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## Recognition of Prior Learning Policy

### 1. Context

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) forms a critical component of EU policy in relation to widening participation to higher education and in supporting lifelong learning. Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin, herein referred to as Trinity, is committed to ensuring that its RPL policy is compatible with its policies on access and progression and that it meets current good practice in the field.

### 2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the assessment of prior learning is facilitated and approached in an equitable, transparent and consistent manner, whilst ensuring that decisions on recognition of prior learning uphold the ethos of a Trinity Education and the academic integrity of a programme of study.

### 3. Benefits

The policy facilitates student access and mobility and thereby supports relevant national and European policies on education and training.

### 4. Scope

- 4.1 This policy applies to prospective undergraduate and postgraduate applicants seeking to gain admission or advanced entry to Trinity on the basis of prior learning.
- 4.2 It also applies to currently registered students who wish to apply for exemption from core coursework (credit exemption for RPL) already completed elsewhere.
- 4.3 This policy should be read in conjunction with the relevant regulations in The University of Dublin Calendar, Parts II and III. (<http://www.tcd.ie/calendar/>)
- 4.4 Transfer between programmes for Trinity registered students is out of scope of this policy; refer to the relevant regulations in The University of Dublin Calendar, Parts II and III.



## **5. Definitions**

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is defined as a process by which prior learning is given a value (European Commission 2008; NQAI, 2005; OECD 2004). The focus of RPL is on the outcome of learning, rather than the experience of learning. It recognises learning that has taken place, but has not necessarily been assessed or measured. Such prior learning may have been acquired through formal, informal or non-formal routes.

### **5.1 Formal Learning**

Formal Learning takes place through programmes of education or training delivered by education and training providers. It refers to learning which has already attracted formal certification within an education system.

### **5.2 Informal Learning**

Informal Learning takes place through life and work experience. It may also be referred to as experiential learning. Often it is learning that is unintentional or unplanned and the learner may not recognise at the time of the experience that it contributed to his or her knowledge, skills and competence. It may be assessed, but does not result in formal certification of achieved learning.

### **5.3 Non-Formal Learning**

Non-Formal Learning is learning which is acquired through planned activities (e.g., an extramural course), but does not result in formal certification of achieved learning.

## **6. Principles**

6.1 Trinity is committed to providing recognition of formal, informal and non-formal learning for applicants seeking admission at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, where achievement of the relevant learning outcomes can be demonstrated.

6.2 RPL seeks to provide applicants with the opportunity to demonstrate the achievement of learning whilst ensuring the integrity of Trinity's awards and academic standards and consistency with those of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

6.3 Trinity endeavours to accommodate learner mobility through RPL as far as is possible, but recognises that some programmes are not suited to admission via RPL and/or the granting of exemptions.

6.4 Trinity's assessment mechanism and criteria in respect of RPL are fair and appropriate. These are aligned with relevant module and programme learning outcomes.

6.5 Trinity does not permit double counting of credit towards different academic awards.



- 6.6 Trinity provides all stakeholders with clear information on the opportunities for RPL and on RPL procedures.
- 6.7 Trinity does not make a full award solely on the basis of RPL.

## **7. Policy**

- 7.1 RPL may be considered for both undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes.
- 7.2 Trinity may recognise formal, informal and non-formal prior learning at undergraduate levels 7 or 8 or postgraduate level 9 for admission.
- 7.3 In formal, non-formal and informal learning, the learning achieved by the applicant will be equivalent to the learning outcomes or performance criteria set down for the course of study and will be supported by satisfactory evidence as required by the University and course committee (see 7.16 and 7.17).
- 7.4 Applicants will demonstrate achievement of required learning outcomes at the prescribed level.
- 7.5 In courses where accreditation by an external professional body is necessary, recognition of formal, non-formal or informal prior learning may not be feasible or appropriate.
- 7.6 Recommendations for the recognition of prior learning, advanced entry, or level of credit to be exempted rests with the appropriate academic unit. See 7.19 Roles and Responsibilities.
- 7.7 When formal RPL is used to gain admission to a programme with multiple award outcomes, the highest NQF level award achieved will normally be used upon graduation.

### **Maximum Credit recognised by Trinity for Advanced Entry**

- 7.8 Trinity recognises up to 60 ECTS (or equivalent credit) in respect of undergraduate advanced entry admission to a programme of approximately 180 ECTS at Level 7. Typically, this will require formal prior learning. These credits relate only to the first year of study. Successful applicants will then complete at least two full academic years at Trinity in order to be eligible for consideration for an undergraduate degree.
- 7.9 Trinity recognises up to 120 ECTS (or equivalent credit) in respect of undergraduate advanced entry admission to a four-year programme of approximately 240 ECTS at Level 8. Typically, this will require formal prior learning. These credits relate only to the first two years of study. Successful applicants will then complete at least two full academic years at Trinity in order to be eligible for consideration for an undergraduate degree.
- 7.10 Where a postgraduate programme is of two or more years duration (at least 120 ECTS), Trinity may recognise formal prior learning up to a maximum of 60 ECTS (or equivalent credit) or one year of study for advanced entry admission.



