

Institute of Microbiome and Applied Sciences

Policy for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)



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Pursuant to the internal regulations and the IQA document of the IMAS and in line with the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) – Definitions, Principles, and Guidelines issued by the MFHEA, IMAS in its meeting held on 10.11.2024 adopted the following:

Regulation on the Recognition of Prior Learning



Scope

This regulation shall define the purpose and types of Recognition or Prior Learning, application procedure, assessment, certification, quality assurance procedures, and other procedural issues important to the Recognition of Prior Learning at IMAS.



Purpose

Through the recognition of prior learning procedures, IMAS aims to enable students to gain access to education and transfer credits earned through formal and non-formal learning in order to prevent unnecessary duplication of learning processes but, at the same time, ensure that candidates possess adequate learning outcomes for the level and content of the intended academic degree. IMAS also aims to enable access to education and training for persons who do not meet the traditional requirements for entry through the recognition of the knowledge and skills acquired during their professional work.



Definitions

For the purpose of this regulation, and in line with the national guidelines, the terms used in this document have the following meaning:

RPL

is the process for recognising learning that has come from experience and/or previous formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts. This includes knowledge and skills gained within school, college and university and outside formal learning situations as «through community-based learning» [SCQF definition 2010].

Formal Learning

Formal learning takes place within the context of programmes delivered by learning and training providers; it is assessed and leads to a recognised qualification or award.

Informal Learning

Informal learning can be defined as experiential learning and takes place through life and work experiences. It is often unintentional learning.

Non- Formal Learning

Non-Formal learning takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training, it may be assessed but does not typically lead to formal certification; for example, learning and training activities undertaken in the workplace, voluntary sector or trade union and through community-based learning

Types of RPL

Types of RPL services offered by IMAS include the following:

1

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 to components or parts of a formal qualification or award through the use of learning outcomes.

2

Formative RPL

is where the candidate is looking to have knowledge, skills and competencies assessed for personal or career development.

3

Summative RPL

is where formal ECTS credit is awarded and recognised as having the same value as credit gained in formal teaching institutions.

4

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 study. The credit can either be subject specific or general credit if the learning is at the same MQF level.

Purpose of RPL and Forms of RPL Recognised

At IMAS, RPL is conducted for the following purposes:

- ✓ RPL to gain entry to a qualification;
- ✓ RPL to gain entry with advanced standing;
- ✓ RPL for the award of ECTS points to gain exemption from parts of an existing programme.

IMAS recognises the following forms of RPL, all aligned with MFHEA guidelines:

Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) – with the aim to recognise an individual's knowledge, skills and competences that have been developed throughout their lives by means of participation in non-formal and informal learning. (Case Example: A candidate has completed multiple in-house training courses in project management while working for an NGO but holds no formal qualifications. She applies under APL to gain access to a business management qualification).

Accreditation of Experiential Learning (APEL) – with the aim to accredit an individual's experience developed through exposure in life to a variety of experiences. (Case Example: A candidate has worked as a chef for 10 years without formal culinary education. He applies under APEL by submitting a portfolio of his work experience to gain entry to a hospitality management qualification).

Recognition of Accredited Prior Learning (RAPL/RAPEL) – Recognition of previously accredited or certified learning that is already pegged to an MQF level. This route allows candidates to apply for exemptions or advanced entry into a programme based on completed qualifications. (Case Example: A candidate has completed a Level 5 Diploma in Health Sciences seven years ago. Since then, she has worked in a clinical nutrition setting and has regularly attended accredited workshops to maintain her knowledge. She applies under RAPL to have both her prior qualification and professional experience assessed with the aim to be recognised for advanced entry to a new health and nutrition programme).

Credit Transfer - Takes place when an individual has gained a formal programme of study and has received formal credit and is looking to gain entry at an advanced stage or exemption from components of another programme of study where the learning outcomes of the programme of study match the learning outcomes of the new programme of study. The credit can either be subject specific or general credit if the learning is at the same MQF level. (Case Example: A candidate has completed 15 ECTS in microbiology at another institution. He applies for a credit transfer to avoid duplication when enrolling in a Life Sciences programme).

The types of programs for which the RPL is available at IMAS include the following:

Program	Total number of ECTS
Award in the Roles and Implications of Microbiota on Human Health: A Therapeutic Approach	3 ECTS; Level 7

RPL claims against modules which consist of practise placements are not accepted.

