
A European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning:

Examples of Good Practice - Cork Institute of Technology

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1.0 EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE - CORK INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

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1.1 Introduction

The Department of Education Development (DEIS) was established by the Institute in July 1996 with a mission to innovate in education for quality and access. It operates generally to assist the Institute in developing its education/training provision to meet the changing needs of various client groups and in making this provision available to an increasing range of clients. In pursuing its mission, DEIS has engaged in developing, piloting and evaluating innovative interventions in education and in the subsequent integration into mainstream of those deemed to have been successful and appropriate.

This has resulted in five main areas of activity:

- Research/Development in Education
- Course Design/Development as a partnership process with a range of client groups
- Development of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy/practice and the provision of support for the RPL process
- Development of e-learning provision and support for this provision on an Institute-wide basis.
- Course development and delivery in the field of Community Education and Development

1.2 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Within the context of the National Framework of Qualifications the Institute has developed a comprehensive policy on RPL, which has been recommended by the Academic Council and agreed by the Governing Body (see below). The RPL process is based on the assessment of learning evidenced within a learning portfolio and measured against particular learning outcomes for the award of specific credit and/or grades - as outlined below.

Portfolio completion by the learner is supported by a mentoring process provided by dedicated academic staff of the Department of Education Development (DEIS). Staff development and support in the area of RPL for the institute academic staff is also provided by DEIS. A course in RPL mentoring and assessment is currently being uploaded to the WebCT Learning Management System. A website dealing with current and future development in RPL is currently under construction and will be maintained by DEIS on a continuing basis.

To date within the Institute over 1000 students across twelve academic departments have been awarded credit within the National Framework of Qualification at levels 6,7 and 8. It is anticipated that in excess of 250 students will be similarly recognised within the current academic year (2004/5).

Current research work within DEIS in the area RPL relates particularly to recognition of work-based and community-based learning using authentic assessment methods and to the use of rubrics in the assessment process.

1.3 RPL Policy at Cork Institute of Technology

Introduction

RPL:

Recognition of Prior Learning is the generic term for systems such as Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) or Advanced Academic Standing which are used within Higher Education to describe the awarding of credit to students on the basis of demonstrated learning that has occurred prior to admission. The philosophy underlying RPL is to enable and encourage people to enter or re-enter formal education, leading to qualifications, by awarding or recognising credit for what they already know from the course curriculum. The onus is on the student to demonstrate the prior learning, by preparing and submitting adequate evidence, under the guidance and advice of the institution.

There are two main categories within RPL:

- Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning (APEL): the awarding of credit for uncertificated learning gained from experience. It should be noted that academic credit can be awarded only for achievement of learning outcomes, not experience per se.
- Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL): the recognition of formal learning for which certification has been awarded through a bona-fide educational institution or other education/training provider. Under the principle that such credit should only be awarded once, such prior learning requires recognition rather than accreditation.

Basic Principles

- The generic issue addressed in this document is Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), which includes Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL);
- Prior Learning refers to learning which occurs before admission to a course or to the relevant stage of a course;
- Prior Learning includes both experiential and certificated learning;
- Exemption from subjects or modules may be granted at the non-award stages of a course on the basis of recognising prior learning, according to the rules and processes stated in Sections 2 and 3;
- Exemptions are granted at the commencement or during the operation of a stage of a course and are recorded at the relevant Examinations Board Meeting;
 - Where the prior learning has not previously attracted credit under the ECTS framework or under a framework articulating with it, credits may be awarded for that learning in the context of the relevant course schedule and according to the rules set out below;

- Credits and exemptions are awarded on the recommendation of the Academic Council;
- Exemptions are not allowed at the award stage or for elements of a course contributing to the award. However, for students with relevant prior learning, arrangements can be made for the consideration and recognition of this learning as indicated in Section 1.3.

Recognition of Learning at Award Stages, including Contributing Elements:

- Where students have substantial, relevant prior learning they may submit a learning portfolio, detailing their prior and current learning, including any additional information that may be specified;
- This portfolio will be assessed and credits and/or marks/grades may be awarded. Any marks/grades awarded will contribute to the overall classification of the award;
- In the case where the prior learning has been certificated and credits given under the ECTS framework or under a framework articulating with it, no further credits will be awarded, but such credits can be recognised and transferred.

Criteria

The following standard criteria for the implementation of RPL apply to all courses. However, a course may operate outside the criteria but all such cases should be specified in the approved course documentation.

RPL in Non-Award Stages:

Recognition or accreditation will only be given:

- for complete modules/subjects;
- where a minimum of 50% of the learning outcomes for the module/subject have been achieved;
- for a maximum of 50% of the modules/subjects for the stage;
- up to a maximum of 50% of the total credits for the stage;

Marks/grades will not be awarded at non-award stages. Where an end of year classification is to be calculated, such calculations will be based entirely on the modules/subjects that have been examined.

RPL in Award Stage(s)

Any stage which has an input to the overall classification of an award is deemed to be an award stage for the purposes of this document.

Recognition or accreditation will only be given:

- for complete modules/subjects;
- where a minimum of 50% of the learning outcomes for the module/subject have been achieved;
- for a maximum of 35% of the subjects/modules for the stage;
- up to a maximum of 35% of the total credits for the stage.

Subject exemptions are not granted at the award stage and, instead, marks/grades are awarded, as indicated in Section 1.3.

