

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION POLICY



THE MICO UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

1A Marescaux Road, Kingston 5

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| Office of Accountability: | VP, Academics |
| Office of Administrative Responsibility: | The Office of the Registrar |
| Document Number | Mico.Aca.Po.16.001 |
| Effective Date of Policy | September, 2016 |
| Date of any Policy Revision | |
| Policy Prepared by: | |
| Date Policy Created: | |
| Date Accepted by Executive Management Com. : | |
| Authorized by: | President and Chairman of Executive Management Com. |
| | VP Administration |
| Date Approved by the Board of Directors: | |
| Authorized by: | Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of the Board |
| | Chairman of the Sub-Committee |
| Version | 01 |

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A. POLICY

OVERVIEW

The Mico University College recognises that many of its students enter the institution with valuable knowledge and skills gained through a range of personal, professional, vocational and community contexts. The University College endorses the concept that learning takes place not only within formal educational environments but also outside of the class room. The University College therefore accepts applicants who, when assessed, can demonstrate the relevant knowledge and skills and will give credit for these competences when evaluated against a given set of standards, competencies, or learning outcomes.

The University College's Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) Policy therefore seeks to provide guidelines for the evaluation of relevant prior learning and knowledge gained through work or life experiences, to ensure that the assessment of evidence provided by the student, is sufficient to support their claim for competence against a given set of standards or learning outcomes.

1. SCOPE

The policy is applicable to any student with significant relevant work or life experience who seeks to be admitted to the University College or wish to apply for Advance Placement.

2. DEFINITIONS

For purposes of this policy, unless otherwise stated, the following definitions shall apply:

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Recognition of Prior Learning: | Describes the process whereby applicants over the age of 18 years and from different backgrounds are eligible to receive recognition and formal credit for learning acquired in the past, through formal study and through work and other life experience. |
| Prior Experiential Learning: | Denotes learning derived from experience which has not been previously assessed and for which there is no certification, e.g. learning from work experiences, community service etc. |
| Prior Certificated Learning: | Denotes learning which has been previously assessed and/or certificated in a formal learning environment, but has not led to an award or qualification identified in the University College's prospectus i.e. learning arising from academic and professional awards e.g. ACCA (Association of Chartered Certified Accountants). |

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Credit Transfer: The reassignment of credit gained either from another programme or an accredited tertiary institution which may be used to offset the current programme requirements. (The credit transfer may either be internal or external).

Advanced Standing: The authority for a student to commence a programme of study with credit granted for components of the programme already achieved.

Articulation: The arrangement between academic institutions to allow students who satisfy academic criteria in a particular programme at one institution to automatically become entitled on academic grounds to be admitted with advanced standing to a subsequent stage of the programme at the other institution.

3. STANDARDS FOR PLAR

3.1. General Standards

PLAR must –

1. Be accessible and relevant focusing on the unique needs and abilities of the individual.
2. Be related to learning (i.e. knowledge, skills and judgement acquired through study or experience) not solely on experience
3. Be fair and equitable and must be free of any bias or barriers.
4. Be efficient (making the best use of resources for the individual) and effective (not holding any false expectations)
5. Be reliable, i.e. the criteria and standards must be recognized and respected by stakeholders.
6. Have valid assessment tools.
7. Have assessors that are trained to perform this task
8. Have a variety of ways, provided by the institution, to carry out the assessment. Individuals should have the opportunity to choose from the slate of options provided by the institution, how their assessment will be done and should have help in making a determination.
9. Have the recognition awarded through PLAR considered equal to recognition awarded in the traditional manner
10. Have the recognition awarded through PLAR transferable between institutions.
11. Be an option or opportunity, not a mandatory process.
12. Have in place procedures for appeal, if there is dissatisfaction with the PLAR assessment.

3.2. Teaching and Learning Standards and the award of Credits

3.2.1. Academic Standards

1. Credit shall be awarded for learning gained from experience and not solely for the experience

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2. University College credits shall be awarded only for tertiary-level learning
3. Credit shall be awarded for learning, appropriate to the subject that has a balance, between theory and practical applications.
4. The determination of competence levels and of credit awards shall be made by the appropriate persons with the subject matter and academic expertise.
5. Credit shall be appropriate to the academic context in which it is accepted.

