NCAD DUBLIN

National College of Art and Design
A Recognised College of University College Dublin

Recognition of Prior Learning Policy

		This policy is effective from	30 April 2025
Approval body	Academic Council	**Approval date**	30 April 2025
Owner	Head of Academic Affairs	**Next review date**	April 2027

1. Purpose

1.1. This policy outlines the purpose and meaning of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and details the processes for applying, assessing and granting RPL to applicants.

2. Definitions

2.1. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a process that allows students, based on experience and demonstrated learning achieved prior to admission to NCAD, to:

2.1.1. Gain admission to a programme of study where formal admission requirements may not have been met.

2.1.2. Gain exemptions from some parts of a programme, or gain credit for modules of a programme, to avoid duplication of effort and learning already achieved.

2.2. RPL involves the assessment of knowledge, skills and competence previously acquired. Learning occurs in many contexts which include work, involvement in social and community activities and learning through life experience generally.

2.3. The European Commission (2022) states that learning takes many shapes and forms and that it is generally categorised in three ways[1]:

2.3.1. Formal Learning – normally takes place in formal education institutions, such as schools and universities, is typically certified by a qualification or diploma, planned and structured by learning objectives.

2.3.2. Non-formal learning – usually structured, planned, and occurs in the form of activities, such as in-company professional training, but does not always result in a credited award..

2.3.3. Informal learning – is experience as part of diverse activities, unstructured, includes for example, digital skills acquired through leisure activities.

2.4. RPL allows for all forms of learning to contribute to an award. RPL provides access to the education system for individuals who may complete their studies in a shorter timeframe without having to revisit learning, through formal acknowledgement of their prior knowledge, skills and competencies. RPL is also used for the award of credit, or exemptions, for individual modules on programmes.

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[1] https://education.ec.europa.eu/news/recognition-of-prior-learning-in-europe

3. Scope

3.1. RPL can be used in NCAD to:

    3.1.1. Gain entry to the first year of a programme of study where the applicant may not meet the standard academic requirements for entry.

    3.1.2. Gain advanced entry to a programme of study, e.g. into Year 2 of a 3-year honours degree.

    3.1.3. Gain entry to Special Purpose Awards (Micro-Credential programmes at Level 9) where the applicant may not meet the standard academic requirements for entry.

    3.1.4. Gain exemptions for a module or modules within a programme of study.

3.2. Where NCAD programmes are also accredited by external professional organisations, the application of RPL may be restricted.

4. General Principles

4.1. Recognising prior learning of programme applicants and students progresses the College's fulfilment of NCAD's Vision and Values, and NCAD's Strategic Focus 2019-2024:

    4.1.1. To embed BOLD and CURIOUS LEARNING at our core: by recognising that learning and experience does not have to be limited to formal certified academic achievement, and that all applicants to programmes should be given consideration, to create and develop a diverse student body.

    4.1.2. To CONNECT and be CONNECTED: by recognising the wide experiences of our applicants and students, acknowledging their professional as well as academic achievements, and to expand the range of applicants to under-represented groups of students.

    4.1.3. To be an EFFECTIVE ORGANISATION: by providing a robust process where applicants can expect their achievements to be fairly assessed and properly certified.

4.2. Recognising prior learning is an important factor in meeting commitments to expand NCAD's base of students, to advocate for art and design education at all levels, to develop alternative routes into our programmes and to ensure our successful applicants reflect the diversity and breadth of contemporary Irish, European and global society.

4.3. We encourage applicants to our undergraduate programmes through entry points other than through Leaving Certificate and equivalent QQI/FETAC standards. Likewise, we welcome applicants for postgraduate programmes who may have experience and learning other than a second-class honours in an undergraduate honours degree.

4.4. NCAD will ensure that information on RPL is easily available to applicants.

4.5. Programme Specification Forms will include reference to NCAD's RPL process, where to access it, and how to apply. Each programme specification will also include any limitations or other specific requirements for making RPL applications for entry to or progression within that programme.

4.6. NCAD will process RPL applications in a timely manner that does not obstruct applicants' access to programmes. NCAD will communicate with applicants to ensure they are updated on the progress of their application.

