INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES

Part XIX Academic Accreditation Criteria for Credit Transfer and Recognition of Prior Learning

Document No.: IAPUC/IQA/RPL-2026-001

Version: 1.0

Effective Date: Pending Official Release

Formulating Institution: IAPUC Quality Accreditation Committee, International Association of Private Universities and Colleges

Applicable Scope: Private higher education institutions that have obtained or are applying for IQA accreditation and implement credit transfer and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policies

Preface

Mobility in higher education — student mobility across institutions, learning modes and life stages — has become a fundamental feature of the global educational ecosystem. Learners no longer necessarily complete their studies through a linear path of enrollment, on-campus study and graduation. Transferring between institutions, returning to study after interruption, in-service learning, self-directed learning and micro-credential accumulation reflect the profound demand for educational flexibility in a knowledge-based society.

For private universities and colleges, this trend poses challenges to the traditional monopoly degree-awarding model while presenting strategic opportunities to demonstrate institutional flexibility and learner-centered philosophy.

Nevertheless, while credit transfer and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) enhance educational accessibility, they raise legitimate concerns regarding academic standards and degree credibility. In the absence of rigorous evaluation criteria and transparent recognition procedures, credit transfer and RPL may become channels for degree devaluation. The tension between maintaining academic bottom lines and ensuring educational flexibility constitutes the core quality assurance proposition in this field.

These Criteria are formulated by IAPUC to establish a reliable institutional balance between the two priorities. The core philosophy is that degree quality depends not on where or how students acquire knowledge, but on whether their knowledge and competence meet the academic standards represented by the awarded degree. Accordingly, credit transfer and RPL are not administrative transcription of learning experience, but academic assessment of learning outcomes.

Based on the above philosophy, these Criteria set forth four institutional design principles. First, **outcome equivalence**: recognition decisions are based on the substantive equivalence of learning outcomes rather than formal similarity of learning experience. Second, **rigorous assessment**: RPL shall adopt formal, documented evaluation methods and undergo quality scrutiny equivalent to course examinations. Third, **transparency and consistency**: policies and procedures shall be publicly disclosed, and consistent standards shall be applied to equivalent recognition cases. Fourth, **capped limitation**: credits obtained through transfer and recognition shall be subject to reasonable upper limits to ensure that core degree components are completed at the awarding institution, safeguarding degree integrity and traceability.

Complementary and aligned with the *IAPUC-IQA Academic Accreditation Quality Standards Manual*, *IAPUC-IQA Academic Ethics and Code of Conduct* and *Supplementary Standards for Quality Assurance of Distance and Blended Learning*, these Criteria provide private institutions with a quality framework that balances educational flexibility and academic bottom-line adherence for credit transfer and RPL practices.

Chapter I General Provisions

Article 1 Purposes and Basis

These Criteria are formulated for the following purposes:

(1) To establish academic quality bottom lines and good practice standards for credit transfer and RPL practices of accredited institutions;

(2) To clarify the evaluation principles, methods and credit ceilings for credit transfer and RPL, so as to safeguard the academic integrity and credibility of awarded degrees;

(3) To set transparency requirements for recognition policies and build traceable and appealable mechanisms for recognition decisions;

(4) To prevent improper utilization of credit transfer and RPL, and mitigate risks of fast-track degrees or diploma mills at the expense of academic standards;

(5) To provide specialized evaluation criteria for IQA review of institutional credit transfer and RPL practices.

These Criteria are formulated based on:

- The accreditation framework specified in the *IAPUC-IQA Accreditation Manual*, particularly Standard 2 (Curriculum and Teaching) and Standard 4 (Student Learning Outcome Assessment);

- The requirements for learning outcome definition and evaluation methods stipulated in the *IAPUC-IQA Academic Accreditation Quality Standards Manual*;

- The provisions on academic integrity and social responsibility of educational institutions stipulated in the *IAPUC-IQA Academic Ethics and Code of Conduct*;

- Relevant principles of the UNESCO *Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications* (2019);

- ILO *Recommendation on Recognition of Prior Learning* (R208);

- Good practices of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and the Bologna Process regarding credit recognition.

Article 2 Scope of Application

These Criteria apply to the following practices:

(1) Credit Transfer

Formal recognition by accredited institutions of credits or qualifications previously obtained by students through the following educational pathways:

1. Equivalent or similar courses offered by other higher education institutions (domestic and international);

2. Credit transfer between different degree programs within the same institution;

3. Courses or micro-credentials provided by accredited non-institutional online education platforms;

4. Courses offered by corporate universities, military academies or government professional training institutions with defined learning outcomes and assessment records as verified by the institution.