### **Credit Exemption (post-entry) for RPL**

- 7.11 Credit exemption post-admission will only be granted in exceptional circumstances. 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.
- 7.12 Exemptions will only be granted for complete modules where all learning outcomes of the module have been demonstrably achieved, and will not apply to Undergraduate New Minor Subjects/Open Modules/Trinity Electives<sup>1</sup>
- 7.13 Credit exemptions for RPL purposes will not be granted in the final two years of an undergraduate programme.

### **Assessment Principles**

- 7.14 In assessing evidence of prior formal, non-formal and informal learning, the following criteria will be considered:
- (i) Relevance: The evidence will be relevant to the course of study and correspond to the learning outcomes of the module(s) and to the broader programme-level outcomes;
  - (ii) Level: The learning will be at the required level, i.e. it will map to the appropriate NFQ level descriptors;
  - (iii) Sufficiency: The evidence in support of RPL will support the claim that the learning outcomes have been achieved;
  - (iv) Reliability: The evidence of prior learning will be reliable and it will be possible to verify that it is the learning of the applicant;
  - (v) Validity: The prior learning will match the required learning outcomes and will be demonstrated by valid mechanisms. These may include, but are not limited to assessment procedures;
  - (vi) Currency: The achieved prior learning will fit with current knowledge and practice.
- 7.15 Decisions on RPL will be made on review of the relevant applications and accompanying documentary evidence (as outlined in sections 7.16 and 7.17 below).
- 7.16 Suitable documentary evidence of formal learning includes: transcripts of results together with certificates of attendance/completion of courses, syllabi of courses, completed research reports and professional portfolios. Evidence of non-formal learning includes course descriptions and durations with certificates of attendance (a certificate of attendance or participation does not constitute certification of achievement). Evidence of informal learning may include letters of reference/verification, work-based portfolios, plans, designs and reports.
- 7.17 The course director or course committee may use alternative/multiple assessment modes to determine whether the criteria (see above 7.13) have been met. Assessment methods may include written examination, interview, viva voce,

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<sup>1</sup> Definitions of New Minor Subject/Open Modules/Trinity Electives are available from <https://www.tcd.ie/TEP/>



performance of a task reflecting an acquired competency, an essay or an assignment, or a portfolio.

## 7.18 **Quality Assurance**

The policies and procedures for the recognition of prior learning are embedded within Trinity's quality assurance procedures.

## 7.19 **Roles and Responsibilities**

### 7.19.1 **Applicant**

- The applicant will state the purpose for which recognition of prior learning is being sought;
- When applying for RPL either at the point of entry or post-entry (credit exemption for RPL), the applicant is responsible for all aspects of the application as set down by the relevant School/Course Committee. In the case of applications for recognition of prior learning following admission (e.g., credit exemption), all documentation, i.e., completed form and evidence, will be submitted to the Course Director;
- The applicant is responsible for ensuring that s/he adheres to all published deadlines for submission of the application and supporting documentation. Their attention is drawn to the assessment principles (see sections 7.14 to 7.17) when submitting an application.

### 7.19.2. **Course Director and Academic Staff**

- Where the applicant is seeking recognition of prior learning at the point of entry or post-entry, the Course Director in conjunction with relevant academic colleagues who make up the Course Committee will normally conduct the review of the application. In undergraduate courses where admission is to individual subjects, the application will be considered by the Head of Discipline or Head of School or their delegate before being considered, where appropriate, by the Course Committee;
- In cases where the applicant is seeking recognition of prior learning at the point of entry, the Course Office or School Office, as appropriate, will communicate the recommendation of the Course Committee to the Dean of Graduate Studies or Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies or their delegate for consideration and approval. The Dean of Graduate Studies or Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies will communicate the decision to the Course Director and the Academic Registry;
- In cases where the applicant is seeking an exemption post-entry, the Course Office or School Office will communicate the recommendation to the Dean of Graduate Studies or /Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies or their delegate for approval.



- Decisions on RPL by the Dean of Graduate Studies or Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies or their delegate are final.

#### **7.19.3. Academic Registry**

- The Admissions team is responsible for alerting Course Directors/Heads of School/Heads of Discipline, as appropriate, to applications for RPL at the point of entry and forwarding all submitted documentation to the relevant Course or School office;
- Following assessment by the Course Committee and approval by the Dean of Graduate Studies or the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies or their delegate, the Admissions team is responsible for making admissions offers to applicants seeking recognition of prior learning at point of entry.

### **8. Responsibility**

- 8.1 The Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies and the Dean of Graduate Studies, as appropriate.
- 8.2 The Academic Registry is responsible for data capture and document management.

### **9. Related Documents**

- 9.1 Admission, Transfer and Progression Policy

### **10. Document Control**

- 10.1 Date of approval: 25 May 2016
- 10.2 Date of Policy Revision: 8 April 2020
- 10.3 Date of next review: Academic Year 2023/24