Admission Guidelines and Procedures for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Carlow College, St. Patrick's (hereafter Carlow College) explicitly encourages applications from mature learners to its courses (as expressed in its promotional literature) and operates a process for assessing existing qualifications and prior learning. In this regard, its policies of admission are in accordance with those expressed by the *QQI Policy Restatement: Policy and Criteria for Access, Transfer and Progression in relation to Learners for Providers of Further and Higher Education and Training (NQAI 2003, restated 2015)*. In particular, this College is consistent with the principles expressed in the National Qualifications Framework that access be provided to those learners who have in the past had limited access to education and training programmes, including mature learners, people with disabilities, and minority groups, both from Ireland and abroad.

What is RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning)?

The concept of lifelong learning indicates that learning should encompass the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Learning occurs in many contexts which include work, involvement in social and community activities, or learning through life experience generally. A major objective of the National Framework of Qualifications is to recognise all learning achievements. 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.

RPL is a process by which value is given to previous learning, both certificated and experiential. Prior learning may be acquired through:

- formal learning: programmes of education or training delivered by recognised education and training providers that are assessed and can lead to awards;

- non-formal learning: learning activities undertaken in the workplace, voluntary sector, community etc. that may be assessed but do not normally lead to certification; and

- informal/experiential learning: acquired through life and work experience. The learning is unintentional and the learner may not recognise at the time that it is contributing to their knowledge, skills and competence.

RPL is defined as 'the process by which prior learning is given a value. It is the means by which prior learning is formally identified, assessed and acknowledged' (National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, 2005). RPL encompasses and replaces the terms 'Accreditation of Prior Certified Learning' (APCL) and 'Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning' (APEL) that have previously been associated with this practice. This more participative, learner-centred approach, places an emphasis on direct engagement, rich learning environments and supporting the construction of meaning by learners as they reflect on and interrogate their own experiences and resulting learning.

RPL Context

Recognition of prior learning is a key policy area across Europe relating directly to the establishment of two European Frameworks and the associated national frameworks. The establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and the Bologna Framework for the European Higher Education Area both include RPL as a central theme. In Ireland, the term RPL incorporates prior formal, non-formal and informal learning which is to be validated in the context of a particular destination award on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 Recommendation[1]

Develop clear routes of progression and transfer, as well as non-traditional entry routes, as follows:

- Delivery of higher education in Ireland must be characterised by flexibility and innovation;

- Undergraduate students should be encouraged to spend some time in a work or service situation, and formally acknowledge such work through accreditation or inclusion in the student's European Diploma Supplement;

- Routes of progression should be flexible into, within and across higher education institutions;

- A national framework for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) must be developed and recognised by all higher education institutions.

Purpose of RPL

Where it is considered appropriate, RPL may be used to gain:

- entry to the first year of a programme;

- advanced entry to a programme;

- exemptions from programme modules, where learning outcomes have demonstrably been achieved;

- transfer between programmes; and

- credit towards an award.

Objectives of RPL

To improve access to third level programmes at Carlow College particularly for applicants who may not have previously considered third level education.

The following principles underpin this policy on the recognition of prior learning:

1. Programmes at Carlow College are accredited by QQI. These guidelines and procedures are developed in compliance with the protocols and standards outlined in the *QQI: Assessment and Standards, Revised 2013*, and the NQAI document: *Principles and Operational Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education and Training* (2005).

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[1] *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (Dublin: Department of Education and Skills, 2011).

2. Carlow College currently provides opportunities for mature student access, transfer and progression; these guidelines and procedures do not seek to replace any of the existing opportunities for applicants, but rather to enhance the mechanisms available to applicants.

3. In applying RPL, Carlow College will ensure that the academic standards as defined by QQI and the integrity of the awards made by QQI, are rigorously protected.

4. Decisions regarding the recognition of prior learning are made based on the judgement(s) of academic staff who are competent to make these decisions.

5. The onus is on each applicant to provide all of the necessary information and documentation required in order for a judgement to be made. The final decision will be based on the evidence provided.

6. Carlow College will endeavour to ensure that the decision process is at all times fair, consistent and transparent.

7. Carlow College will provide clear and accessible information and guidelines regarding the RPL process (see below).

8. Where parameters of limitations exist in the amount of learning which can be recognised, this will be explicitly stated.

9. Where prior learning is accredited by Carlow College, this will be clearly stated on the students' transcripts, judgement sheets, Diploma Supplement, etc.

10. The prior learning must be such that it satisfies the learning outcomes associated with the module from which exemption is sought.

11. Carlow College will not give credit for the same learning twice regardless of whether the learning is from within the College or outside the College.

12. The maximum number of credits available under RPL for each programme of study is 50% of the credits for the programme which includes all prior certificated and experiential learning. The minimum number of credits awarded is 5. Certification of learning/experience which could permit credits outside of these limits would require Academic Council approval.

