



TUS

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Guide for Learners

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WHAT IS RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING?

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is when a higher education institution recognises what you already know, understand and can do before, for example, starting on a programme or module. This eliminates the duplication of learning, meaning you don't have to relearn things you already know.

Prior learning is acquired in different ways and can be broken into the following three categories:

- **FORMAL LEARNING** takes place through programmes or courses of study that are delivered in an organised, formal way by education providers and that attract awards or credits. Formal learning is sometimes referred to as certified or accredited learning. Under the principle that credit should only be awarded once, such prior learning is given recognition rather than accreditation.
- **NON-FORMAL LEARNING** takes place alongside or outside the mainstream systems of education and training. It may be assessed but does not normally lead to formal certification. Examples of non-formal learning are planned learning and training activities undertaken in the workplace, voluntary sector, or in community-based settings.
- **INFORMAL LEARNING** takes place through life and work (e.g. 'on-the-job') experience. It does not lead to certification.

RPL makes it possible for a person to build on the learning they've achieved and to be rewarded for it, for example in the form of access to a programme or exemption/credit on a module(s) in a programme.

The TUS Recognition of Prior Learning Policy can be viewed [here](#).

BENEFITS FOR LEARNERS

With RPL you can get recognition from a higher education institution for the prior learning you've done in work, life and the community which in turn can provide a pathway to and through higher education. RPL is itself a learning process as it involves reflecting on your past experiences and identifying and documenting what you

have learnt. Relevant learning can then be assessed and, if it meets the required standard, be recognised by a higher education institution and used by the applicant for:

- Entry to a programme
- Advanced entry to a programme
- Credit towards an award (qualification) or exemptions from some programme modules

In some higher education institutions, RPL may also be used to gain a full academic award. The availability of full awards is at the discretion of each higher education institution.

RPL is beneficial for learners, higher education institutions and employers alike. By making visible the valuable skills and learning that people have acquired through work or other life experiences, RPL can enhance a person's self-esteem and well-being by ensuring that learning does not have to be duplicated. For higher education institutions, RPL is a critical component of lifelong learning and widening participation as it can make programmes more accessible to learners who may not meet minimum entry requirements but have, for example, relevant prior informal or non-formal learning. It can also expedite a learner's progress through a programme, for example through advanced entry or exemptions. Research from the higher education sector shows that RPL adds value to an institution's relationship with industry partners and can be used in the development of customised learning solutions sensitive to existing employee skillsets and organisational needs.

In Ireland and across the world, the urgency of lifelong learning, upskilling and reskilling workers has never been clearer as together we face the fall-out from the climate crisis, digitalisation and automation, migration and displacement and demographic shifts. Nearly every job will change, many quite profoundly, and most of today's employees will need to develop new skills to participate in the workplaces of the future. People will, therefore, need to upskill or reskill throughout their lives. RPL is an essential tool to support that cycle of entry and re-entry and enhance our collective capabilities to address the complex challenges of today and tomorrow.

RPL IS DESCRIBED AS A PROCESS BY WHICH PRIOR LEARNING IS FORMALLY VALUED. IT IS A MEANS BY WHICH FORMAL, NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING CAN BE ASSESSED AND RECOGNISED BY A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION. RPL MAY BE USED WHEN APPLYING TO PROGRAMMES AND COURSES (FOR EXAMPLE, MICRO-CREDENTIALS) OR FOR CREDIT/EXEMPTION AT ALL LEVELS OF THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFICATIONS (NFQ).

- RPL is a critical component of lifelong learning and widening participation
- RPL enables individuals to access and participate in the higher education system
- RPL can enhance a person’s self-esteem and well-being
- RPL makes visible the valuable skills that people have acquired through work or other life experiences (for example, critical thinking and interpersonal skills).
- RPL may reduce the amount of time and cost required to acquire a qualification or credential and can have a positive impact on student success
- RPL supports the participation of learners of all ages in higher education, including older adults who may wish to pursue personal development and/or ‘second careers’

THE APPLICATION PROCESS TYPICALLY HAS 5 ‘STAGES’, THESE ARE:



1. **INFORMATION:** This is where applicants find out about what RPL opportunities exist in a higher education institution and how the process works.

2. **IDENTIFICATION:** Applicants are asked to explore their experiences and learning to date with a view to making an RPL application.
3. **DOCUMENTATION:** Applicants undertake a reflective process and gather relevant materials to support their application. Some examples of materials may be CV's and job descriptions.
4. **ASSESSMENT:** The application is then assessed by a staff member in the higher education institution. A range of assessment mechanisms may be used including portfolios, interviews, essays or examinations.
5. **OUTCOME/CERTIFICATION:** The learner will receive a decision from the Institution regarding their application.

RPL applications are assessed against the relevant criteria, for example, programme entry requirements or module learning outcomes. As part of the RPL application process, applicants will typically provide evidence that they have attained the learning outcomes or in the case of programme entry, evidence that they are sufficiently prepared for the programme of study. Evidence of attainment is subject to the same quality assurance standards which the institution applies to all its programmes.

If the application is unsuccessful (e.g. if the applicant is not accepted onto a programme or course of study or not granted an exemption course of study through RPL), any available options or supports will be outlined to the applicant. As noted above, the applicant may avail of the appeals procedure that is in place, which will be communicated to them.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

Currently there is no fee for processing the RPL application. Standard course fees will apply.

