

3. Recognition of Prior Learning

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a method of assessment that considers whether students can demonstrate that they can meet the assessment requirements for a programme/award through knowledge, understanding or skills they already possess and so do not need to develop through a course of learning. This policy is part of DA's efforts to uphold fair and equitable education for students who may face challenges in meeting entry requirements based purely on accredited qualifications. It is however used sparingly and is primarily applicable to adult students returning to education.

The purpose of this policy is to set out DA's approach to the recognition of prior learning (RPL) for student applying to follow home-grown programmes/awards. DA's international partners and awarding bodies have their own RPL policies which are in line with European standards and are adhered to by DA.

Policy

DA believes in the importance of developing and cultivating a diverse student population and appreciates the range of experiences, academic and general background of each student. DA also aims to ensure that all suitable applicants may be able to follow their studies with profit and is aware that this may not depend solely on the person's qualifications; rather, students come with rich experiences which, often, for the purposes of their academic or career progression, could be considered to be equivalent to or a substitute for formal education.

Thus, at DA all applicants are given the opportunity to demonstrate that they have the skills and experience to succeed in their chosen programme, even in cases where they do not have the usually expected and/or accepted qualifications. This policy outlines the process by which prior learning can be equitably and consistently assessed so as to determine their suitability for admission to their chosen programme.

The RPL policy applies to all DA's accredited programmes with the exception of any course which may lead to a warranted profession, courses such as First Aid, and courses whose formal admission requires prior formally supervised practices. Student's requests for RPL do not come with a guarantee of approval and a request for RPL can cover a **maximum of 50%** of the total credits of the qualification/award. Whether RPL is granted and the maximum amount of credits covered is decided by DA.

Types of RPL evaluated by DA:

Recognition of Prior Learning: is achieved when an individual can have their learning formally assessed and quality assured to successfully be admitted to or gain exemptions from components or parts of a formal qualification or award through the use of learning outcomes.

Formative RPL: is where the candidate is looking to have knowledge, skills and competencies assessed for admission to a path of studies.

Summative RPL: is where formal ECTS credit is awarded and recognised as having the same value as credit in formal teaching learning.

Credit Transfer: is when a candidate has gained a formal award or qualification, and has received formal ECTS credit, and is looking to gain entry at an advanced stage or exemption from a component of another programme of study, where the *learning outcomes* of the first programme of study match the learning outcomes of the new programme of studies. The credit can either be subject specific or general credit if the learning is at the same MQF/EQF level.¹

Procedure

The full policy and procedures for the student admissions process for DA is outlined in the *Student Admissions Policy and Procedure*.

At the pre-admission stage, specifically during the meeting with the SRO, the student is informed of the possibility of RPL which is an integral part of DA's student-centred learning approach. The eligibility and conditions to present a request are also outlined. The SRO and, if necessary the Registrar and the Chief Academic Officer, will guide the student in the process so that they may benefit of this option. The application is *free of charge* and is requested through a letter addressed to the Registrar; the letter needs to indicate what the student wishes to be exempt from and why.

Possible Outcomes:

- Full acceptance of the claim as entry requirements into a programme of study.
- Full acceptance of a claim for advanced entry (exemption) into a programme of study.
- Partial acceptance of the claim for exemption.
- A request to submit further information, documentation and/or evidence.
- Rejection of claim outlining the reasons for the decision and recommendations for alternative paths.
- Rejection of claim supported by reasons.

The review of the application for RPL is done by the DA Admissions Board. The criteria for recognising prior learning are the following:

- **Relevance:** The experience and learning provide the applicant with knowledge that is relevant to the programme applied for.
- **Sufficient:** The experience is of a sufficient academic level to the required qualification and sufficient to demonstrate the applicant's competence.
- **Verifiable:** The applicant can provide evidence that the experience and learning is valid and the result of their own efforts.
- **Recent:** The experiences are sufficiently recent to the time of application so as to ensure that knowledge is still relevant.

Transparency for Students

During their enquiries for admission into a programme of study, and during interviews with the SRO, applicants will be made aware of the RPL process, timeframes, any fees that may apply (the process is free of charge, except for fees related to MQRIC recognition when applicable), and the requirements for the recognition of prior learning including their collaboration and obligations in providing this

¹ MFHEA, 2021. *Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) – Definitions, Principles and Guidelines*, p. 3.

information. Depending on the programme, there may be standard/specific documentation required, or it may need to be discussed and assessed on a case-by-case basis. It usually involves the mapping of level and credits of any relevant past qualifications. The ultimate aim of the process is to ensure, as much as possible, that the student can follow the chosen programme of studies successfully and with profit.

In general, required supporting evidence includes:

- Certificates or documentation attesting non-accredited or informal knowledge gained, such as workplace experience or other elective training.
- CV
- Personal statement from applicant.
- Written reference letter/s from employer or other relevant persons, companies or institutions.
- Portfolio of prior work and learning.
- Other documentation or tasks/tests as may be necessary.
- Possibly, an interview with to assess (aspects of) learning.

The prospective student's unjustified failure to provide any of the required documentation or to perform or undergo requested tasks/tests would result in a rejection. DA's agreement to consider prior learning does not guarantee a successful application; if the documentation provided does not meet the requirements of the Admissions Board.

Upon notification of rejection, the prospective student has 15 working days to appeal the Admissions Board's decision. In that case, an Appeals Board will be set up which will review the case within 7 working days from the set-up of the Appeals Board.

During the examination of the merits of the case, the student may be accompanied and advised by another person of their choice.

Prospective student is notified of the Appeals Board's decision within 3 working days after their decision is made.

The decisions of the Appeals Board may be appealed only if fresh evidence is provided. All documents relating to the case – including minutes of each meeting – are filed by the Registrar and retained securely.

Appeals Board

Composition: The Appeals Board is composed of 3 members, including the Registrar and a faculty member who was not involved in the Admission Board's initial evaluation of the request for RPL.