Introduction
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a process which acknowledges, and gives value to, learning achieved prior to registering for a programme of study at NUI Galway.

RPL allows students to gain admission to a programme of study, to gain exemptions/credit from some parts of a programme, to transfer from one programme of study to another or to get advanced academic standing (admission to a year other than year 1), based on demonstrated learning achieved prior to admission. This information guide explains how prospective applicants should prepare and make an application for RPL in relation to programmes of study offered by NUI Galway.

Who is RPL aimed at?
RPL is intended for learners who may or may not have had structured formal education but who have learned from their involvement in employment, community activities, home duties, sports, etc. Learners may also have undergone formal learning in another educational institution and received certification for it.

What can RPL be used for?
RPL can be used for
- admission to a programme of study where the standard entry requirements are not met
- advanced entry to a programme of study,
- transfer from one programme of study to another within the University
- transfer from an external programme of study to a programme within NUI Galway
- the award of exemptions on a programme of study where it is proved that the learning outcomes have already been achieved. This allows accelerated progress towards the final qualification.

The system is used to gain formal recognition for knowledge and skills acquired through life and work experience. The RPL applicant identifies and selects this learning and compares it to learning outcomes specified on the programme module of interest.
**What is Prior Learning?**

Prior Learning is learning which has taken place, but not necessarily been assessed or measured, prior to admission and acceptance to a programme of study. The learning can be certified or experiential.

**What is Prior Certified Learning?**

Prior Certified Learning refers to learning which has taken place on a formal programme of study at another HE institution or training organisation. It is specifically designated as learning, with specific programme content, learning objectives, stated duration for the programme and learning support. Typically the learner has completed formal assessments and has received an award. The learner will have a certificate as proof of this. Certified learning can also be referred to as formal learning.

**What is Prior Experiential Learning?**

Prior Experiential Learning refers to learning which has not previously been academically accredited. It generally takes place through learning and training activities undertaken in the workplace, voluntary sector or trade union and in community-based learning. Sometimes prior experiential learning can be referred to as non-formal learning if it results in certification that cannot be easily placed on the National Framework of Qualifications. For example, certificates received from in-house training programme. On the other hand informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner’s point of view. It takes place through life and work experience and is not seen as structured learning. Informal learning can also be referred to as prior experiential learning. How people use their experience demonstrates their level of learning and this may be dependent on the duration and quality of their experience, which can be gained as a result of involvement in a wide range of activities.

**What is involved in the RPL Process?**

The RPL process is based on the practice of learners building a learning portfolio. This is a record of your learning achievements, skills and competencies, relevant to the particular programme or module you have chosen. The focus is on the achievements of learning rather than on the learning process itself. Each Learning Portfolio, accompanied by an RPL Application Form, will be submitted to the University and assessed by the relevant assessor(s). This may then lead to admission to a programme of study, exemptions/credit from some parts of a programme, transfer from one programme of study to another or advanced academic standing within a programme of study.
Information on RPL opportunities made available to potential applicants →
Target programme selected →
Identify Learning Outcomes →
Demonstrate achievement of Learning Outcomes (Portfolio or other format) →
Assessor Recommendation →
Assessor recommends Admission/Credit/Exemption →
Application inform decision →
Reflect on learning and gather evidence →
RPL Support Consultation/Advice →
Submit Portfolio of learning and RPL Application form →
Learning Evidence Assessed →
How can you demonstrate your prior learning?

Your skills and knowledge can be demonstrated when you submit evidence of learning to the University as part of your learning portfolio.

(A) Prior Certified Learning
In the Certified Learning Portfolio, evidence of learning will be presented by the applicant in the form of official transcripts of results and formal syllabi accompanied by relevant support documents.

(B) Prior Experiential Learning
In the Experiential Learning Portfolio, the applicant will present evidence of learning, arranged to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes of the relevant programme or module. Where experiential learning is concerned a number of methods can be used to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes. These may include: written evidence, a formal presentation, an interview, performance of set tasks or combinations of these. Experiential Learning may include both informal and non-formal learning.

Where to Begin?

Step 1
Identify the programme of study that you wish to apply for. Are you hoping to use RPL for admission purposes, for module exemption purposes, for transfer purposes or for advanced academic standing (admission to year other than year 1)? Contact the programme co-ordinator to enquire about the RPL procedures specific to the programme you are interested in. The programme co-ordinator may invite you to submit a preliminary RPL application and on reviewing this he/she may be able to advise you on whether it would be worth your while to submit a full Learning portfolio.

