

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

Avanza Training Academy

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PURPOSE

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the process of recognising learning obtained through formal, non-formal and informal learning other than the mainstream certification. Through RPL one's existing skills, knowledge and life experiences are recognised towards the achievement of a national certification/qualification.

Such learning can also include the acquisition of competencies gained through educational institutions such as schools, workplaces, life, and work experiences, and even through personal interests.

By allowing applicants the opportunity to demonstrate learning achieved through varied learning experiences, including formal, non-formal and informal education, RPL will allow them access to courses or programmes of study and/or gain exemption from parts of it.

This policy aims to guide Avanza Training Academy in managing the process of recognition of prior learning. This process is based on a set of principles that will be adhered to, together with a set of key features that are intended to ensure a fair, consistent, and transparent process.

This document builds on the document issued by the MFHEA in collaboration with the SCQF entitled *Recognition of Prior Learning – Definitions, Principles and Guidelines* (May 2021). It recognises that there are three different types of RPL, namely Formative RPL, Summative RPL, and Credit Transfer. The MFHEA document notes that:

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

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

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 (2021, p.3).

GLOSSARY

Recognition of Prior Learning

“RPL is the process for recognising learning that has come from experience and/or previous formal, nonformal and informal learning contexts. This includes knowledge and skills gained within school, college, and university and outside formal learning situations as through life and work experiences” [SCQF definition 2010]

Formal Learning

Formal learning is achieved through formal education. It is organised and built round a structured curriculum, national/international standards and leads to a formal qualification that is accredited and recognised by local and international educational institutions and potential employers.

Non-Formal Learning

Non-formal learning is learning which occurs outside of compulsory education. It can either be organised by an institution as part of their professional development offered to staff, and is flexible, hands-on, and learner centred.

Whilst sessions/courses undertaken may be assessed, they do not typically lead to certification. Examples of non-formal learning include: CPD courses organised by institutions or companies, voluntary organisations, and community-based settings. These sessions/courses may lead to forms of certification that shows that a person has attended particular programmes for a number of hours.

Informal Learning

Informal learning is the learning that takes place in everyday life. This learning is vicarious in nature and accumulated over the years. Informal learning is often referred to as experiential learning or incidental learning and typically does not lead to certification.

Work-Based Learning

Work-based learning (WBL) involves learning through work, learning for work and/or learning at work. It consists of authentic structured opportunities for learning which are achieved in a workplace setting or are designed to meet an identified workplace need. This type of learning typically has a dual function of

being designed to meet the learning needs of the employees, developing their knowledge, skills, and professional behaviours, and also meeting the workforce development needs of the organisation. WBL offers real-life, practical work experiences, to better prepare the student for the challenging world of employment—a merging of theory with practice.

Portfolio

A portfolio is a way to organize and present your skills, samples, visual demonstrations of your projects, training, and education. It allows you to display your best work. It presents documentation, references and records of past experiences compiled by the applicant demonstrating the learning that has been achieved through different learning engagements. Can also contain letters of recommendation along with your resume.

Candidate

A candidate is a person who is making a claim for RPL and/or credit transfer.

Credit Transfer

Credit transfer takes place when an individual who has followed 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.

Learning Outcomes

Learning Outcomes are statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do after having completed a study-unit, course or programme of studies. Applicants wishing to apply for RPL will be expected to demonstrate how their certified or experiential learning maps against the knowledge, skills, and competences of the programme (or parts of) for which they are seeking exemption.

RPL Coordinator

The RPL Coordinator (registrar@avanza.com.mt) is the person who co-ordinates the RPL procedures within Avanza Training Academy. This is the first point of contact for the non- traditional/adult/lifelong learner wishing to access a programme through the validation of their formal, informal, and non-formal learning. An RPL Coordinator is responsible for supporting applicants in building their portfolio and for providing information and advice throughout the process.

RPL Advisors

RPL advisors (advisory@avanza.com.mt) have the administrative background that can be referred to when a candidate makes a formal application. They can be referred to both prior to entry into a course of studies and support the potential applicant in the preparation of their application and then channel the application to the appropriate assessor.

