


Policy document on prior experiential learning		
	3AD07	File Location:
		Current Revision: 03
		Approved by: Discussion draft
		Document Owner: Registrar
	3AD07.03	Document Level: 03

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Revision History

Revision	Date	Revision Description DCRT#	Originator
01	31 July 03	Conversion of OP173	Diarmuid O'Callaghan
02	23 February 2007	Revisions as agreed by Admissions SC of Academic Council on 19 February 2007 – inclusion of Appendix 1	AA&SAM
03	15 March 2013	Minor typographical update	QA Officer

1. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to define Institute policy and procedure on accrediting prior experiential learning.

2. Scope

Credit for Prior Experiential Learning is intended for mature students who may or may not have had structured formal education but who have learned from their involvement in employment, community activities, home duties, sport etc. This learning when evaluated both qualitatively and quantitatively might entitle a learner to credit for prior experiential learning.

In general, the persons who might benefit and the learning which they may have gained can be classified into the followings categories:

(a) Credit for learning gained in employment might have been achieved for learning which can be equated to learning outcomes listed for subjects on an approved course.

Note: Prior Experiential Learning is not to be confused with Concurrent Experiential Learning which is learning planned and structured into a course as a way of achieving certain of the learning outcomes for that course. A common form of Concurrent Experiential Learning would consist of a student being placed in employment in industry for a fixed number of weeks.

(b) Learning gained from voluntary/community activities

Individuals may have been carrying out duties in associations, sporting organisations, political organisations or charities which might entitle them to exemptions from the learning outcomes on courses in politics, leisure/recreation, communications, administration etc.

(c) Learning gained from experience working in the home

Individuals, who have had substantial experience of managing a household and rearing children may have gained learning in the area of caring, budgeting, time management, inter-personal skills etc. This might merit exemptions from learning outcomes in courses in business studies, health care, childcare, catering etc.

3. Definitions

Prior Experiential Learning or learning gained prior to enrolment on a course is defined as knowledge and skills acquired through life, work experience and study, not formally attested through formal certification. Academic credit can be awarded

only for achievement of learning outcomes, not for experience per se. The achievement of these learning outcomes is dependent on the learner and the quality and duration of the experience; this can include experience gained as a result of involvement in employment, community activity, home duties, sport and other life/work experience.

4. Policy

Quality of learning

- The criteria to be employed by academic staff in institutions when assessing prior experiential learning are of paramount importance in ensuring that adequacy and consistency of standards are maintained.
- The learning should imply a conceptual as well as a practical grasp of the knowledge or competence required and be applicable outside the environment in which it was acquired. It must be emphasised that experience is not what is being evaluated but learning.
- In order to facilitate the granting of credit for prior learning, subjects should be described in terms of learning outcomes*. If credit is to be given to an applicant for prior experiential learning gained outside the institution environment, the institution concerned must be satisfied that the applicant has already mastered learning outcomes of a subject or module on a particular course. Only those approved courses which have their individual subjects or modules described in terms of learning outcomes will be suitable for participation in this scheme.

* A learning outcome is that which a learner should know and/or be able to do, as a result of his/her involvement in a learning process.

Quantity of learning

- It will be necessary in order to avoid fragmentation, that applicants gain exemption from entire subjects on courses as a result of assessed prior learning. The decision in relation to an applicant's eligibility for exemption from an entire subject on the basis of Prior Experiential Learning, lies with the assessor(s). However, assessors should use the guideline that an application must meet a minimum of half the learning outcomes of a particular subject in order to gain exemption from that subject.

5. Procedure

- Applicants for admission to, and/or exemption from subjects/courses on the grounds of experiential learning should make their application in the first instance to the office of the Registrar of the Institute, in accordance with the administrative and financial procedures of that institution. The application should contain the reasons why the

applicant feels the case merits consideration. Form 4FAD02 should be used for this purpose. Applicants are advised to refer to Appendix 1 of this policy for guidance.