Rights and responsibilities of the parties involved in the RPL procedure

The candidate – must make a prior self-assessment to determine whether he/she meets the requirements of the study program and must follow instructions received by the IMAS administration. The candidate is entitled to support from the IMAS administration and provided with access to information about all stages of the RPL procedure.

The RPL coordinator – is responsible to manage the RPL applications and maintain individual contact with the candidates to support their application process and provide assistance with regards to the identification and gathering of the prior learning evidence.

The RPL Assessor – is responsible for assessing the candidate's RPL claim and reach a final assessment decision with regards to the RPL claim.

Support to candidates

The recognition of Prior learning at IMAS is student-centered. Therefore, all potential candidates wishing to apply for recognition of prior learning will be provided support in terms of the application procedure. They will receive sufficient and complete information about the application process, including the benefits of undergoing an RPL, possible outcomes, the rights and responsibilities including appeals procedure, costs, and time frames related to the RPL process.

All potential candidates will be informed about the levels of qualification requirements and the need to present sufficient evidence to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and competencies related to the respective program.

IMAS ensures that the RPL Regulation and specific instructions for the application process are publicly available through its institutional website. Also, additional information can be requested at any time through the official email rpl.coordinator@imas.edu.eu

Potential candidates can also engage in discussions about their prior learning with the IMAS Administration, ensuring that they sufficiently reflect upon their experience. The communication at this stage is provided through the Corporate Manager and in a way that ensures that the candidate's privacy is protected.

Application procedure

Once the candidate has decided to undergo the RPL process, he/she will first need to complete an online application form accessible [here](#). Candidates must indicate at the beginning of the application form the specific RPL category they are seeking, which may include:

- application for entry onto a program of study;
- application for advanced entry onto a program of study;
- application for exemption from specific modules of an existing program of study;

In addition to completing the application form, the candidate must provide a portfolio of relevant work, certificates, or any formal documentation that demonstrates competencies are aligned with the learning outcomes of the program. Supporting documents of the candidate's prior learning should be sent in scanned copy via email to the IMAS RPL Coordinator (rpl.coordinator@imas.edu.eu).

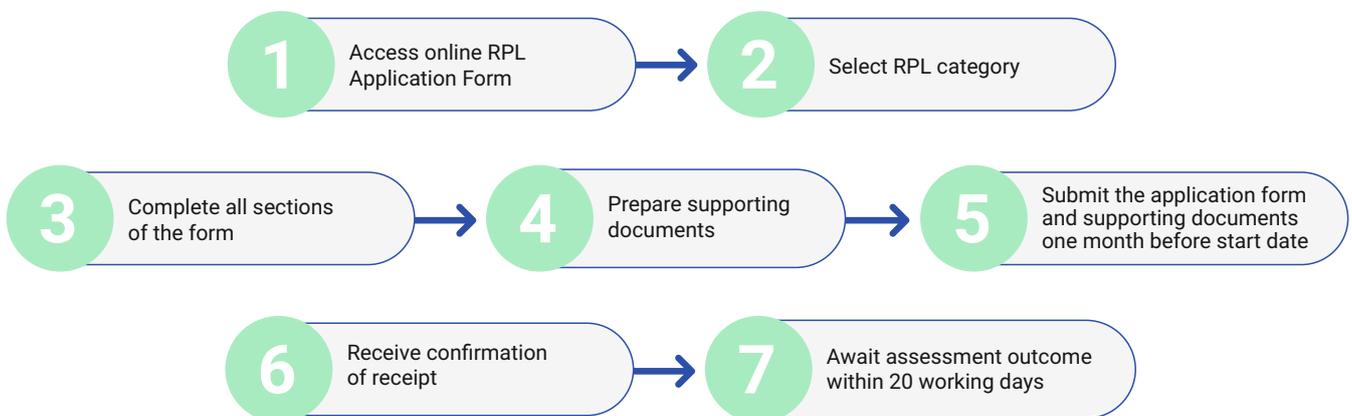


Application documentation should be filed at least one month prior to the commencement of the program for which the candidate has made the application.

Once the decision about the application has been reached, the candidate will be required to submit the application form and the supporting documents in physical form.

A visual representation of the application procedure is provided below

Recognition of Prior Learning Application Process



Candidate's portfolio

The evidence must demonstrate that the candidate meets the required skills and knowledge for the required program.

Evidence must be prepared in a standard form as to enable the candidate clearly indicate every evidence in relation to each learning outcome of the selected module within the qualification.

