



COMMONWEALTH of LEARNING

Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

**A Model Policy for
Universities and Higher
Education Institutions in India**



Model Policy on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)



CEMCA

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FOREWORD

In India's expanding educational ecosystem, a fundamental query must be redefined: we need to shift our focus from *"Where did you sit to study?"* to *"What are you actually able to demonstrate?"* Across factory floors, community enterprises, agricultural hubs, and self-directed digital workspaces, millions of skilled individuals acquire advanced, practical competencies. Yet, historically, tertiary institutions have operated as walled gardens, requiring non-traditional learners to bend to rigid, linear academic timelines.

Despite India's enabling policy landscape, anchored by instruments such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the National Credit Framework (NCrF), the National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (NHEQF), UGC guidelines, and the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), the higher education institutions (HEIs) have been slow to embrace Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Many tertiary institutions continue to view RPL with hesitation or treat it merely as a peripheral compliance exercise.

This represents a profound missed opportunity. To achieve India's national target of a 50% Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) by 2035, tertiary institutions cannot rely solely on school-leaving cohorts. RPL is not a dilution of academic rigor; it is a gateway to unlock hidden human capital, foster lifelong learning, and bring uncertified artisans, experienced workers, and returning professionals directly into higher education.

This **Model Policy on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)**, developed by COL-CEMCA, directly addresses institutional hesitation by establishing a transparent, standard-driven, and audit-ready framework. Built on the principle of *"Same academic standards, different learning pathways,"* this model policy demonstrates that recognizing lived expertise and protecting academic integrity are mutually reinforcing goals.

Key features embedded in this framework include:

- **Outcome-Based Equivalence:** Shifting evaluation away from length of service to verified Course and Programme Learning Outcomes (CLOs/PLOs).
- **Inclusive Evidence Metrics:** Replacing overly academic documentation hurdles with practical challenge tests, oral vivas, workplace demonstrations, and community validations.
- **Robust Quality Safeguards:** Integrating credit caps (up to 30%), a prohibition on double-counting, gap-fill bridge learning modules, and multi-tier institutional governance to preserve qualification credibility.
- **Seamless Digital Mobility:** Utilizing APAAR IDs, DigiLocker, and the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) to ensure recognized credits remain portable across institutions nationwide.

Higher education institutions, especially Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and dual-mode universities are uniquely positioned to lead this transformation. By establishing proactive RPL pathways, mapping local industry cluster competencies, and training faculty as certified evaluators, universities can position themselves as dynamic hubs of lifelong learning.

It is time for India's tertiary education sector to seize RPL as a powerful catalyst for equity, institutional modernization, and national growth. By adopting this Model Policy, universities can send a clear message to the nation's workforce: *"What you know counts. Your lived expertise has value. Welcome to higher education."*

Dr. B. Shadrach

Director, Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (COL-CEMCA)

New Delhi, India



INSTITUTIONAL METADATA & APPROVAL RECORD

Name of University/ HEI: [Insert Full University Name Here]

Approved By: Academic Council/ Competent Statutory Authority

Meeting Number: [Insert Meeting Number] | **Agenda Item No.:** [Insert Agenda Item No.]

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Date of Approval: [DD/ MM/ YYYY] | **Effective From:** [DD/ MM/ YYYY]

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(Mandatory review at least once every 3 years)

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SECTION 1: PREAMBLE & RATIONALE

Learning occurs across diverse formal, non-formal, informal, experiential, workplace, traditional, digital, and self-directed settings beyond conventional academic classrooms. A substantial portion of the national workforce acquires advanced technical, vocational, and domain competencies through employment, family occupations, community engagements, micro credentials, and practical experience. However, much of this learning remains uncertified, creating barriers to formal academic progression, credit mobility, and professional growth.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) provides a transparent, rigorous, and standard-driven framework to identify, verify, map, assess, and formally certify prior learning relative to approved university courses, modules, and qualifications. This Policy promotes flexible learning pathways, lifelong learning, credit mobility, employability, and social inclusion.

