

Recognition of Prior Learning

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OPERATIONAL OWNER:	RPL Committee
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Version History

VERSION	DESCRIPTION	AUTHOR	APPROVAL	EFFECTIVE DATE
1	Initial version	Aaron Rizzo	2021	2021
2	Revision of the <i>Fees</i> section (Section 3) under <i>Policy</i> to cater for EU citizens who are paying students	Aaron Rizzo	2025	2025
3	Policy to cater for all applicants of RPL to pay the fees.	Aaron Rizzo	2025	2026

Related Policies

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External Refences

MFHEA / SCQF PARTNERSHIP, 2025. *Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): Principles and Practices for Providers*. 2nd Edition. Prepared by SCQF Partnership in collaboration with MFHEA. [Online]. Available at:
<https://mfhea.mt/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/MFHEA-Recognition-of-Prior-Learning.pdf>

Definitions

Formal Learning	Formal learning can be described as learning which takes place in a structured manner and an organised environment such as universities, institutions or at the workplace. This is normally structured in a way that time, objectives, tasks and resources are clearly notified. Candidates will apply; therefore, learning is intentional from the candidate's point of view. Formal learning will then lead if successful to formal certification.
Non-Formal Learning	Learning is defined as learning which taking place within other planned activities and are not explicitly attached and designated as learning which takes place in a formal institution or in a structured manner in terms of specified time frames, listed objectives and provided support. Non-formal learning may still be validated which can then lead to certification or recognition of prior learning as non-formal learning is also sometimes described as semi-structured learning.
Informal Learning	Informal learning is not intentionally organised or structured in terms of main objectives, tasks and time constraints. Informal learning is normally gained from various activities done on a daily basis resulting from the place of work, and other leisure and family activities. Objectives may though be achieved unintentionally to the candidate's knowledge or perspective. Informal learning is achieved through experience which can be also random incidental learning.
Work Based Learning	Work based learning can be achieved using alternate methods in a vocational context between VET institutions and or on the job. A typical example of alternative work-based learning are apprenticeship programmes where knowledge and skills are shared alternate lively.
Life-long Learning	There is also a debate on "life-wide learning". According to the report by the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN), lifelong learning and life-wide learning is based upon four main principles. The first and main objective is to keep the beneficiary at the centre, offering independence giving a holistic approach while giving equal opportunities.
Knowledge	Facts, information, and skills acquired through experience or education; the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject.
Skills	The ability to do something well; expertise.
Competence	The ability to do something successfully or efficiently.

Learning Outcome	Learning outcomes are statements that identify what the learner is expected to know and able to do after having completed a study-unit or programme. Knowledge, skills and competencies are mapped against these learning outcomes (fully or parts of it) for which the candidate seeks exemption from a study unit therefore gaining credits.
Portfolio of Evidence	Portfolio is a collection of objects, things and materials compiled by the applicant to substantiate/demonstrate the learning achieved through different learning processes.
RPL Coordinator	RPL coordinator is the person who coordinates the RPL procedures within the Institute of Tourism Studies. This is the person which first point of contact of individuals seeking RPL prior to a programme of studies within the Institute of Tourism Studies. The RPL coordinator is responsible for supporting applicants throughout the process.
RPL Technical / Academic Experts	RPL Technical Experts are academic experts which has a sound and a technical or academic background within a particular area or subject.

