

Document Title/Reference	Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy
<b>Purpose</b>	<p>To encourage current and prospective students to consider prior learning as a valuable means of accessing further educational opportunity and self-improvement.</p> <p>To facilitate IPA staff as they support applicants who request that prior learning be recognised for the purposes of 1) admission to a programme, 2) application of credit towards a programme.</p>
<b>Scope</b>	<p>The RPL Policy applies to programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level.</p>
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<b>Definitions</b>	<p><b>Recognition of Prior Learning:</b> “The process by which prior learning is given a value. It is a means by which prior learning is formally identified, assessed and acknowledged” (NQAI, 2005). RPL encompasses all forms of prior learning, including formal/accredited learning (certified learning); non-formal/informal/experiential learning (learning outside the formal education system, through the workplace and through experience).</p> <p><b>Access:</b> Process by which applicants enter a programme of study in the IPA. In addition to the published entry criteria, RPL can be used as a mechanism to secure admission to a programme at the initial or at advanced stages.</p> <p><b>Transfer:</b> Process by which a student can transfer from one IPA programme to another by being awarded general credit (no grades associated with the credit) to recognise learning outcomes already achieved in the previous programme.</p> <p><b>Progression:</b> The means by which students, on successful completion of an IPA programme, can progress to another IPA programme. The Registrar’s Office has established approved progression pathways between programmes, which are published in the IPA’s Application Brochure.</p>
<b>Contextual Guidelines</b>	<p>ESG 1.4 ‘Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification.’</p> <p>QQI Core Guidelines 3.2 ‘Learner Admission, Progression and Recognition.’</p> <p>Principles and Operational Guidelines for RPL in Further &amp; Higher Education and Training (NQAI, June 2005/2016)</p> <p>UCD RPL Policy (2016)</p>

<b>Related IPA Policy</b>	<p><i>Admission Policy &amp; Criteria</i></p> <p><i>Learner Charter</i></p> <p><i>Access, Transfer &amp; Progression Policy</i></p>
<b>Audience &amp; Communication</b>	<p>Applicable to all Whitaker School staff and students.</p> <p>The IPA policy on Recognition of Prior Learning is available on the Institute's website. Relevant information is provided with course entry requirements and directly to applicants.</p>
<b>Policy Owner &amp; Implementation</b>	<p>The Head of the Whitaker School has overall responsibility to ensure that RPL is recognised as a valid method of entry and learner mobility and that procedures for recognition of prior learning are embedded within the Institute's structures.</p>
<b>Key Implementation Actions</b>	<p>The Registrar's Office is responsible for ensuring that information relating to programmes and arrangements for RPL are available to prospective learners.</p> <p>The Faculty Committee is responsible for deciding on RPL applications. Faculty Committee delegates responsibility to the Head of School, Assistant Registrar and programme co-ordinator to assess and determine a student's eligibility to access a programme or gain credits based on their prior learning.</p> <p>The Registrar's Office is responsible for notifying applicants of the outcome and for making the appropriate adjustments to student records.</p>
<b>Monitoring, Review &amp; Continuous Improvement</b>	<p>The Registrar's Office will report to Faculty on RPL decisions.</p> <p>The Registrar's Office will capture data on student progression – pass/ failure rates – relating to students availing of RPL mechanisms.</p> <p>The effectiveness of the policy will be based on the number of students who have used RPL as a means, or partial means, of entry onto a programme, and their successful engagement with the programme thereafter.</p> <p>The policy will be evaluated every 3 years by the Head of Whitaker School, Assistant Registrar and Faculty as part of the cyclical review.</p>
<b>Revision History, Commencement Date &amp; Date of Next Review</b>	<p>Version 1: 2006</p> <p>Version 2: 2016</p> <p>Version 3: 2017/18</p> <p>Commencement Date (Version 3): 2018</p> <p>Date of Next Review: 2021</p>

## Recognition of Prior Learning: Policy & Procedures

### 1 Policy Statement

The Institute of Public Administration recognises the importance of lifelong learning and widening access to education. The Institute is committed to recognising the achievements and attainments of learners, and their development of skills and talents, whether such formation comes from the academic or professional arena, or life experience. The Institute facilitates recognition of an applicant's learning outcomes achieved prior to entry to support his/her meaningful engagement with the programme and to avoid unnecessary duplication of outcomes.

There is widespread recognition that in an era of 'lifelong' learning continuous enhancements to professional education and skills guarantee better career opportunities, mobility and satisfaction for the learner, and a more competent and flexible workforce for society. The central and enabling mechanism for a successful lifelong learning system is the recognition and awarding of credit to learning experiences that may or may not have been previously recognised, measured or assessed, such as a learner's non-formal, informal and formal learning experiences. In this regard, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is recognised as a critical part of EU policy.

