

Recognition of Prior Learning Policy

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Feedback or issues arising on implementation of this policy should be communicated to the policy author.	
Policy Author:	Vice President Student Experience & Recognition of Prior Learning Coordinator

Policy Management Framework Compliance Review as requested by EMT all draft policies should be reviewed by the Policy Review Group¹ in advance of review by EMT. Please confirm that the policy was reviewed by the policy review group.

Date Policy Reviewed:	5 October 2023
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1. Introduction/Context

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a process that facilitates admission to South East Technological University (SETU), either to enter a programme or to receive credits from parts of that programme, based on previous education, work and voluntary experience. It is a means by which prior learning is identified, assessed, and formally recognised. This makes it possible for an individual to build on learning previously acquired and to be rewarded for it. SETU recognises that knowledge, skills and competencies can be acquired from a wide range of learning experiences and RPL forms part of the inclusive approach to learning at SETU.

RPL is an integral component of the University's commitment to learning and makes higher education more accessible, inclusive and flexible, thereby widening participation. The University acknowledges the varied means by which learning happens and provides alternative routes to and through SETU programmes. RPL encompasses formal learning, non-formal learning, and informal learning.

2. Purpose

The University encourages RPL as a means of providing entry to, or credit within, all programmes, at all levels and in all disciplines of study. RPL should be offered on all University programmes unless specifically ruled out on individual programmes by Academic Council. Students/Applicants at SETU will be supported to enter a programme at a level appropriate to their prior learning and/or qualifications based on an assessment of a formal RPL application and supporting evidence provided.

RPL can be used to:

- i. Gain entry to a programme in cases where applicants may not meet the formal learning qualification entry requirements
- ii. Gain advanced entry/admission to a programme, following a process of evaluation where the learner is deemed to have achieved the learning outcomes equivalent to those of the previous stage(s)
- iii. Gain exemptions or credit against a module, or a number of modules of a programme, so that an individual does not duplicate learning outcomes already acquired. Learning presented and verified is assessed as satisfactorily meeting the learning outcomes of the module/s in question. Partial module or module component exemptions are not possible

3. Scope

This policy applies to all SETU programmes and to all SETU students and applicants unless specifically excluded by SETU academic regulations. While this policy applies to all SETU programmes, as defined by the Academic Regulations, limitations to RPL may apply at programme level. Programmes that are externally accredited by professional bodies may be

restricted in the use of RPL e.g. Social Care programmes. Other programmes may include elements that are not suitable for the purposes of RPL. In such cases information on any limitations or additional criteria for RPL must be made available by the relevant Programme Board to applicants. The SETU RPL Policy is linked to the SETU Admissions Policy.

4. Principles

The following principles will apply to the implementation of RPL within SETU:

- The learner is central to the process of RPL²
- Policy, procedures, and practices of RPL are clearly documented and communicated openly and plainly to all potential applicants, staff and enterprise partners.
- RPL is underpinned by quality assurance. The RPL process is fully embedded in the quality assurance procedures of SETU and is aligned with the NFQ
- The assessment of prior learning is an academic activity that is performed primarily by academic staff and is underpinned by the following principles:
 - **Relevance:** The evidence of learning provided is relevant to the discipline and course of study and corresponds to the learning outcomes of the module(s) and to the broader programme-level outcomes for which recognition is being sought
 - **Sufficiency:** The evidence in support of RPL supports the claim that the learning outcomes have been achieved
 - **Reliability:** The evidence of prior learning will be reliable, and it will be possible to verify that it is the learning of the applicant
 - **Validity:** The prior learning will match the required learning outcomes, be at an appropriate level and demonstrated by valid mechanisms. These may include, but are not limited to, a variety of assessment procedures
 - **Currency:** The achieved prior learning fits with current knowledge and practice
- The value of RPL is recognised and supported by SETU and its facilitation is recognised as part of the university's responsibility
- Training, support and guidance on RPL practice and procedures is available for all staff and applicants. Click [here](#) for more information.
- Unsuccessful RPL applications may be appealed under the existing Appeals procedures of SETU
- Double counting of credits towards different academic awards is not permitted

² This policy aligns with the National Framework for RPL that has learner centeredness as one of the core values. More specifically that means:-

- The learner is central to the RPL process.
- The RPL process respects and values the uniqueness of the individual's learning.
- Participation in RPL is voluntary for the individual learner concerned.
- The RPL process is conducted in a manner that is transparent, consistent, fair, and nondiscriminatory.
- Information on RPL is clearly visible and accessible to learners.

