

# POLICY FOR RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

January 2024

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## SUMMARY

### What is this document about?

This Policy sets out the principles and processes for recognition of learning through assignment of credit for prior certificated and experiential learning.

### Who is this for?

This Policy will be of most interest to applicants, members of staff involved with admissions, RPL Assessors and Advisors, and staff with course leadership responsibilities. It will also be of interest to the UK Quality Assurance Agency and the wider public.

### How does the University check this is followed?

Academic Registry reviews this Policy every three years and consults sector wide external sources such as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. The Policy is approved by Quality Assurance Committee in line with other documentation regarding quality and standards.

### Who can you contact if you have any queries about this document?

If you are external to the University and you have any questions about this policy please contact Academic Registry at [academicregistry@port.ac.uk](mailto:academicregistry@port.ac.uk).

If you are internal to the University please contact your Faculty AD(A) or Academic Registry at [academicregistry@port.ac.uk](mailto:academicregistry@port.ac.uk).

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning. This may be either a credit transfer from another University, other certificated learning, such as professional development, or experiential learning.
UAC	University Admissions Centre.
Applicant	The person applying for Recognition of Prior Learning.
RPL Advisor	Each course has an RPL Advisor, to provide advice and guidance to applicants about the submission of their claims. The RPL Advisor will also review RPL applications considered under Stage 1 of the approval process (see section <b>2.1</b> below). Details of this RPL Advisor will be held by the UAC and will be provided to applicants.
RPL Assessor	The RPL Assessor makes the final decision as to whether RPL is valid or not at Stage 2 of the approval process (see section <b>6</b> below). In some instances, the RPL Assessor may be a panel rather than a person.
AD(A)	Associate Dean (Academic)

## USEFUL LINKS

- [Application Form for Certificated Learning only](#)
- [Application Form for Certified and Experiential Learning](#)
- [Awards of the University of Portsmouth](#)
- [Recognition of Prior Learning - Guidance for Applicants](#)
- [Tuition Fees](#)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The University is committed to the principle that relevant learning, wherever it occurs, can be recognised in an appropriate way within its academic provision at all levels.
- 1.2. The University may establish agreements with other organisations and/or collaborative partners, through Memoranda of Agreement, to grant RPL to applicants who have obtained certain qualifications or undertaken specified periods of study. These agreements reflect that RPL has already been agreed for these applicants and does not need to be applied for again.
- 1.3. Where a course is a top-up course, the admissions requirement shall be deemed to be equivalent of the relevant amount of RPL.
- 1.4. This policy seeks to recognise other relevant learning through one of three methods:
  - a) Credit transfer;
  - b) Prior certificated learning;
  - c) Prior experiential learning.
- 1.5. Credit transfer refers to the consideration of credits or qualifications that have been awarded by a UK higher education degree awarding body.
- 1.6. Prior certificated learning is the consideration of learning which is at a higher education level but for which the applicant has not previously been awarded credits or a qualification positioned on the [Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#). This includes professional development awards, employment-based awards and credits or qualifications awarded by a non-UK higher education degree awarding body.
- 1.7. Prior experiential learning considers learning that has been gained through experience; this does not entail consideration of the experience itself.
- 1.8. All of the different methods of learning recognised through this policy come under the title of RPL. Applicants are not limited to applying for only one sort of RPL and may apply for as many types as are relevant to their prior learning.
- 1.9. The University operates a Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) and all applications for RPL will be considered against this. Where the University recognises relevant learning, the learning will be allocated an appropriate number of credits, which will be in a multiple of 20 credits for undergraduate programmes and 15-30 credits for postgraduate programmes.
- 1.10. RPL uses the award of credit to recognise prior learning but will not allocate any mark to these modules, nor will they be used in calculating any classification of a University of Portsmouth award. Where a Board of Examiners feels that a student may be disadvantaged due to the inclusion of RPL, they may exercise discretion to make a higher classification of award.
- 1.11. An applicant can use credit transfer to obtain credits towards an exit award where those credits have

already been previously used to obtain an award at an equivalent, higher or lower level of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. However, an applicant may not use credit transfer to repeat the same award to improve their classification.