Depending on the purpose you hope to use RPL for, the programme co-ordinator may be able to advise you on certain aspects such as the modules in the programme of study that you could consider claiming exemption from based on your prior learning. It is important to note that this advice from college staff does not guarantee exemption from any module.

If you are submitting prior learning in order to meet entry criteria for a programme of study then you will be required to submit your learning portfolio at the same time you submit your programme application.

If you are using the RPL process to apply for module exemptions then some programmes will require you to submit your learning portfolio at the same time you make your application while other programmes will ask you to submit your evidence after you have been awarded a place on the programme. Please check this out with the programme co-ordinator.

If you are planning on using the RPL process to apply for module exemptions then you will be required to map your prior learning against the learning outcomes of the module(s) in question. For
RPL, the learning outcomes refers to the learner’s knowledge, understanding, skills and/or competences - what the learner knows and can do to the required standard as a result of prior learning.

**Step 2**
If you are planning on presenting prior **certified** learning for programme entry or for module exemptions then you will be required to present evidence of learning in the form of official transcripts of results and formal syllabi accompanied by relevant support documents.

**Step 3**
If you are planning on presenting prior **experiential** learning for programme entry or for module exemptions then you will be required to present evidence of learning arranged to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes of the relevant programme module. Where experiential learning is concerned a number of methods can be used to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes. These may include: written evidence, a formal presentation, an interview, performance of set tasks or combinations of these. Experiential Learning may include both informal and non-formal learning. Applicants who are preparing a Learning Portfolio based on experiential learning can avail of advice and assistance from the University RPL Co-ordinator.

**Step 4**
After submitting your completed Learning Portfolio, your application will be assessed, and a final decision will be made.

**Meeting the RPL Co-ordinator**
When you first contact the RPL Co-ordinator, you will discuss the module(s) in which you feel you are eligible for exemption(s). The RPL Co-ordinator may discuss the level and course content of the modules(s) you have chosen, and go through their learning outcomes with you so you become familiar with them.

**Portfolio Preparation Training**
This is held on a regular basis for groups according to demand.
- This training explains the RPL process and how to prepare a portfolio for assessment.
- It guides the participants through a process of reflection and analysis of their past experience, current situation and future aspirations.
- It assists the applicant to thoroughly document past learning, knowledge, skills and competencies.
- It shows how to organise and present evidence of past learning achievements that demonstrate individual skills and competencies.
- It helps applicants to develop a portfolio to be used as a base for benchmarking their learning and to identify career options and future learning requirements and opportunities.
**What is a Learning Portfolio?**

A Learning Portfolio contains all the evidence that will be required by the assessor to evaluate your claim for entry or exemption under RPL.

The evidence of learning achieved is compiled following the advice from the portfolio preparation training or from your discussions with the programme co-ordinator and should provide a comprehensive demonstration of achievement.

The evidence in the portfolio must be linked to specific learning outcomes and serves to show what a learner knows in relation to a particular subject area. The portfolio building process is led by the candidate but will supported by the RPL Co-ordinator. An assessor or a group of assessors is appointed to review the portfolio and the requests for entry or module exemptions. Assessors are all specialists in the subject matter being assessed.

The learning portfolio consists of a statement of your experience and learning and evidence to support your learning. It is not just a folder of all the work you have done. It must show self-assessment and control of learning.

**How to assure the Quality of the Evidence**

The following points can be used as a guide to help ensure that the evidence you collect meets some basic standards. Ask yourself the following questions:

Is the evidence

**Valid?**
Is your evidence directly related to the subject in question?

**Authentic?**
It must be clear that the evidence originates from you and no other person. Ask your Supervisor to sign documentation.

**Current?**
Is your evidence up to date with current practice?

**Sufficient?**
Is there sufficient evidence to prove that you meet the outcome?

**Reliable?**
Can the evidence produced here be repeated at another time?

**Relevant?**
Is the learning gained relevant to the programme of study you now intend to take? This means that it must be at a similar level, have similar learning outcomes, and cover a similar knowledge-and-skills-base. The level, learning outcomes and knowledge-and-skills-base need not be identical but they must be close enough to those outlined for your target programme.

The Assessor may orally examine you in relation to your claim, or request you to undergo a written or practical test, as a check that you have achieved specific learning outcomes if necessary.
What happens if the Assessor does not grant an Exemption?

