

Recognition of Prior Learning

Information Guidelines for Students



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Purpose of the Information Guide

This Guide has been developed to assist those interested in seeking academic credit for learning already acquired prior to registering on a course in CIT. This system is referred to as the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and applies to all courses at all levels as accredited by CIT.

The booklet has been designed to assist students to answer such questions as:

- What is RPL?
- Is my learning relevant?
- How do I apply?
- How do I structure my application?
- What kind of evidence is required to support my application?
- What does it cost?

Support is provided to students and potential students who wish to apply through the RPL Coordinator in CIT.

In CIT RPL can be used to gain:

- an exemption or mark for a module or for a number of modules;
- entry to a course in first year where an applicant may not meet the standard entry requirements;
- advanced entry to a course at a stage other than first year

There are two main categories within RPL

1. the recognition of learning which has already had formal certification within the higher education system in Ireland or abroad, often referred to as **formal learning**.
2. the recognition of learning which has been gained through experiences in the workplace, in voluntary work or elsewhere, usually referred to as **experiential learning**.

Every course in CIT is mapped to the appropriate level on the National

Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) www.nfq.ie. Courses are considered in terms of credits, modules, semesters and stages. A stage is equivalent to one academic year of a full-time course which normally runs from September to June. Each stage is made up of two semesters. The number of credits for each stage is 60 unless otherwise stated. The number of credits for each module is normally 5. Details of courses and modules are included in the <http://courses.cit.ie> database online.

Stage	= 2 Semesters/60 Credits
1 Semester (full time)	= 6 Modules
1 Module (normally)	= 5 Credits*

**unless otherwise stated, e.g. Projects may equal 10 or more credits.*

The RPL system allows for learning to be measured and recognised regardless of where it was gained. This means that a student can be granted credits and/or exemptions from modules on CIT courses where they can show that they have achieved sufficient prior learning.

The application for RPL is structured as a portfolio document. A portfolio is a collection of information and documentation which supports an application and provides evidence of the learning.

Introduction to the Recognition of Prior Learning System

CIT has a process whereby formal recognition can be given for prior learning regardless of where or how it was gained. There are some limitations with regard to this system which are outlined in the RPL website at www.cit.ie/rpl.

How to Apply for RPL

If you are interested in applying for recognition of your prior learning you must first register and pay for the relevant course and modules as normal. If you do not register, then the module assessor will be unable to enter your result on the marking system. It is also recommended that you would discuss your case with the course coordinator or module lecturer before beginning the application process.

To present a case for assessment you must decide on what basis you are making a claim:

- Have you previously completed a certified course in a higher educational institution which covers the material in the module?
- Do you have substantial relevant learning from the workplace or life experience?
- Is your learning a combination of both types of learning, i.e. formal and experiential?

Deadline for RPL Applications

The deadline for applications for exemption is the end of week 6 of the relevant semester to ensure assessment for that semester. Applications can be received after that date, however, there is no guarantee that the material will be assessed within the semester.

Applications for Advanced Entry must be received prior to the start of the academic year.

Prior Formal Learning Cases

The RPL Application Form must be completed in full. It is important that each applicant clearly identifies the module for which the application is being made. The Application Form is available online at www.cit.ie/rpl.

When the application is based on a previous formal course it is necessary to state what prior exam(s) form the basis of the case and present this information along with proof of learning on the appropriate template which is also available online at www.cit.ie/rpl.

Proof of formal learning must include the following:

- Transcript of results
- Syllabus of previous subject(s)
- Past exam papers

Please note: where transcripts of results are used as evidence of learning, the originals must be presented for verification purposes and a photocopy must be submitted with the application form. If the above is not available in English then it must be translated and stamped by a translation service. The onus is on each applicant to ensure that the information they submit is accurate.

Prior Experiential, Combination or Advanced Entry Cases

For applications based on prior experiential learning or a combination of experiential and formal learning it is recommended that, having initially discussed your case with the Course Coordinator, you should seek support from the RPL Coordinator to prepare your case and attend an RPL workshop.

If you feel you have sufficient learning for advanced entry to a course you must arrange to meet and discuss your case with either the Head of Department or the Course Coordinator initially. The application must be submitted in full, prior to the start of the academic year.