3.2.2. Administrative Standards

1. Credit awards and their transcript entries shall be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning
2. Policies and procedures shall be in place, applicable to the assessment of prior learning, including the provision for appeal.
3. Fees charged for assessment shall be based on the service performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.
4. Personnel involved in the assessment of learning shall receive adequate training for the functions performed, and there shall be provisions for their continued professional development.
5. Assessment programmes shall be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served.

4. PRINCIPLES OF RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

The following are key principles for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) –

1. **Learner centred approach:** RPL shall promote positive aspects of the learner’s experience, rather than deficiencies. It shall promote learner reflection and active participation in assessment.
2. **Collaboration:** RPL shall be promoted between learning providers and employers.
3. **Accessibility:** RPL shall address barriers to engagement, such as low levels of literacy or prior engagement in education, and include provision of initial and continuing advice and guidance to learners.
4. **Flexibility:** RPL programmes shall be delivered in a variety of different settings, and at different schedules.
5. **Reliability, transparency and consistency:** This is essential to ensure users (employers, training providers and workers) can be confident of the validity of RPL outcomes.
6. **Clarity of roles for provider and learner:** This shall be ensured through appropriate training for assessors and providers.
7. **Quality:** RPL services shall be underpinned by quality assurance mechanisms.
8. **Emphasis on competency and knowledge:** Assessors and learners shall focus on identifying what has been learnt through an experience, rather than just identifying an experience.

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9. **Parity of esteem:** Formal learning shall not be given greater significance than learning gained through other contexts. This shall follow from a focus on knowledge and competency rather than the learning route followed.

5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

5.1. The Institution

The Institution in administering the PLAR processes shall:

- a) Have in place:
 - A governing policy
 - The necessary structure and facilities to administer the policy
 - The necessary staff to administer the policy
 - Bank of assessment instruments
 - Record-keeping systems
- b) Facilitate the administration/registration of PLAR candidates;
- c) Ensure that the learning outcomes or curriculum outlines for each course or qualification is clearly stated and made public, the copies of which are to be kept in a data bank to supply learners or candidates with the necessary information so that they may compile the application documents;
- d) Provide guidance to candidates. (The Administrator/Advisor/Assessor to liaise and coordinate activities with a view to determining the process for each candidate, as each candidate is unique);
- e) Conduct assessments and assign credit or equivalences as stipulated by The Mico's standards and the UCJ's standards and in tandem with the National Qualifications Framework;
- f) Ensure that the assessors/advisors have the requisite training as an assessor or in the subject matter and PLAR to conduct the assessment. (This is an important quality control measure).
- g) Ensure that the assessment of any candidate is done by no less than two persons, at least one of whom shall be a specialist in the field.

5.2. The Administrator

The PLAR Administrator shall be the Registrar and shall:

- a) Provide guidance to the candidate with respect to the application process, the PLAR requirements and the types of assessments available;
- b) Advise individuals on the process of Prior Learning;
- c) Collaborate in the development of an action plan to assess prior learning and determine time lines.

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5.3. The Advisor

The PLAR Advisor shall be an Advisor in the Faculty/Department and shall:

- a) Assist individuals to identify their specific goals;
- b) Assist individuals to reflect on what they know and can do;
- c) Assist individuals to relate learning from education, work and life experiences to vocational or academic programme learning outcomes;
- d) Collaborate in the development of an action plan to assess prior learning, determine gaps (if any) and recommend a course of action in keeping with the candidates goals. Assessment of Prior Learning should have time lines;
- e) Guide individuals to prepare and present evidence or demonstrate prior learning relevant to the outcomes or agreed-upon criteria;
- f) Link individuals to appropriate resources;
- g) Promote individuals' independence/ownership of their articulation of prior learning;
- h) Support individuals through an action plan (appointments, workshops, courses, videos, teleconferencing) to gather appropriate evidence;
- i) Facilitate challenge exams / portfolio development;
- j) Advocate for the individual or trouble shoot any system problems with the individual;
- k) Liaise with the assessor(s) to ensure a smooth process;
- l) Review the structure of the submission of evidence to ensure that the information is well organized and meets the The Mico's criteria;
- m) Review the Assessment Process;
- n) Provide post-assessment guidance and opportunity to discuss results. Provide feedback.