### 2 Definitions & Purpose

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is defined as "the process by which prior learning is given a value. It is a means by which prior learning is formally identified, assessed and acknowledged" (NQAI, 2005). RPL encompasses all forms of prior learning, including formal learning (certified/accredited learning); non-formal/informal/experiential learning (learning outside the formal education system, through the workplace and through experience).

In the Institute, RPL can be used in the following ways:

- A. RPL can be used to gain admission to undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in cases where applicants may not meet the standard published admission requirements.
- B. RPL can be used to award credit towards a programme of study so that an individual does not duplicate learning outcomes already acquired.

### **3 Principles**

- 3.1 The IPA supports and encourages the recognition of prior learning (RPL) which students may have achieved prior to first registering on their IPA programme of study.
- 3.2 The IPA will provide for RPL as a legitimate means of accessing IPA programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate level and of having credit applied towards an IPA programme.
- 3.3 In evaluating an applicant's prior learning, the IPA will award *general* credit to recognise the achievement of identified programme learning outcomes rather than requesting that a student duplicate learning already achieved. In such cases, no grade may be associated with the credit used towards the IPA programme of study.
- 3.4 The IPA will consider all formal, informal and non-formal learning presented by the learner that can be demonstrated, checked and verified through documentation, interview or other means.
- 3.5 The IPA will ensure that all recognition of prior learning decisions are made by designated IPA staff based on academic judgement and the learning outcomes within a particular programme.
- 3.6 The IPA will ensure that the assessment of a student's prior learning is consistent, transparent and equitable, and in keeping with academic integrity and the Institute's ethos.
- 3.7 The IPA will communicate to staff and students the arrangements for RPL across programmes and the conditions attached.

### **4 Arrangements for RPL (Formal/Accredited Learning & Non-Formal/Informal/Experiential Learning) for Purposes of Admission or Gaining Credit**

- 4.1 Formal academic attainments of third level students from the IPA and other higher education institutions can be used to (i) access a programme where the applicant does not meet the standard entry requirements, or (ii) secure credits (which may include module credit or advanced entry to a programme) based on learning outcomes achieved prior to application.
- 4.2 The IPA permits access to applicants who believe that their professional and life experience provides a basis for fair recognition of prior learning and a justifiable incentive for further study. Such practice is critical to the personal and educational development of an individual, and also to the workplace. Work place training, professional experience, volunteerism and general life experience (non-formal/informal/experiential learning) can be used by an applicant to (i) access a programme where the applicant does not meet the standard entry requirements, or (ii) secure credits (which may include module credit or advanced entry to a programme) based on equivalent learning outcomes achieved prior to application.
- 4.3 Applicants assume the responsibility for demonstrating that their prior learning meets the learning outcomes of the target programme.

- 4.4 Applicants must complete the requisite application form and supply the relevant supporting documentation, thus clearly indicating whether they are applying for (i) admission or (ii) module credit and/or advanced entry.
- 4.5 Applicants are invited to forward required documentation, as directed in programme information, to the assistant registrar, who in conjunction with the Head of School and programme co-ordinator, will decide on eligibility for admission/credit.
- 4.6 Criteria for adjudication on Formal/Accredited Learning will include the specialisation of the programme under review, the qualification and date of award, the award type and level on the NFQ, the credit volume and the student's academic history. Please note that previous qualifications cannot be older than ten years, unless at the discretion of the Head of School.
- 4.7 Criteria for adjudication on Non-Formal/Informal/Experiential Learning includes the length and type of professional experience, workplace training and evidence of related experiential learning, volunteerism, community work (where comparable learning outcomes were achieved), a letter of intent from the applicant, a letter of support from the funding department if applicable, and interview.
- 4.8 Required documentation submitted to the Institute in support of an applicant's case, therefore, will normally include (for recognition of prior formal/credited learning):
  - completed Application Form,
  - proof of qualification,
  - official transcript of results for each year of previous third-level studies,
  - syllabus,
  - past exam papers.

For recognition of prior experiential learning, documentation will include:

- completed Application Form,
  - letter of intent from the applicant,
  - letter of support from the funding department, if relevant,
  - full outline of the relevant experience with evidence of workplace training, professional status and work experience.
- 4.9 In general, the assessment principles used by the IPA in considering such applications are as follows:
    - Access/general credit is awarded to students based on demonstrable prior learning. Applicants must provide evidence of learning outcomes.
    - Learning outcomes must be relevant, current (no older than ten years) and equivalent to the IPA programme.