RPL Workshop

Workshops in the processes of RPL are held at multiple times and days in the first six weeks of a semester. These are timetabled at a time suitable for both full-time and part-time students. Each student should attend one of these workshops and access the relevant information online and in this handbook, prior to booking an individual support session with the RPL Coordinator.

Fees and Registration

For cases based on prior academic learning the full module fee is payable. Once the application has been assessed, the outcome successful and formally recorded in the module exam board, an examination fee is held and the difference is refunded.

Full module fee is payable for all other cases (i.e. experiential or combination).

Assessment of the Portfolio

The assessment of the portfolio(s) is completed by appropriate academic staff and not by the RPL Coordinator.

Valuing Learning at Work

If you are undertaking a course in CIT which has been developed in partnership with your workplace then it may contain a significant element of work based learning or recognition of prior learning. If this is the case then the information contained in this booklet may also be of use to you. In order to accurately and sufficiently capture the learning from work it may be useful to create a virtual or physical file where you can record critical incidences or activities as they occur. These can then be used to support your claim for recognition of learning from the workplace.

If you have questions on how to start this process contact the RPL company advisor by email rpl@cit.ie.

The Portfolio Structure

The format of the portfolio is dependent on the basis of the claim and will vary from applicant to applicant. An overview of a structure and some guidance is provided below. A general outline of the portfolio is provided on the website.

The Learning Portfolio – Outline Structure

Curriculum Vitae and Job Description

Employment

- Current Employment
- Previous Employment

Education

- Third Level Education
- Training
- Other Education

Relevant Additional Information

Learning Achieved

- Learning Outcomes Achieved

Portfolio Inventory

- Index of supporting documentation
- The actual documentation you are including

Appendix

- Declaration by Learner

There are three main sections in a learning portfolio.

1. The **CV and Job Description** is the first part. This outlines your education, training, work and life experience to date.
2. The second part is the **Learning Achieved** section. This is where you must show the learning you have achieved through work or other experiences against each of the learning outcomes of the module for which you are seeking recognition.
3. The third part is the **Portfolio Inventory**. This section verifies or proves the materials presented in the first two parts of the portfolio.

There is a declaration at the end of the template which must be signed and dated by you. The declaration states that the portfolio of work represents your learning in an area and that you are aware this is examination material.

The three sections of the portfolio are similar to a jigsaw puzzle as the content of each section should complement the other two sections. If you outline particular learning you have in section one and two, this should be supported by evidence in section three.

CV and Job Description Section

This section outlines your work and life experience to date. The general template may need to be altered for your particular information. You should choose how best to present your own case for assessment. The following guidelines are designed to help you through the sub-headings.

1. Employment

Current Employment

Describe current duties and responsibilities in your present job. The aim is to provide a clear idea of where you work within an organisation and your main tasks and responsibilities.

Previous Employment

Fill in any previous work experience here. Outline what position you held and your main duties and responsibilities.

2. Education

Provide details of courses attended; include the year, modules grades etc. Under Training (section 2.2), include any in-company training courses completed. The template should be adapted to include as much necessary relevant information as possible as it will strengthen the case for application.

3. Relevant Additional Information

If information which is relevant to an application is not documented in the previous sections it should be entered here.

Voluntary Work

Include any relevant voluntary work undertaken.

Leisure Activities

This can include any related learning or skills gained through interests or hobbies.

Learning Achieved Section

Having reviewed the course and details of the module, in this section you outline the basis of why you should be exempt from a particular module.

The content of this section of the document depends on the basis of your claim. On the first page of this section in the portfolio template, you are asked to state the basis on which you are applying for the exemption.

The two options presented to you are

- Prior academic learning
- Prior experiential learning

It is at your discretion to indicate what forms the basis of your application. If it is a combination of both forms of learning then both options should be selected.

Basing a Claim on Prior Formal Learning

If you have completed or partially completed a course similar to the one on which you are now registered in CIT it is necessary to include the syllabus, a transcript of results and where possible, a certificate from the awarding body, which will then be assessed. It is a requirement that the module being used to support the application was successfully completed and passed. If the previous module was failed or not completed then this cannot be used as the basis of application for RPL.

