KING'S INNS
Recognition of Prior Learning Policy

Responsible staff member:	Registrar
Date of first approval:	3/7/2025
Name of approval body:	Council of King's Inns
Frequency of review:	Every 3 years, unless it is required sooner
Next review date:	2028

Revision No.	Details of change/s	Date
01		
02		
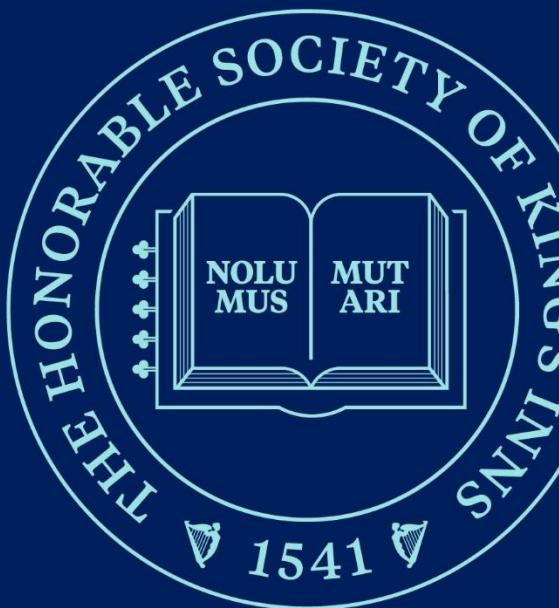
CONTENTS
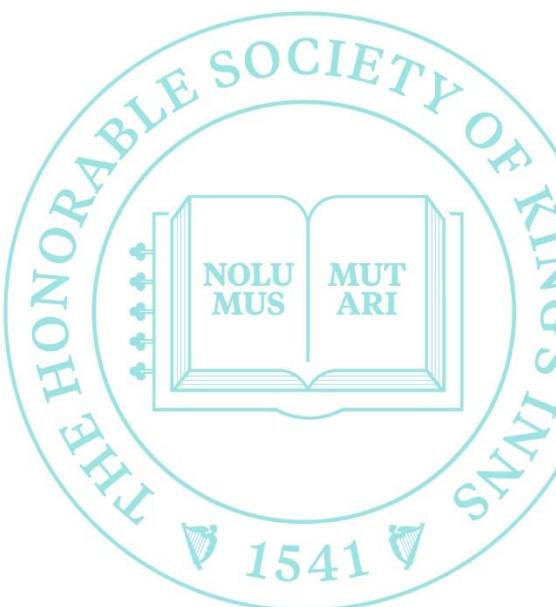
1. Purpose of Policy

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

RPL is an important element of EU policy for widening access to qualifications and supporting lifelong learning. QQI is responsible for establishing policies and criteria for access, transfer and progression (ATP) for providers. Within this context, the current RPL policy framework is set out in the Principles-and-operational-guidelines-for-RPL originally published by the NQAI and in the Access, transfer and progression policy restatement (2015). The purpose of RPL is to expand access to educational courses and qualifications for people previously lacking formal qualifications and to reduce the time and cost of courses for people who already possess some of the knowledge, skills and competencies which a programme seeks to develop in learners.

The benefits for learners are identified by the National RPL in Higher Education Project :
- RPL makes visible the valuable skills that people have acquired through work or other life experiences (for example, critical thinking and interpersonal skills). Valuing and recognising prior learning may significantly improve individuals' self-esteem and well-being.
- RPL enables individuals to access and participate in the higher education system. In so doing, it is a valuable tool in widening participation in higher education.
- RPL may reduce the amount of time and cost required to acquire a qualification or credential and can have a positive impact on student success.
- RPL supports the participation of learners of all ages in higher education, including older adults who may wish to pursue personal development and/or a 'second career'.

King's Inns recognises that knowledge, skills and competencies can be acquired from a range of learning experiences, including formal, non-formal and informal. This is in line with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) goals which aim to recognise all learning achievements by supporting the development of alternative pathways to qualifications (or awards) and by facilitating the recognition of prior learning.

King's Inns has operated a mature entry route to the Diploma in Legal Studies for many years. The mature entry route is a fundamental principle of the Diploma in Legal Studies. This new policy incorporates what formally was the mature entry route.

Graduate applicants may also seek to rely on RPL if applicable.

2. Scope of Policy

This policy applies to applicants to King's Inns programmes. While this policy applies to all programmes limitations to RPL may apply for Professional courses and Continuing Development (CPD) programmes. This policy is concerned solely with applications for RPL from individuals.

3. Definitions

3.1 Recognition of Prior Learning (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. This makes it possible for an individual to build on the learning achieved and to be rewarded for it (e.g. in the form of acknowledgement or accreditation).

