



UNIVERSITY OF MALTA POLICY FOR THE RECOGNITION AND ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) AND FACILITATION OF ACCESS TO UNIVERSITY COURSES

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of Recognition and Accreditation of Prior Learning (RPL) is to recognize and, where appropriate, accredit the expertise gained by skilled individuals in non-academic contexts. By contributing to the holistic assessment and self-assessment of non-traditional learners, RPL supports the European agenda for Lifelong Learning.
- 1.2 By allowing applicants to demonstrate learning achieved through a range of learning experiences, including formal, non-formal and informal education, RPL enables them to gain access to undergraduate or taught postgraduate programmes of study and/or gain exemptions from parts of it.
- 1.3 This policy aims to guide departments in managing the process of recognition and accreditation of prior learning by providing a set of core principles and key features intended to ensure consistency and transparency in the application of the principles of RPL throughout the University.

2 GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Term	Explanation
Recognition and Accreditation of Prior Learning (RPL)	The process whereby non-traditional learners are eligible to receive recognition for learning acquired in the past through formal (certified) learning, as well as through non-formal and informal (experiential) learning.
Department	Department refers to any academic entity within Faculties, Institutes, Centres and Schools of the University.
Formal Learning	Formal learning means learning that occurs in organised and structured contexts and is explicitly designated as learning in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view and leads to a qualification. ¹ Examples of formal learning include learning which takes place within educational and training institutions.

¹ Source: Education Act, Chapter 327, Article 63

Non-Formal Learning	Non-formal learning means learning embedded in a planned activity organised outside the formal educational system, which activity is not explicitly designed as learning but which contains an important learning component. ¹ Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view, but normally does not lead to certification. ² Examples of non-formal learning are: learning and training activities undertaken in the workplace, voluntary sector or trade unions and in community-based settings.
Informal Learning	Informal Learning refers to learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. ² Informal learning is often referred to as experiential learning and typically does not lead to certification.
Learning Outcomes	Learning outcomes are statements that identify what the learner is expected to know and be able to do after having completed a study-unit or programme. Applicants wishing to apply for RPL will be expected to demonstrate how their certified or experiential learning maps against the learning outcomes for the programme (or parts of it) for which they are seeking exemption.
Learning Portfolio	A Learning Portfolio is a collection of materials compiled by the applicant in order to demonstrate the learning achieved through prior certified or experiential learning.
Non-Traditional Learners	Non-Traditional Learners, also referred to as Adult Learners or LifeLong Learners, are students who decide to return to learning after the traditional post-secondary schooling years.
RPL Coordinators	RPL Coordinators are persons who coordinate the support of RPL procedures at university level. They are normally the first point of contact for non-traditional learners wishing to access a programme through the validation of their informal and/or non-formal learning. An RPL Coordinator is responsible for supporting applicants in building their learning portfolios and for providing information and advice intended to enable applicants to make informed and practical choices.

² Source: Referencing Report, 4th Ed., February 2016

RPL Advisors	RPL Advisors are identified by the respective departments, and are academic or administrative persons who are fully conversant with the requirements of the programmes offered by their department. Such persons shall further have the ability to determine the educational and professional development of each applicant. RPL Advisors will assist applicants in the preparation of their application for assessment and then channel the application to the appropriate Assessor.
RPL Assessors	RPL Assessors are academic experts in a given area who can assess applications for the recognition and accreditation of prior learning through the evaluation of portfolios compiled by applicants. RPL Assessors should not be involved in the compilation of the documentary evidence which needs to be submitted by applicants in support of their application for RPL.

3 KEY PRINCIPLES

- 3.1 Learning that takes place outside formal educational institutions may be enriching and may contribute to acquisition of foundational skills and knowledge. Recognition of prior informal and non-formal learning makes this type of learning more visible and more valuable to society at large as it allows non-traditional learners to complete formal education by not having to repeat content which they have already mastered.³
- 3.2 Through the recognition of informal and non-formal learning which has occurred before admission to a course or to the relevant stage of a course, the University aims to valorise the relevant learning, irrespective of mode or place of learning. The University will ensure that academic standards expected of traditional learners are maintained and applied throughout the RPL process.
- 3.3 The decision on whether to allow applicants to gain access to a programme through RPL rests with the Faculty/Institute/Centre or School (F/I/C/S) after consultation with the relevant department. Where RPL is deemed appropriate, the RPL practices for specific programmes must be framed to suit differing contexts.
- 3.4 Applicants seeking admission and/or exemption through RPL must provide evidence in writing, through the submission of a portfolio, that they have achieved the specific learning outcomes at the required levels. The evidence of learning achieved should be compiled by the applicant following advice/discussions with the RPL Advisor and should provide a comprehensive demonstration of achievement. The portfolio building process is led by the applicant but will be supported by an RPL Coordinator and the RPL Advisor.