(2) Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Formal recognition by accredited institutions of knowledge and competence acquired by students through informal education and/or work experience, which can be converted into course credits or course exemption qualifications. RPL applicable objects include but are not limited to:

1. Professional competence accumulated from work experience equivalent to the learning outcomes of specific courses;

2. Knowledge and skills acquired through self-directed or informal learning;

3. Competences verified via professional certifications, vocational qualifications or industry association examinations that are equivalent to degree course learning outcomes.

These Criteria do not apply to credit transfer arrangements under dual-degree or joint-degree cooperation agreements between institutions, which shall be governed by the provisions on cooperative programs specified in the *Multi-Campus and Transnational Operation Accreditation Review Guidelines*.

Article 3 Basic Principles

Credit transfer and RPL shall adhere to the following basic principles:

Principle	Core Connotation
Outcome Equivalence	Recognition decisions are primarily based on the substantive equivalence of learning outcomes — verified student knowledge and competence shall be comparably equivalent to the expected learning outcomes of corresponding institutional courses in terms of level, coverage and achievement degree. Learning form, venue and duration shall not be decisive factors for recognition.
Rigorous Assessment	RPL is not a simple endorsement of resumes or working years, but a rigorous academic assessment based on verifiable evidence. All recognition procedures shall be incorporated into the institutional quality assurance system.
Transparency and Consistency	Recognition policies, standards and procedures shall be disclosed to students and the public. Consistent judgment standards shall be applied to equivalent recognition cases of the same type and level under identical conditions.
Proportional	Credits obtained through any form of recognition shall be subject

Capping	to reasonable upper limits to safeguard degree academic integrity, ensuring that the awarding institution bears non-transferable academic responsibility for core degree components.
Traceability and Remedy	All recognition decisions shall be fully documented with complete archival records covering the entire process from application to final decision. Students shall enjoy the right to be informed and the right to appeal against recognition results.

Chapter II Credit Transfer

Article 4 Core Basis for Credit Transfer

(1) All credit transfer decisions shall address the following two core questions:

1. Whether the learning outcomes of previously completed courses are substantively equivalent to the expected learning outcomes of corresponding courses at the institution;

2. Whether the academic standards of previously completed courses are comparable to those of corresponding courses at the institution.

(2) The following factors serve as auxiliary references only and shall not replace the judgment of substantive learning outcome equivalence:

- Reputation or ranking of the previous institution — institutional reputation and ranking shall not substitute for specific review of course content and learning outcomes;

- Similarity of course titles — courses with similar titles but different content shall not be recognized merely based on title resemblance;

- Formal equivalence of teaching hours or credit volume — credit similarity shall be verified in combination with course level and content coverage.

Article 5 Credit Transfer Evaluation Procedures

(1) Institutions shall establish formal credit transfer evaluation procedures, which shall include at minimum:

1. Submission of formal applications by students, including official transcripts, syllabi, learning outcome descriptions, and where applicable, portfolio samples or assessment records of previous courses;

2. Academic evaluation of application materials by discipline-qualified faculty or credit review panels composed of disciplinary teachers, with supplementary materials or disciplinary interviews required when necessary;

3. Issuance of recognition recommendations by evaluation panels, including full recognition, partial recognition (specifying exempted content or supplementary

modules) or non-recognition with justified reasons;

4. Official recording and filing of final recognition decisions by academic affairs or quality management departments.

(2) Institutions shall ensure that academic judgments for credit transfer evaluations are led by faculty with relevant disciplinary backgrounds. Administrative departments are responsible for procedural support and archival filing and shall not replace faculty academic judgment.

(3) Institutions may establish bulk credit transfer channels with accredited institutions of equivalent mission and academic standards with mutual trust to improve transfer student credit conversion efficiency. Bulk transfer mechanisms shall be based on formal institutional evaluation of mutual course learning outcomes and academic standards, rather than institutional reputation or categorization alone.

Article 6 Credit Transfer Filing and Capping

(1) All credit transfer decisions shall be clearly recorded in student academic records, including at minimum: transferred credits, previous course names and awarding institutions, corresponding exempted courses at the home institution, and recognition effective date.

(2) Institutions shall stipulate a maximum proportion of total degree credits obtainable via credit transfer, generally capped at no more than 50% of total degree credits. Institutions proposing higher caps with sufficient academic justification shall elaborate relevant reasons in self-evaluation reports and obtain peer review approval.

(3) Within institutional credit transfer limits, core compulsory course credits for the major shall maintain a minimum completion ratio at the home institution. Institutions are recommended to require at least 50% of major core course credits to be completed on-site, with special cases subject to case-by-case approval by faculty academic committees.

Article 7 Academic Standard Maintenance for Transferred Credits

(1) Grades of transferred credits shall generally meet or exceed the institutional passing standard for equivalent courses. Where external grading systems are not directly comparable, institutions shall establish and publish official conversion criteria.