- Institutions should take account of the time needed for the evaluation of prior learning and for guidance for applicants in the applications process, bearing in mind that in the context of the CAO/CAS application system, such applicants are deemed "non-standard".
- All applicants seeking credit for Prior Experiential Learning should be interviewed by staff* in the institution. This process has three main objectives:
 - (i) To ensure that the applicant has selected the most suitable course for his/her needs.
 - (ii) To review the experience gained by the applicant so as to identify potentially creditable learning.
 - (iii) To advise the applicant on the preparation of a portfolio.
- The applicant should then be requested to produce, within an agreed period of time (typically four/five weeks), the portfolio describing the prior experience in the context of potentially creditable learning. Experience cited as undertaken while in employment should, where possible, be certified by the employer concerned.
- The portfolio, when received by the institution, should be scrutinised by the assessor(s). This involves the identification and evaluation of prior learning encompassed in the portfolio. Tests or other assessment instruments appropriate to the applicant's needs may be used as required.
- Having evaluated the learning gained, the assessors must now match this learning with the learning outcomes of the subject(s) from which the applicant may be exempted. No grade or mark should be allocated to the exempted subjects as the applicant's performance in examinations will be determined only on the basis of marks gained in other subjects which are examined in the normal way.
- Appropriate standards must be maintained throughout the process of the assessment of prior learning. It is expected that only those academic staff who have participated in workshops on the assessment of prior experiential learning will be involved in the assessment process within the institution. The workshops will be discipline-related to ensure that those assessing students in engineering, business studies, etc. come from those disciplines.
- In assessing whether learning gained from experience matches learning outcomes for a particular subject, attention should be paid by assessors to the following quality criteria:

- A common complaint about traditional learners is that, although they may have scored highly on examinations which concentrate on the theoretical principles of a subject, they are weak when it comes to the application of these principles.
- On the other hand, the common complaint about experiential learning is that they can 'do' but because they have not really mastered the general principles that underlie a subject they cannot discuss the concepts embodying those principles in an analytical way. For example, an individual working in a mechanical engineering workshop for some years might have high levels of practical skills in operating particular machines. However, it is essential that this individual also has an understanding of the Materials Science and Machine Tools Technology which underlie these processes if credit is to be given for such prior learning.
- Therefore, assessors should ensure that applicants being considered for credit or exemption on the basis of their prior learning have achieved the appropriate balance between applied and theoretical learning that is appropriate to the subject.
- Learning acquired through prior experience must be transferable to contexts other than that of the learning environment within which it was acquired. For example, the subject Accountancy on a particular course might list learning outcomes requiring a student to understand a range of accounting methods using different computing applications. However, an employee in an accounting firm might know how to complete the accounts in that firm only, or when a particular software package is being used. In such a situation this individual would be required to acquire further knowledge and skills before exemption from the subject could be granted.
- When assessing learning gained from prior experience care should be taken to ensure that this learning is at the appropriate academic level. For example, a laboratory technician might have a limited understanding of the theory underlying the techniques being used in the laboratory in which he has been employed but might not have this understanding to the level required in stage 1 or stage 2 of a National Certificate in Food Science.
- The rigorous application of the principles described in this document is essential in achieving this objective.

APPENDIX 1:

Suggested template to aid demonstration of meeting learning outcomes through prior certified or experiential learning

Notes:

- *Part 1 should be repeated for each module for which exemptions are being sought.*
- *Each section of Part 2 should be repeated, as appropriate, to cover all the learning outcomes in the module syllabus*

PART 1:

Details of exemptions sought	
Course Title	
Course Code	
Year of Course	
Module Title	
Module Code	

PART 2:

Learning outcome – as per module syllabus

Certified Learning (list all relevant training undertaken; attach all certificates received)	
Course title	
Date completed	
Duration	
Content	

Experiential Learning	
Give detailed account of relevant work experience, e.g., the duration of such experience, the position held when such experience was gained, how it has assisted you in meeting the listed learning outcome	

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