³ Source: *Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning – Pointers for Policy Development*, OECD, March 2010.

- 3.5 The evaluation of prior learning is an academic task and, like other forms of assessment, is done by academic experts in a given field, drawing on other experts as needed.

4 THE RPL PROCEDURE

The University will strive to provide support and guidance to non-traditional learners wishing to access programmes through RPL. The service which is currently provided to prospective applicants through SAS will be further enhanced by the creation of an RPL Administrative Office that will help ensure non-traditional learners receive adequate support to enable them to identify and collect all the evidence required for the validation of their prior informal and/or non-formal learning.

The members of staff (academic or administrative) who will assist non-traditional learners with the application process will need to be identified. Such members of staff will receive training to ensure that non-traditional learners are properly guided through the application process.

In order to ensure transparency, fairness and equity throughout, all departments within F/I/C/S should consistently follow and apply the procedures outlined hereunder:

4.1 Contacting the RPL Coordinator: Identifying areas of learning

- 4.1.1 An applicant wishing to access a programme of study through the RPL route should first establish contact with an RPL Coordinator at the RPL Administrative Office. As the gathering of evidence is normally time-consuming, applicants are advised to start this process eight months ahead of the deadline for submission of applications. Though the University will do its utmost to process all RPL applications in time, it cannot guarantee that applications which are submitted later than this deadline can be processed in time for the next intake.
- 4.1.2 The RPL Coordinator will support applicants in compiling the learning portfolio by helping them to identify the skills and competences achieved through prior certified and/or experiential learning which demonstrate achievement of specific learning outcomes. The identification of learning outcomes achieved through prior learning is an essential part of the RPL process as it enables the Coordinator to guide applicants in finding appropriate programmes of study relevant to their field of interest.
- 4.1.3 Following the preliminary mapping of learning outcomes against appropriate programmes of study, applicants are referred to the RPL Advisor/s within specific departments.
- 4.1.4 An applicant whose current formal and experiential learning is not considered sufficient for entry to a University programme will be guided to follow an Access Programme instead of proceeding with the normal RPL procedure. The Access Programme will be advised by the RPL Office in consultation with the relevant faculty depending on the course of study the applicant wishes to join.

4.2 Contacting the RPL Advisor: Identifying Programmes of Study

- 4.2.1 Once an applicant identifies the programme of study which is of interest to him/her, s/he will receive support from an RPL Advisor in order to demonstrate how outcomes obtained as a result of prior learning are consistent with the educational requirements

or aims of the programme to which the applicant is seeking acceptance and/or exemption.

- 4.2.2 The RPL Advisor is required to contact the RPL Assessor to determine what form of evidence needs to be submitted with the formal application. In some cases, applicants may only be required to submit a portfolio containing a set of documents, while in other cases the Assessor may request a presentation of particular skills, a written assignment, or the taking of an oral or written exam, as would be appropriate to the nature of learning outcomes to which the achievements are related.

4.3 Preparing an application for RPL

- 4.3.1 Non-traditional learners wishing to access a programme through the RPL route shall be responsible for demonstrating how the learning outcomes obtained through prior certified and/or experiential learning are relevant to the programmes of study on offer that are appropriate and of interest to them.

- 4.3.2 In order to ensure that assessment of prior learning can be carried out effectively, any documented evidence which is attached to the application must be carefully sorted and numbered. The responsibility for preparing, completing and submitting an application for RPL always rests with the applicant. Applicants should be aware that the evidence they submit in support of their application (which must be submitted to the RPL Coordinator) shall be assessed by Departments against the requirements and learning outcomes of the relevant programme, and that consideration will be given to:

- **Validity**
The prior learning presented, which should be at the appropriate academic level, would need to match the learning outcomes required by the relevant programme.
- **Sufficiency**
Applicants must provide sufficient documentation as evidence, including a completed form, the learning portfolio and any other evidence requested by the relevant department.
- **Authenticity**
Applicants must be responsible for the veracity of documentation provided.
- **Currency**
The prior learning achieved and submitted for accreditation should be up-to-date with current knowledge and practice.
- **Relevance**
The prior learning gained should be relevant to the programme of study that the applicant intends to follow.