(2) Transferred credit grades shall generally not be included in institutional Grade Point Average (GPA) calculations to avoid incomparable GPA results caused by cross-institutional grading disparities. Transferred credit summaries may be listed on transcripts for reference.

(3) Institutions shall conduct regular sample reviews of credit transfer decisions, focusing on consistent standard application across evaluators and subsequent academic performance of students with transferred credits for result verification.

(4) Where students demonstrate systematic learning difficulties in follow-up courses

after credit exemption, institutions shall review and adjust relevant recognition standards in a timely manner.

Chapter III Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Article 8 Core RPL Requirements

(1) RPL award shall satisfy the following core requirements:

1. Verified student knowledge and competence are substantively equivalent to the expected learning outcomes of the applied institutional courses;

2. Recognition is based on reliable, verifiable and traceable direct and/or indirect evidence;

3. Recognition decisions undergo formal academic evaluation by discipline-qualified faculty;

4. Complete recognition records are retained for subsequent quality audits.

(2) RPL decisions shall not be made solely based on the following factors:

- Working years — seniority alone cannot prove competence and must be supported by capability evidence;

- Job titles or employer recommendation letters — positional titles and recommendations cannot replace practical competence assessment;

- Unassessed training attendance records — training participation certificates do not equate to verified learning outcome achievement.

(3) RPL shall not be applied for full degree award. RPL is only applicable to partial course credit recognition and exemption.

Article 9 RPL Evaluation Methods

(1) RPL evaluations shall adopt validated assessment methods matching the academic level of targeted courses. Acceptable evaluation methods include but are not limited to:

Direct Evidence Assessment:

- Formal portfolio review: Discipline-qualified faculty or designated RPL panels conduct academic evaluation of applicant-submitted professional works, project outputs, design products and program codes based on standardized grading rubrics;

- Competence demonstration: On-site practical verification via simulation, demonstration and operational assessment;

- Challenge examinations: Comprehensive tests equivalent to regular course final examinations for RPL applicants;

- Structured academic interviews: Disciplinary faculty conduct targeted oral assessments focusing on verified learning outcomes.

Indirect Evidence Assessment:

- Equivalency evaluation of professional qualifications: Verified professional certifications or vocational qualification results recognized after cross-comparison with course learning outcomes;

- Formal verified certification issued by employers or clients with detailed describable skill verification;

- Completed accredited training course records with institutional formal review of training learning outcomes and assessment standards.

(2) Institutions shall specify applicable evaluation methods and judgment criteria for each RPL course application. Selected RPL assessment methods shall maintain rigor comparable to regular course evaluation methods. RPL credits graded only on a pass/fail basis without detailed grading shall be explicitly marked on transcripts to ensure transparent interpretation by employers and external institutions.

(3) RPL evaluators shall possess disciplinary expertise corresponding to the assessed courses. All evaluation reports shall take effect after review and confirmation by academic affairs or quality management departments.

Article 10 RPL Credit Capping

(1) Institutions shall set a maximum credit limit for RPL recognition, generally capped at no more than 25% of total degree credits.

(2) The combined total credits obtained via credit transfer and RPL shall not exceed 50% of total degree credits. For special programs (e.g., specialized degree programs for experienced in-service learners), institutions may apply for higher RPL caps by elaborating caps, justifications and supplementary quality assurance measures in self-evaluation reports, subject to peer review approval prior to implementation.

(3) Advanced core courses and capstone comprehensive courses of a degree shall generally be ineligible for RPL recognition to safeguard the integrity of high-level degree learning experiences.

Article 11 RPL Fee Transparency and Accessibility

(1) Institutional RPL assessment fees shall be publicly disclosed and proportionate to tuition savings from course exemption. RPL fees shall not constitute substantive barriers for eligible applicants.

(2) Institutions shall fully disclose RPL policies, application procedures, evaluation criteria and fee standards through public channels.

(3) Students with partially approved or rejected RPL applications shall receive written justifications. Institutional RPL policies shall include formal procedures for reassessment application and appeal.

Chapter IV Quality Assurance

Article 12 Internal Quality Assurance for Recognition Decisions

(1) Institutions shall incorporate credit transfer and RPL decisions into regular internal quality assurance review cycles, aligned with institutional course review frequencies.

(2) Reviews shall cover the following dimensions:

- Consistent application of evaluation standards and comparable recognition results for equivalent applicant cases;

- Subsequent academic performance of students with recognized credits for retrospective verification of recognition accuracy;

- Faculty feedback and improvement suggestions on evaluation practices.

(3) All review results shall be compiled into formal written reports and submitted to institutional academic quality assurance bodies.

Article 13 Representation in IQA Self-Evaluation and Review

(1) Institutions shall set up a dedicated chapter in IQA self-evaluation reports to elaborate quality assurance practices for credit transfer and RPL, including institutional policies, three-year recognition statistical summaries, evaluation systems and internal review conclusions.

