



# **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)**

**MSLETB**

**Policy and Procedure**

**NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP**

**PROGRAMME**

## Context

- a) Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the generic term for learning assessment mechanisms which are used to describe the awarding of credit/exemptions to apprentices on the basis of demonstrated learning that has occurred prior to admission.
- b) RPL is an important element of national and EU policy for widening access to qualifications and supporting lifelong learning.
- c) The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 established the right for an applicant to get recognition for prior learning. The Act reflects a national commitment to widening participation to education and is supported by the QQI guidelines. A major objective of QQI is to give equal recognition to all learning. The philosophy underlying RPL is to enable and encourage people to enter or re-enter formal education, leading to qualifications recognised within the National Framework of Qualifications. This was reinforced in the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.
- d) RPL involves awarding the applicant recognition in the form of initial or advanced admission to a programme, credits within a programme, exemption(s) from element(s) of a programme, or a full award.
- e) The prior learning can be certified or experiential (non-certified).
- f) **Prior Certified Learning** is learning that has already been accredited by an awarding body such as Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) or other state recognised universities, colleges and/or institutes. Prior certified learning can also include qualifications awarded by bodies abroad, such as the City & Guilds of London Institute.
- g) **Prior Experiential Learning (Non-Certified Learning)** is learning acquired through experience or learning achieved from non-accredited bodies e.g. learning acquired in the workplace.
- h) MSLETB, in conjunction with collaborating provider, will ensure that all apprentice applicants are made aware of the potential benefits of RPL. Appropriate support services relating to portfolio preparation will be made available to interested apprentices.

## Procedures for Management of RPL

1. **RPL Applications for Access to a Programme:**

Collaborating providers will be required to adjudicate on applications from potential apprentices seeking to use RPL as a method of satisfying entry requirements to a new National Apprenticeship programme. Such adjudication shall be carried out in accordance with the procedures set out in this policy.
2. **RPL Applications seeking Exemption(s) or Advanced Entry to a New National Apprenticeship Programme(s):**
  - a) Applications may be made seeking exemption(s) or advanced entry through either the provisions of Recognition for Prior Certified Learning (RPCL), as described in Section 2 below, or Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL), as described in Section 3 below, or a combination of both.
  - b) Advanced entry equates to the granting of sufficient exemptions/credit covering the early stage(s) of a programme. This process is adjudicated on by the Coordinating

provider through the National Programme Board

- c) The National Programme Board<sup>1</sup> shall establish an RPL Committee with subject matter expertise, drawn from the National Programme Board and supported by such external RPL assessing expertise that it determines is required to carry out this function.
- d) The RPL committee, supported by the Coordinating ETB, shall establish a communications and support services plan to help apprentices in the preparation of their applications, particularly in relation to the development of a portfolio of evidence.
- e) The RPL committee shall establish a panel from which two representatives will be nominated to assess applications received.
- f) Outcomes from the RPL assessment process are subject to ratification by the National Examinations Board. This is appropriate as a positive recommendation on RPL leads to the grant of credit or exemptions.
- g) Apprentices have the right to appeal the outcome of their RPL application in accordance with the provisions below.

### **3. Policy and Procedures for Operation of the RPL Process**

- a) Prior learning refers to learning which has occurred before admission to a programme or to the relevant stage of a programme.
- b) Prior learning shall encompass all forms of learning – certified and uncertified.
- c) Participation is a voluntary matter for the individual.
- d) Recognition of prior learning provides opportunities for access, transfer and progression to education and training.
- e) The process of recognising prior learning should maintain the standards of the National Framework of Qualifications and its awards.
- f) The policies, processes and practices for the recognition of prior learning shall be clearly stated and documented and available to all apprentices.
- g) Guidance and support shall be made available for apprentices and all involved in the processes of recognition of prior learning.
- h) Credit from RPL will normally only be awarded for complete modules.
- i) There is no limit placed on the maximum credit allowed to be achieved via RPL in the non-award stages of a programme.
- j) RPL will normally only be given for stage 1
- k) The outcome of RPL applications shall be ratified by the National Examination Boards though apprentices may be provisionally informed to facilitate module completion.
- l) When an apprentice receives recognition for prior certified learning, he/she cannot use the same prior learning to gain further exemptions in additional programmes in the ETB.

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<sup>1</sup> The Consortium Steering Group may act as a National Programme Board in this regard, prior to the establishment of the National Programme Board by the Co-ordinating Provider and the commencement of the validated programme.

## Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL)

a) Prior Certified Learning is where an applicant has already been awarded a qualification for a formal programme or module taken at an institution or training organisation. This prior certified learning can be recognised on the National Framework of Qualifications and may entitle the applicant to:

- Admission to a programme or programme of study
- Advanced entry on the programme
- Exemptions from some parts of a programme

b) Where prior certificated learning is the basis for RPL, the applicant is required to provide the relevant syllabus and a transcript of results.

