PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

NURSING

Framework for the Recognition of Prior Learning

For Education Bodies Providing Graduate Entry Nursing General Education Programmes

Bord Altranais agus Cnáimhseachais na hÉireann
Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland

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Introduction

The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland (NMBI) is the independent statutory body which regulates the nursing and midwifery professions in Ireland. Our mission is to protect the public through the promotion of high standards of education and training and to protect the integrity of the professions of nursing and midwifery. We are mandated by the Nurses and Midwives Act 2011, as amended, to set standards and requirements for programmes leading to registration. These provide guidance for education bodies (EBs) and practice partners for the preparation of curricula and delivery of education programmes leading to registration.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) forms a critical component of EU policy in relation to widening participation to higher education and in supporting lifelong learning. This is evidenced in International, European, and national policy documents that emphasise the need for a national framework for RPL in Ireland. In acknowledging the value that is placed on RPL nationally, all education bodies in Ireland have implemented relevant policies and procedures.

In response to workforce challenges within the nursing profession the NMBI proposes to use RPL for widening access routes into professional programmes. In applying RPL, the aim is to ensure that the integrity of programmes leading to registration of a nurse are rigorously protected and that academic standards are maintained. Working collaboratively with international nursing colleagues and academics, the NMBI believes in the value of increasing capacity and diversity, facilitating mobility across the EU, and creating a more inclusive workforce. We want to make it as seamless as possible for an applicant to demonstrate how they meet our standards and assist education bodies in determining a broad, consistent, and efficient approach to recognition of prior learning.

The NMBI is adopting the National Pilot Framework to optimise consistency in the implementation of RPL across education bodies. This framework must be read in conjunction with the Graduate Entry Nursing General Registration Education Programme Standards and Requirements (First Edition) 2023.

Definition of RPL

RPL is a process by which prior learning is formally valued. It is a means by which prior learning is identified, assessed, and recognised by an educational institution. This makes it possible for an individual to build on learning achieved and to be rewarded for it (e.g. in the form of acknowledgement or accreditation).

RPL acknowledges the varied means by which learning happens and provides additional pathways to and through higher education. It is a key component of lifelong learning and makes higher education more accessible and flexible. Also, it renders visible and gives formal value to the knowledge, skills, and competences that individuals have obtained. This matters because learning happens everywhere, and all the time. It occurs in many contexts, including (but not limited to) on the-job learning, involvement in social and community activities, through caring responsibilities, via sport and other leisure activity, or by means of life experiences more generally.

'Prior learning' is defined as learning that has taken place but has not necessarily been assessed, measured, or assigned credits. Prior learning may have been acquired through formal, non-formal, and/or informal routes. The concept of lifelong learning indicates that learning encompasses the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal, and informal learning.

With the aim of developing a national approach to RPL, these may be defined as follows:

- **Formal learning** takes place through programmes or courses of study that are delivered in an organised, formal way by education providers and that attract awards or credits. Formal learning is sometimes referred to as certified or accredited learning.
- **Non-formal learning** takes place alongside or outside the mainstream systems of education and training. It may be assessed but does not normally lead to formal certification. Examples of non-formal learning are planned learning and training activities undertaken in the workplace, voluntary sector, or in community-based settings.
- **Informal learning** takes place through life and work experience. Typically, it does not lead to certification.

Non-formal and informal learning are sometimes referred to as experiential learning.

Benefits of RPL for Nursing

RPL can have a range of positive impacts. Some benefits are outlined below.

- RPL is a key component of lifelong learning, both in Ireland and internationally. Promoting a culture of lifelong learning across society and within the workforce is an ongoing national and international priority. On setting a new EU target in relation to lifelong learning, the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan noted that increasing adult participation in lifelong learning is paramount to improve employability, to boost innovation, to ensure social fairness, and to close the digital skills gap.
- RPL is a driver for workforce development. As well as supporting individuals' career development, can facilitate accelerated learning and upskilling/reskilling opportunities to meet workforce needs at local, regional, and national levels.
- RPL makes visible the valuable skills and knowledge that people have acquired through work or other life experience (e.g. transversal skills, such as critical thinking and teamwork or technical skills).
- RPL is a mechanism that facilitates the participation of learners of all ages in higher education, including older adults who may wish to pursue personal development and/or second careers.
- RPL candidates possess skills and experience that drive classroom discussion and class performance forward and are often acknowledged as exemplar students.
- RPL may help to reduce the amount of time and cost associated with acquiring a graduate nursing qualification.

Quality Assurance

RPL is underpinned by quality assurance. Quality assurance delivers public trust and confidence in the learning environment and in any resulting awards or qualifications obtained by learners. This is essential when considering RPL for a Graduate entry nursing course. In applying RPL the EB must be cognisant of the need to ensure that the integrity of its awards is rigorously guarded and that academic standards are maintained.