4.4 Assessment of the Application

- 4.4.1 The RPL Assessor identified by the respective F/I/C/S should be a Resident Academic who is familiar with the programme of study to which the application relates. The Assessor should understand the level of knowledge and understanding as well as the kind of skills that are required of applicants admitted to the programme through the conventional route.

- 4.4.2 To ensure impartiality, the RPL Advisor and Assessor shall work separately in the implementation of procedures for the recognition and accreditation of prior learning, except where required otherwise by this Policy.
- 4.4.3 The evaluation of a single application typically requires only one RPL Assessor; however, if an application relates to more than one major area of study, more Assessors may be involved. An RPL Assessor is autonomous and may also ask applicants to provide additional evidence to support their claims, e.g. ask applicants to take part in an oral or written exam. In such instances, applicants should receive support in preparing for the exam (e.g. by providing them with a list of required readings). Oral examinations/interviews, when held, shall be conducted by at least two assessors.
- 4.4.4 Participation in the RPL procedure should give applicants an opportunity for learning and personal development: the entire assessment process should be formative in nature and assessors should therefore provide applicants with feedback at each stage of the assessment process.

4.5 Evaluation Methods

Applications for RPL must be accompanied by a **Learning Portfolio** which must include a collection of materials compiled by the applicant in order to demonstrate the learning achieved through prior certified or experiential learning. The evidence that could be included in the portfolio would typically include:

- A detailed curriculum vitae
- Certificates confirming participation in training
- The scope of duties performed to date
- A report from an internship/apprenticeship agreement
- Professional certification
- Articles or other works written by the applicant
- Opinion issued by the employer or manager or leader of an organisation
- Evidence of participation in a project and the scope of duties involved
- Evidence of participation in foreign exchange periods
- Examples of work performed (e.g. prepared reports, budget sheets, plans, etc.)

In addition to submission of a learning portfolio, the evaluation of an applicant's request for RPL may also include one or a combination of the following:

- **The undertaking of a project:** this would allow applicants to demonstrate the learning outcomes acquired outside their formal educational experience.
- **An Interview/Oral Examination:** this would give applicants an opportunity to submit additional information in person as to the nature of learning outcomes resulting from prior learning, and will further enable applicants to discuss their goals and aspirations for future education and development.
- **Simulation/Practice observation:** where appropriate, the direct observation of applicants' competences can be carried out in an appropriate setting, such as their workplace. If applicants are not able to demonstrate specific skills at the workplace, a simulation or role play may be carried out.
- **The Undertaking of a Proficiency Test in English:** Applicants not in possession of a Secondary Education Certificate pass at Grade 5 or higher in English Language, or

a pass at the same standard in a comparable qualification, shall be required to sit for a proficiency test in English as approved by the University.

4.6 Decision regarding the RPL application

- 4.6.1 Once an application has been assessed, the RPL Assessor shall submit a detailed report to the Faculty Admissions Committee, which will subsequently submit its recommendation to the University Admissions Board (UAB) for a final decision.
- 4.6.2 In the event of a positive assessment, the applicant shall receive an official letter affirming the recognition of prior learning in reference to specific courses offered by the University. Such a letter and any conditions imposed by the UAB shall be issued by the Admissions Office of the University, and copied to the RPL Coordinator.
- 4.6.3 Applicants who fail to complete the RPL assessment successfully shall be informed of the knowledge, skills and competences they still need to achieve, and will be given the possibility to either
 - (i) re-take the RPL assessment when they think they have achieved the missing elements; or
 - (ii) follow an Access Programme (or parts of it) to enable them to make up for the identified shortfalls
- 4.6.4 Applicants who fail the RPL assessment and feel they were unfairly judged shall have the right to petition the UAB in order to request a revision of the assessment process. This revision will be carried out by an RPL Assessor who was not involved in the initial assessment. The same procedure outlined in 4.6.1 is to be adopted by the RPL Assessor appointed to conduct the review process.

4.7 Applicable Fees

- 4.7.1 Applications for the Recognition and Accreditation of Prior Learning (RPL) are subject to a processing fee of €25.
- 4.7.2 Applications for a revision of the RPL assessment process are subject to an additional fee of €25.

Approved by Senate on 27 October 2016