If no exemption is granted then the Assessor makes a recommendation. This informs the candidate of the necessary steps/actions which must be taken. This can be a recommendation for additional work, study, research, project work, assignment, short course, attendance at a seminar, or further development work on the portfolio. The assessor may also require further clarification or verification of evidence contained in the portfolio before a decision can be made.

What is a Learning Outcome?

For RPL, the learning outcomes refers to the learner’s knowledge, understanding, skills and/or competences - what the learner knows and can do to the required standard as a result of their involvement in a learning process. Each programme module is made up of a number of learning outcomes.

To complete a portfolio and submit for a module exemption, you will seek to provide evidence that your learning to date is equivalent to the learning outcomes of the module(s) in question. Typically a module will have between 8 and 10 learning outcomes. If there are ten learning outcomes for a module you must provide response for each learning outcome. The response must focus on the learning or experience gained for each outcome in particular. This involves some preparation but provides a clear account of how your certified and/or experiential learning matches that of the subject you are claiming exemption for. If you have no experience to meet a particular learning outcome, state so clearly. Don’t leave any learning outcome unanswered.

Setting out this information in a clear logical manner and providing sound evidence to meet these claims forms the basis on which the assessor makes a decision.
The Learning Portfolio

There are three stages in preparing your portfolio:

1) Preparation of an expanded Curriculum Vitae and Job Description
2) Identification of prior learning you have achieved, and comparing this to the course content and learning outcomes of the subject(s) you have targeted for exemption.
3) Finally, producing evidence of the prior learning you have achieved and collating this for the final portfolio.

The following sections explain what you have to do to complete each of these three stages.

Stage 1: Curriculum Vitae and Job Description

A Curriculum Vitae (CV) is used to present and record a person’s education and work experience to date. Please ensure you include information on the main duties and responsibilities of any position you have held.

The following headings must be included in the CV:

1) – Personal Details
Your CV must contain a summary of your Personal Details, which are used both as a record by the college and as contact information for you.

2) – Previous Certified Education and Learning
Here you can include a summary of your education, training and qualifications.

   • Secondary education. State the subjects you took for examination and the grades you received for each subject.
   • Previous third level education you may have. Fill in details of any course you have attended in any third level college (University, IT, etc.)
   • Details of any other training you have received, whether at work or from some external source or recognised body (for example Apprenticeship, FETAC, PLC courses etc.)

3) - Employment and Experiential Learning
Here you can include your learning from employment and/or voluntary work. Describe the main tasks, which comprise your job, and previous work roles that you believe are relevant to your study area, or that show how your role in the workplace has developed with your experience.

4) - Additional Information
Discuss your aims and ambitions, or anything else that you feel may be relevant to your application.
You are being asked to provide your CV so that your assessor can get an overview of the range of experiences you are drawing from in compiling your learning portfolio. Also you may be referring in the next section to specific roles you have held in the workplace or otherwise. Therefore your CV provides a useful backdrop to your reflective comments and learning experiences described in the next section.

**Stage 2: Relating the Learning You Have Achieved to the Learning Outcomes of the Module for Exemption or to Standard Entry Criteria**

First of all you should have a copy of the most recent learning outcomes of the module(s) that you are seeking exemption from. We ask you to compare the learning you have achieved to the learning outcomes of the subject(s)/module(s) that you wish to gain exemption in. Your advisor will discuss the learning outcomes of the particular module with you prior to completing this section. The learning outcomes of each module are also covered in the course documentation. It is important that you fully understand the scope of each learning outcome of the module in question. If you need any explanation or clarification of particular aspects of a learning outcome, raise it with your advisor, who will arrange for the appropriate lecturing staff / course coordinators to discuss the matter with you.

Each learning outcome of a subject should be dealt with individually. You should create a rough draft response and consider this carefully before finally completing this section of your learning portfolio. Describe clearly how your work and prior learning relates to the learning outcome, and explain how you have achieved this learning outcome previously. Think of learning in terms of knowledge, skill and competence you have gained.

In addressing each of the learning outcome, you must focus on the learning your have achieved from a particular experience, event or activity. You should be specific about the learning you have achieved, showing the knowledge, skills and competences that you have gained from the experience. Remember recognition can only be given to for learning and not for experience itself so you must ensure that you make it clear to the assessor that you have already achieved the learning outcomes. You should clearly and logically identity the evidence relevant to each learning outcome. Consult with your advisor if you need a second opinion, and remember that your reported learning must display to the subject assessor that you have achieved these learning outcomes, so be accurate in what you write.