The prior academic learning must also be at the same academic level as the exemption sought. An explanation of the National Framework of Qualifications and Levels is available at www.nfq.ie. Exceptions to this can be made if you have significant experiential learning which enhances your learning in a particular area. Please refer to the next section regarding the approach which should be taken for this type of application.

Combination of Formal and Experiential Learning

If you want to present a combination of formal and experiential learning then both parts of the template to illustrate your case should be used. If you have formal learning but it falls short of covering all of the learning outcomes you may still be able to proceed if you have relevant experiential learning which would cover the remaining learning outcomes.

It is recommended to first concentrate on presenting the formal element of the prior learning case. The syllabus, transcript of results and a certificate from the awarding body should be included so the assessor can see clearly what you have achieved. The focus should then turn to presenting the experiential learning. Any additional information which needs to be submitted should be included in the second part of the template. The examples below will help in addressing the learning outcomes.

Experiential Learning Only

It is necessary to answer all of the learning outcomes of the module to prove that your prior experiential learning is appropriate for an exemption. In this instance you will only use the second part of the template, ignoring the Prior Academic Learning Section.

Learning Outcomes

“A learning outcome is what a learner should know and/or be able to do as a result of being involved in a learning process.”

Each module in each course is made up of a number of learning outcomes, usually 4 – 6. These learning outcomes describe the key learning a student achieves having completed that module. To complete a portfolio and submit for credits/exemption a student must provide a response for each learning outcome for the module.

The response must focus on the learning or experience gained relating to that outcome in particular. This can take a bit of preparation on your part as you must provide a clear account of how your prior experiential learning matches that of the module for which you are seeking recognition.

Setting out this information in a clear and logical manner and providing sound evidence to meet these claims forms the basis on which the assessor makes a decision to grant recognition or not.

If you are interested in taking the module via the RPL route you should contact the relevant Course Coordinator and the RPL Coordinator to start the process. The RPL Coordinator will help you to identify the required learning outcomes from which to develop a portfolio. The modules are reviewed over time so it is important to make sure that you have the latest version. Details of the courses and module content are available online at <http://courses.cit.ie>.

The portfolio template document has a learning outcomes page which gives you a format for addressing each learning outcome. The text of the particular learning outcome should be entered in the space provided under the 'Learning Outcome' heading, and the response entered under the "Learning Achieved" heading. Only one of these pages is provided in the document so the template needs to be copied and pasted as many times as there are learning outcomes. Allow a page for each learning outcome and answer as it presents well in the final document.

How to Answer the Learning Outcomes

If you take one learning outcome at a time it is easier to concentrate on setting out the evidence of your learning. The aim for you is to respond to the outcome in your own words in a way that best describes your own case. Everyone will have slightly different answers reflecting their own experiences.

The suggested approach to developing your portfolio is to think of each learning outcome as a separate question. If there are five learning outcomes in a particular module then you have five questions to answer.

If the learning outcome is structured in two or three parts then your answer should have two or three parts. This ensures that you leave nothing out and that your work is clear to the Assessor. Always make sure that the response answers the learning outcome fully. No part should be omitted unless you have no learning in that particular area.

It is a good idea to respond first to the learning outcomes in a general way. The first few sentences should be a general statement of abilities in relation to the learning outcome. This serves to get you started before providing specific detailed examples of your learning.

After the introductory paragraph you should provide one or two specific examples of how you meet the learning outcome. Use your own words and outline the example fully.

If you take this approach with every learning outcome then there is a good likelihood that the first draft of the document will be well on the way to completion.

Remember that there is no one correct answer. Everybody has individual learning so you should respond in your own words in a way that best describes your own particular strengths.

Example of Learning Outcomes and the Answer Provided

When answering a learning outcome it is important to structure the response in a meaningful way. The following are some guidelines which may assist you in developing your application.

- Begin with a general response
- Follow this with one or two specific examples to illustrate prior learning
- The content of the answer should reflect the nature of the subject matter

On the following pages are three different examples illustrating how the students base their responses on their own background and experience and then relate their learning to the specific learning outcome.

Example 1

Mary is a laboratory assistant who works in a healthcare company. She is developing a portfolio against the module "Good Manufacturing Practice 1 and Quality Assurances". The example below gives one of the learning outcomes in the module and some extracts from the response that Mary prepared for it.