It aligns with the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**, **UGC Guidelines for Implementation of RPL in Higher Education (2025)**, **National Credit Framework (NCrF)**, **National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (NHEQF)**, **National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF)**, **NCVET RPL Guidelines**, and **Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) regulations**.

Guiding Principle: *Same academic standards, different learning pathways.*

Prior learning shall be recognized only when the learner demonstrates required learning outcomes through verifiable evidence and standardized evaluation. RPL shall not lower, dilute, or compromise the academic quality, rigor, or value of qualifications awarded by the University.





SECTION 2: SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT AND AUTHORITY

1. **Short Title:** This Policy shall be called the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy of [Name of the University].
2. **Commencement:** It shall come into force on the date of approval by the Academic Council or competent statutory authority of the University.
3. **Applicability:** This Policy applies across campus-based, Open and Distance Learning (ODL), online, blended, vocational, and dual-mode programmes approved and notified for RPL by the University.
4. **Regulatory Primacy:** Implementation remains subject to the University's Act, Statutes, Ordinances, Regulations, and directives from statutory bodies (including UGC, NCVET, ABC, and State Governments). In cases of conflict, competent regulatory provisions shall prevail.
5. **Operational Authority:** The University retains authority to issue Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), application formats, rubrics, and operational guidelines.

SECTION 3: DEFINITIONS

- **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL):** The formal process of identifying, verifying, assessing, and recognizing learning gained prior to or outside formal study. Prior Learning: Knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired via formal, non-formal, informal, experiential, workplace, traditional, digital, or self-directed learning pathways.
- **Formal Learning:** Structured learning delivered by accredited schools, colleges, universities, or training institutions.
- **Non-formal Learning:** Organized, structured learning taking place outside formal education, such as professional development workshops, workplace training, or non-degree online courses. Informal Learning: Unstructured learning acquired through daily life, workplace activities, family trades, community engagements, or self-directed study.
- **Experiential Learning:** Competencies gained through direct field exposure, practical work, internships, apprenticeships, or professional activities.
- **Learning Outcomes:** Clear statements defining what a learner knows, understands, and can demonstrate upon completing a learning experience.
- **Competency Mapping:** Alignment of prior learning evidence against approved Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) or Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs).
- **RPL Credit:** Academic credit awarded following formal assessment and administrative approval of prior learning.
- **Portfolio:** An organized body of evidence submitted by a learner to substantiate an RPL claim.
- **Bridge Learning:** Targeted educational components prescribed to address identified outcome gaps before credit is granted.
- **RPL Cell:** The administrative unit coordinating RPL operations, applications, guidance, record maintenance, and credit tracking.

SECTION 4: POLICY PRINCIPLES

1. **Demonstrated Learning:** Demonstrated Learning: Credit is granted based strictly on demonstrated learning outcomes, never on experience, age, job title, or duration of service alone.
2. **Outcome Mapping:** Prior learning must map directly to approved Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) or Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs).
3. **Verification and Validity:** Evidence must be verified for authenticity, currency, and sufficiency prior to credit award.
4. **Assessment Integrity:** Evaluation methods must be valid, reliable, transparent, and fair, maintaining standard qualification benchmarks.
5. **Single-Use Credit:** Prior learning shall not be counted more than once toward academic credit or exemption across qualifications.
6. **Inclusivity & Dignity:** Applicants from non-formal, traditional, rural, and informal sector backgrounds shall be treated with dignity and equitable access.
7. **Accessibility:** Reasonable accommodations shall be provided to Divyangjan / PwD learners per legal frameworks.
8. **Auditability:** All RPL evaluations and administrative decisions shall remain documented, traceable, and open to quality audits.



SECTION 5: SCOPE AND APPLICABILITY

RPL shall apply exclusively to programmes, courses, modules, or components explicitly approved and notified by the University. It applies across certificates, diplomas, undergraduate degrees, postgraduate diplomas, vocational degrees, micro-credentials, and lifelong learning offerings.

