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RPL for Credit Exemption: Case Study for the School of Nursing and Midwifery

Case Background

This case study is an analysis of a reported problem with RPL for exemption within the School of Nursing and Midwifery. It concerns the NFQ Level 8 *Professional Certificate in Nurse/Midwife Prescribing of Medicinal Products* programme (30 ECTS) and permissible credit exemption against the NFQ Level 9 *Master of Science in Advanced Practice* programme (110 ECTS).

The following documents were used as the basis for building this case study:

1. Professional Certificate in Nurse/Midwife Prescribing of Medicinal Products (Curriculum Document 2017)
2. Master of Science in Advanced Practice (Nursing/Midwifery) (Curriculum Document 2020)

The problem arose where graduates from the Professional Certificate were unable to acquire 30 ECTS of exemption on the Master of Science in Advanced Practice programme. Graduates who completed the Professional Certificate (30 ECTS) were only permitted 20 credits of exemption on the Masters programme, leaving 10 ECTS to be completed as part of the Masters programme, which in this case, resulted in learners having to complete an already completed module in order to progress through the Masters programme. Students who enrolled on the Masters programme expressed their unhappiness in having to essentially re-take a module that they already successfully completed. Furthermore, the problem extended as this programme is delivered by a consortium where maximum credit exemption for the completion of the Professional Certificate is acceptable in the remaining consortium institutions leaving Trinity as an outlier in terms of ECTS exemption allowance.

RPL Policy and Credit Exemption

To begin with it is important to consider the Trinity RPL Policy regarding what is permissible in terms of credit exemption for postgraduate programmes. The Trinity RPL Policy states (7.10, p.3): Where a postgraduate programme is of two or more years in duration (at least 120 ECTS), Trinity may recognise ECTS up to

a maximum of 60 ECTS. Technically, the Masters programme (Advanced Practice) is 110 ECTS so it does not meet the defined criteria for the above statement (10 ECTS short), but the statement is based on the vast majority of ECTS normally associated with a two-year Masters Award, i.e. 60 ECTS per year is the norm. For credit exemption post-admission, exemption will only be granted in exceptional circumstances, and the RPL Policy states (7.11) 'Credit exemption will be set at a maximum of 20 ECTS (undergraduate level 7, or 8) and 10 ECTS (postgraduate level 9) in a given year. It could be argued that the learners progressing to the Masters programme are post-admission, and therefore the current allowance of 20 ECTS, not 10 ECTS, is already an exception in this instance. This extends the challenge of seeking 30 ECTS exemption for these learners.

Consortium Agreement

When considering RPL and Transfer/Progression, the Master of Science in Advanced Practice (Nursing/Midwifery) (Curriculum Document 2020) document states that if the student wishes to change HEIs, then he/she would need to apply for an inter-institution transfer providing relevant documentation (transcript of results, details of work completed, references, etc.) and the HEI would consider such a request using the existing RPL processes.

If a Trinity student completes the Professional Certificate (30 ECTS) and decides to complete the Masters programme at one of the other consortium institutions they would be permitted 30 ECTS exemption. For Trinity, this has created a progression problem where students are electing to transfer to another institution to acquire the 30 ECTS as opposed to the 20 ECTS exemption that Trinity permit.

School Considerations

The School of Nursing and Midwifery endeavored to create a solution to this known and on-going challenge. Students also made complaints and questioned why they could not acquire the 30 ECTS exemption when enrolling

on the Masters programme, which is seen as a natural progression from the Professional Certificate. The School concluded that the best course of action was to build a case study around this issue and sought to answer the question below:

Can we seek an exception to the rule for this programme partnership? This is an exception for the school, and not a widespread policy, therefore in this case can we apply a special circumstance to permit 30 ECTS for this programme relationship?

The critical argument against the approval of 30 ECTS in this case were the NFQ Levels and the comparison of Module Learning outcomes presented in this report, a counter-argument was required to evidence how these modules were indeed the same, and supporting evidence from lecturers and programme administrators was required.

Solution Process

The RPL Lead assisted in the development of an objective case study which involved comparing the learning outcomes of both programmes, and the feasibility of permitting 30 ECTS exemption from the *Professional Certificate in Nurse/Midwife Prescribing of Medicinal Products* programme onto the *Master of Science in Advanced Practice* programme. The case study concluded with a set of considerations for the programme team. The case study was presented to the Nursing and Midwifery PG Course Committee on the 6th October 2022 and subsequently, the Course Committee elected to seek approval from the Graduate Studies Committee (GSC) to permit the full 30 ECTS exemption from the Level 8 certificate programme to the Level 9 Masters programme. The Director of Postgraduate Teaching and Learning presented the case to GSC on the 25th May 2023 and GSC approved the credit exemption in this case, an exception to the RPL Policy.

Evaluation and Impact

The School of Nursing and Midwifery had reported the disappointment from applicants progressing to Masters programme on the 20 ECTS allowance,

and some applicants elected to join the Masters programme provided by external consortium providers as a result. This special consideration will now eliminate this particular issue as the full 30 ECTS is now permissible for credit exemption on the Masters programme.