(2) IQA review panels shall incorporate credit transfer and RPL practices into desk review and on-site inspection scopes to verify compliance with these Criteria. Systematic deficiencies in recognition practices (e.g., excessively lenient evaluation standards, incomplete archival records) shall be documented as negative accreditation findings.

Article 14 Archival Retention of Recognition Documents

All credit transfer and RPL decision archives shall be retained in accordance with the*IQA Accreditation Records and Data Retention Management Rules*, with a minimum retention period of 10 years after student graduation or withdrawal.

Chapter V Supplementary Provisions

Article 15 Term Definitions

Term	Definition
Credit Transfer	Formal institutional recognition of credits or qualifications previously obtained at other educational institutions, involving credit transfer and equivalency confirmation from the source

	institution to the receiving institution.
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)	Formal recognition of student knowledge and competence acquired through informal education and/or work experience, which can be converted into corresponding course credits or exemption qualifications.
Informal Learning	Learning activities conducted outside formal educational institutions, generally without official qualification awarding, including but not limited to work-based learning, self-directed study, corporate training and open online courses.
Substantive Equivalence	Comparable alignment with institutional corresponding courses in terms of learning outcome level, coverage and achievement degree, without requiring identical content and form.
Portfolio	A systematic collection of evidence submitted by applicants to verify prior learning outcomes and practical experience.
Challenge Examination	Comprehensive assessments equivalent to regular course final examinations specially designed for RPL applicants.
Credit Ceiling	The maximum proportion of total degree credits obtainable via specific recognition methods.

Article 16 Relationship with Other Normative Documents

Document	**Relationship with These Criteria**
IAPUC-IQA Academic Accreditation Quality Standards Manual	These Criteria provide specialized expansion of the chapters of Curriculum Design and Learning Outcome Assessment in the manual for credit transfer and RPL scenarios.
IAPUC-IQA Academic Ethics and Code of Conduct	The rigorous assessment requirements stipulated herein constitute the specific application of academic integrity principles in credit recognition practices.
Supplementary Standards for Quality Assurance of Distance and Blended Learning	Credit transfer for online courses shall comply with the outcome equivalence principle herein; RPL evaluation design for distance courses shall meet special remote assessment requirements.

IQA Accreditation Records and Data Retention Management Rules	The archival retention period and filing standards for recognition decisions specified in these Criteria are governed by the Rules.

Article 17 Interpretation and Revision

(1) These Criteria shall be interpreted by the IAPUC Quality Accreditation Committee.

(2) IAPUC reserves the right to revise these Criteria timely in accordance with international development and best practices in higher education credit transfer and RPL. Revised versions shall be released upon IAPUC Council approval with a reasonable transition period.

Article 18 Entry into Force and Transitional Provisions

(1) These Criteria shall come into force officially upon approval by the IAPUC Council.

(2) Accredited institutions at the time of implementation shall elaborate their compliance progress with credit transfer and RPL standards in the next annual report and fully implement all provisions in the next self-evaluation or re-accreditation review.

(3) These Criteria do not require retrospective reassessment of credit transfer or RPL decisions made prior to implementation, but shall govern all ongoing institutional credit recognition practices upon entry into force.

Appendix: Self-Evaluation Checklist for Credit Transfer and RPL Practices

Dimension	**Core Self-Evaluation Questions**	**Yes/Partially/No**	**Evidence Index**
Policy Transparency	Are credit transfer and RPL policies fully disclosed to students and the public?		
Evaluation Criteria	Are recognition decisions based on substantive learning outcome equivalence rather than course title similarity or institutional reputation?		
Evaluator Qualification	Are all evaluations led by discipline-qualified faculty?		

Evaluation Methods	Are RPL evaluation methods designed with rigor comparable to regular course assessments?		
Credit Capping	Are formal credit caps stipulated for credit transfer and RPL, not exceeding 50% of total degree credits?		
Independent RPL Capping	Does the independent RPL credit cap comply with criteria requirements or obtain special approval?		
Advanced Courses	Are advanced core courses and capstone courses generally ineligible for RPL recognition?		
Recording Standards	Are recognition decisions marked on transcripts in compliance with these Criteria?		
Quality Review	Are recognition practices included in regular internal quality reviews?		
Post-Recognition Verification	Is subsequent academic performance of recognized students systematically tracked and verified?		
Appeal Mechanism	Do students have formal appeal rights against recognition decisions?		

Document Approval

Role	**Name / Position**	**Date**
Drafting	IAPUC Quality Accreditation Committee Credit Recognition Standards Working Group	May 2026
Review	IAPUC Quality Accreditation Committee	To be confirmed
Approval	IAPUC Council	To be confirmed

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