RPL Pathway Options:

1. **Admission Eligibility Support:** Validating prior learning to satisfy standard entry requirements (where permitted).
2. **Direct Course Exemption:** Exemption from specific courses based on verified outcome equivalence.
3. **Full Course Credit Award:** Awarding full numeric academic credits for target courses.
4. **Partial Credit with Bridge Learning:** Granting partial credit while prescribing short gap-fill modules.
5. **Block Credit:** Grouped credit awards for modular or skill cluster competencies.
6. **Component Exemption:** Exemption from a component of a course without award of numerical credit.
7. **Advanced Standing / Lateral Entry:** Entry into intermediate stages of a programme based on broad competency recognition, where permitted.
8. **Credit Transfer and Learner Progression:** Use of recognised RPL credit for transfer and progression, as provided in Section 14.
9. **Resource Arrangements**

RPL shall be considered only when the concerned programme, course or module has clearly defined learning outcomes or competency standards.

The University shall issue programme-wise notification specifying courses open for RPL, credit limits, evidence requirements, assessment methods, fees, timelines and exclusions.



SECTION 6: EXCLUSIONS AND NON-APPLICABILITY

Unless explicitly permitted by statutory professional regulators and approved by the Academic Council, RPL credit shall NOT be granted for:

- Mandatory core foundational courses designated as non-exemptible by the University.
- Dissertations, research theses, and capstone terminal projects.
- Mandatory clinical practices, internships, apprenticeships, field work, and practica.
- Laboratory work and practical performance components requiring real-time supervision.
- Safety-critical, high-risk, or professional licensure-linked modules.
- Mandatory portfolio requirements.
- Any component specifically excluded by the University or regulator.
- Claims supported by falsified, unverified, outdated, or insufficient evidence, or evidence unrelated to the claimed learning outcomes.





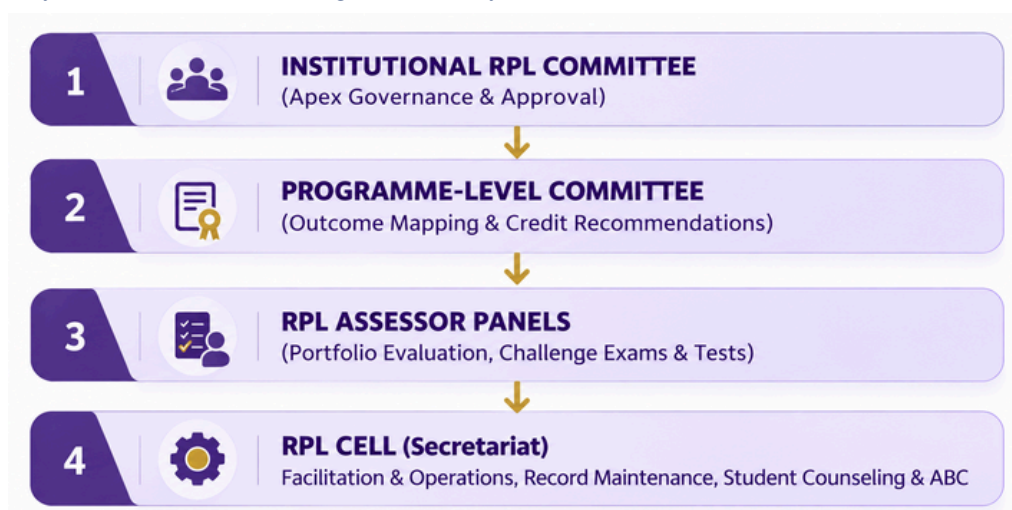
SECTION 7: ELIGIBILITY FOR RPL

1. Any learner meeting baseline entry criteria may apply for RPL in notified programmes. The applicant shall meet the minimum eligibility requirements of the programme, unless a waiver of such requirement is specifically permitted by the competent regulator and University rules.
2. Applicants must submit verifiable evidence demonstrating alignment with target course outcomes.
3. Applicants must consent to document verification, digital verification, employer checks and contact with references, practical tests, and record storage.
4. **Alternative Evidence Formats:** For informal or traditional sector learners lacking conventional documentation, the University accepts self-declarations, sworn affidavits, community validation, work samples, practical skill demonstrations, viva, or other approved evidence.
5. This provision supports working professionals, skilled workers, informal sector workers, self-employed persons, traditional knowledge holders, women returning to education, rural learners and other learners who have acquired learning outside the regular academic route.
6. Eligibility to apply does not guarantee credit award, course exemption or admission.



