Procedure for the
Assessment of Prior Certified/Prior Experiential Learning

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1. Purpose

This procedure supports Atlantic Technological University's (ATU's) *AQAE009 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy*, which sets out the principles and standards underpinning the approach to and implementation of RPL at ATU. The policy ensures that assessment of prior learning at ATU is approached and facilitated in a manner which is fair, equitable and transparent; and upholds the academic integrity of all programmes of study and awards provided by the University. This procedure provides details on how RPL will be operationalised at ATU, in accordance with the policy.

2. Scope

This document outlines the procedures involved in the process of assessment of certified prior learning (RPCL); and assessment of prior experiential learning (RPEL), in relation to:

- learners who have applied for initial or advanced admission to a programme of study at ATU, and
- registered students of ATU who are seeking exemptions from module(s) in a programme.

3. Reference Documents

AQAE009 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy

AQAE005 Marks & Standards Policy

4. Procedure

The sections that follow set out:

- Timelines
- Applying for Direct Entry or Advanced Entry
- Applying for Module Exemptions
- Appeal the outcome of an RPL Application
- Fees

4.1 Timelines

ATU provides support to all RPL applicants via the RPL Unit. In addition, the applicant will be supported by a Mentor. It is the applicant's responsibility to provide adequate documentation, in a timely manner, to allow for assessment of their application and related decisions to be made.

4.1.1   Application Timelines

Application forms for RPL are available from the RPL Unit. Application forms should be completed and submitted to the Head of Department (HoD) as per the indicative timelines outlined in Table 1. Dates and deadlines will be posted on the ww.atu.ie/rpl. Additional information is available from rpl@atu.ie

Applicants seeking recognition of *prior experiential learning* are advised to commence the process of preparing their portfolio well in advance of these deadlines.

RPL Application for Direct or Advanced Entry	
Applicant engages with the RPL Unit	A minimum of 30 working days in advance of programme commencement
Applicant submits their RPL application for Direct or Advanced Entry	20 working days in advance of programme commencement
Applicant is informed of outcome of RPL application.	Normally 10 days from receipt of application
RPL Application for Module Exemptions	
Engagement with the RPL Unit	Ideally, a minimum of 10 working days in advance of module commencement
Submission of an RPL application for Module Exemptions	Where possible, applications should be made in advance of module commencement, but applications will be accepted up to 10 days after module commencement.
Applicant is informed of outcome.	Normally within 10 working days from receipt of application

Table 1. Indicative timelines for submitting and processing RPL applications.

4.1.2   Assessment Timelines

ATU will endeavour to process and assess applications for entry/advanced entry prior to the commencement of the relevant teaching period. This is contingent on the applicant

adhering to the application timelines indicated and providing *all* required supporting documentation.

In the case of applications for module exemptions, students are required to attend the module until such time as the outcome of the assessment process is communicated to them.

4.2 Applying for Direct Entry or Advanced Entry

An individual who has identified a programme of study at ATU should submit their application for Direct Entry or Advanced Entry as follows:

1. The applicant makes an inquiry to the RPL Unit and meets with a staff member to discuss the feasibility/appropriateness of an RPL application.
2. The applicant notifies the relevant HoD of their intention to apply for Direct Entry/Advanced Entry.
3. The applicant completes the relevant form which is available from the RPL Unit and downloadable from the www.atu.ie/rpl
4. The HoD in consultation with the RPL Unit appoints an RPL Mentor to support the applicant.
5. The RPL Unit provides the applicant with the relevant templates for both the cover sheet and the matrix for mapping evidence to entry requirements and the award standard/Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs).
6. The RPL Mentor meets the RPL applicant to discuss entry requirements, award standards/PLOs and the *identification* and *documentation* and appropriate evidence in support of the application.
7. The applicant prepares a portfolio of evidence aligned to the entry requirements and award standards/PLOs of the proposed programme of study.
8. The RPL Mentor meets the RPL applicant to review the completeness of the portfolio and to discuss the next two steps (*assessment and certification*).
9. The applicant submits the portfolio of evidence to the RPL Unit who forward it to the relevant HoD for assessment by an Assessor.
10. An RPL Assessor reviews the portfolio of evidence. The RPL Assessor compares the learning presented in the portfolio to the entry requirements and award standards/PLOs of the proposed programme of study.
11. In the case of an application based on RPEL, the Assessor may require the applicant to undertake a verification activity.
12. In accordance with section 4.3.1.1 of *AQAE009*, if learning gaps are identified in an applicant's prior learning, the applicant may be required to undertake bridging modules prior to entry as determined by the Assessor.
13. If the Assessor determines that the learning requirements are sufficiently similar,

then the RPL applicant is deemed to meet the entry requirements. It is at the discretion of the Assessor to request additional information and/or an interview with the applicant.