RPL Assessors

RPL assessors (academia@avanza.com.mt) are the academic experts who either coordinate the study programme in question or else are involved in the design and development of the course being sought. They are competent in evaluating the portfolio compiled by the applicant.

Non-Traditional Learner

Non-traditional learners, also known as Adult Learners and Lifelong learners, are students who have decided to return to learning at a later stage in life, often whilst being in employment.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Learning that takes place outside formal education can be a rich source of human capital and may contribute to the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences.

RPL gives visibility, value, and currency to non-traditional learners as it acknowledges different forms of learning and learning acquisition. It can allow people to complete formal education more quickly, efficiently, and cheaply by not having to enroll in courses for which they have already mastered the content (OECD, March 2010). This recognition will take place prior to the admission and enrolment to a programme of studies or to the relevant stage of a course. Avanza Training Academy will ensure that academic standards expected of traditional learners are maintained and a rigorous process of recognition and accreditation of the different modes of learning is undertaken.

This implies that candidates who wish to pursue a particular programme of studies will be supported to adequately prepare themselves to go through the RPL process so that due recognition is given to their previous learning. Upon completion of the RPL process candidates may be exempted from particular modules or study units. Only up to 50% of the total amount of ECTS within a programme of studies may be achieved through RPL. The decision on whether to allow potential applicants to gain access to a programme through RPL rests with the course coordinator and RPL Coordinator.

Applicants seeking admission and/or exemption through RPL must provide the necessary evidence as part of their application. Potential candidates will be supported in this endeavour (see Procedure Section and Figure 1). Candidates will need to provide evidence in writing through the submission of a portfolio that they have accumulated over the years. Through this portfolio they will need to exhibit that they have achieved the learning outcomes at the required level/s of particular study units. Candidates will be supported to compile this evidence following advice and discussions with the RPL Coordinator and RPL Advisor.

RPL PROCEDURE

Avanza Training Academy will strive to provide support and guidance to non-traditional learners who wish to access one of our programmes through RPL. This process takes time so potential candidates are encouraged to seek advice at least six months ahead of a deadline for the submission of applications so that they will be able to gather the information/evidence in time to gain access to a particular programme of studies.

Initial Contact

An applicant wishing to apply for a particular programme of studies through RPL is encouraged to visit the Avanza Training Academy website (<https://avanza.com.mt/>) to get an idea what the process entails. Then, potential candidates are encouraged to get in touch with the RPL Coordinator (registrar@avanza.com.mt) to initiate the process.

Application Process

Prospective applicants are to contact the RPL Coordinator in order to start the RPL process and identify the learning outcomes achieved through prior certified and experiential learning. Applicants are advised to start this process six months ahead of the deadline for submission of applications.

Once the necessary discussions have been held and the documentation gathered the evidence will need to be submitted together with the application form. The final responsibility for preparing, completing and submitting the application for RPL rests with the applicant.

These documents will be filed and saved by Avanza Training Academy's administration office. The applicants should be aware that these documents will be accessed and assessed by RPL Advisors. Apart from adhering to the Quality Assurance policy of Avanza Academy in avoiding any form of discrimination against students, the latter will also be knowledgeable of the programme of studies in question. Assessment is thus achieved against the requirements and learning outcomes of the programme/course, and due consideration will be given to:

Validity

The prior learning presented should be at the appropriate level and match the learning outcomes required by the programme of studies and the respective study units.

Sufficiency

Applicants need to provide sufficient documentation as evidence to support their application.

Authenticity

Applicants are responsible for the veracity of all the documents submitted. A signed declaration form to attest to this must also be submitted with the application form.

Currency

The prior learning that is submitted as evidence with the application form needs to be up-to-date.

Relevance

The prior learning that is submitted as evidence with the application form needs to be relevant to the programme of studies that the applicant intends to follow.

EVALUATION METHODS

Reviewing the Application Form

The process, as noted above, will involve the RPL Coordinator and the assigned RPL Advisor/s.