Learning Outcome: Explain the importance of documentation, including change control processes, and write a standard operating procedure.

Learning Achieved: Good documentation control is central to the smooth operation of ABC Ltd. Every aspect of the manufacturing process and Quality Assurance support is carefully monitored on paper and by electronic means.

All monitoring and reporting procedures are completed according to the Standard Operating Procedure (SOPs) set down by ABC Ltd. My average working day involves completing routine testing procedures according to company specifications and then reporting them in the manner set down by the company.

One instance of when I practice good documentation control is when I ...

I attach an example of this Report in the Verification section of this portfolio.

Reliable and accurate documentation is crucial in the company because ...

Throughout my work I deal with standard operating procedures and I have considerable experience in writing and updating such procedures. I attach ... as an illustration of my work ...

Mary has highlighted the importance of adhering to company procedures and the correct flow of documentation in a manufacturing environment. Her portfolio should include sample documents which illustrate her work.

Example 2

Peter is working as a sales person in the media industry for the past five years. He is preparing a portfolio against a 'professional development' module.

Learning Outcome: To communicate effectively and influence appropriately.

Learning Achieved: In a sales context, the ability to effectively communicate and influence is of paramount importance. To relay information to a customer, in a peer-to-peer manner, avoiding use of jargon, in my experience, has proved the most effective way to communicate the sales message. I relay the sales message in a manner that is meaningful to the customer. I achieve this by ...

In terms of common objections I would meet in my sales role, the following is an example of how I would address them ...

Handling complaints is another area which I have considerable experience in. My competence in this area is strong and I encourage the exchange of ideas and assistance between teams and team members. An example of a complaint that I have dealt with ...

The final area of relevance is dealing with difficult clients and determining their needs. I had the experience of inheriting a client from a colleague who was unhappy with the rate they had paid to use the services of TTT.com and the response rate achieved. I worked this through with the client by ...

Peter identified the different aspects of his job which are relevant to this module and how his learning in the area has evolved over time allowing him to meet the various challenges which arose.

Example 3

David is working in an IT service capacity within a multinational organisation. He is using his day to day activities as well as work based training and processes to support his application for the module 'IT Service Support'.

Learning Outcome: Define Service Desk requirements and select the most appropriate Service Desk solution.

Learning Achieved: My work experience involves me in undertaking negotiation with clients and appropriate service level agreements. I have to choose an appropriate main support option depending on the work involved ...

I work through the requirements with the client by ... and determine the appropriate solutions.

I completed relevant training courses, the details of which are in the Appendix at the back of this document. These training courses were pertinent to me in the following ways in determining the most appropriate Service Desk solution ...

The company is a large organisation which has several different departments with general and specific IT requirements. The solutions I devised for the departments include the following ...

Example 1 ...

Example 2 ...

The reference contained in the Appendix from my supervisor supports these examples. The examples also demonstrate how my learning has developed over time in relation to how I do my job and the expertise I now have in the area.

David has demonstrated in his answer his awareness of his learning and how it has developed over time through training and work place learning.

Portfolio Inventory Section

This section is to verify or prove that the learning actually occurred. You must verify what you said in the first two sections of the portfolio. You should list all of the evidence you are using to support your case in the Portfolio Inventory.

Remember that you are applying for an exemption from the whole module and the evidence selected should reflect this. The Assessor wants to see that you meet all of the learning outcomes of the module.

Here are examples of the range of evidence that can be used to verify all of the learning you have.

Records of on-the-job training	Published material
Letters of Certification *	Written reports
Judgements, evaluations by others	Photographs / audio / video tapes
Diaries	Teacher training records
Testimonials	Reports on unpaid work
Documents	Critical incidents
Copies of Certificates	References
Completed project work	Job Profiles

*A Letter of Certification is not a reference. This letter should state that you do have the experience that you are claiming. It should state for how long and the author should state who he or she is and their relationship to you.

One piece of documentary evidence can cover several learning outcomes. It should be noted in the portfolio inventory or at the end of the learning outcome what evidence is being used to support the answers provided.

In the case where Certificates or other original documents are used, the RPL Coordinator having seen the original document will then allow you to attach a copy of this document to the portfolio. They will sign the photocopy to say that they have seen the original document.