5.4. The Assessor

The PLAR Assessor shall be a specialist in the field and shall:

- a) Interpret the evidence presented by the candidate to determine the knowledge, skill and abilities of the individual. (Assess the learning and competencies of the individual);
- b) Identify and use standards in designing learning outcomes or performance expectations (Products and methods of assessment shall be inclusive and accessible);
- c) Prepare assessment instruments/methods that seek to ensure that learning outcomes are observable and measurable and that seek to determine the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes;
- d) Collaborate in the development of an assessment plan;
- e) Ensure criteria for assessment are set, are clearly stated, are publicized and hence there is transparency to the process;
- f) Be able to apply assessment criteria and recognize equivalent learning

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- g) Use a variety of assessment tools;
- h) Apply flexible yet rigorous assessment practices;
- i) Review evidence with the individual, evaluate evidence and provide feedback;
- j) Verify authenticity of evidence and be able to validate evidence;
- k) Document relevant observations and answers to questions;
- l) Assess the level of competence for the learning outcome(s) or standard(s) of performance for the occupation or workplace;
- m) Provide and document rationale for decisions;
- n) Identify learning gaps;
- o) Determine credit awards or competence level;
- p) Provide post-assessment guidance;
- q) Identify a process for individuals to appeal an assessment decision.

B. PROCEDURES

1. Introduction

The Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition Process seeks to ensure that the competencies of the applicant are at the standards established by the institution, and where necessary, credited. The applicant must therefore demonstrate prior learning gained through previous education or experiences, which will be assessed, based on specific learning outcomes (using various assessment strategies) and will be awarded credit.

2. Detailed Procedure for PLAR

2.1 The Process

The typical PLAR process involves

- Providing advise to the candidate about the process
- Providing candidates with sufficient information and time to enable them to prepare their evidence to meet the standards required for the PLAR assessment process
- Identifying the evidence required
- Recording the outcome, and
- Reporting to key internal and external stakeholders

| | Action | Responsible Person |
|----|--|---------------------------|
| 1. | Advise the student of the PLAR process | Registrar / HOD |
| 2. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete the Application Form, and pay the requisite fee • Indicate the preference of assessment i.e. by way of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Challenge Examination, or - Submission of a Portfolio, or - Assessment on the job, or - Any other assessment strategy • Ensure that there is evidence of prior learning and that this evidence is submitted to the Registrar together with the application. • Submit all documents to the Office of the Registrar | Applicant |
| 3. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive the documents from the applicant • Organise an interview with the applicant (as necessary) • Organise a review of the information provided. | Registrar |

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| 4. | <u>For the Interview</u> | Registrar |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a Panel to conduct the interview with the student. The Panel should consist of – the Subject Specialist, the Curriculum Specialist, the Registrar, the Dean or any other relevant person • Conduct the interview with the student and determine the competencies – both general and specific to the area of specialization (as necessary) | |
| 5. | Determine the competencies and the learning outcomes specific to the specialization and circulate to other members of the Panel | Subject Specialist. |
| 6. | Set and administer the Challenge Examination | Subject Specialist. |
| 7. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sit Challenge Examination, OR • Submit a portfolio of learning experiences in relation to the programme to be pursued, OR • Have an assessment of On-the-Job Performance | Applicant |
| 8. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the Challenge Examination / Portfolio / On the Job Performance against core criteria. Assessment should be the same standard as other assessments for the subject/course etc. • Ensure that the evidence provided is valid, authentic, current and sufficient and that the process is fair, flexible, reliable and valid | Assessor |
| 9. | Determine the outcome of the assessment | Panel |
| 10. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advise the applicant accordingly. <p>If the applicant is denied credit – the applicant must be advised of the other options i.e. classroom instruction etc.</p> <p>If the applicant is accepted with credit – the applicant must be advised of the requirements of the programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the relevant information is placed on the student file • Advise the Dean of the Faculty | Registrar |
| 11. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up with the applicant who has been accepted | HoD |

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2.2 Challenge Exams

1. Indicate on the Application Form the preference for a Challenge Examination Applicant
2. Ensure that all the requisite fees pertaining to the Challenge Exam is paid Applicant
3.
 - Confirm that all the requisite fees pertaining to the Challenge Exam are paid before the process can be started. Lecturer of Course
 - If fees are duly paid
 - Set Examinations and
 - advise the Examinations Department
 -
4. Make arrangements in terms of question paper and location and ensure that the examination is sat within four (4) weeks from the start of the semester. Examinations Dept

The regular examinations procedures shall apply. However the student must pass the Challenge Examination with a minimum of 60-64% for undergraduates and 70% for graduates to satisfy the Faculty Board that he/she is competent in this area to qualify for the exemption. No letter grade shall be given for the course challenged, but the exemption will reduce the number of credits the student has to gain to be eligible for graduation. (The result of the challenge will be listed as Pass/Fail and will not be used to calculate GPA).