### 1. Assessing Prior Certified Learning

a) When an apprentice presents prior certified learning in order to gain admission, the Collaborating Provider shall appoint an experienced assessor to consider the application and make a decision.

b) In the case of an application for advanced standing or exemption(s), the Coordinating Provider shall appoint two assessors from the panel established by its RPL Committee, to consider the application and make a decision. This decision is subject to ratification by the Examination Board. In each case the assessors will base their decision to grant this exemption or advanced standing on the following:

### 2. Level of Prior Award in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

**The NFQ was introduced in 2003 as a system of ten (10) levels.**

The ten levels capture all learning, from the very initial stages of level 1 to the most advanced learning of level 10. In the case of exemption applications, the prior certified learning which the apprentice is basing his/her exemption on must be at the same level or at a higher level in the framework than the level the apprentice is seeking the exemption in. The process of recognising prior learning should maintain the standards of the National Framework of Qualifications and its awards. See Appendix G

#### **Comparison of Learning Outcomes**

The assessors should compare the learning outcomes of the prior certified learning to the learning outcomes of the module(s)/programme the apprentice is seeking the exemption(s) in. If the assessors believe the learning outcomes are sufficiently similar, then an exemption may be awarded. It is at the discretion of the assessors to decide what is sufficiently similar.

#### **Currency of Prior Certified Learning**

The Prior Certified Learning must have been achieved in a comparatively appropriate time frame (in some instances this may be in the last three (3) years, five (5) years or ten (10) years, depending on the learning achieved). For example, computing learning of ten years ago is of limited benefit today on a current programme, while some culinary training outcomes may be more timeless.

### 3. Foreign Qualifications

Apprentices seeking RPCL for foreign qualifications should contact Qualifications Recognition ([www.qualificationsrecognition.ie](http://www.qualificationsrecognition.ie)) to have their qualifications aligned with the appropriate Irish qualification. Qualifications Recognition is the QQI body responsible for the recognition of foreign qualifications.

### 4. Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL)

- a) Prior certified learning may entitle the apprentice to exemptions on a programme, not credits. As this certified learning has already received credit, the apprentice does not receive credits for it again, but recognition in the form of exemptions. No grade will be awarded to the apprentice for the certified learning.
- b) It is the apprentice's responsibility to apply for the RPCL. Apprentices must submit their claim on the relevant form to their collaborating Programme Manager within ten (10) working days of the module commencement. Apprentices should also include certificates, results, programme details and, where possible, learning outcomes of modules completed. Apprentices should be advised to participate in the module(s) until a decision has been made (and written confirmation received) on whether to grant the exemption or not.
- c) The Collaborating Provider Programme Manager(s) shall forward applications without delay to the Coordinating Provider Programme Coordinator who shall nominate two assessors from the Panel established by the RPL committee. One of these assessors should be a person qualified to deliver and assess the module.
- d) The assessors shall consider the application and agree a decision regarding it within ten (10) working days of receipt of the application.
- e) Assessors have the right to recommend that exemptions be granted with conditions/recommendations (e.g. certain research is carried out, attendance at certain workshops, etc.). The apprentice has a right to appeal. The appeal should be made in writing to the Programme Coordinator within five (5) working days of the initial decision. The appeal will be considered by a Programme Manager from another Collaborating Provider along with a qualified assessor(s) not involved in the initial assessment. Their decision is final.
- f) The documentation submitted by the apprentice (RPL Application form, photocopies of certificates, learning outcomes, examination results, etc.), together with the recommendation of the assessors, must be kept for the normal period specified for retaining archived assessment documents.
- g) When Prior Certified Learning is accepted as the basis for granting an exemption on a programme of study, further application using the same learning for the granting of further exemptions in the same programme will normally not be considered.

### 5. Limitations for Prior Certified Learning

The National Programme Board shall determine if there should be a limitation on the volume of exemptions or on the type of learning that may be exempt.

## Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)

- a) This involves the awarding of credit for learning gained from experience.
- b) In this case, the apprentice must demonstrate that the required equivalent learning has been achieved by producing a Portfolio of Evidence to support the claim for access or credit (the RPL Committee will have a support service in place to help apprentices with the production of the portfolio).
- c) Other assessment tools such as examination, assignment, interview or observation can also be used to assess prior experiential learning.
- d) As a general principle, credit is given for learning, not for experience per se.
- e) The portfolio of evidence must be written in such a way that the matching of the knowledge, skills and competencies of the module learning outcomes to the prior learning is clearly demonstrated.
- f) The evidence the apprentice has to submit will be based on the learning outcomes of the module(s)/programme he/she seeks credits for.
- g) Evidence may include:
  - References
  - CV
  - Job descriptions and experiences
  - Details of any training completed
  - Certificates for qualifications, training programmes, etc.
  - Sample work (e.g. drawings, minutes from meetings, business plan, etc.)
  - Evidence from the apprentice's personal life
  - Published work
  - Professional licenses/registrations or membership of professional organisations
  - Acknowledged accomplishments
  - Relevant recreational activities or hobbies
- h) The apprentice may be required to provide verification from previous or current employers that the learning stated has been achieved by the apprentice.
- i) As part of the assessment, the assessors may interview the apprentice.
- j) When assessing portfolios, it is important to consider the currency of the prior learning. It must be achieved within a suitable time frame, for example within the last five (5) years (depending on the nature of the learning achieve