RPL for Graduate Entry Nursing

Graduate Entry Nursing (GEN)

The approval of the GEN General Registration Education Programme Standards and Requirements (2023) provides an education pathway for people who already hold a National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) level 8 undergraduate bachelor's degree and wish to complete an education programme leading to registration as a general nurse. RPL is permitted and will be determined by the NFQ as set out by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), based on evidence submitted by applicants to the education bodies. Education providers will consult with the NMBI regarding their organisational policy on RPL and agree the process and details of how it will apply to the programme.

The NMBI acknowledges the extensive work evidenced by the funding of the National Recognition of Prior Learning in Higher Education Project by the Irish government's Human Capital Initiative (HCI) Pillar 3 (Innovation and Agility). The pilot Framework has informed the work of the NMBI and is intended as a resource to assist with the development of institutional policy and procedures. Many of the project leads were involved in the development of the NMBIs framework document that is recommended for use in conjunction with the pilot Framework.

Purpose of the Framework

The purpose of the Framework is to ensure that the assessment of RPL for graduate entry nursing is approached and facilitated in an equitable, transparent, and consistent manner in EB's, while ensuring that decisions on RPL are fair and balanced and protect the academic integrity of a nursing programme that leads to registration.

Scope of the Framework

- This framework applies to prospective EB's seeking to provide a graduate entry nursing programme.
- It applies to prospective postgraduate applicants seeking to gain admission and advanced entry to the Graduate Entry in Nursing programme based on prior learning.
- This framework must be read in conjunction with the 'Pilot Framework for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Higher Education'.
- To meet EU Directive requirements of 4,600 hours leading to registration in nursing NMBI recommend that up to 1,100 hours can be recognised through prior learning in advance of starting the graduate entry nursing programme. Please see below for a suggested breakdown.

NMBI registration requirements are level 8 degree: minimum 4,600 hours or 180 ECTS

Prior learning

Suggested pre-requisite learning for applicants prior to commencing the programme: 1,100 hours RPL – MAXIMUM Total 40 ECTS attained and certified.

50 hours Preparation for the programme (At the discretion of the Education Body)

- Programme induction (50 hours)

500 hours Theory

- **Level 8 modules**
  - Anatomy and Physiology - 10 ECTS (250 hours)
  - Research Skills - 10 ECTS (250 hours)

550 hours Practice

- 450 hours in a health-related setting signed off by a Registered Nurse
- 100 hours reflection to be evidenced in a portfolio
- The practice hours MUST be achieved within the two-year period prior to commencing a programme.

Total RPL permitted = 1,100 hours (MAXIMUM Total 40 ECTS attained and certified)

Programme learning - Graduate Entry Nursing Programme learning

Graduate Entry 2-year full time programme: 3,500 hours

70 ECTS theory (1,750 hours)

70 ECTS practice (1,750 hours)

- Year 1: Supernumerary 625 hours (17 weeks)
  + specialist placements 225 hours (6 weeks) in either year
- Year 2: Internship 900 hours (24 weeks)

EU programme compliance: Total 4,600 hours

The Education Body RPL application review panel must include a registered nurse. Interviews adds robustness to the selection process.

A Pilot Framework for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Higher Education

Recognition of Prior Learning
Your Learning Counts

SUMMARY

Purpose of Framework: The Framework's main aim is to support higher education institutions in Ireland to develop a shared understanding of RPL and to achieve coherence and consistency in policy and practice.

Definition of RPL:

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a process by which prior learning is formally valued. It is a means by which prior learning is identified, assessed, and recognised by an educational institution as part of its programmes, courses, and/or modules on Ireland's National Framework of Qualifications. This makes it possible for an individual to build on learning achieved and to be rewarded for it.

RPL acknowledges the varied means by which learning happens and provides additional pathways to and through higher education. It is a key component of lifelong learning and makes higher education more accessible and flexible.

The Framework shows that RPL is underpinned by two core values:

1. **Learner-centredness:** The learner is central to the RPL process. A wide range of learners may wish to apply for RPL: RPL is for everyone.
2. **Quality assurance:** The RPL process is embedded in the quality assurance procedures of each higher education institution and is aligned with the National Framework of Qualifications.

The RPL process typically includes five stages. These are:

A. Information	B. Identification	C. Documentation	D. Assessment	E. Certification
The learner obtains information about what is possible and how the RPL process works.	The learner explores their prior learning with a view to making an RPL application.	The learner undertakes a reflective process and gathers relevant materials to substantiate their application.	The learner's application is assessed. A range of assessment mechanisms may be used (e.g. portfolios, interviews, essays, examinations, etc.).	If the application is successful, the learner will receive formal recognition or certification, which will lead to one or more of the following outcomes:

- Credit towards an award or exemption from some programme modules
- Advanced entry to a programme
- Entry to a programme

Note: In some higher education institutions, RPL may also be used to gain a full academic award. The availability of these outcomes of RPL is at the discretion of each higher education institution.

For further information, visit: @RPL_Irl @Recognition of Prior Learning www.priorlearning.ie

thea TECHNOLOGICAL HIGHER EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
iua IRISH UNIVERSITIES ASSOCIATION
HCI Human Capital Initiative

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