SECTION 8: GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The University establishes a three-tier governance system to administer RPL:



8.1 Institutional RPL Committee (Apex Body)

Composition: Vice-Chancellor (or nominee) as Chair; Deans/Directors; Registrar; Controller of Examinations; IQAC/CIQA Coordinator; RPL Cell Coordinator; IT/MIS representative; Finance representative; external experts.

Responsibilities: Policy oversight, approval of SOPs, determination of programme RPL readiness, final approval of credit awards, operational reviews, monitoring of quality assurance, recommendation of policy revision, and handling complex claims.

8.2 Programme-Level Committee

Composition: Head of School/Department; Programme Coordinator; Board of Studies nominee; subject faculty; industry experts; RPL Cell representative.

Responsibilities: Identifying courses eligible for RPL, defining and confirming learning outcomes, course outcome mapping, calculating programme credit caps, designing gap-fill bridge modules, reviewing assessor reports, and submitting credit, exemption or rejection recommendations to the Institutional RPL Committee or competent authority.

8.3 RPL Assessor Panels

Composition: Certified faculty assessors, domain experts, external evaluators, and practical skill specialists.

Responsibilities: Reviewing portfolios, conducting challenge exams/practical tests, applying evaluation rubrics, and issuing outcome-based reports.

8.4 RPL Cell (Administrative Coordination Unit)

Facilitates workflows, applicant counseling, assessment scheduling, communication, reporting, transcript maintenance, and Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) data uploads using APAAR IDs. Holds no authority to make academic credit determinations *or to decide academic equivalence*.

8.5 Resources and Institutional Support

The University shall make available the human, financial and technical resources needed to run RPL in each programme it opens for RPL. These shall be identified before the programme is opened and may include:

- a designated RPL Cell Coordinator and support staff;
- a budget for verification, assessment, learner support and digital systems;
- honoraria, workload recognition or other approved incentives for assessors, subject experts and external evaluators; and
- support for learners who cannot afford fees, as provided in Section 20.

The University may meet these costs from its own funds, notified fees, or grants and other support from the

Government, UGC or other agencies, as permitted. Where fee concessions or waivers are granted, the University shall identify how the resulting cost will be met.

Payments to assessors and evaluators shall not depend on the outcome of any assessment.





SECTION 9: APPLICATION AND PROCESSING WORKFLOW

The University shall follow a documented RPL process comprising the following steps:

1. **Awareness & Self-Assessment:** Applicant accesses guidance & counseling and completes a self-assessment checklist.
2. **Submission:** Formal application submitted alongside portfolio evidence and fees.
3. **Screening & Verification:** RPL Cell verifies document completeness and authenticity.
4. **Competency Mapping:** Faculty assessors map evidence against target CLOs/PLOs.
5. **Formal Assessment:** Assessor Panel evaluates applicant via portfolios, challenge exams, practical tests, or interviews.
6. **Recommendation & Approval:** Programme-Level Committee reviews assessor reports and submits recommendations for final approval by the Institutional RPL Committee.
7. **Notification & Recording:** Learner is notified in writing or through an approved digital system; granted credits are logged in academic transcripts and ABC systems.
8. **Appeal:** Where an appeal is filed, it is handled as provided in Section 19.
9. **Record Retention & Audit:** Records are retained and remain open to audit, as provided in Section 18.

The University shall prescribe timelines for each stage through SOPs.

Where a claim is rejected or partly accepted, reasons shall be recorded and communicated to the learner in brief.