Based on the type of RPL claim and the relevant prior learning, the candidate must submit a portfolio which includes, but it is not limited to, the following evidences:

- updated CV which clearly indicates the job description;
- a written essay detailing the candidate's journey of previous certificated learning and experience;
- certificates of attendance of training sessions;

- ✓ awards or diploma demonstrating the completion of formal (certified) learning;
- ✓ transcript of records for previous studies;
- ✓ performance reviews;
- ✓ a statement through which the candidate testifies that all evidences submitted are original and of the candidate's own work;
- ✓ any other evidence that supports the work experience of the candidate.

RPL Coordinator

The Corporate Manager assigns an RPL coordinator to manage the RPL application and maintain individual contact with the candidate who needs support to provide the needed evidence to complete the assessment process.

The **RPL coordinator** is responsible to provide the candidate with the necessary assistance to prepare documentation, select and collect relevant evidence to carry out the evaluation process and support the candidates in all stages of the RPL process. The coordinator will systematically review the candidate's portfolio according to the qualification evaluation criteria determined based on the learning outcomes.

The **RPL coordinator** is a qualified administrative person who has ample information about the RPL procedure as well as the specifics of the study program. He/she is also responsible for managing RPL application data and coordinating the activities related to RPL quality assurance procedures.

RPL Assessor

After the candidate has collected the necessary evidence, he/she will be assigned an assessor who has not been involved in preparing the candidate's portfolio.

The RPL assessor must be a person with academic experience who is qualified in the relevant field. He/she must have extensive knowledge of the RPL process, the rights and obligations of the candidate, as well as detailed knowledge of the qualification and evaluation criteria.

The final decision of the assessor will be submitted to the Corporate Manager who will confirm the application of the candidate or reject it.

Assessment criteria

IMAS applies a transparent, consistent and quality assured RPL procedure which aims to ensure that all learners are given the opportunity to fairly be assessed.

The assessment is designed to assess all learning outcomes of the module, knowledge, skills and competences. Evidence submitted by the candidate are matched against the learning outcomes of the program and the MQF levels are adequately considered.

The assessment of evidence must be valid and reliable to ensure the integrity of the qualification and the RPL system. The submitted evidence will be assessed against the following criteria:

- Acceptability - in terms of accuracy of data and certified documents;*
- Sufficiency - in terms of quantity and quality;*
- Authenticity – to ensure that evidence contain only the candidate's work;*
- Currency - to meet learning outcomes and assessment criteria*



To be assessed based on formal prior learning, the candidate's certificates of attendance of training sessions, awards or diploma demonstrating the completion of formal (certified) learning, transcript of records for previous studies, shall be assessed to certify the achievement of learning outcomes at the indicated level.



To be assessed based on informal and non-formal learning the candidate's certificates, training records, evidence of involvement in community activities shall be assessed to certify the achievement of learning outcomes at the indicated level or that the candidate's prior learning is comparable to the admission requirements of the selected degree.



For entry into a qualification, minimum of 3 years of professional experience are required, which should be verified with evidence such as work references or a detailed CV outlining relevant roles and responsibilities.

All evidence submitted by the candidate must demonstrate that the prior learning has not taken place more than 10 years before the RPL claim.

An assessment interview may be included as part of the evaluation process to verify the depth of skills and knowledge acquired through prior work experience or qualifications. IMAS will notify the candidate on time to schedule the interview.

To ensure fairness and consistency across assessors, all RPL assessments will undergo internal moderation, whereby a second qualified assessor will review a sample of decisions for consistency with assessment criteria. A minimum of 20% of applications per cohort will be moderated. Where the total number of applications is fewer than 10, at least two applications will be reviewed. Moderation outcomes will be discussed in periodic assessor meetings to maintain a shared understanding of standards.

In cases when portfolios narrowly fail to meet the threshold for recognition (borderline portfolio), a second assessor will review the application (double-marking). Additionally, an interview may be scheduled to clarify the candidate's learning. In such cases, the final decision will be taken jointly to ensure fairness and transparency.

RPL applications will be assessed in line with the criteria and thresholds set out in the RPL Sample Evaluation Rubric (Annex 2), which forms the single reference source for applicants and assessors.

A visual representation of the assessment process is provided below.



Outcomes for the RPL claim



IMAS will inform the candidate via email about the outcomes of their RPL claim within twenty working days of the application date.