- Decisions will balance a fair and just recognition of an applicant's prior learning against the Institute's obligations to protect the integrity of prescribed course schedules and, ultimately, the quality of awards in respect of studies.
- The IPA reserves the right to consult with, and seek relevant information from any institution or person in relation to any applicant's examination results, academic standing, professional experience.

4.10 In making a decision, the IPA will take on board the following regulations:

- Credits are granted, normally, on a module-by-module basis, but in relevant cases, these may be combined to exempt applicants from full stage requirements and to allow them advanced entry to a programme.
- Credit is not used to establish eligibility for a full award. Credits are not awarded towards any part of the award year of a programme, or a programme whose duration is one year or less. In these cases, specific grades obtained by the student in the IPA programme of study (and not general credits awarded based on prior learning outcomes) are required for the calculation of an award result.
- The maximum credit allowable based on prior achievement of learning outcomes is:
  - 1-Year programme = no credits allowable
  - 2-Year programme = 50% of the IPA programme of study (no credits allowable in final award year)
  - 4-Year programme = 75% of the IPA programme of study (no credits allowable in final award year).

4.11 In circumstances where the IPA has an existing RPL arrangement with another institution, whereby the academic judgement to recognise a programme has already been made, individual students do not need to make formal applications. They will be required, however, to submit verification of award.

4.12 The IPA reserves the right to request an applicant to undertake a bridging studies programme or similar where it considers that such action will supplement the prior learning and enable admission/credit.

4.13 Depending on the date of receipt, RPL applications relating to prior formal/accredited learning should be processed within ten working days. RPL applications relating to non-formal/informal learning may take up to four weeks and incur a fee. Successful applicants will be sent a letter of acceptance and a programme application form.

**Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)  
APPLICATION FORM**

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Surname                 Forename             Title

Correspondence Address

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 Home.....  Mobile.....  Work..... E-mail.....

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- Please tick which type of RPL you are seeking.
- ☐ Recognition of Prior Formal/Accredited Learning (certified learning from a Higher Education Institute). Please complete Section 1.
  - ☐ Recognition of Prior Non-Formal/Informal/Experiential Learning (learning outside the formal education system, such workplace learning, etc). Please complete Section 2.

Please give a brief outline of what you are requesting:

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## Section 1 – Application for credit exemptions/advanced entry based on learning at a Higher Education Institute (HEI).

1.1 Please state clearly the relevant prior learning you wish to have recognised for exemption and attach required supporting documents e.g. official transcript of results.

Name of Qualification	NFQ level of course/ programme	Date Awarded	Accreditation Body	Name of Institution and Student Number	Relevant IPA modules for which you are applying to have your prior learning recognised

## Section 2 – Application for admission/ credit/advanced entry based on experiential learning.

In presenting your experience you should refer to the learning outcomes you have achieved and why these are relevant to your IPA programme, including which IPA modules you feel are possible equivalences and for which you are applying to have prior learning recognised.

**Please attach all required supporting documentation (e.g. CV, references, etc. as listed above)**

<p><b>Future learning plan and the role of RPL in this</b> What is your main reason for considering third level education now and how best would RPL contribute to this?</p>
<p><b>Life/work experience, including experience and skills gained through volunteerism/care work</b> This would include key learning and skills achievements.</p>
<p><b>Education details:</b> second level and any subsequent education and training courses undertaken, including work-related training.</p>
<p><b>Other achievements,</b> including awards or prizes or publications.</p>
<p>Please list the supporting documents you have attached to this form.</p>

## Checklist and Declaration

In order that your application can be dealt with as quickly as possible, please submit, where applicable photocopies of the following documentation with this form:

Applicants requesting advanced entry/credit exemption based on **learning accredited at a Higher Education Institute** – have you attached the following supporting documents?

- ☐ An official transcript of results, and
- ☐ A formal syllabus which includes topics covered, texts and references, learning outcomes and assessment and grading criteria for the relevant module(s)/programme(s).

Applicants requesting admission/ advanced entry/credit exemption based on **experiential learning** – have you attached the relevant supporting documents? These may include:

- ☐ Your CV
- ☐ References
- ☐ An official syllabus or outline of education/training undertaken
- ☐ Other

**Declaration** I wish to apply for recognition of my prior learning as outlined above. I have read and understood the IPA's RPL Policy. I declare that the details provided by me are accurate. I understand that the data provided by me in this form will be used and protected by the IPA in full compliance with data protection regulations.

**Signature**

Please sign:

Date:

Please send completed forms to:

Admissions, Undergraduate Office, Institute of Public Administration, 57-61 Lansdowne Road, Dublin 4.

Phone: +353 (01) 240 3600 LoCall: 1890 20 26 26 Fax: (01) 668 9135 Email: [undergrad@ipa.ie](mailto:undergrad@ipa.ie)