SECTION 10: EVIDENCE AND PORTFOLIO STANDARDS

Submitted evidence (academic transcripts, employer records, work samples, project reports, publications, digital badges, video demonstrations, community validations, sworn affidavits) is evaluated against eight benchmark standards:

Benchmark Standard	Evaluation Criteria
1. Relevance	Direct connection to target course learning outcomes.
2. Authenticity	Verifiable proof that the learning belongs to the applicant.
3. Sufficiency	Adequate depth and breadth of evidence to demonstrate competence.
4. Currency	Knowledge and skills reflect current field practices.
5. Validity	Clear match to specified qualification standards.
6. Reliability	Consistent demonstration of competence across contexts.
7. Level	Aligned with required NCrf / NHEQF levels.
8. Alignment	Directly mapped to specified unit/course components.



SECTION 11: COMPETENCY MAPPING AND ASSESSMENT

1. No RPL credit, exemption or advanced standing shall be granted without competency mapping and assessment.
2. Prior learning must be mapped against PLOs, CLOs, NCrF/NHEQF levels, and relevant NSQF/National Occupational Standards.
3. Assessment methods include portfolio reviews, viva voce, challenge examinations, practical skill demonstrations, simulation tasks, project reviews, and written tests.
4. Assessments may be conducted in Indian languages where feasible, without lowering academic standards.
5. Practical tests must be documented via written reports, rubrics, attendance records, practical output, and media recordings (photographs/geo-tagged videos).

SECTION 12: CREDIT AWARD MODELS AND MANDATORY CREDIT CAPS

1. RPL credit awards may take the form of direct course credit, partial credit with bridge requirements, block credit, component exemptions, or advanced standing. Credit shall be awarded only after evidence verification, competency mapping, assessment and approval by the competent authority.

2. **Mandatory Credit Cap:** Total academic credit awarded through RPL shall not exceed 30% of total programme credits.

Exemptions beyond 30% require formal statutory regulatory approval prior to implementation.

Programme Level	Total Programme Credits	Maximum Permissible RPL Credits (30%)
Certificate / Diploma	40 Credits	12 RPL Credits
Bachelor's Degree	120 Credits	36 RPL Credits
Honours Degree	160 Credits	48 RPL Credits

SECTION 13: BRIDGE LEARNING MANDATE

1. Bridge learning is mandated when prior learning covers target outcomes partially, leaving identifiable competency gaps.
2. Measures include tutorials, SWAYAM online modules, micro-credentials, short internal courses, targeted assignments, supervised field tasks, project work, practical workshops, or any other approved learning activity.
3. Final RPL credit or exemption is granted only after successful completion and evaluation of prescribed bridge learning components, and demonstration of the required outcomes.
4. The Programme-Level Committee or Board of Studies shall prepare a Gap-Fill Catalogue for programmes where RPL is offered.
5. The record of bridge learning and reassessment shall be maintained in the learner's RPL file.



SECTION 14: CREDIT TRANSFER, ABC AND TRANSCRIPTS

1. Approved RPL credits shall be uploaded to the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) using APAAR IDs.
2. RPL credits must be explicitly designated on marksheets/transcripts using standard labels:
 - "Credit Awarded via RPL"
 - "Exempted through RPL"
 - "Competency Recognized through RPL"
3. Acceptance of RPL credits for transfer between institutions remains subject to the receiving institution's rules and regulatory frameworks.



SECTION 15: PROHIBITION OF DOUBLE COUNTING

1. The same prior learning shall not be credited or exempted more than once across qualifications or courses.
2. Applicants must sign a formal declaration confirming that submitted evidence has not been used to claim credit in previously awarded degrees or qualifications.
3. The RPL Cell shall maintain central tracking to detect duplicate claims.