Abbreviations

BOG	Board of Governors
ECVET	European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ELGPN	European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
EU	European Union
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance
ITS	Institute of Tourism Studies
MQF	Malta Qualifications Framework
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning

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A. Policy and Procedure

POLICY

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of Recognition and Accreditation of Prior Learning (RPL) is to recognise and where appropriate, accredit knowledge, skills and competencies gained by individuals through formal, non-formal, informal or experiential learning through the European agenda for life-long learning.
- 1.2. By allowing applicants to demonstrate learning achieved through a range of learning experiences, including formal, non-formal, informal education. RPL enable a candidate to gain entry or access for a chosen program of studies or even gain credits exemptions from parts of it. Only **50%** of the total amount of credits from the selected full programme of studies may be achieved through recognition and accreditation of prior learning.
- 1.3. The policy is aimed to guide the departments at the Institute of Tourism Studies in managing and understanding the process of recognition and accreditation of prior learning by providing the process and guidance based on a set of core principles intended to ensure guidance to the applicants while ensuring fairness and transparency throughout the process.
- 1.4. Provide the necessary guidance to candidates applying for recognition and accreditation of prior learning.

2. Principles of Recognition and Accreditation of Prior Learning

- 2.1. Learning which takes place outside formal education may be enriching and may contribute to acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies. Recognition of prior informal and non-formal learning gives visibility, value and currency to such experiential learning thus making the learning more valuable to society. This may also allow non-traditional learners to enrol or complete formal education, while gaining exemption from a unit within a program of studies thus avoiding repetition of content.

- 2.2. Through the recognition of informal and non-formal learning which shall occur before admission to a course or a relevant stage of a course, the Institute of Tourism Studies will aim to give value to relevant learning, irrespective of mode or place of learning. The Institute of Tourism Studies that its academic standards are maintained throughout the RPL process when mapping the learning outcomes of a study unit with those that the applicant may have achieved through formal, informal, non-formal or experiential learning.
- 2.3. Exemption or accreditation of credits may only be applied within the selected program of studies and therefore cannot be transferred from one study unit to another study unit within a different programme of studies unless the study unit is also listed within the other program of studies.
- 2.4. Prospective applicants should seek immediate guidance prior to applying for recognition through the RPL coordinator.
- 2.5. Applicants or candidates seeking admission and/or exemption through RPL must provide the necessary evidence while filling a declaration form that the evidence provided is solely their own work.
- 2.6. Only **50%** of the total amount of credits within a programme of studies may be achieved through RPL and/or **exemptions** given for formal qualifications calculated together.
- 2.7. Candidates must obtain a pass mark within the same guidelines used by the Institute of Tourism Studies for the study unit applied for to obtain exemption and be allocated the number of credits allocated to the particular study unit.

3. Fees

RPL pricing – RPL fees (currently €25 per ECTS) is charged to all students, whether paying or not, with the proviso that non-paying students who are successful in their RPL exercise are refunded the RPL fee while paying students are refunded tuition fees, as per current practice.

- 3.1. The final fee of the RPL shall be based on the number of the total credits allocated per study unit. (e.g., if the study unit has 6 credits - ECTS / ECVETS - allocated to it, a fee of €150.00 should be charged prior to the assessment process).
- 3.2. Students who are paying for their courses need to pay RPL as per established fees.
- 3.3. RPL fees for BSc Diving Safety Management-related modules:

Many of the study units that are related to the diving aspect involve an element of practice, that is, confined and/or open water dives where the candidates would have acquired the skills and competences associated with the unit in question.

Candidates requesting an RPL may be asked to show their competences and skills that they are claiming to have acquired by simulating a particular scenario. In the case that this may require the candidate to perform a dive, it is the responsibility of the student to have all the necessary equipment to do so.

In some instances, it may also require that this is carried out at a particular (diving) site away from campus and therefore the candidate must have a means of transportation to get to the dive site in question.

Should the candidate be unable to organize his/her own means of transportation and/or not have the necessary equipment, ITS will endeavour to provide them against payment.

NOTE: The number of dives required, the equipment and air/gas fills may vary from study unit to study unit and therefore it would have to be calculated on an individual basis.

An Example:

Mr Johnson is a paying student from USA which does not form part of the EU. He is to pay for the course fees that he is to enrol in. He then asks for recognition of prior learning (RPL) for module XYZ001 which falls within the course of studies that he has enrol in. If Mr Johnson succeeds and an exemption through RPL is granted, he is to pay for the RPL assessment per credit as stipulated in 3.1 for the module he has applied and found to be successful in, but the amount paid will be deducted from his study course fees. This is done so students do not have pay a double fee for the same module while at the same time encouraging them to take RPL if they feel they can make it.