13. The applicant will have the right to appeal as detailed below.

Application Information

Applications should complete the **Initial RPL Application Form** (Appendix 1.1) and submit it to the Office of the Registrar. The Office of the Registrar will respond providing details of the relevant programme and module learning outcomes to applicants. They will be advised of the modules for which RPL exemptions can be applied. The applicant should then submit a full formal application, utilising the **Full RPL Application Form** (Appendix 1.2), detailing the RPL exemptions they are applying for. Applicants for RPL will be required to submit all relevant syllabi and other supporting documentation with their application. Applications for exemptions on RPL will be considered on an individual case-by-case basis by the Office of the Registrar.

Assessment Guidelines

An applicant may have their assessment based on any one or a combination of the following depending on the prospective applicant and the programme for which they are applying:

a) attendance at interview;

b) submission of a portfolio of evidence of learning to include a CV, written application, supporting statements from employers, publications, etc. The College does not generally offer personal advice/counselling in the preparation of portfolios/CVs etc.; and

c) by undertaking an appropriate assessment test.

Assessment will be undertaken by staff who are qualified and competent. These staff will be appointed by the Office of the Registrar on a case by case basis. In all cases these will include the relevant Programme Director. The following assessment criteria will be used to evaluate the prior learning submitted by the candidate:

a) Validity

b) Currency

c) Relevance

d) Sufficiency

e) Authenticity

Applicants who provide false information will be deemed to have disqualified themselves from consideration.

Award of Credit

Specific Credit may be granted where the learning outcomes match the learning outcomes of the Carlow College module. General Credit may be awarded where the prior learning is not directly equivalent to specific learning outcomes of the Carlow College programme but is relevant to the programme learning outcomes. A limited number of credits would be available in this case.

RPL is a complex process requiring a high degree of academic judgement in order to protect academic standards. The determination of the outcome of the application for prior certificated or experiential learning is the responsibility of the Registrar. The Registrar will be guided by the academic staff within the relevant Programme who are competent to advise on such matters.

Normally exemptions will be awarded for RPL. However, where the module contributes to an overall award a grade will be provided. Where a grade cannot be provided for modules which contribute to the overall award, the candidate will be advised that an exemption may be awarded instead. In the case where a candidate chooses to take an exemption in place of enrolling for the module, the candidate will be advised that the acceptance of an exemption, in this instance, will result in an unclassified overall award. This means that the candidate's final degree award will have a grade of PASS. It will not be possible to award an honours' classification.

Carlow College will record any exemptions awarded on the student's record and all application documentation and any other relevant material will be retained for the College records.

Appeals Procedures

1.   *Strategies for Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning Appeal Procedures*

The purpose of these procedures is to set out the standards for informally and formally resolving appeals regarding recognition of prior learning.

2.   *Detailed Steps, Procedures and Actions*

2.1   Informal Resolution

Disputes can frequently be resolved, without taking a formal appeal. Before using a formal appeal procedure, students should discuss any disputed recognition of prior learning with the relevant Programme Director. Students may be accompanied by another person from within the College during these discussions.

2.2   Student Assistance

A student may seek assistance and advice from the College Counselling Service, academic staff, and/or Student Services, in preparing an appeal.

2.3   Grounds for an Appeal

An appeal may be considered if:

   i)   previous study meets requirements for advanced standing;

   ii)   competencies are able to be demonstrated;

   iii)   the maximum amount of advanced standing has not already been granted;

   iv)   previous study was completed no more than seven years ago.

2.4   Formal Appeal Procedures

2.4.1   A student who wishes to appeal shall do so, in writing within ten working days of notification, to the Registrar.

2.4.2   On receipt of the appeal Registrar shall:

   i)   Acknowledge receipt of the appeal in a timely manner;

   ii)   Refer the matter to two Programme Directors who have not been involved in the decision, a member of the relevant Programme Board, and the Student's Union representative on the Academic Council, and seek a determination from them whether to uphold or dismiss the appeal. Their decision shall be final;

   iii)   Notify the student, in writing, of the decision within ten working days of acknowledgement.

Updated 6 March 2019

Appendix 1: RPL Application Guidelines

The concept of lifelong learning indicates that learning should encompass the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Learning occurs in many contexts which include work, involvement in social and community activities, or learning through life experience generally. A major objective of the *National Framework of Qualifications* is to recognise all learning achievements. 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.

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Application Information

Applications should complete the **Initial RPL Application Form** and submit it to the Office of the Registrar. The Office of the Registrar will respond providing details of the relevant programme and module learning outcomes to applicants. They will be advised of the modules for which RPL exemptions can be applied. The applicant should then submit a full formal application, utilising the **Full RPL Application Form**, detailing the RPL exemptions they are applying for. Applicants for RPL will be required to submit all relevant syllabi and other supporting documentation with their application. Applications for exemptions on RPL will be considered on an individual case-by-case basis by the Office of the Registrar.

Assessment Guidelines

An applicant may have their assessment based on any one or a combination of the following depending on the prospective applicant and the programme for which they are applying:

d) Attendance at interview.

e) Submission of a portfolio of evidence of learning to include a C.V., written application, supporting statements from employers, publications, etc. The College does not generally offer personal advice/counselling in the preparation of portfolios/CVs etc.

f) By undertaking an appropriate assessment test.