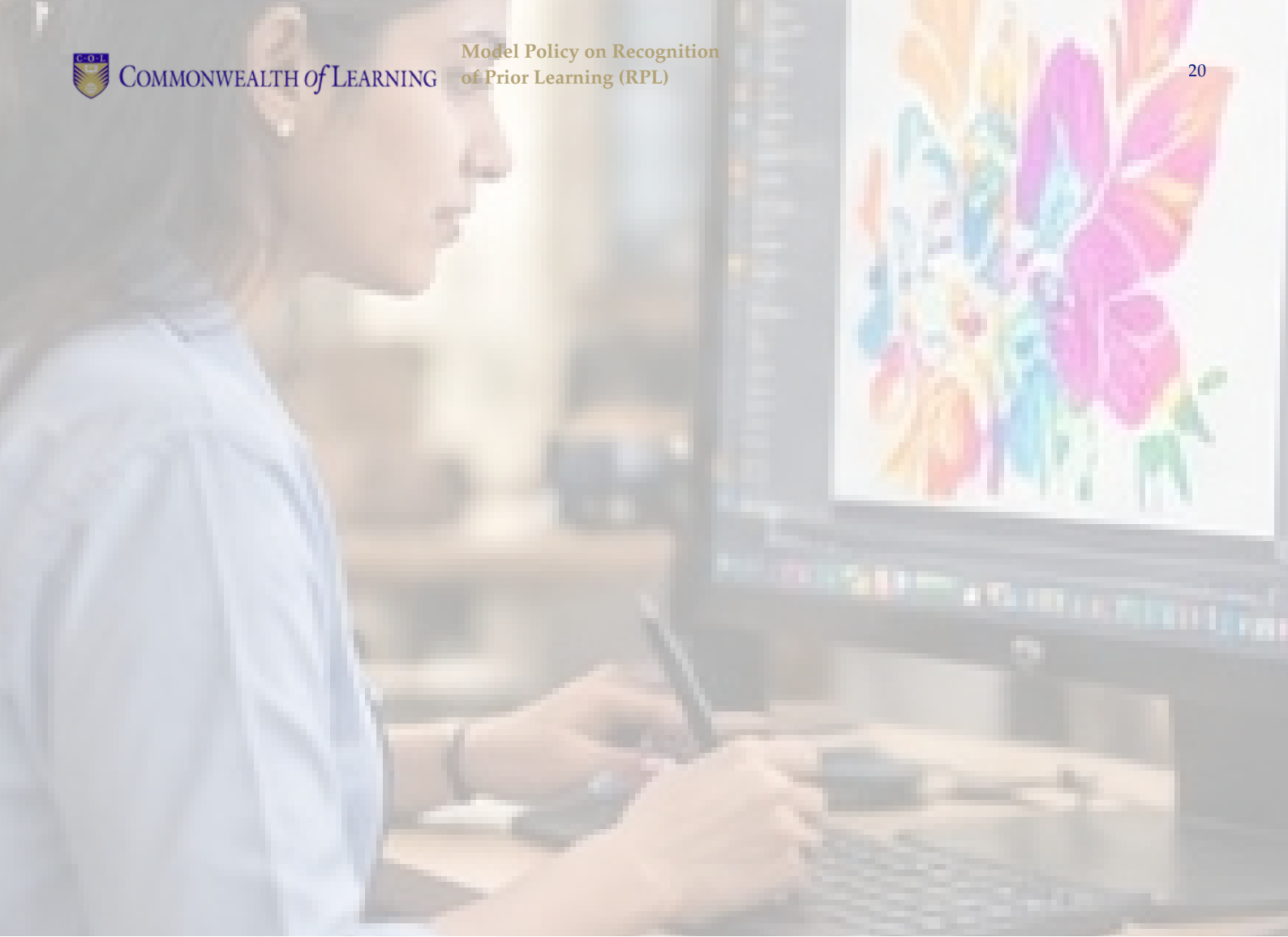
SECTION 16: LEARNER SUPPORT AND ACCESSIBILITY

1. The University provides pre-application guidance, portfolio templates, and counseling. Dedicated outreach is extended to rural applicants, working adults, informal sector workers, and returning women learners.
2. **Divyangjan / PwD Accommodations:** Reasonable accommodations shall be provided, including accessible digital portals, assistive technologies, alternative assessment formats, scribes/readers, interpreter support, and extended assessment time, while maintaining evaluation standards.