4. Feedback / Decisions

- 4.1. Once the application has been assessed, the RPL coordinator shall submit a detailed report provided by the assessors / technical experts to registrar's office and a copy of the report should be also provided to the Institute's Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) Office.
- 4.2. The team of technical/academic experts shall give the RPL coordinator a detailed written report of any assessments carried out so proper feedback can be given to the applicant during the feedback process.
- 4.3. Applicants which fail or found not competent through their assessment are to be informed of the knowledge, skill or competence that a candidate may have not achieved and shall be given the opportunity or the possibility to either:
 - 4.3.1. re-take the RPL assessment when the candidate thinks that the missing learning outcomes/elements have been achieved; or

- 4.3.2. follow a study unit or parts of it on a part-time basis to make up for the identified knowledge, skill or competence against a nominal fee.

5. Right of Appeal

- 5.1. Applicants who may feel that the RPL assessment did not justify their competence, may forward a written complaint to the RPL coordinator using the rpl@its.edu.mt and copy the Institute of Tourism Studies Internal Quality Assurance Department. This shall be done against a minimal nominal fee indicated from time to time by the Institute of Tourism Studies.
- 5.2. The RPL coordinator shall appoint another assessor/s as, technical/academic experts to re-assess the first assessment if such a need arises through a formal complaint that the applicant was unfairly assessed. The second assessment result shall be deemed as final, and feedback shall be provided to the candidate/applicant in a detailed written report prepared by the experts appointed.
- 5.3. Any reports carried out during the RPL shall remain confidential and filed at registrar's office for any future purpose relating to the RPL process.
- 5.4. The Internal Quality Assurance should be given access to check on reports or complaints that a candidate/applicant may have requested.

PROCEDURE

The Institute of Tourism Studies will aim and strive to provide support and guidance to those candidates coming from different concepts of learning which may be described as non-traditional learners together with formal learners wishing to access different programmes of studies through RPL.

Information about the process shall be available online through the Institute's website as to facilitate and encourage prospective candidates to come forward and seek guidance prior to application.

In order to ensure fairness, transparency and equity within the RPL process all departments within the Institute of Tourism Studies should consistently follow and apply the procedures outlined hereunder:

1. Contacting registrar's office at The Institute of Tourism Studies

- 1.1. An applicant wishing to access a programme of study through the RPL route should first establish contact with the institute's registrar's office.
- 1.2. Registrar's office will/shall provide and guide the prospective candidate on how the candidate shall apply and pass or give the necessary documents related to RPL.
- 1.3. Registrar's office at The Institute of Tourism Studies shall immediately inform the RPL coordinator and pass on contact information of the applicant so guidance can be given to prospective applicants.
- 1.4. Information sessions shall be provided to prospective applicants and registrar's office will contact prospective candidates and inform accordingly. Where two or more candidates apply through the RPL process and procedure an informative session will be provided to all candidates.
- 1.5. All relevant applications, portfolio's and other material which is provided by prospective applicants shall remain under the custody of the head of registrars and or registrar's office and these may be given access only to the RPL provider or internal quality assurance thus provided that these are given back upon completion of inspection.
- 1.6. An applicant whose current formal and experiential learning is not considered sufficient for entry to one of The Institutes programme of studies can be guided to follow or proceed within the RPL procedure.