Component Subjects

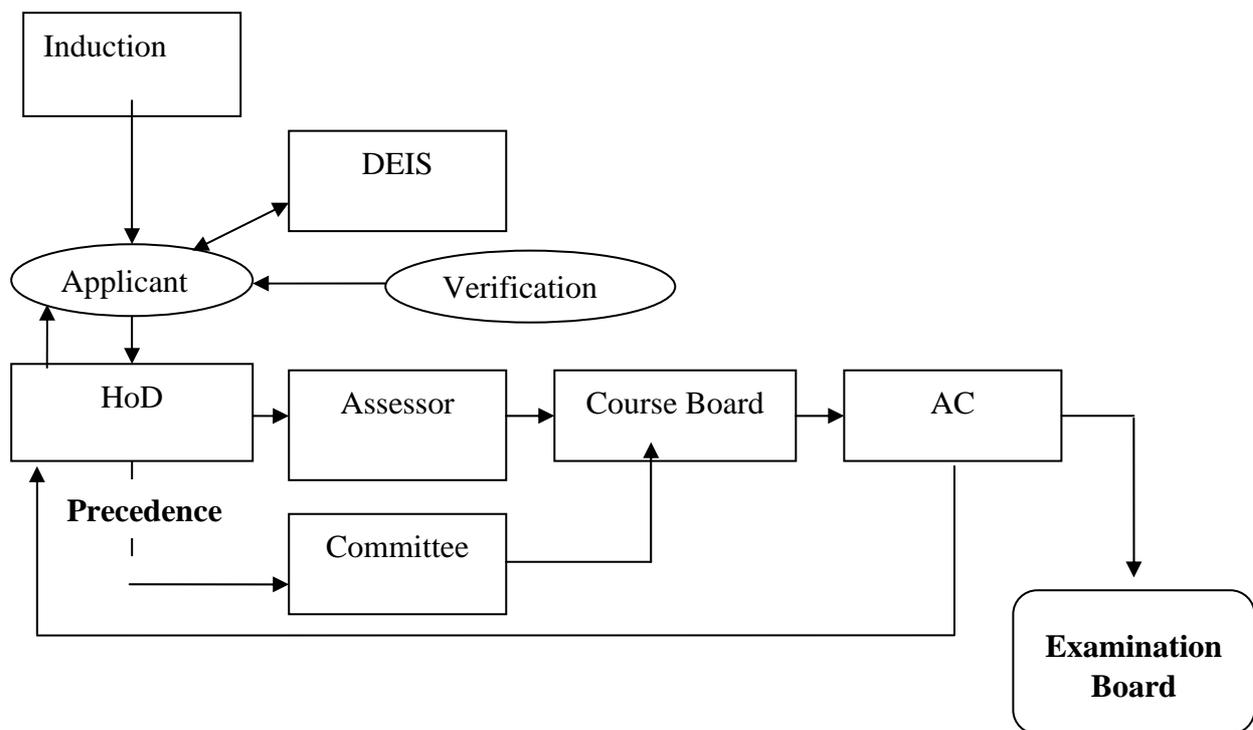
Where an examination subject comprises component subjects, and the criteria for RPL have been met by the student for some but not all of the component subjects, recognition or accreditation can be given through a Section 1.3 process, with the marks/grades awarded being combined from those of the examined component subjects to give an overall mark/grade for the examination subject.

RPL Process

- The relevant Department informs all new students about Recognition of Prior Learning, including the granting of credits and/or exemptions, as part of the induction process.
- The application for RPL is a rolling process. However, applications for RPL in a subject are not accepted after the first examination sitting for that subject.
- The student is required to initiate the process by applying in writing to the relevant Head of Department, providing all appropriate documentation in support of their application. The Department will advise and assist the student regarding the documentation needed and presentation of their case.
- Where prior certificated learning is the basis of the case, the student is required to provide the relevant syllabus, the examination paper and a transcript of results. Where experiential learning is involved, the student is required to provide a learning portfolio for assessment. All such information must be independently verified.
- The Course Board has responsibility for assessing the application and making a recommendation for the granting, or otherwise, of credits and/or exemptions to the Academic Council.
- Where no precedence exists or where experiential learning is involved, an assessor appointed by the Head of Department, normally the subject lecturer, will evaluate the information and make a recommendation for each subject. The opinion of the assessor is then forwarded by the Head of Department to the Course Board, along with all relevant documentation.
- Where precedence exists, the Course Board may delegate the decision to a committee including the Head of Department and Chair of the Course Board or Course Co-ordinator. All decisions of this committee, together with the relevant documentation will be communicated to the Course Board for its next scheduled meeting;

- The Course Board may recommend or reject the request for RPL, or seek further input from the student. This could take the form of a written submission or interview or other methodology, as appropriate.
- In reaching its decision, the Course Board must satisfy itself that the student has presented learning of an appropriate standard.
- The recommendation of the Course Board is submitted to the Academic Council for final decision. A copy of the supporting documentation is provided along with the recommendation, the original documentation being retained by the Department. All relevant documentation is available to extern examiners.
- Once a decision is made by the Academic Council, the Head of Department informs the student in writing of the outcome and copy the letter to the Course Co-ordinator, subject lecturer and year co-ordinator, if applicable.
- The various stages of the RPL process are shown on the flow chart in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Flow-chart of RPL Process



Implementation

- The provisions of this document will be implemented initially for a pilot period of two years;
- It will be subject to review by the Academic Council after the pilot period;
- An advisory group will be appointed by the Academic Council to facilitate the implementation of the RPL scheme during the pilot period. The Advisory Group will provide guidance and assistance to Course Boards and Academic Council.