3.2 Prior Learning

Prior Learning is learning which has taken place prior to admission to a course, or to a stage of a course, but has not necessarily been assessed, measured or assigned credits.

The learning can be certified or experiential.

For the purpose of this policy document, the generic term RPL will be used and will incorporate the terms Recognition of Prior *Certified* Learning (RPCL) and Recognition of Prior *Experiential* Learning (RPEL).
RPCL and RPEL will be used in this policy document where precise clarification between the two terms is required.

3.3 Recognition of Prior *Certified* Learning (RPCL)

Where an applicant has already been awarded certification for a formal course taken at another institution or training organisation, this prior learning can be recognised and may entitle the applicant to admission to a course, exemptions from some parts of a course or advanced entry within a course.

3.4 Recognition of Prior *Experiential* Learning (RPEL)

This involves recognising learning from experience, i.e. learning which has not previously been academically accredited. In this case, the applicant must prove that the required learning outcomes have been achieved. This proof can then be used to support an application for admission to a course, exemptions from/credit for some parts of a course or advanced entry within the programme. As a general principle, recognition is given for evidence of learning, not for experience *per se.*

3.5 Learning Routes

Prior Learning may have been acquired through formal, non-formal or informal routes. For the purposes of this policy document, these learning routes are defined as follows:

3.5.1   *Formal learning* is course-based learning which takes place in an organised formal way. It is specifically designated as learning, with specific course content, learning objectives, stated duration for the course and learning support. It typically leads to certification. Formal learning is sometimes referred to as certified or accredited learning.

3.5.2   *Non-formal learning* is intentional from the learner's point of view. It takes place through planned, organised learning activities 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 community-based settings.

3.5.3   *Informal learning* is not organised or structured (in terms of objectives, time or learning support). It takes place through life and work experience – and is sometimes referred to as experiential learning. It typically does not lead to certification.

3.6 Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes are clear statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate at the end of a period of learning.

3.6.1   *Module-level* learning outcomes will be specific to the learning that takes place in a module.

3.6.2   *Programme-level* learning outcomes are high-level learning outcomes, expressing the knowledge, skills or attributes a graduate of an entire course should be capable of demonstrating.

3.7 Types of Recognition

3.7.1   *Specific Recognition* is granted where the learning outcomes achieved are deemed equivalent to the learning outcomes of a specific programme module.

3.7.2   *General Recognition* is granted when prior learning is not directly relevant but is deemed equivalent in level and credit weighting to modules in the proposed programme of study.

4. Policy Statement

The following principles will apply to the implementation of RPL within King's Inns:

4.1 The RPL process is fully embedded in the quality assurance procedures of King's Inns and is aligned with the National Framework of Qualifications. The learner is central to the RPL process.

4.2 Participation in the RPL process is voluntary for the applicants concerned.

4.3 Through the recognition of prior learning, King's Inns aims to take account of the inherent academic value of relevant learning, irrespective of mode or place of learning.

4.4 RPL recognises learning which has occurred before admission to a programme or the relevant stage of a programme

4.5 King's Inns will ensure that academic standards comparable to those attained on programmes by traditional mode will be maintained and applied throughout the RPL process.

4.6 The assessment of prior learning is an academic activity that is performed primarily by academic staff.

4.7 RPL will be facilitated by King's Inns, where possible, in the context of the overall structure and requirements for particular programmes of study and will be at the discretion of the Education Committee.

4.8 In seeking recognition under RPL, prior learning must be evidenced in writing or through whatever medium is appropriate to the particular learning outcomes and authenticated [1]at the appropriate level(s).

4.9 Time limits may be applied in assessing/evaluating the currency of prior learning.

4.10   Recognition will normally be given:

- for complete modules only.
- where all of the learning outcomes of a module have been achieved.
- up to a maximum of 50% of the total credits for an academic course.
- for modules/programmes from recognised Irish HE institutions

4.11   Candidates will normally be allowed an exemption for entire modules only, not parts of them.

4.12   *Prior certified learning* may not contribute to the classification of a second award. Under the principle that credit should only be awarded once [2]such prior learning may be recognised by (a) awarding module exemptions, enabling the learner to contribute towards the credit requirements of a programme, (b) offering direct entry to a programme or (c) offering advanced entry to a programme.

4.13   *Recognition for prior experiential (non-certified) learning* may be awarded on the basis of demonstrated learning which shows that a candidate has achieved specified learning outcomes of a named programme or module.

4.14   Whilst every effort will be made to facilitate recognition of prior learning, it may not always be possible to grant such recognition in the case of certain programmes or programme elements, for which an applicant is seeking exemption. Certain programmes of study at King's Inns are constructed according to specific programme requirements where particular programme elements (especially experiential learning elements) cannot be treated in isolation from the rest of the programme of academic study. Processes and

---

[1] The authenticity of documentation submitted for RPL should conform to guidelines for academic integrity. Academic integrity 'assumes that all interactions with the HEI are approached with the value system of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage. This includes all documentation and artefacts submitted to the institution for academic purposes. Responsibility for demonstrating academic integrity lies with the enrolled learner'. QQI (2021), *Academic Integrity Guidelines*, p.10.