SECTION 17: TRADITIONAL, INDIGENOUS AND COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING

1. Learning acquired through traditional, indigenous, or community-based practices shall be recognized where mapped to academic outcomes.
2. On-site assessments may be conducted at workplaces, craft centers, or community locations.
3. Master craftspeople and traditional experts may serve as co-assessors.
4. Intellectual property and community knowledge rights shall be protected.
5. Assessment shall be context-sensitive.



SECTION 18: DIGITAL WORKFLOW AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

1. RPL operations shall be managed through a secure digital workflow with role-based access controls.
2. Quality assurance oversight is maintained by IQAC/ CIQA through assessor training, evaluation rubrics, moderation of assessment samples, regular system audits, and an Annual RPL Operations Report submitted to the Academic Council.



SECTION 19: ETHICS, SAFEGUARDS AND APPEALS

1. Applicants must sign an authenticity declaration, and assessors must declare conflicts of interest. Commercialization or guaranteed credit promises are prohibited.
2. **Appeals Process:** Applicants may appeal RPL decisions on grounds of procedural irregularities, unconsidered evidence, outcome mapping errors, or assessor bias within notified timeframes, using the prescribed form. An independent Appeals Committee (excluding original assessors) shall review claims. Appellate decisions are final within the University.



SECTION 20: FEES, TIMELINES AND COMMUNICATION

The University shall notify the application fee, assessment fee, appeal fee and any other fee approved by the competent authority.

Fee concessions or waivers may be provided as per University rules or government directions.

The University shall prescribe timelines for application, screening, verification, assessment, approval, communication, bridge learning, reassessment and appeal.

The decision on an RPL claim shall be communicated in writing or through the approved digital system.

Where the claim is rejected or partly recognised, reasons shall be recorded and communicated in brief. Refund, resubmission and reapplication rules shall be notified by the University.

SECTION 21: MONITORING, REPORTING AND REVIEW

The RPL Cell shall prepare an annual RPL report in consultation with Programme-Level Committees and concerned offices.

The report shall include:

- number of applications received;
- number of approved cases;
- number of rejected cases;
- credits awarded;
- programmes covered;
- learner categories;
- appeals;
- bridge learning cases;
- ABC uploads;
- assessor training conducted;
- learner feedback;
- employer or community feedback, where available;
- quality audit findings;
- post-certification outcomes, where available;
- recommendations for improvement.

The report shall be reviewed by the Institutional RPL Committee, IQAC / CIQA and Academic Council or competent authority.

This policy shall be reviewed at least once every three years, or earlier if required by regulatory changes, implementation experience or University decision.

SECTION 22: POWER TO ISSUE SOPS AND OPERATIONAL ANNEXURES

The Vice-Chancellor or competent authority holds the power to issue and update operational guidelines, assessment rubrics, and templates without requiring primary policy text amendments, provided such changes do not alter the basic provisions of this Policy. Standard operational templates include:

- **Annexure A:** Application Form & Self-Assessment Checklist
- **Annexure B:** Learner Authenticity Declaration & Evidence Checklists
- **Annexure C:** Portfolio Submission Template, Competency Mapping Frameworks
- **Annexure D:** Assessment Rubrics, Assessor Report Formats & Approval Sheets
- **Annexure E:** Credit Cap Calculation Formats & Bridge Module Catalogues
- **Annexure F:** Appeal Application Forms & Conflict of Interest Declarations

SOPs and annexures shall remain consistent with this Policy and applicable regulatory provisions.





SECTION 23:

INTERPRETATION AND SAVINGS

In matters of interpretation, decisions made by the Vice-Chancellor / Academic Council shall be authoritative. Scenarios not explicitly covered in this Policy shall be governed by regulations from the UGC, NCrF, NHEQF, NCVET, ABC, and statutory bodies, which supersede institutional provisions.

