skills. They should be competent project managers and have the ability to complete projects on budget and to schedule. They should also have relevant work experience, preferably in the fields of education, life-long learning, or in the areas of further education or third level education.

Example of the post holders responsibilities:

- Develop and deliver a Programme of initiatives and supports aimed at widening mature / young adult participation in third level education through precognition of prior learning.
- Oversight of the interview process being used to assess RPL applicants which will include providing advice to faculties when conducting interviews, participating in some of the interviews and regularly reviewing and updating procedures associated with this process.
- Develop and update on-line information and other resources such as portfolio, for prospective recognition of prior learning applicants.
- Represent DCU at relevant undergraduate and postgraduate career fairs nationwide.
- Liaise with individuals who are internal or external to the University regarding issues and queries relating to recognition of prior learning entry to University.
- Manage queries from prospective student cohort through the establishment of a new enquiry service for recognition of prior learning.

- Maintain, abstract and analyse data relating to the applications and admission of students through recognition of prior learning, including statistical information on student applications/registrations and progression.
- Develop promotional materials for DCU which will best inform and facilitate the decision making process of potential undergraduate and postgraduate entrants who would wish to utilise recognition of prior learning.
- Encourage university wide involvement in the delivery of services to this prospective student cohort.
- Liaise with members of staff in the Secretary's Office, Registry, Student Support and Development, Public Affairs and with other administrative and academic staff on matters of interest.

The competencies which will be used for the purpose of this interview are as follows:

1. Knowledge of the organisation / sector
2. Communication
3. Personal Effectiveness / Excellence
4. Building and maintaining relationships

#### **Appendix 4** RPL interview criteria and policy

*A meeting was held with DCU Human Resources to discuss competency interviewing, record keeping and other related matters. The final paper/appendix was not available in time for circulation with the USC papers. It is hoped to circulate this appendix by soft copy prior to the USC meeting on February 3<sup>rd</sup>.*