COLÁISTE CHEATHARLACH
NAOMH PÁDRAIG
CARLOW COLLEGE
ST. PATRICK'S

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 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)?

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.

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

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 and SETU. These guidelines and procedures are developed in compliance with the protocols and standards outlined in the *QQI: Assessment and Standards, Revised 2022*, and the National RPL in Higher Education Project.[2]
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 the necessary information and documentation required in order for a judgement to be made. The final decision will be based on the evidence provided.

[2] QQI has a Recognition of Prior Learning Portal that includes advice, information and resources to institutions and learners. For more, please click here.

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 learners' 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

Prior to submitting an application for RPL, if an applicant has any queries regarding RPL, they should contact the Admissions Office at: 059 9153243 or admissionscc@carlowcollege.ie.

For applications applying via RPL, please complete the RPL Application Form by clicking on the following link: https://carlowcollege.ie/rpl-application-form/.

Applicants for RPL will be required to submit all relevant syllabi (if relevant) and other supporting documentation with their RPL Application Form. Applications for exemptions on RPL will be considered on an individual case-by-case basis by the Office of the Registrar and the relevant Programme Director.

For applicants registering for the B.A. in Applied Social Studies (Professional Social Care) Programme, they should complete the Applied Social Studies RPL Application Form at the following link: https://carlowcollege.ie/rpl-application-form-pc404/. Please note that applicants for the BA in Applied Social Studies (Professional Social Care) Programme will have their application assessed using the RPL Proficiency Assessment Tool.

Assessment Guidelines

An applicant may have their assessment based on the application and supporting documents (50%) and an interview (50%). For the **RPL Overall Marking Rubric** see Appendix 5.1. Please note that some applicants may be required to submit 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.

Assessment will be undertaken by staff who are qualified and competent. The 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.

Scope of RPL in Relation to Programmes at Carlow College

Applications for RPL may be made in relation to all degree programmes at Carlow College.

Where an RPL application is made in relation to a request for exemptions or transfer to an advanced stage of a degree programme recognised by an External Professional Regulator, the applicant must provide evidence that they are in a position to meet the learning and / or skills requirements of the relevant professional regulator within the context of the programme for which they are applying. In such instances, applicants will need to provide (i) evidence of having achieved the specific proficiencies or other requirements specified by the External Professional Regulator for which they are seeking exemption, and (ii) indicate how these proficiencies or requirements articulate across, at a module level, to the programme to which they are applying.

In relation to applications for the recognition of prior learning for exemptions or transfer to the B.A. in Applied Social Studies (Professional Social Care) Programme, the following will apply:

- Only formal learning from an equivalent programme delivered by recognised education and training providers that are assessed and can lead to awards will be considered by the College.
- Only Specific Credit will be considered under the application procedure. An application for General Credit will not be considered. Additionally, applications will be assessed using the RPL Proficiency Assessment Tool.
- No application for entry beyond Stage 2 will be considered.

Learners seeking RPL for this programme should complete the Applied Social Studies RPL Application Form at the following link: https://carlowcollege.ie/rpl-application-form-pc404/.

Appeals Procedures

For the College's documented procedures governing decisions pertaining to admissions, please see the *Appeals Procedures for Admissions Decision* (Appendix 10).

Appendix 5.1: RPL Overall Marking Rubric

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RPL Overall Marking Rubric

Applicant's Name:	**Programme Title:**
_____	_____

Assessments:

Application Form: _____ / 5**0**

Interview: _____ / 5**0**

Date and time of interview

Date: ___ / ___ / ___ Time: _____

NB: must be dated with time of interview

Overall Score: _____ / 100

Positive rating = 40+

Positive / Negative / Other Rating:	_____
If rated negatively, please provide some constructive feedback for the applicant:	

Date Approved: 24 June 2025

Signed: _____ Date: _____ / _____ / _____
Programme Director

Signed: _____ Date: _____ / _____ / _____
Office of the Registrar

RPL Interview

Applicant's Name:

_____

Programme Title:

_____

Date of Onsite Interview: _____ Time of Interview: _____

Duration of Interview: _____

Criteria Sections for the Interview *(please note the questions below are sample questions only)*

1. Knowledge of Programme • What knowledge do you have about the programme you applied for? • Why did you apply to this programme? • What areas of research are you interested in? *(postgraduate programmes)*	**_____ / 5**
2. RPL Eligibility • What supporting documents, as part of RPL, did you submit as part of your application? • Could you please take us through your RPL Application and supporting documents?	**_____ / 30**
3. Potential Challenges / Opportunities • What challenges may you face in undertaking this programme? • Owing to your RPL Application, are there any potential areas that might pose as barriers and / or opportunities?	**_____ / 10**
4. Questions about the Programme / College • Are there any questions that you have about the programme and / or Carlow College, St. Patrick's?	**_____ / 5**

Notes:

Signed: _____ Date: _____ / _____ / _____
Interviewer