Applying for RPL

During the RPL process applicants will be assisted to collate the documentation/ portfolio of their learning experiences, that can be verified and validated. This portfolio will be developed together with the RPL Coordinator and would typically include:

- A detailed curriculum vitae (C.V.)
- Certificates confirming participation in professional development undertaken over the years
- The scope of duties performed at current/past jobs
- Professional certification
- Reference letter/s issued by an employer or past employers
- Evidence of participation in projects together with your involvement in the project
- Evidence of participation in foreign exchange programmes
- Involvement in internships or apprenticeship schemes
- Involvement in community work
- Examples of work performed (eg. prepared reports, budget sheets, plans, etc.)
- Evidence that is linked to the programme of studies and particular study units
- Police conduct certificate (if applicable)
- A letter explaining your motivation for joining this course.

The RPL Assessment will include the review of the portfolio in line with the Level Descriptors of the Malta Qualifications Framework to determine the level of the evidence that is submitted. The learning outcomes of the programme of study, where the RPL claim is being made, are also used to this effect. RPL Assessors are chosen to be specialists in the programme of study that the evidence is being measured against. In addition to the portfolio, one or a combination of the following assessment methods may also be required:

- **Undertake a project/assignment.** This will be assigned by the RPL Advisor. This will help the applicant to demonstrate the learning

outcomes gained through other forms of learning.

- **Sit for an interview/oral examination.** Through a face-to-face or online session the applicant can engage with the RPL Advisor on specific issues related to one's portfolio.
- **Undergo simulation/practice observation.** The applicant may be asked to be directly observed whilst at work.

- **Case Study.** This will involve a situation and tasks given by the RPL Adviser and related to a specific task that involves the particular study units being reviewed under RPL.
- **English Proficiency.** Applicants not in possession of a Secondary Education Certificate pass at Grade 5 or higher in English Language (or a pass at the same standard in a comparable qualification) shall be required to sit for a proficiency test in English.

If the use of such methods are deemed essential the candidate will be informed in the initial stages of the application review so that adequate time is allocated to prepare and undergo the assessment. The acceptance or otherwise of the student to Avanza Training Academy will be communicated within 30 days from submission following an internal verification of the assessment (e.g. through comparison to comparable RPL claims), to ensure fairness and consistency.

FEEDBACK AND DECISION

Once an application has been assessed, the assessors involved will write a detailed report that outlines whether the candidate has reached the required standards through the RPL system. These reports will also be filed with the original application and used for future reference to ensure consistency. The official letter communicating the assessment results will include ONE of the following:

- Full recognition of prior learning as entry requirements to a specific programme of study
- Full recognition of prior learning for advanced entry (exemption of up to 50% of ECTS) to a programme of study
- A request for resubmission of a claim including further evidence
- Failure of claim featuring the skills and competencies they still need to achieve to be able to resubmit.
- Failure of claim

If the RPL assessment is positive, the date of the next intake to the programme is also specified. Since prior learning is rigorously approved at the application phase, against previous internal and external evaluations of Avanza courses, any eventual certification of students who gain access through this route will be analogous to that of other candidates. On the other hand, detailed transcripts will include the list of ECTS's achieved through Avanza Academy's in addition to the percentage of academic material achieved through RPL if credit transfer was employed for the student to gain access. Applicants who fail the RPL assessment and feel that the assessment was unfair have a right to petition and request a revision of the assessment process within 10 days of receiving the outcome of the evaluation. This can be done through a written complaint to the RPL Coordinator (registrar@avanza.com.mt) via an email. In this case another RPL Advisor will be asked to reassess the submission as if it is an original submission. The second assessment will be deemed as final.

Applicable Fees

A processing fee of €25 per ECTS is applied. The final fee of the RPL shall be based on the number of ECTSs that are exempted from the course the applicant has applied for. For example, if a candidate wishes to be considered for a programme of studies that has 90ECTS and is exempted from 10ECTS then the candidate is charged €250 and then only charge for the 80ECTS that the candidate will attend and not the fees for the full programme.

RPL PROCESS