Examples of how to prove what was said

Example 1:

The learning outcome is:

The learner will be able to explain the importance of documentation, including change control processes, and write a standard operating procedure.

What could be used to prove this learning outcome?

- Standard Operating Procedure for monitoring and reporting test results
- Signed copy of a page from the General Product Testing Logbook
- Signed copy of the End of Shift Report showing batch sheet with microbial results on it
- Signed copy of the page of the Final Batch Report showing a summary of test results
- A signed copy of a Batch Variation Report showing results outside of company specifications

Example 2

The learning outcome is:

To communicate effectively and influence appropriately.

What could be used to prove this learning outcome?

- Sample call log used for dealing with a client
- Personal sales presentation used on clients
- Good salesperson log example
- Pitching for new business example
- Example of the CRM record of a customer used on a day to day basis
- Customer complaint handling record

Example 3

The learning outcome is:

Define Service Desk requirements and select the most appropriate Service Desk solution.

What could be used to prove this learning outcome?

- ECDL Expert Certificate
- ECDL Test Centre Staff Training Program Certificate
- Microsoft Office User Specialist Master Certificate
- Microsoft Project Advanced Certificate
- Global Incident Management Process
- Configuration Management
- Customer Interaction Management
- Incident Management & Resolution

This evidence should be listed in the Portfolio Inventory and the signed copies inserted after this page.

Putting the Portfolio Together

The final step is to check that the portfolio is complete and finalise any questions that are outstanding with either the RPL Coordinator or the Course Coordinator at this stage.

Important - the declaration must be signed. With this declaration you are agreeing that you are submitting this portfolio in accordance with CIT procedures and that it represents your work with regard to a particular module. The RPL Coordinator will submit the portfolio to the Course Coordinator or Assessor. A copy of the portfolio should be retained by you.

Example of a Declaration of Understanding

RPL Assessment

I have read and understand the RPL regulations which include:

- My rights and responsibilities as an RPL candidate
- The CIT RPL assessment policy and procedures
- The timespan of the RPL process
- The importance of submitting my application before week six of a semester
- Appeals against the outcome of my application, will be subject to the CIT Examinations Appeal Process
- My application is subject to the academic regulations of CIT

Full Name
(please print)

Signature

Student ID Number

Date

RPL at a glance ...

What is RPL?

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is the generic term used to describe the system for recognising a range of relevant learning that a student may have gained prior to entry onto a particular course.

RPL includes:

- (i) Recognition of Prior Formal Learning: This refers to the recognition of formal learning which is linked to the National Framework of Qualifications and for which certification has been awarded; it might include a course or part of a course that has been completed previously.
- (ii) Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning: This refers to the recognition of the kind of learning that has been gained through work or life experiences. It could also include learning gained through workplace training courses.

How is the prior learning measured?

Our courses are composed of modules and the stated learning outcomes of these modules are seen as the basic levels of learning. Therefore, in CIT, these become the minimum standards against which prior learning is measured. The RPL process can enable students who have already achieved the learning outcomes for a subject/module on their chosen course to apply for an exemption from taking that subject/module again. In this way, it allows learners to build on previous learning wherever it was attained and not to repeat learning.

Who is RPL aimed at?

Generally the RPL process is aimed at mature learners who will have significant experiential learning in a particular area and who may also have some formal education.

How can RPL be used?

There are two main ways in which the RPL process is used generally:

The RPL process can be used to gain access to a course for a student who might not meet the standard entry requirements. This is classed as advanced entry to a course. A student who can demonstrate and provide evidence for learning at, e.g., Level 6, in a particular discipline may gain access to a course at Level 7 despite not having attained an award at Level 6.

More commonly, the RPL process can be used to gain exemptions from a module or a number of modules within a course. In this case, the student might be able to provide evidence that they have already acquired the learning related to one or more modules of a particular course.

Where do I start?

After applying for the course a good point to start is to contact the Course Coordinator. Their phone numbers are available in the CIT prospectus. They are best placed to give you relevant advice as they have an in-depth knowledge of the course materials and can see how your prior learning relates to this. You should then attend an RPL workshop and access the RPL supports on the CIT website.

What does it cost?

When you register for a module the cost is the same whether you intend to apply for RPL or not. The exception to this is if you apply for an exemption based on your prior formal learning the cost will be the examination fee only.