2. Contacting the RPL Coordinator

- 2.1. Once the candidate shows interest to apply through RPL candidates are to be directed to contact the RPL coordinator on rpl@its.edu.mt to seek immediate guidance on the process and procedures.
- 2.2. The RPL coordinator will explain how the applicant can carry a self-assessment prior to formally apply for RPL. This information is to be provided free of charge prior formally applying for RPL. Other useful information can be found on the institute website on www.its.edu.mt

3. Preparing an application for RPL

- 3.1. Non-traditional learners who may opt to access a programme of studies through RPL route shall be responsible for demonstrating how the learning outcomes obtained through prior certified and/or all concepts of learning are relevant to the programme of study on offer that are appropriate and interest to them.
- 3.2. In order to ensure that assessment of prior learning can be carried out effectively, any relevant documented evidence which is attached to the application must be carefully sorted out and arranged in a portfolio of evidence which is scanned and submitted to registrar's office on registrar@its.edu.mt and also to the RPL coordinator on rpl@its.edu.mt. An acknowledgement of the received documentation will be sent to the candidate. These documents shall fall under the responsibility of the registrar's office and access to these documents shall be given to the RPL coordinator / Director of Studies and Internal Quality Audit for further inspection.
- 3.3. The applicant shall fill and sign two declarations forms which are to be provided by registrar's office upon application. The applicant is to sign that the evidence provided is authentic and appropriate. The applicant shall agree to give access and permission to ask former educational institutions and/or former employers to verify documents provided with the application.
- 3.4. The RPL coordinator may appoint one or more members were deemed appropriate to carry out these assessments if the application relates to more than one area of study. In such instances, the RPL coordinator shall offer support to coordinate and facilitate such process.
- 3.5. Applicants should be aware that the evidence that they submit to support their application shall be assessed against learning outcomes of study unit descriptors provided by the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS) which can be provided through an access given to the candidate by the institute for only the study unit descriptors that the candidate is applying for. the documents provided shall be:

Valid

Documents and evidence provided for prior learning should match the appropriate academic level and match the learning outcomes required by the relevant programme.

Sufficient

Sufficient documentation to support evidence including a completed form/ portfolio should be provided for assessment purposes thus determining the type of assessment to be carried out by technical experts within a subject or a vocational area of studies.

Authentic

The applicants must be responsible for the veracity of the documentation provided and initial declaration forms must be signed and submitted with the formal application.

Contemporary

Learning achieved through prior learning which is submitted for accreditation should be up to date and in line with current knowledge, skills and competence listed within a study unit or a whole programme of studies including work-based learning practices.

Relevant

Learning achieved throughout all concepts of learning are relevant to the programme of studies.

4. Assessment of the application

- 4.1. The RPL Coordinator will support assessors/technical expertise within the process and where a conflict/dispute within the selected technical expertise the RPL coordinator decision shall be final.
- 4.2. Where oral examinations/interviews are to be held as part of the RPL assessment technical and /or academic experts are to be appointed with the other person being the coordinator if disputes or disagreements arise.
- 4.3. The technical or academic experts carrying the assessment shall provide a written report on the outcome of the assessment in a template provided by the institute to provide formative feedback but also for auditing purposes that the internal quality assurance (IQA) may carry out from time to time. This also applies to external audit that the institute may have from time to time.

5. Evaluation Methods

Applications for RPL must be accompanied by the necessary documents/portfolio of evidence. The evidence that could be included in a portfolio would typically include:

- A detailed up-to-date curriculum vitae.
- A Passport Copy or Identity Card
- Official Employment History (e.g., Jobsplus)
- Any formal certificates or continuous professional development awards.
- Letter of Reference/s
- Duties performed

- Voluntary work
- Examples of work (e.g. prepared reports, budgets, plans, articles)
- Internship or apprenticeship programmes
- Others relevant to programme of studies

In addition to submission of a learning portfolio may also include one or a combination of the following:

- An extra piece of work/ Assignment
- An interview or oral assessment
- Simulation/ Practice Observation