[2] Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of a National Approach to Credit in Irish Higher Education and Training, 2006. https://www.qqi.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/principlesandoperguidelinesgreen.pdf

practices for RPL will be clearly stated, documented and accessible to all potential applicants.

4.15   In the RPL process applicants must demonstrate the appropriate academic level of learning as determined by the academic unit involved.

4.16   During assessment for RPL, applicants must demonstrate that they understand the theory as well as the practical learning elements of a module.

4.17   King's Inns will ensure that the RPL process shall be consistent, fair and transparent. It will be conducted within a reasonable timeframe for each applicant.

5. The RPL Process

The RPL process typically includes five stages. These are:

Stage 1 Information	Stage 2 Identification	Stage 3 Documentation	Stage 4 Assessment	Stage 5 Recognition
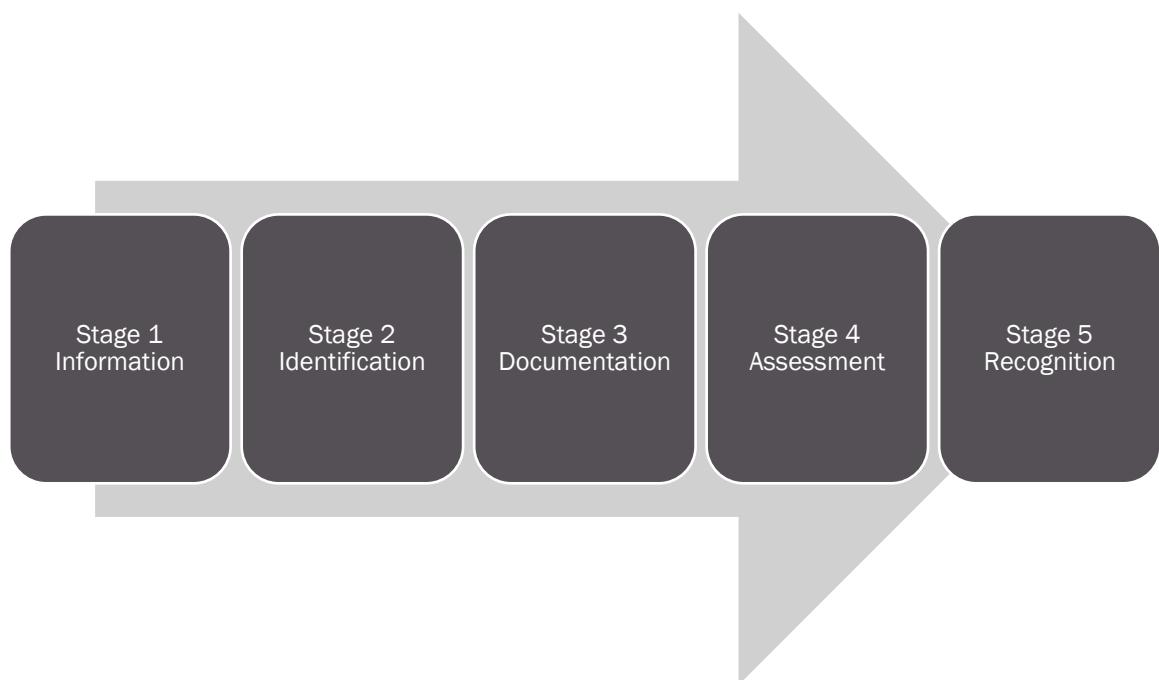
Stage 1. Information
During this stage, the learner will be provided with accessible, user-friendly information about what is possible and how the RPL process works. Information on RPL, the RPL process and who to contact. RPL application forms will be available on the King's Inns website.

Stage 2. Identification
During this stage, the applicant explores their prior learning (e.g. in relation to a programme's entry requirements or the learning outcomes of a particular module/s) with a view to making an application for recognition of their learning.

Stage 3. Documentation
This stage makes visible the individual's learning in the context of their application. For the applicant, this involves a reflective process, the gathering of relevant materials to substantiate their application and the presentation of a learning portfolio for assessment

Responsibility for submitting applications for the recognition of prior learning rests with individual applicants. They will engage with this stage of the RPL process by providing appropriate information to support their application. Applicants should review the RPL application information documentation for details of the steps involved. Where required the

prospective applicant may contact the relevant Coordinator for further clarification on course content or entry standards.