14. The Assessor makes a decision, on the RPL application and forwards the result of the assessment to the HoD who notifies the RPL Unit.
15. The outcome of the assessment is communicated in writing to the applicant by the RPL Unit.
16. If there is a successful outcome (*certification*) the HoD will request that the Admissions Office, make the applicant an offer for entry/direct entry to the programme of study.

* *This does not apply to year one of full-time undergraduate programme. These applications are made to and processed by the Central Applications Office (CAO).*

4.3 Applying for module exemptions

1. The applicant makes an inquiry to the RPL Unit and meets with a staff member to discuss the feasibility/appropriateness of an RPL application.
2. The applicant notifies the relevant HoD of their intention to apply for an exemption from a module(s).
3. The applicant completes the relevant form which is available from the RPL Unit and downloadable from the www.atu.ie/rpl
4. The HoD (or nominee) in consultation with the RPL Unit, (as necessary), appoints an RPL Mentor to support the applicant.
5. The RPL Unit provides the applicant with the relevant templates for both the cover sheet and the matrix for mapping evidence to Module Learning Outcomes (MLOs).
6. The RPL Mentor meets the RPL applicant to discuss: the module learning outcomes and the *identificatio*n and *documentation* of appropriate evidence in support of the application.
7. If the application is on the basis of experiential learning the applicant prepares a portfolio of evidence aligned to the MLOs.
8. The RPL Mentor meets the RPL applicant to review the completeness of the portfolio and to discuss the next two steps (*assessment and certification*).
9. The applicant submits the portfolio of evidence to the RPL Unit who forwards it to the relevant HoD (or nominee) for assessment by an Assessor.
10. An Assessor reviews the portfolio of evidence.
11. The Assessor compares the learning outcomes of the portfolio of evidence to the MLOs (of the module from which the applicant is seeking an exemption).
12. If the Assessor determines that the learning outcomes are sufficiently similar, then an exemption may be awarded. It is at the discretion of the assessor to request additional information and/or an interview with the applicant.

13. The Assessor makes a decision on the RPL application and forwards the result to the HoD (or nominee) who notifies the RPL Unit.
14. The outcome of the assessment is communicated in writing to the applicant by the RPL Unit.
15. If the application is successful (*certification*), the HoD notifies the Programme Board, and the exemptions are recorded on the students record by the Examinations Office.

4.4 Assessment

4.4.1   Principles of Assessment of RPL at ATU

AQAE009 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy sets out five principles which guide the assessment of RPL at ATU. These are as follows:

1.   Assessment of prior learning will follow consistent, precise and unambiguous assessment criteria to ensure that the process is transparent, equitable and fair for all learners.
2.   Decisions on recognition of prior learning shall be based on sound academic judgement.
3.   The RPL assessment process will have sufficient flexibility to allow for adaptation to different discipline areas and different types of prior learning, and the use of a range of assessment tools (e.g. portfolios, essays, interviews), appropriate to the programme/discipline and the needs of the applicant, is encouraged.
4.   Assessors and Mentors involved in the RPL process will be provided with training and support in fulfilling these different duties.
5.   RPL assessments will be conducted in a reasonable timeframe.

4.4.2 Guidelines for the Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning

The *Portfolio of Evidence* must be written/structured in a way that the knowledge, skills and competencies align and are mapped to entry requirements/award standards, PLOs or MLOs. Evidence of prior learning must be clearly demonstrated. An RPL applicant may use the same evidence for more than one MLO. ATU will consider the currency of the prior learning. It must be achieved within a suitable time frame.

Evidence contained in the portfolio may include, but is not limited to the following:

- References
- Job Descriptions and experiences
- Details of any training completed
- Certificates for qualifications, training courses undertaken etc.,

- Sample work (e.g. drawings, minutes from meetings, business plan, video recordings, artefacts etc.)
- Evidence from the learner's personal life
- Published work
- Professional licenses/registrations or membership of professional organisations
- Acknowledged accomplishments
- Relevant recreational activities or hobbies.

Examples of evidence which may be used to support applications for experiential learning are outlined in Table 2 below.

Evidence Type	Description	Examples
Formal Learning	Courses which were formally organised and assessed.	Certificates and copies of assessments.
Non-formal learning	Training events which were organised but did not have assessment.	Descriptions of courses Certificates of attendance Samples of materials
Self-managed learning	Learning achieved that was not organised by others	Published work Voluntary activities Self-study Recreational activities
Work history	Aspects of paid and voluntary work that are relevant to the module	Job descriptions Curriculum Vitae Professional accreditations/licences
Reports from employers	Documents which outline roles, responsibilities, performance and achievements.	Letters of verification References Records from HR Departments

Table 2: Examples of Evidence for RPEL

4.4.3 Guidelines for the Assessment of Prior Certified Learning

An application for recognition of prior certified learning should be accompanied by documentation which provides evidence of the credit or qualification which the learner has already achieved.