The module fee applies for exempted modules.

WHAT DO I NEED TO DO TO APPLY VIA RPL?

1. Research your programme of choice on [Courses Archive - TUS](#)
2. Contact the programme coordinator and the head of department to discuss your intention to submit an RPL application. They will advise you if they are willing to consider an application from you.
3. Contact rpl@tus.ie if you need assistance.
4. Application forms are available online [on this webpage](#).
5. One application is for entry / advanced entry using RPL.
6. The other application is for module exemption using RPL and can only be used if you have already registered for the module.
7. Apply for postgraduate programmes through the individual programme page on the TUS website. Tick the RPL box if using RPL and then complete the RPL application [on this webpage](#).
8. Flexible Learning programmes can be applied for by following the instructions on the individual programme page on the TUS website. If you tick the RPL box, then follow up by filling out the RPL application [on this webpage](#).
9. You can submit your application form when you have completed all of the sections.
10. You then need to submit all of your documents to support your application. For module exemption applications you can attach the documents to your application. For entry and advanced entry applications you will need to email rpl@tus.ie for a link to an upload folder. You will be sent a link to a secure folder.

GATHERING INFORMATION FOR YOUR APPLICATION.

How do I collect my formal / informal / experiential learning and how do I categorise them?

FORMAL LEARNING takes place through programmes or courses of study that are delivered in an organised, formal way by education providers and that attract awards or credits. Formal learning is sometimes referred to as certified or accredited learning. Under the principle that credit should only be awarded once, such prior learning is given recognition rather than accreditation.

Examples of documents that will support your application for RPL of prior formal learning are:

- Transcript of results
- Module descriptors

NON-FORMAL LEARNING takes place alongside or outside the mainstream systems of education and training. It may be assessed but does not normally lead to formal certification. Examples of non-formal learning are planned learning and training activities undertaken in the workplace, voluntary sector, or in community-based settings.

Here are examples of a range of evidence that can be used to verify all the learning that you have achieved:

Records of on-the-job training	Letters of certification
Judgements by others	Testimonials
Documents	Copies of certificates
Completed work projects	Published material
Written reports	Photographs/audio/video files
Training Programme	Training records
Reports on unpaid work	References
Job descriptions	Professional Body Membership
Research	Sports achievements
Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP)	CAD, Plant 3D
Management Modules	Computer applications
Machine operation and maintenance	LEAN principles and methodology

Gather any certificates or documented evidence provided for such training if available to you.

INFORMAL LEARNING takes place through life and work (e.g. 'on-the-job') experience. It does not lead to certification. Consider all the skills you have acquired through your life/work experience. Examples could include the following:

Completing documentation	Computer applications – MS Office suite etc
Budgeting/Finance applications	People Management
Business Development/Strategy	Working as a carer
Planning/Administration/Co-ordination	C.V.

Collate all the relevant information you have gathered and append to your application in the form of a portfolio.

APPLICATION DEADLINES / WHEN DO I NEED TO APPLY?

Please check the relevant course information for application deadlines for programme entry.

The closing date for Advanced Entry applications, in TUS, is May 20th of the year of entry.

Module exemptions can be applied for once you have registered on a programme and must be submitted within three weeks of beginning the module.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?

TUS endeavors to deal with RPL applications in a timely manner and once you have submitted your application as well as all of your supporting documents, you should get a reply with 3 to 4 weeks of submission.

If you submit a late application, after May 20th, this will be dealt with at the beginning of the following academic year i.e. in September.

DO I NEED TO DO AN INTERVIEW?

RPL candidates may be called for an interview. The programme leader will let you know if you are required to attend for interview.

CAN I GET A GRANT?

You will need to check with SUSI to see if you qualify for a grant.

See [Eligibility Criteria | SUSI](#) for information. SUSI deals with full time programmes.

Some part-time options are funded, through various sources, for eligible learners. Examples include Skillnet and Springboard.

ARE THERE ANY RESTRICTIONS (I.E. WHERE RPL DOESN'T APPLY).

Some programmes will have special entry requirements and should always state these on the programme information page. Often, these programmes are linked to professional bodies.

DO I HAVE TO HAVE MY LEAVING CERTIFICATE?

No.

WHAT IF I FAILED MY LEAVING CERTIFICATE?

Prior formal learning is not always essential. Your learning is also valuable if it has been acquired through non-formal and informal pathways.

CAN I TALK TO SOMEONE ABOUT RPL IN TUS?

Yes, we have an RPL officer in TUS who can be contacted at rpl@tus.ie

Once you have identified the programme that you would like to pursue, it is advisable to make contact with the programme coordinator/leader and head of department. This information will be available on each programme webpage / prospectus page. Once you have discussed your intention to make an RPL application for the programme, you can follow the application information on [RPL Application Details - TUS](#).

WHAT DO I TELL MY EMPLOYER?

If you have chosen a part-time programme that affects your working hours, then you would need to discuss that with your employer.

If your employer is funding your studies, they will probably look for more information from you.

There is no general answer to this question.

DO I NEED TO TAKE TIME OFF WORK?

The initial search for your programme of interest and the application process can be completed outside of working hours.

You might be asked to attend for interview. This might require you to take some time off work, but a mutually agreed time can also be accommodated in most cases.