The RPL application process includes an RPL Application Form (Form RPL1), in which the applicant presents the details of their application for RPL and a Learning Portfolio (Form RPL2) which contains the evidence of learning to support their application. These forms are available in the Appendix.

a)   Application for Recognition of Prior Certified Learning

An application for the recognition of Prior Certified Learning will consist of an RPL Application Form and a Learning Portfolio. In a Prior Certified Learning Portfolio, the evidence of prior certified learning will typically be presented by the applicant in the form of official transcripts of results and formal syllabi accompanied by relevant supporting documents. These should be arranged to demonstrate the achievement of the learning outcomes of the relevant module/course standards for which the application is being made.

b)   Application for Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning

An application for the recognition of Prior Experiential Learning will consist of an RPL Application Form and a Learning Portfolio. In a Prior Experiential Learning Portfolio, the applicant will present evidence of learning, arranged to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes of the relevant module/programme standards. Examples of evidence include planned learning and training activities undertaken in the workplace, voluntary sector, or community-based settings and informal learning through life and 'on-the-job' experience.

Stage 4. Assessment

During this step of the RPL process, the application is assessed. This stage must be appropriate to the application and fit for purpose.

a)   Assessment of Prior Certified Learning by King's Inns

The assessment of prior certified learning will normally be carried out by the Coordinator, in consultation with the Dean. Recognition of prior certified learning is subject to evaluation of the following: applicant's academic record; course of study; syllabus, course description, learning outcomes, number of contact hours, forms of assessment; NFQ level of qualification awarded (or equivalent if outside Ireland) and awarding institution. It is the responsibility of the applicant to document how their prior certified learning achieves the learning outcomes of the module/s that are the subject of the RPL application.
p
b)   Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning by King's Inns

Assessment of prior experiential learning will normally be carried out by the Coordinator, in consultation with the Dean - ideally those who are or have been involved in the conventional assessment process for the module/s in question. The use of a range of assessment mechanisms will be facilitated. These will be appropriate to the course entry standards or module content and comparable to other assessment processes used to determine whether learning outcomes have been achieved. Assessment may be based solely on the learning portfolio submitted or additional methods such as written exams, essays, assignments, multiple choice questionnaires, oral presentations etc., which may be used as appropriate. In general, the assessment will be based on an evaluation of the prior learning presented.

c) Criteria for Assessment

The following criteria will be used by assessors to help them determine if the evidence of learning presented is appropriate and sufficient.

Validity	Does the prior learning presented match the learning outcomes of the module/s for which RPL is being sought? Is the prior learning being presented by the applicant at the academic level required by the relevant academic unit?
Sufficiency	Is there enough evidence to demonstrate that the learning outcomes have been achieved? Is the evidence presented appropriate to the level and the award?
Authenticity	Is it clear that the prior learning is that of the applicant? Is it possible to verify that the learning is that of the applicant?
liability	Is the evidence of prior learning presented reliable? Is the evidence what would be expected from a learner with a similar learning profile? Is the evidence appropriately verified?
Currency	Is the prior learning current? Is it up to date with current knowledge and practice?

During the assessment process, the applicant can be requested to provide further information or to take part in a further assessment process such as an interview, a presentation, or a written test.
The Coordinator will make a recommendation to the Dean following the assessment process.

Stage 5. Recognition
Decisions on the recognition of prior learning will be made by the Education Committee following a recommendation from the Dean. A successful application will result in formal recognition leading to one or more of the following outcomes:

− Admission to a programme
− Exemption from specified programme module or modules
− Advanced entry to a programme.

Decisions must be communicated in a timely fashion to the Registrar's Office.

Communications

All prospective applicants and enrolled students will be made aware of RPL opportunities in programme literature and on the King's Inns website. Applicants will be fully informed of the application process, the stages within it and the nature and range of evidence that is considered appropriate to support an application for recognition of prior learning, including the learning outcomes against which prior learning will be assessed. All applicants will be advised, in writing, by King's Inns, of the outcome of the RPL assessment process within a reasonable period of time.

Appeals Process

The RPL applicant has the right to appeal the outcome of the RPL assessment process. Applicants will be informed of the appeals procedure. Appeals will be made to the Registrar. The RPL applicant has the right to appeal the outcome of the RPL assessment process. Applicants will be informed of the appeals procedure. Appeals will be made to the Registrar.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

The Registrar is the owner of this policy and will oversee the implementation of this policy.

6. Monitoring and Review of Policy

The policy owner is responsible for monitoring implementation of the policy, ensuring that all associated documents are updated and current, and that the policy is reviewed as required.

The policy will be reviewed every three years from the date of first approval unless changes are required owing to legal, statutory and/or organisational change.

All policies and policy changes are approved by Council on the recommendation of Standing Committee. Policies relating to the School of Law will be reviewed in the first instance by the Education Committee before being recommended to Standing Committee.