2.3 Portfolio

1. Indicate on the Application Form the preference to submit a Portfolio Applicant
2. Ensure that all the requisite fees pertaining to the submission of the Portfolio are paid Applicant
3. Prepare a portfolio ensuring that the portfolio Applicant
 - Looks professional and organized
 - Gives background information
 - Gives numbers, show results, give facts; not opinions or impressions
 - Shows your mastery of competencies (i.e. your evidence must demonstrate that you can apply knowledge gained from experience.
 - Does not duplicate information
 - In general, quality is better than quantity

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4. Assess portfolio on competencies Assessors

Assessors shall ensure that the portfolio has evidence of knowledge and application; that the evidence is authentic; that the evidence is sufficient

2.4 On the job Performance

1. Indicate on the Application Form the preference to have an assessment of On-the-Job Performance Applicant

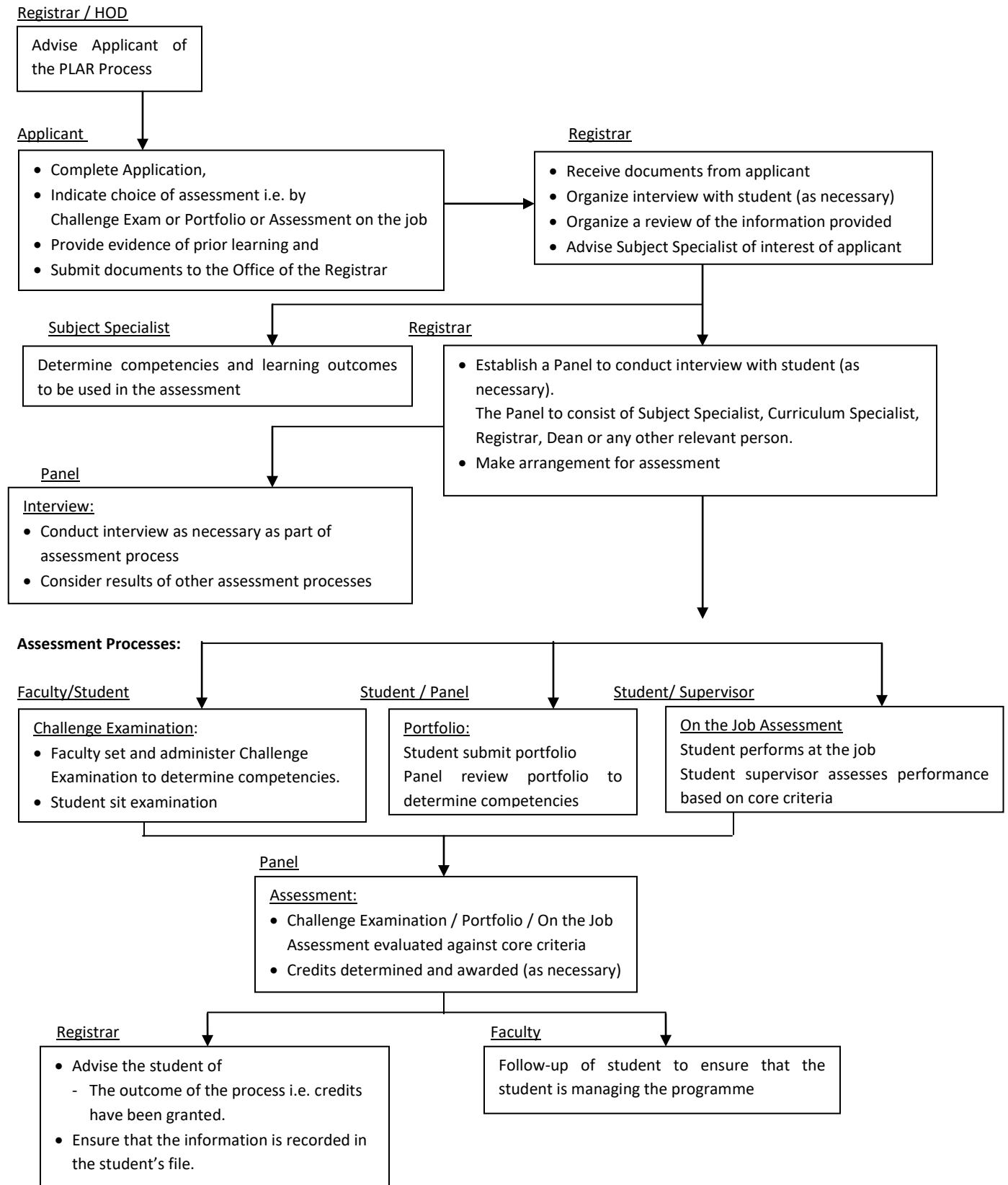
2. Ensure that all the requisite fees pertaining to the assessment of the On-the-Job Performance are paid Applicant