What is a portfolio?

A portfolio is an accumulation of evidence of learning relating to a particular module's learning outcomes (for exemption) or to an award at a particular level on the National Framework of Qualifications (for entry). Depending on the subject area or discipline the portfolio can include a huge variety of material. The portfolio will contain the package of evidence that will be assessed to see if you have already met the module learning outcomes or level of learning.

Am I given help to develop a learning portfolio?

Yes, the RPL Coordinator will support you through the process. In preparing a portfolio you are preparing a claim to prove your prior learning and have it accredited. You are provided with a workbook and a template to support your efforts and you can decide how best to present your own case. If you have any questions about the scope of the learning outcomes within the module you should direct them to the lecturer involved or the Course Coordinator.

How do I know if my work is good enough?

The RPL Coordinator will be able to provide general advice and support and the appropriate academic staff will be able to help you to answer module specific questions.

How long does it take?

This is really up to you. You direct the pace. Most candidates take two to three weeks to complete a portfolio for a particular module.

Do I get a grade for my portfolio?

Yes, if it is an application for exemption based on prior experiential learning only, the portfolio is graded. You will not be awarded a grade for all other types of portfolio. If the outcome of your assessment is successful you will be granted an exemption or entry to a course depending on the situation.

What if I don't get the exemption?

If an exemption is not granted then the Assessor makes a recommendation. It means the assessment process isn't finished yet. This informs the candidate the necessary steps/actions which must be taken in order to obtain the exemption. 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 recommendation can also be that the normal assessments of the module should be completed and lectures attended.

Are there any rules I should be aware of?

The limitations and rules for applications for exemptions are as follows:

- You can only be exempt from a whole module, not part of one.
- The Assessor will compare the learning that you have presented in your portfolio and the evidence in support of that learning with the learning outcomes of the module in question.
- How you present your case depends on the basis of your claim. If you are seeking to have prior formal learning recognised then you may present a comparison of your course syllabus with the relevant CIT course syllabus and then prove your case with certificates and transcript of results.
- If you are basing your claim on prior experiential learning only then you must respond to each of the learning outcomes of the module specifically.
- There is no upper limit for the number of modules which can be achieved using prior experiential learning only. A grade will be awarded for each portfolio submitted.
- In the case of prior experiential learning portfolios you will not be advised of your grade prior to the module exam boards at the end of the relevant semester.
- In the event that you are unhappy with the outcome of the assessment then you can appeal the result.

Glossary

Advanced Entry

Term used to denote entry to a course beyond year one.

Credits

Credits refer to the academic weighting of a particular module. Modules are usually in 5 credit units unless otherwise stated.

Exemption

This is the term used to state that you have met the learning of a module through your prior learning. It is represented by an 'X' on the broadsheet.

Formal Learning

Term used to describe learning which has been accredited by an academic institution or a national qualifications agency.

Informal Learning

Term used to describe learning which has been gained through work or life experiences.

Learning Outcome

It outlines what a person will know following the completion of a module. Usually there are four – five learning outcomes per module.

Module

This is an individual unit of learning or assessment in a particular subject area.

Non Formal Learning

This refers to learning gained through company training courses or professional body examinations which have not earned formal academic credit.

Non Standard Entry

Entry to a programme where the standard entry requirements cannot be met but the learner has prior learning equivalent to the entry requirements of a course.

Portfolio

This is a collection of material which represents an individual's learning in an area. Its content is dependent on an individual's background and learning.

Portfolio Inventory

Is a listing of all the documentary evidence available to support an application for prior learning.

Programme

In CIT we use the term programme and course interchangeably to describe what a person has registered to study in CIT and its constituent colleges.

Semester

This is the term used to describe the academic year September to December and February to June. There are two semesters per academic year. The content of a programme is detailed per semester in the <http://courses.cit.ie> site.

Work Based Learning

Relates to learning gained through work related activities. It may be learning occurring at the same time as the completion of a course.

Recognition of Prior Learning

RPL Guidelines for Students

www.cit.ie/rpl



Ireland's EU Structural Funds
Programmes 2007 - 2013

Co-funded by the Irish Government
and the European Union



EUROPEAN UNION
STRUCTURAL FUNDS