5. Units & Credit Levels

5.1. A module is the smallest unit considered under RPL. Credit cannot be awarded for part of a module.

5.2. Learning can be recognised, and credit awarded against a module or against multiple modules.

5.3. Academic Council may approve recognition of prior learning within the following limits:
- NCAD taught programmes:
  o Not to exceed 60 credits, and
  o Not to exceed ½ of the overall programme credits.
- NCAD research programmes:
  o Not to exceed 2/3 of the taught credits of the programme.

5.4. Granting of RPL above the maximum limits set in the Policy should be considered exceptional and requires the recommendation of the Academic Council and the approval of UCD's University Programmes Board.

5.5. Prior learning will be applied directly to the new programme, where it carries a grade and contributes to stage and/or award GPA, only in cases where the learning:
- Has been completed in NCAD, and
- Is considered equivalent to the current NCAD module(s) in the programme to which RPL will be applied, and
- Has not already been counted towards an NCAD award.

5.6. Where prior learning does not meet all three criteria established in principle 5.5, the learning will not carry a grade and will not be included in GPA calculations. Such credit can be awarded against a module or multiple modules.

5.7. Credit recognised for informal/experiential learning will not carry a grade and will not be included in GPA calculations.

5.8. Credit recognised for prior learning once cannot be recognised as prior learning again.

6. Academic and Quality Assurance overview

6.1. NCAD will carry out the process of RPL in a transparent and equitable manner across all programmes.

6.2. NCAD's Academic Council has responsibility for quality assurance and academic governance of RPL processes. The Academic Council will coordinate RPL applications through the NCAD Academic Registry team, who will work closely with the faculty across the College to ensure that the process is timely and equitable for each applicant.

6.3. NCAD's Academic Registry will support the work of Academic Council through an annual report on (as per the Academic Registry remit):

6.3.1. The number of applications;

6.3.2. The ratio of successful applications;

6.3.3. A tracking of the progression of RPL applicants.

6.4. NCAD's School Boards will support the work of Academic Council through an annual report on (as per the School Board remit):

6.4.1. The number of applications and to which programmes;

6.4.2. The ratio of successful applications;

6.4.3. The completion rate of RPL applicants.

7. Application process

7.1. For **Entry to the first year of a programme of study** where the applicant may not meet the standard academic requirements for entry:

7.1.1. In the case of non-standard entry to UG Year 1, such applications are considered through the Admissions regulations and processes and, as such, sit outside of this policy.

7.1.2. In the case of non-standard admission to Year 1 of a PG programme, the Admissions Team will:

7.1.2.1. Identify any applications that do not meet the minimum academic entry requirements and bring these to the attention of the Programme Team.

7.1.2.2. If, following interview and review of supporting documentation, the Programme Team wishes to progress the application they can either recommend admission and set a qualifying exam or recommend admission based on RPL.

7.1.2.3. In both cases the outcome is reported to the Head of Academic Registry who brings the recommendation to the Academic Council for approval.

7.2. For **Advanced Entry to a programme of study**, e.g. into Year 2 of a 3-year degree:

7.2.1. In the case of admission to UG Year 2 through Advanced Entry, such applications are considered under the Admissions regulations and processes and as such sit outside of this policy.

7.2.2. In the case of admission to UG Year 3 or 4 through Advanced Entry and where in excess of 50% of the programme credit is sought, the Admissions team will:

7.2.2.1. Identify these applications and bring them to the attention of the Programme Team;

7.2.2.2. If, following interview and review of supporting documentation, the Programme Team wishes to make an offer, they will inform the Academic Registry who will bring this recommendation to the Academic Council for approval.

7.3. For **entry to Special Purpose Awards**. NCAD offers several special purpose awards (Micro-Credentials at Level 9). Applications for these programmes may require an RPL process if:

● The applicant has not achieved the appropriate accredited learning to facilitate progression into the level of the programme, as specified in the programme specification;

● The applicant has achieved accredited learning to apply for the programme but not in the discipline of the requested programme.