The outcome can be:

- a) "full acceptance of the claim," which indicates that the candidate has sufficiently fulfilled the assessment criteria for entry onto a program of study;
- b) "full acceptance of the claim for advanced entry onto a program", which indicates that the candidate has sufficiently fulfilled the assessment criteria for advanced entry onto a program of study;
- c) "full acceptance of the claim for exemption from specific modules of an existing program";
- d) "failure of the claim," indicating that the candidate has failed to meet the necessary assessment criteria.



If the candidate's RPL claim for entry onto a program of study is accepted, the candidate will be informed about the date for joining the next intake of the program.

If the candidate's RPL claim for advanced entry or exemption is accepted, the candidate will be exempted from the modules and its respective assessment. He/she shall receive timely information about the continuation of the rest of the modules in line with the academic calendar of the program.



The candidate who has received a "failure of the claim" decision will be advised and guided by IMAS based on the results of the evaluation report so that within a certain period, he/she can achieve the necessary competencies.

IMAS will also notify the candidate who has received a "failure of the claim" decision about the appeals procedure and the Appeals Form set out in Annex 1

All outcomes of the RPL claims will be stored in the central database of the IMAS.

Certification

IMAS will issue a written notification based on the candidates' achievements detailing the RPL claim which shall be signed by Institute Director.

- ✓ The positive outcome for entry onto a program of study will be recorded in the student's transcript indicating the level of study.
- ✓ The positive outcome for advanced entry onto a program of study or exemption from specific modules of the existing program, will be recorded in the candidate's transcript. The modules and the number of credits granted shall be indicated also in the candidate's academic record and diploma supplement.

Academic records obtained through the RPL procedure must be of the same form and equivalent to those obtained through formal certification

Fees



There is currently no RPL assessment fee. If a fee is introduced in future, IMAS will publish the amount and a hardship-waiver process on the website and in this policy.

Appeals

If the candidate considers that a procedural error has occurred or due process has not been followed, he/she has the right to submit an enquiry to the Quality Assurance Department.

The inquiry will be considered if the following conditions have been met:

- ✓ the enquiry is submitted in writing using the IMAS Appeals Form (Annex 1) and sent via email to the QA Department [✉ qa@imas.edu.eu](mailto:qa@imas.edu.eu) within 10 working days of receipt of the assessment outcome
- ✓ the enquiry includes the grounds for the appeal and any supporting documentation

The QA Department shall review the enquiry and communicate an outcome via email within 5 working days from receipt of the enquiry.

In case the candidate is not satisfied with the outcome, they may submit an appeal directly to the Institute Director via email (m.biazzo@thebioarte.com), following the same procedure stated above.

The Institute Director shall review the appeal and communicate an outcome via email within 7 working days from receipt of the appeal.

This stage is the final step in the appeals process and a final decision will be made regarding the outcome of the initial enquiry.

IMAS will not apply further fees for appeals.

Quality Assurance of RPL

IMAS will apply a quality assurance system related to the RPL procedures.

RPL's self-evaluation processes are integrated within the institutional quality assurance framework and take place within the time limits defined by the internal quality document.

The main responsible person to oversee the internal quality assurance procedures of the RPL is the QA Manager.

IMAS will carry out its regular self-assessments of RPL processes through:

-  gathering periodic quantitative data through feedback forms from candidates upon completion of the process;
-  gathering periodic quantitative data through feedback forms from RPL assessors/reviewers upon completion of the process;
-  gathering ad hoc feedback from randomly selected students and academic staff;
-  gathering and analysing data on student progress and academic performance.

In addition, data on the number of applications, the number of positive decisions, and the volume of recognized credits will be recorded and maintained in the central database by the Corporate Manager.

The Quality Manager will review annually a sample of 20% of applications to ensure the consistency and fairness of decision-making. An external peer review of a sample of RPL decisions will also be conducted at least once per year as part of the quality assurance cycle.

All self-assessment results, including findings from external peer reviews, will be used to inform the revisions of the RPL procedure and its continuous improvement. IMAS will integrate the results of the RPL assessments into the overall institutional quality assurance reports.

Staff Training and Continuous Development

IMAS is committed to maintaining a high standard of service and expertise within its RPL system. All RPL Coordinators, assessors, and administrative staff will receive structured training, participate in periodic workshops and updates on national and European RPL policies and engage in continuous professional development to stay informed about best practices and changes in MFHEA or MQF standards.