5. Definitions

Recognition is a process by which prior learning is given a value. It is a means by which prior learning is formally identified, assessed, and acknowledged. This makes it possible for an individual to build on learning achieved and to be rewarded for it.

Prior learning is learning that has taken place but has not necessarily been assessed or measured. Prior learning may have been acquired through formal, non-formal, and/or informal routes.

Recognition of Prior Learning is a process by which prior learning is formally valued. It is a means by which prior learning is identified, assessed, and formally recognised by an educational institution as part of their modules and programmes on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). This makes it possible for an individual to build on learning achieved and to be rewarded for it.

Learning encompasses the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal, and informal learning, these may be defined as follows:

- **Formal learning** takes place through programmes of study that are delivered by education providers and that are formally certified and credit bearing.
- **Non-formal learning** takes place alongside 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 learning and training activities undertaken in the workplace or in community-based learning, such as non-accredited continuous professional development.
- **Informal learning** takes place through life and work experience. Often, it is learning that is unintentional, and the learner may not recognise at the time of the experience that it has contributed to their knowledge, skills, and competences.

6. Policy

The key premise of RPL is that:

- i. Recognition is given for evidence of learning achieved through prior certified or experiential learning, not for experience alone
- ii. Credit awarded as a result of RPL is of the same value as credit gained through formal learning
- iii. The applicant is responsible for identifying and demonstrating their prior learning with appropriate guidance and support from staff

In seeking recognition under RPL, prior learning must be evidenced in writing by the learner or through whatever medium is appropriate to the particular learning outcomes and authenticated at the appropriate level(s). The decision on awarding credits should be made by a suitably qualified academic, based on a robust documented assessment, and should be endorsed by the relevant Faculty Head/Head of School. However, it should be noted that credit exemption is not normally graded, which may have consequences for awarded grades, where exempted modules ordinarily contribute to overall grade calculations.

The focus of the University's RPL process will be on the achievement of learning, or the outcome of learning, rather than the experience of learning. The University does not recognise experience by itself for academic purposes; learning must demonstrably have taken place as a result of that experience.

Recognition will normally be given:

- i. No partial exemptions, full module exemptions only
- ii. Where required learning outcomes have been achieved
- iii. A maximum of 50% of the total credits for an academic programme leading to a major award. Please see Restrictions section below for exemptions.
- iv. Will be in line with the requirements of SETU Admissions Policies

Exemptions from modules may be granted at the non-award stages of a course on the basis of recognised prior learning. Where exemptions are being sought for an award level module then the assessment process should, if feasible, assign a mark for the module arising out of a robust assessment of the learning achieved as defined by the assessment criteria of the module. Where it is not possible to assign a mark to the exemption the student shall receive a non-classified award and the implications of this shall be outlined to the student.

Where prior learning has not previously attached credit under the European Credit Transfer system (ECTS) framework or similar framework, credits may be awarded for that learning in the context of the relevant programme schedule and according to the following rules:

- i. Credits and exemptions are awarded following the robust academic assessment outlined above and endorsed by the department RPL panel which may include Head of Dept./School/Faculty members
- ii. At the Award Stage, or for elements of a course contributing to the Award, prior learning is not considered for exemption but is graded

Exemption - Once the RPL application is assessed the results are presented to an internal RPL board/programme board prior to exam board. RPL for exemption is subject to the SETU Examination appeal system.

Entry - The applicant will have a Right of Appeal to the VP for Academic Affairs once the decision on the applicant's RPL application has been formally communicated to the applicant, on either procedural grounds or substantial grounds or both.

The result of the appeal will be subject to no further review.

The University will ensure that academic standards in line with those attained across all SETU programmes will be maintained and applied throughout the RPL process. SETU will ensure that the assessment of a student's prior learning is assessed using the SETU approved processes and is consistent, transparent and equitable, and in keeping with academic integrity and the University's ethos.

In the RPL process, applicants are responsible for demonstrating the appropriate academic level of learning, by producing evidence of knowledge in use and practical skills.

Each school / department / faculty is responsible for the assessment of RPL applications. Each school / department / faculty ensures that their assessors are fully trained in RPL.

The same accredited learning may be approved for credit exemption on more than one programme, where appropriate, but a learner may only receive the credit exemption once.