As per EU (2017), '*credit*' means confirmation that a part of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of learning outcomes has been assessed and validated by a competent authority, according to an agreed standard; '*qualification*' means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent authority

determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards (Council Recommendation 2017/C 189/03).

Table 3 below outlines the minimum requirements, based on EQF Recommendation (EU, 2017) as the main elements that should appear in any qualification/certificate.

1.	Identification of the learner
2	Title of the qualification and field
3	Awarding body or competent authority
4	Date of issue (and expiry if relevant)
5	Level of the credential or qualification within the NFQ/EFQ
6	Type of Assessment

Table 3: List of fields to be included in credits or qualifications presented for RPCL

When a learner presents prior certified learning (PCL) in order to gain entry/advanced entry or module exemption(s), the Assessor will base his/her decision to grant this exemption on the following eight factors:

1. The Assessor, in consultation with the Admission Office, checks the NFQ level and the credit weighting of the PCL.
2. The Assessor should compare the learning outcomes of the PCL to the PLO/Award Standard/Entry Requirements of a specific programme or the MLOs of the module for which an exemption is being sought.
3. If the Assessor determines that the learning is sufficiently similar, then entry or exemption may be awarded.
4. The PCL must have been achieved in an appropriate time frame. The HoD in consultation with the Assessor will determine the appropriate timeframe.
5. Where an applicant is seeking RPCL for foreign qualifications, the Assessor, in consultation with the Admission Office, checks the NARIC database for comparability. If an applicant's qualification is not listed on the NARIC database, the RPL unit will advise the applicant to contact QQI to have their qualifications aligned with the appropriate Irish qualification.
6. When PCL is accepted as the basis for granting a module exemption on a programme of study, further application using the same learning for other module exemptions in the same programme will not be considered.
7. PCL may entitle the candidate to exemptions on a programme, not credits. No grade will be awarded to the learner for the certified learning.
8. The assessor makes a decision regarding the PCL application within 10 working days of application.
9. The documentation submitted by the learner (Application form, photocopies of certificates, learning outcomes, examination results etc) together with the recommendation of the assessor must be stored by the RPL Unit as per ATU's data

retention policy.

Some programmes may require a limitation on the volume of exemptions or on the type of learning that may be exempt due to implications from third party or other state or professional bodies.

4.4 Appealing the outcome of an RPL Application

The applicant has a right to appeal the decision. The grounds for appeal are:

- Additional information relevant to the application is now available that could not have been made available at the time of application.
- Incorrect information was submitted, which the applicant now wishes to have revised.
- The applicant considers that their prior learning was not fully taken into consideration by the assessor.

An appeal should be made in writing to the Office of the VP for Academic Affairs and Registrar (VPAAR) within 5 working days of the initial decision. There will be a cost associated with the appeal. This cost will be determined on an annual basis. The appeal will be considered by the VPAAR or a nominee.

The office of the VPAAR may uphold or reject the appeal as deemed appropriate. The decision on an appeal will be communicated in writing to the applicant, HoD and the RPL unit.

The decision in relation to the appeal will be made within 5 days of receipt. If the appeal is successful any fee paid will be refunded in full. The decision of the office of the VPAAR is final.

4.5 Fees and Payments

4.5.1 Application charges and fees

- There is no charge for making an RPL application.
- For applicants appealing an RPL outcome, an appeal fee will be incurred by the applicant, the amount of which will be in line with fee associated with appeal of module result.
- A student receiving module exemption is not entitled to a reduction in the fee for the stage.

4.5.2 Payment to Mentors and Assessors

- Academic Staff who act as RPL Mentors will either be paid an hourly rate for their work, or the work will be included in their allocation of hours.
- Academic Staff who undertake assessment of RPL will submit a claim as per the usual procedure for claiming for exam corrections.

5. Associated Documents Generated by this Procedure

- *AQAE027_001 Application for Exemption based on Prior Certified Learning Form*
- *AQAE027_002 Application for Exemption based on Prior Experiential Learning Form*
- *AQAE027_003 RPL for Entry or Advanced Entry Portfolio Submission Form*

6. Measurement of Effectiveness of this Procedure

Data on RPL applications will be compiled on an annual basis by the RPL Unit. This will include data on applications per type, timelines for processing applications and number of successful RPL applications.

7. Revision History

Revision No	Description of Change	Approval Date
000	New procedure. Approved by Academic Standards and Policy Committee of Academic Council	28/02/2023