## Assessing Experiential Learning (RPEL)

- a) The Apprentice is responsible for their RPEL Application<sup>2</sup>, (portfolio of evidence). The portfolio must be submitted within ten (10) working days of the commencement of the module to the MSLETB Programme Manager.
- b) The Programme Manager shall forward the applications to the Programme Coordinator who shall nominate two assessors from the Panel established by the RPL committee.
- c) The assessors should examine the submission and agree a decision regarding the application within ten (10) working days of receiving the RPEL portfolio.
- d) Apprentices should be advised to participate in the module(s) until a decision has been made (and written confirmation received) on whether to grant the exemption or not.
- e) The portfolio is assessed, and an agreed grade is assigned by the assessors.
- f) Apprentices should receive a grade for their portfolio of evidence which carries equal weight to modules taken in the conventional method. Assessors must satisfy themselves that the assessment methods used to determine the standard of the experiential learning gained be equivalent to assessment methods applied to conventional apprentices.
- g) Assessors have the right to recommend that credits be granted with conditions, e.g. certain research is carried out, attendance at certain workshops, etc.
- h) The documentation submitted by the apprentice (RPL Application form, portfolio, CV, etc.), together with the recommendation of the assessors, must be kept for the normal period specified for retaining archived assessment documents.
- i) The apprentice has a right to appeal. The appeal should be made in writing to the Coordinating Provider Programme Coordinator within five (5) working days of the initial decision. The appeal will be considered by a Programme Manager from another Collaborating Provider along with a qualified assessor(s) not involved in the initial assessment. Their decision is final.
- j) Portfolios of evidence should go through the same quality assurance procedures as exams/assignments submitted by apprentices completing the programme in the conventional manner.
- k) Submission of a portfolio does not guarantee that the apprentice gains credits.

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<sup>2</sup> It is recommended that the provider provides guidance to applicants on assembling the portfolio of evidence.

## Summary of Terms and Conditions associated with RPL

	Prior Certified Learning	Prior Experiential Learning
Closing Date for RPL Application	Within ten (10) working days of module commencement	Within ten (10) working days of module commencement
Evidence Submission Date: - (E.g. Portfolio/Copies of Certificates)	Within ten (10) working days of module commencement	Within ten (10) working days of module commencement
Maximum credits/ Exemptions Allowed for RPL  <b>Non Award stages</b>	100%	100%
Maximum credits/ Exemptions Allowed for RPL  <b>Award stages</b>	0%	0%



## Appendix 6: Summery Recognition of Prior Learning

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the generic term for learning assessment mechanisms which are used to describe the awarding of credit/exemptions to apprentices on the basis of demonstrated learning that has occurred prior to admission.

- a) MSLETB, as Coordinating Provider, is committed to utilising RPL as an instrument for determining standard access equivalences and for the award of credit or exemptions, for stage one of the apprenticeship programme only, to apprentices with qualifications or relevant prior experience in the area.
- b) The prior learning can be certified or experiential (non-certified).
  - i. **Prior Certified Learning** is learning that has already been accredited by an awarding body such as Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) or other state recognised universities, colleges/institutes. Prior certified learning can also include qualifications awarded by bodies abroad, such as the City & Guilds of London Institute.
  - ii. **Prior Experiential Learning (Non-Certified Learning)** is learning acquired through experience or learning achieved from non-accredited bodies, e.g. learning acquired in the workplace.
- c) MSLETB, as co-ordinating provider, in conjunction with Collaborating Providers, shall ensure that all apprentice applicants are made aware of the potential benefits of RPL. Appropriate support services relating to portfolio preparation must be available within the Coordinating and Collaborating Providers to interested apprentices.
- d) Further details on the policy and procedures for the management and operation of RPL are attached to the MSLETB QAPs in Appendix E.
- e) Summary of Terms and Conditions associated with RPL

	<b>Prior Certified Learning</b>	<b>Prior Experiential Learning</b>
Closing Date for RPL Application	Within ten (10) working days of module commencement	Within ten (10) working days of module commencement
Evidence Submission Date: - (E.g. Portfolio/Copies of Certificates)	Within ten (10) working days of module commencement	Within ten (10) working days of module commencement
Maximum credits/ Exemptions Allowed for RPL <b>Non Award stages</b>	100%	100%
Maximum credits/ Exemptions Allowed for RPL <b>Award stages</b>	0%	0%