RPL Assessment

The principles underlying the RPL assessment are as follows:

- i. The assessment of prior learning is an academic activity performed by academic staff. RPL should be benchmarked against assessment criteria aligned to the relevant learning outcomes.
- ii. Evidence of the attainment of learning outcomes is assessed by applying a robust approach to assessment in line with that which the University applies to all its programmes.
- iii. Assessment criteria are made explicit to applicants and applied consistently and fairly. Assessment and verification mechanisms for RPL are appropriate and fit for purpose.
- iv. If applying for RPL at award stage, all modules should be graded, where possible, or an unclassified award would be issued, and students should be advised of the implication of this.
- v. The assessment of prior learning will consider the validity, currency, relevance, sufficiency, and authenticity of the learning.
- vi. RPL Assessment outcomes will be processed in line with SETU Quality Assurance procedures.

The use and re-use of credit

Normally, credit for a completed major award can only be used to seek advanced entry to an award at a higher level. Credit for a complete award cannot normally be used towards another award at the same level, as this would constitute double counting of credit. Credit from a complete award can be used towards another award at the same level only if the following criteria are met:

- At NFQ level 9 (Masters level) applicants with postgraduate diplomas, the learning outcomes of which satisfy those of the Masters degree to which they are seeking entry, may apply to gain full recognition of their prior credit and undertake the remaining credits at SETU, recognising that all other quality and educational requirements must be met. Key considerations to include the time that has elapsed between the completion of the previous award, the application of the learning in a professional context and a portfolio prepared by the applicant to provide evidence of that learning. The transcript of results will reflect the recognition of prior learning.
- Where RPL is being sought for an enterprise cohort of learners in relation to a particular programme, credit limits may vary based on learning outcome mapping.

Restrictions

- i. An applicant/student can be exempted up to a maximum of 50% of associated credits of a major award, with the exception of applicants to Masters programmes who hold a postgraduate diploma and enterprise cohorts. These limits may also be subject to School specific limitations and appropriate compatibility of the prior learning with the module for which exemption is sought and/or admission applied for, which may have specific requirements such as professional, statutory, or regulatory body requirements.
- ii. Applicants/students granted access/advanced entry to a higher qualification via RPL will not receive an award relevant to the lower qualification, but merely be allowed to register for a relevant higher qualification, should they wish to do so.

7. Responsibility and Authority

The University policy is reviewed by the appropriate committee/s of Academic Council, Executive Management Committee and approved by the Academic Council. At a minimum, this review will be completed every five years.

8. Compliance

It is expected that all employees of the University and all members of the SETU will comply with this policy.

9. Related Documents

Relevant/related existing internal and external documentation includes but is not limited to:

- SETU Admissions Policies
- SETU Appeals Policy
- SETU Marks and Standards 2022
- SETU Fitness to Study Policy
- SETU Fitness to Practice Policy
- SETU Academic Regulations

- National Framework for Recognition of Prior Learning 2022

10. Useful Links

[Policies page](#)

11. Policy Review

Date of next review: 3 years from date of approval

This policy will be reviewed in advance of the review date i.e. dd/mm/yyyy and/or as soon as possible following new or updated legislation, national or sectoral policy.

12. Policy Author

The authors of this policy are the Vice President Student Experience/RPL Coordinator. Any feedback or issues arising on implementation of this policy should be communicated to the policy authors. They are responsible to ensure that Derek O' Byrne, VP for Academic Affairs is aware of these comments when reviewing the policy.

13. References

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Council of the European Union (2012) 'COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 20 December 2012 on the validation of nonformal and informal learning - 2012/C 398/01', Official Journal of the European Union, C 398, pp. 1–5.

Department of Education and Skills (2012) Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.

Dept of Education and Skills (2015) Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025. Dublin: Dept of Education and Skills.

Government of Ireland (2021) The Human Capital Initiative (HCI). Available at: <https://hea.ie/skills-engagement/human-capital-initiative/>

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QAI (2005), Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education and Training, www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/2021-09/principles-and-operational-guidelines-for-rpl-2005.pdf.

QQI (2020) Recognition of Prior Learning. Available at: <https://www.qqi.ie/what-we-do/qqi-awards/recognition-of-prior-learning-provider>.

T&L National Forum (2021) RPL Practitioner Network. Available at: <https://rpl-ireland.ie/>.

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