Annex 1

IMAS Appeals Form for the Recognition of Prior Learning

Section 1: Applicant Details

Full Name: _____

Email Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Section 2: Appeal Information

Date of Assessment Outcome Notification: _____

Assessment Outcome (select one):

- Entry
- Advanced Entry
- Exemption
- Failure
- Other: _____

Section 3: Grounds for Appeal

Please indicate the reason(s) for your appeal (tick all that apply):

- Procedural error occurred during the assessment process.
- Due process was not followed.
- Other (please specify): _____

Section 4: Appeal Statement

Please provide a clear explanation of your appeal. Attach any supporting documentation.

Section 5: Declaration

I declare that the information provided in this form is accurate and complete.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

**Email the completed form and any supporting documents to the Quality Assurance Department via the following email: qa@imas.edu.eu within 10 working days of receipt of your assessment outcome.*

**If unsatisfied with the outcome, you may submit the appeal to the Institute Director at m.biazzo@thebioarte.com within 7 working days of receiving the QA decision.*

Annex 2

Sample Evaluation Rubric for RPL

This rubric is the single reference for both applicants and assessors. It ensures that all RPL applications are assessed transparently, consistently, and in alignment with MQF learning outcomes:

Evidence Type	Acceptability	Sufficiency	Authenticity	Currency
Formal Certificate / Diploma	Certified copy from accredited provider	Clearly linked to learning outcomes and MQF level	Issued in the candidate's name	Dated within the last 10 years
CV/ Work experience				
Work portfolio				
Reflective Essay / Statement				
Interview (if applicable)				

Weighting per evidence

Evidence Type	Weight (%)
Formal Qualification	25
CV / Work Experience	25
Portfolio / Work Samples	20
Reflective Essay / Statement	15
Interview (if conducted)	15

Outcome Thresholds

Total Score	RPL Outcome
80–100%	Full acceptance (entry, advanced entry, exemption)
60–79%	Partial recognition or conditions applied
Below 60%	Failure of the claim

Annex 3

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is RPL?

RPL is a formal process that allows individuals to gain recognition for learning acquired through work, life experience, previous studies, or non-formal learning. This recognition may lead to program entry, advanced standing, or exemption from certain modules.

Who is eligible for RPL?

You may be eligible to apply for RPL if you have acquired relevant knowledge, skills, or competences through:

- ✓ Formal learning – such as completed diplomas, degrees, or accredited courses.
- ✓ Non-formal learning – such as professional training, short courses, or in-house learning that wasn't part of a formal qualification.
- ✓ Informal learning – such as work experience, volunteer activities, self-directed study, or life experience relevant to the programme.
- ✓ Previously awarded ECTS credits – that can be transferred from another institution or programme.

What documents do I need to submit?

Depending on the type of RPL, you may need to submit: certified diplomas or transcripts, Curriculum Vitae (CV), work samples or project portfolios, letters of reference, reflective essays or personal statements, certificates from workshops or trainings.

You will receive personalised support in preparing your portfolio.

How do I know which type of RPL applies to me?

The type of RPL depends on the nature of your previous learning and experience:

APL: You've done non-formal or informal learning, such as on-the-job training, volunteer work, or workshops – but without a formal qualification.

APEL: You've gained knowledge and skills through extensive work or life experience, and can reflect on how this experience meets learning outcomes.

RAPL/RAPEL: You already hold a formal qualification, diploma, or certificate that is accredited and pegged to an MQF level, and want it recognised for exemptions or advanced entry.

Credit Transfer: You've earned ECTS credits in a previous programme (e.g., university studies) and want to transfer those credits into a new programme.

What is the timeline for application and decision?

Your complete RPL application, including supporting documentation, must be submitted at least one month prior to the start date of the programme you are applying for.

How long does the assessment process take?

The standard processing time is 20 working days from the moment your complete application and portfolio are received. You will be notified by email once a decision is made.

What happens if my application is rejected?

You have the right to appeal. The appeal must be submitted in writing using the official IMAS Appeals Form within 10 working days of receiving the decision.

How is my personal data handled?

IMAS processes your data for RPL assessment and quality assurance in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR) and the Maltese Data Protection Act (Cap. 586). RPL outcomes and credit decisions will be retained permanently on student records/transcripts, while supporting evidence and documentation will be securely stored for a minimum of five (5) years after the decision to meet legal and quality-assurance obligations. Your data will be processed on the lawful bases of consent and legitimate interest. For queries: contact@imas.edu.eu.