6. Feedback / Decisions

- 6.1. Once the application has been assessed, the RPL coordinator shall submit a detailed report provided by the assessors / technical experts to registrar's office and a copy of the report should be also provided to the Institute's Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) Office.
- 6.2. The applicant must obtain a pass mark or competency to gain the credits that are listed and allocated in the study unit descriptors of the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS). Exemption will then be given and allocated to the candidate.
- 6.3. The experts appointed by the RPL coordinator to carry the pre- assessment and assessment shall be compensated for their preparatory work and assessments carried out during RPL. The compensation is of €25.00 per hour. The maximum number of hours that the assessor/s shall be compensated for shall not exceed three hours for each assessment.
- 6.4. The team of technical/academic experts shall give the RPL coordinator a detailed written report of any assessments carried out so proper feedback can be given to the applicant during the feedback process. Compensation for the work carried out will not be processed unless the report is provided in the form that the Institute shall provide for these reports.

- 6.5. Applicants which fail or found not competent through their assessment are to be informed of the knowledge, skill or competence that a candidate may have not achieved and shall be given the opportunity or the possibility to either:
- 6.5.1. re-take the RPL assessment when the candidate thinks that the missing learning outcomes/elements have been achieved; or
 - 6.5.2. follow a study unit or parts of it on a part-time basis to make up for the identified knowledge, skill or competence against a nominal fee.
- 6.6. Applicants who may feel that the RPL assessment did not justify their competence, may forward a written complaint to the RPL coordinator using the rpl@its.edu.mt and copy the Institute of Tourism Studies Internal Quality Assurance Department. This shall be done against a minimal nominal fee indicated from time to time by the Institute of Tourism Studies.
- 6.7. The RPL coordinator shall appoint another assessor/s as, technical/academic experts to re-assess the first assessment if such a need arises through a formal complaint that the applicant was unfairly assessed. The second assessment result shall be deemed as final, and feedback shall be provided to the candidate/applicant in a detailed written report prepared by the experts appointed.
- 6.8. Any reports carried out during the RPL shall remain confidential and filed at registrar's office for any future purpose relating to the RPL process.**
- 6.9. The Internal Quality Assurance should be given access to check on reports or complaints that a candidate/applicant may have requested.**

7. Fees

- 7.1 RPL pricing – RPL fees (currently €25 per ECTS) is charged to all students, whether paying or not, with the proviso that non-paying students who are successful in their RPL exercise are refunded the RPL fee while paying students are refunded tuition fees, as per current practice.
- 7.2 The final fee of the RPL shall be based on the number of the total credits allocated per study unit. (e.g. if the study unit has 6 credits - ECTS / ECVETS - allocated to it a fee of €150.00 should be charged prior to the assessment process).
- 7.1. The same fee of €25.00 per ECVET/ECTS credit will be **APPLIED** for all at EQF/ MQF Level 7 recognition of prior learning (RPL) assessments.
- 7.2. Students who are paying for their courses (i.e. non-EU or part-time) need to pay RPL as per established fees. If they are given the exemption of that particular module through RPL then they will be deducted from the tuition fees.

An Example:

Mr Johnson is a paying student from USA which does not form part of the EU. He is to pay for the course fees that he is to enrol in. He then asks for recognition of prior learning (RPL) for module XYZ001 which falls within the course of studies that he has enrol in. If Mr Johnson succeeds and an exemption through RPL is granted, he is to pay for the RPL assessment per credit as stipulated in 3.1 for the module he has applied and found to be successful in, but the amount paid will be deducted from his study course fees. This is done so students do not have pay a double fee for the same module while at the same time encouraging them to take RPL if they feel they can make it.

B. Document Retention

Category	Retention Period
Recognition of Prior Learning	5 years

C. Review

The terms of this policy will be reviewed after its first year of operation and regularly thereafter.

D. Document Control

Version	Purpose of Review/ Changes	Date Published	Date of Next Review
1	Initial version	2021	2025
2	Revision of the <i>Fees</i> section (Section 3) under <i>Policy</i> to cater for EU citizens who are paying students	2025	2026
3	Revision of RPL fees to be charged to all RPL applicants.	2026	2027