FORMAL INSTITUTIONAL APPROVAL

This Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy has been formally reviewed, approved, and adopted by the competent statutory authority of the institution.

Approved By: Academic Council / Competent Authority

Meeting Number: _____

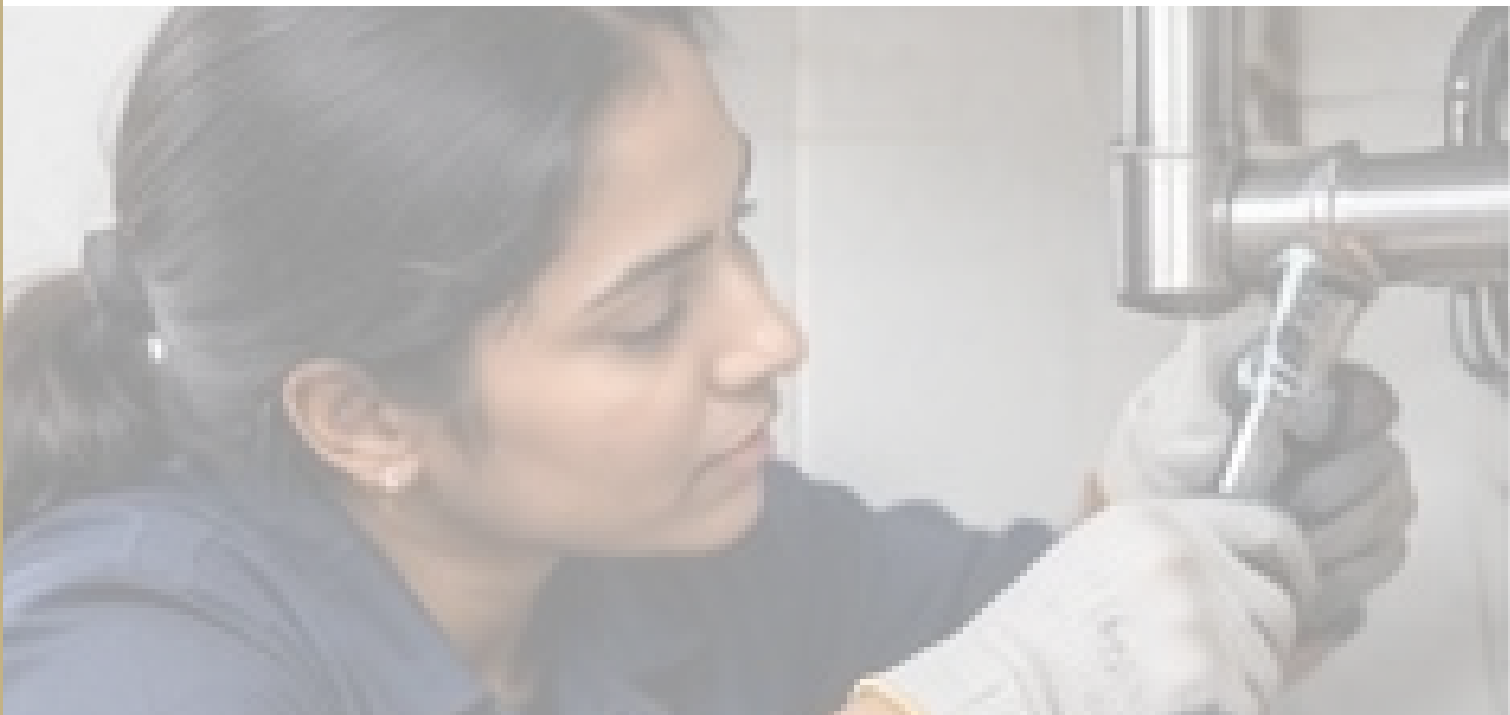
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Resolution Number: _____

Date of Approval: ____ / ____ / ____

Signature of the Registrar / Authorized Competent Official

[Official University Seal]





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