7.3.1. If RPL is required, the applicant is responsible for completing the relevant application in advance of the relevant deadline and to supply all evidence and documentation in support of their application.

7.3.2. Applications to a place on a Special Purpose Award are considered by the relevant programme leader. The list of students recommended through this process is noted by the relevant School Board, which reports this to NCAD Academic Council.

7.4. For **exemptions for a module or modules** within a programme of study:

7.4.1. Applicants are responsible for completing the relevant application in advance of the relevant deadline and to supply all evidence and documentation in support of their application;

7.4.2. Applications are normally submitted before the applicant commences the programme and RPL will not normally be considered retrospectively following registration.

8. Application guidelines

8.1. Applicants are responsible for completing the RPL Application Form and collating the supporting evidence, including:

8.1.1. Academic transcripts of previously completed modules or programmes. This should include a brief of each module, the learning outcomes and assessments completed, credits and level of the module or programme and when it was completed.

8.1.2. Supporting documentation for non-formal or informal learning, such as portfolio of work, references or testaments from employers (on official letterhead), documented evidence of relevant projects or tasks completed, a list of responsibilities, evidence of achievements, etc.

8.1.3. Other documentation that will provide assurance that the applicant has completed modules or programmes, or has completed professional or other experience that would warrant recognition being granted.

9. Assessment of applications for Credit

9.1. When the RPL application has been submitted, the relevant Head of School will appoint a senior member of staff (the Assessor) to assess the application.

9.2. The Assessor will assess the application in line with this Policy.

9.3. All RPL decisions are made by academic staff on the basis of academic judgement and published learning outcomes.

9.4. **Assessment Criteria**: In assessing RPL, the following criteria will be considered:

i. **Validity**: the prior learning should be relevant to the award, at an appropriate level mapped to the NFQ or equivalent, and it should broadly match the learning outcomes required by the relevant modules or broadly match the standards required at entry.

ii. **Sufficiency**: the evidence should be sufficient to demonstrate the learning claimed. The prior learning should be broadly equivalent to the volume of learning which the exemption is being sought for. The evidence should demonstrate sufficient achievement of key competencies.

iii. **Authenticity**: the evidence should be genuine and should clearly indicate that the learning has been achieved through personal efforts and achievements.

iv. **Reliability**: the evidence should be valid and reliable.

v. **Currency**: the evidence should represent the learner's current knowledge and skills. The expectation is that the learning has normally been acquired within the last 5 years.

9.5. If the Assessor considers the evidence to be insufficient to support the RPL application, or where there is a gap between the standards or extent of the prior learning and the level

All policies and policy related documents and forms are subject to amendment. Please refer to the NCAD website for the official, most recent version.

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required for entry into a programme or for credit to be awarded for a module or programme stage, the Assessor may request:

i.   Further documentation to support the RPL application;

ii.   A submission of work to further support the RPL application;

iii.   An interview to help determine the outcome of the RPL application;

iv.   An assessment, such as an exam or an assignment;

v.   An observation of work practice.

10. Outcome

10.1.   After assessing the application, the Assessor will make a recommendation to the Head of School.

10.2.   If the Head of School is in agreement, they will relay the outcome to Academic Registry, who will bring the recommendation to Academic Council for consideration.

10.3.   The Academic Council will make one of three judgements:

10.3.1. Support the recommendation.

10.3.2. Decline the recommendation.

10.3.3. Seek further information on the application, at which point the process reverts back to 8.4. above

10.4.   Where the Academic Council approves the application, Academic Registry will ensure the applicant's student record and academic transcript appropriately reflect any credits awarded as part of the RPL application.

10.5.   Where the crediting of modules in a programme has an impact on student loans, bursaries, funding or scholarships, Academic Registry will advise the applicant before the credit is allocated. An applicant may withdraw their application at this point if they feel it is appropriate to do so.

10.6.   Where there is an impact on fees, Academic Registry will communicate these to the applicant and adjust fees owing or paid accordingly.

11. Appeals

11.1.   Applicants who wish to appeal decisions of the RPL assessment should refer to the Student Appeals Policy.