3. Assessed by way of a variety of the following (which is not an exhaustive list) Assessor
 - Job description
 - Performance Appraisal
 - Testimonials
 - Skills tests
 - Simulations
 - Observations

3. References

- a) Manual on Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)
Prepared for the Council of Community Colleges of Jamaica, January 2016

4. Flow diagram - PLAR Process



C. APPENDICES

Appendix I – PLAR Application Form

The Mico University College

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT and RECOGNITION (PLAR) APPLICATION FOR PORTFOLIO and/or CHALLENGE PROCESS ASSESSMENT(S)



This form is to be completed by the student requesting credit recognition for learning that was received previously.

SECTION I – PERSONAL INFORMATION

FULL NAME _____
First Name Middle Name Surname

STREET ADDRESS _____

MAILING ADDRESS _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS _____

CONTACT NOS. _____
Home Work Cell

SECTION II – PRESENT EMPLOYMENT / EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

CURRENT PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT _____
 (If applicable)

Where have you worked in the past? When? What was the nature of your employment?

Limit response to learning from employment experience relevant to the programme of study

| PAST PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT | PERIOD | NATURE OF EMPLOYMENT |
|--------------------------|--------|----------------------|
| | | |
| | | |

SECTION III – ACADEMIC GOALS

WHAT ARE YOUR ACADEMIC GOALS? _____

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACHIEVE THESE GOALS? _____

SECTION IV – ASSESSMENT PREFERENCE

Challenge Examination
 Portfolio
 On the Job Performance

Please note that you will have to make yourself available for an interview

SECTION V – PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF STUDY

PROGRAMME _____ DEPARTMENT _____

I am requesting assessment of prior learning for the following courses

| COURSE NAME | COURSE CODE |
|-------------|-------------|
| | |

Declaration :

I affirm that to the best of my knowledge the information provided in this application and in the supporting documents to this application for credit are authentic, accurate and true.

I understand that incomplete information may result in the application not being processed.

I recognise that it is my responsibility to provide all necessary documentary evidence of my qualifications.

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Signature of student

Date

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT and RECOGNITION (PLAR)

The Mico University College endorses the concept of admission of persons with significant learning as a result of experiences and previous education and accepts the fact that learning also takes place outside of classrooms and formal educational environments.

The applicant's experiential learning will be assessed and the applicant may –

- i) Seek to gain admission
- ii) Seek advanced standing in his/her course of study or in a module, having met the stipulated matriculation requirements.
- iii) Seek equivalency in the content and learning outcomes of one or more courses not exceeding four (4) courses in the award programme and be awarded credit.

Applicants who feel that they have significant college-relevant learning based on life or work experience creditable toward a degree, may apply for and gain admission based on this prior learning through the portfolio process or by way of a Challenge Examination or assessment of On-the-job performance, which seeks to demonstrate competencies in a particular area.

Applicants should complete this application form and provide information and evidence to indicate their learning gained from experience to include, but not limited to the following:

- a) Two letters of reference (preferably from the last places of employment relevant to the programme of study)
- b) Complete record of employment and personal history, highlighting points relevant to the application and programme of study
- c) An indication of the preference in demonstrating prior learning from experience, in relation to the programme to be pursued, and hence whether the preference is to:
 - i) Sit a Challenge Examination
 - ii) Provide a portfolio
 - iii) Have an On-the-Job assessment
- d) Any other official documentation as evidence of learning gained from experience.

All portfolios of learning experiences must be submitted when the applicants are interviewed. The portfolio will then be submitted to the Faculty Board of the relevant faculty for assessment, which will become the property of the institution.

The assessment –

1. Will award credits only for the learning which is equivalent to the standards of attainment required by the programme in which credit is sought.
2. May require the applicant to provide additional demonstration of learning

The applicant will be notified in writing of the outcome of their assessment(s).