If you are preparing a learning portfolio to enable you to be admitted to a programme of study then you will need to demonstrate that your learning is equivalent to the standard entry criteria. You can refer to the National Framework of Qualifications [www.nfq.ie](http://www.nfq.ie) for level descriptors of awards and these can be used as a reference point when you are documenting your own personal learning. Again you should describe how your work experience and prior learning has contributed to the achievement of learning that can be deemed equivalent to the standard entry criteria. Think of your learning in terms of knowledge, skills and competences you have gained.
Stage 3: Providing Evidence of Learning

In order to gain an exemption from a subject, you must meet the learning outcomes of that subject. One piece of evidence may be used to demonstrate more than one learning outcome.

To prove that you have the undergone the previous learning experiences, which you claim, you need to provide **evidence** to support your claim. The following is a list of the types of evidence that you can submit to support your claims:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letters of Certification</th>
<th>Judgements, Evaluations by others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diaries</td>
<td>Testimonials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>Transcripts of Examination Results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Project Work</td>
<td>Job Profiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Published Material</td>
<td>Records of On-the-job Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Reports</td>
<td>Photographs / Audio / Video Tapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Training Reports</td>
<td>Reports on Unpaid Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Incidents</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Articles</td>
<td>Work Samples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copies of Certificates</td>
<td>Logbooks</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Do not include original documents in the portfolio** – include authenticated photocopies instead.

In cases where the college requires additional proof, you may have to undergo brief oral and written examinations in order to check that you have achieved specific learning outcomes.

When collecting your evidence, use the following points as a guide. This will help ensure that all your evidence meets a basic standard:

- Make sure that the evidence you are supplying is appropriate and directly related to the subject, for which you are applying for exemption or the entry criteria you are hoping to meet.
- Make sure it is clear that the evidence you are supplying comes from you, and relates to you.
- Currency is important. The evidence you are supplying should show that you are up to date with current practices and are capable of achieving certain criteria.
- Ensure that you have enough evidence to show that you have covered all the learning outcomes for the module(s).
- Your evidence must be reliable.

Finally, all evidence must be clearly documented in the **portfolio evidence list**.

Stage 4: Putting the Portfolio Together

At this stage, most of the work is done; all you need to do now is ensure your portfolio is complete, by:

1) Preparing a Cover page (See Appendix 1 for template)
2) Reading through all the documentation again, considering what you have written and making amendments if you think them necessary
3) Consulting your advisor if you have any final questions
4) Making your portfolio presentable by getting it professionally bound.
5) Reading through the full document once the binding has been done to ensure every required item is present.

Stage 5: Submitting Your Portfolio

When you are satisfied that your portfolio is complete, the final step is to submit it to your Programme Co-ordinator/ RPL Co-ordinator by the due date. Make sure to keep a copy of your completed portfolio yourself. Make sure that your learning portfolio is accompanied by the appropriate RPL application form if required.

For further information on the RPL Process please contact:

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RPL Co-ordinator,
Adult and Continuing Education,
National University of Ireland, Galway

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Fax: 091 525051
E-mail: suzanne.golden@nuigalway.ie

RPL: Recognition of Prior Learning
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Student ID Number (if available)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Programme of Study</td>
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<td>Module</td>
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<td>Module Code</td>
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<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>Applicant Signature</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2

The Learning Portfolio Template

Cover Page See Appendix 1

1. Section 1
   Curriculum Vitae and Job Description
   A. Personal Details
   B. Previous Certificated Education and Learning
   C. Employment and Experiential Learning
   D. Additional Information

2. Section 2
   Addressing the Learning Outcomes for Module (Insert Name of Module)
   A. Learning Outcome 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Describe an experience/activity /event</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refer to the relevant evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Comment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe how your work and prior learning relates to this learning outcome and how it has contributed to the achievement of this learning outcome in the past. Think of learning in terms of knowledge, skills and competences you have gained.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   (Repeat Section 2.A for all the other learning outcomes on the module)

   B. If you are preparing a learning portfolio to enable you to be admitted to a programme of study then you will need to demonstrate that your learning is equivalent to the standard entry criteria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Describe an experience/activity /event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refer to the relevant evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Comment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe how your work and prior learning relates to the standard entry criteria and how it has contributed to the achievement of learning that can be deemed equivalent. Think of learning in terms of knowledge, skills and competences you have gained.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Section 3
   Evidence of Learning
   A. List of Evidence being submitted as part of your Portfolio
      List and number the pieces of evidence you are submitting here.
   B. Actual Evidence
      Include the actual evidence itself in this part.