Appendix 1.2: Initial RPL Application Form

CARLOW COLLEGE
ST. PATRICK'S

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY: **COURSE CODE** _____

Date Received: _____   **Documentation Received**: 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____

Attended Interview: Yes / No   **Place Offer**: Yes / No   **Offer Accepted**: Yes / No

INITIAL APPLICATION FORM:

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

SECTION 1	**PROGRAMME DETAILS**	*BLOCK CAPITALS*

B.A. in Arts & Humanities   **(PC402)** ☐

B.A. (Hons) in Arts & Humanities   **(PC410)** ☐

B.A. (Hons) in English & History   **(PC411)** ☐

B.A. (Hons) in Social, Political & Community Studies   **(PC405)** ☐

B.A. in Applied Social Studies in Social Care (Professional Care) (PC404) ☐

Stage: **1ˢᵗ** ☐   **2ⁿᵈ** ☐   **3ʳᵈ** ☐   **4ᵗʰ** ☐

Specific Exemptions Requested by module:

| SECTION 2 | PERSONAL DETAILS | *BLOCK CAPITALS* |

SURNAME: _____ **FORENAME(S):** _____

ADDRESS: _____

_____

_____

_____

DATE OF BIRTH: _____ / _____ / _____

TEL: Home _____ **Mobile** _____

E-MAIL: _____

CARLOW COLLEGE
ST. PATRICK'S

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

FULL APPLICATION FORM

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY: COURSE CODE _____

Date Received: _____   **Documentation Received**: 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____

Attended Interview: Yes / No   **Place Offer**: Yes / No   **Offer Accepted**: Yes / No

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SECTION 1 PROGRAMME DETAILS	*BLOCK CAPITALS*

B.A. in Arts & Humanities   **(PC402)** ▢

B.A. (Hons) in Arts & Humanities   **(PC410)** ▢

B.A. (Hons) in English & History   **(PC411)** ▢

B.A. (Hons) in Social, Political & Community Studies   **(PC405)** ▢

B.A. in Applied Social Studies in Social Care (Professional Care) (PC404) ▢

Stage: 1st ▢   2nd ▢   3rd ▢   4th ▢

Specific Exemptions Requested by module:

SECTION 2	PERSONAL DETAILS	*BLOCK CAPITALS*

SURNAME: _____   **FORENAME(S):** _____

ADDRESS: _____

_____

_____

_____

DATE OF BIRTH: _____ / _____ / _____

TEL: Home _____ **Mobile** _____

E-MAIL: _____

SECTION 3	PRIOR ACCREDITED LEARNING	*BLOCK CAPITALS*

A. **Programme Name**	
Providing Institution	
Award	
NFQ Level	
Duration of Course	
Year of Award	

Your claim for recognition of Prior Accredited Learning must be supported by:

- A copy of assessment transcripts for each year of your programme of study; and
- A copy of the programme syllabus.
- Course Description which includes whether full-time or part-time study, number of contact hours per week and learning outcomes.

B. *(where applicable)* **Programme Name**	
Providing Institution	
Award	
NFQ Level	
Duration of Course	
Year of Award	

Your claim for recognition of Prior Accredited Learning must be supported by:

- A copy of assessment transcripts for each year of your programme of study;
- A copy of the programme syllabus; and
- Course Description which includes whether full-time or part-time study, number of contact hours per week and learning outcomes.

SECTION 4   EMPLOYMENT DETAILS   *BLOCK CAPITALS*

1. Current

NAME & ADDRESS OF EMPLOYER:			
CONTACT NAME:			
FROM:	TO:	VOLUNTARY	PAID
DUTIES:			

2. Previous

NAME & ADDRESS OF EMPLOYER:			
CONTACT NAME:			
FROM:	TO:	VOLUNTARY	PAID
DUTIES:			

SECTION 5   PLACEMENT DETAILS   *BLOCK CAPITALS*

Should you have undertaken Practice Placement, please provide details below.

<u>*PLACEMENT 1*</u>:

Supervisor:	
Name & Address of Agency:	
Duration of Placement (i.e. no. of weeks):	No of days placement per week:
Brief Description of work:	

SECTION 6	OTHER DETAILS YOU FEEL MAY BE RELEVANT	*BLOCK CAPITALS*

SECTION 7	DECLARATION BY APPLICANT	*BLOCK CAPITALS*

I hereby submit my application for credit / exemption on the above programme. I declare that the information contained in this application and all supporting documentation is a true and accurate reflection of my prior learning.

I accept that any advice or instruction given to me by the Institution or its staff in the preparation of the application does not confer any entitlement to credit / exemption in respect of the modules above.

Print Name: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

SECTION 8	DOCUMENT CHECKLIST (tick as appropriate)	*BLOCK CAPITALS*

☐ **Application Form**

☐ **Assessment Transcript(s)**

☐ **Programme Syllabus**

☐ **Course Description**

☐ **Prior Experiential Learning portfolio (if applicable)**

☐ **Other documentation (please give details)**