## 2. APPROVED LIST OF EXISTING RPL

- 2.1. Where a claim for RPL is agreed for an applicant as part of the RPL process, it will be possible to agree this claim for future applicants with the same qualification against a specified course for a set period of time (see 7.1). The details will be held by the UAC and all further applications that match the application for recognition of prior learning, can be agreed by the RPL Advisor without having to follow the full process. Agreement by the RPL Advisor will constitute approval of these claims.
- 2.2. All RPL details held by the UAC for future use should be reviewed every 3 years by the appropriate Academic School or Department to ensure that they are still relevant and required. In the academic year that the agreed RPL is due to expire, UAC will contact the departments to let them know which approved RPL is due to expire. The department can decide, through the programme monitoring and review procedures, to extend the agreed RPL for another three years, or to remove it from the approved list. The department will then notify UAC with their decision as to whether or not it is to be agreed for a further three years. Substantive changes to a course, which require re-approval of the course, will require a review of any agreed RPL at the same time.

## 3. LIMITS ON RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

- 3.1. The total of specific credit allowed for RPL may not exceed two thirds of the credit value of the course. Approved regulations for a named award may, exceptionally, specify higher or lower limits. Any such exceptions are subject to the normal exemption procedures.

## 4. APPLICATION FOR RPL

- 4.1. Applications for RPL should in the first instance be directed to the UAC. The UAC will then send the applicant the relevant RPL claim form and guidance notes on receipt of their application.
- 4.2. If an applicant wishes to use RPL to start as a direct entrant on to a stage of the course other than the first, they must apply for RPL before the first day of teaching in the academic year in which they wish to make their claim. Applicants cannot apply for RPL for an entire stage once the academic year has begun.
- 4.3. If an applicant wishes to use RPL to gain credit for some but not all modules on a stage of the course, they must apply for RPL within twenty working days of the first day of teaching in the academic year in which they wish to make their claim. RPL cannot be applied for after twenty working days from the first day of teaching.
- 4.4. The UAC will undertake an initial check to ensure that the RPL form has been completed correctly. If the RPL form has been completed incorrectly, the UAC will contact the applicant to advise on the correct completion of the form. The complete and correct RPL form will be sent to the RPL Advisor. The UAC will indicate to the RPL Advisor the signatures that will be required, which will normally be

both the RPL Advisor and RPL Assessor. If the RPL falls under the categories laid out in 2.1 above, only the signature of the RPL Advisor will be required.

- 4.5. When considering RPL, the evidence must be linked to the learning outcomes expected, be at an appropriate level and of an appropriate volume. The University will evaluate:
- a) the relevance of the evidence presented – whether there is an appropriate match between the evidence presented and the learning claimed; and
  - b) the sufficiency of the evidence presented – whether there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate the achievement of the learning claimed; and
  - c) the authenticity of the evidence presented – whether the evidence relates to the applicant's own efforts and achievements; and
  - d) the currency of the evidence presented – whether the evidence relates to current learning.
- 4.6. The claim form provides a formal record of the decision made and will be used in the student's department to:
- a) Update the student's record on SITS;
  - b) Form part of the relevant range of evidence (e.g. portfolio, transcript) which is retained for a sufficient time to allow scrutiny by External Examiner(s);
  - c) Offer evidence of good practice on a sample basis to AD(A)s, external auditors and/or assessors.
- 4.7. Applicants with credits or qualifications that have been awarded by a UK higher education degree awarding body, which are directly related to the course that they are applying to study and have been awarded within the last five years, should provide their transcript and any certificate together with an outline of the syllabus to the UAC.
- 4.8. Applicants with other certificated learning gained within the last five years, which is directly related to the course that they are applying to study and has been awarded within the last five years, should provide their certificate and an outline of the syllabus to the UAC.
- 4.9. Applicants who wish to apply for RPL under **4.7** or **4.8** above should complete the RPL form for certificated learning available here: [Application Form for Certificated Learning only](#)
- 4.10. Applicants who wish to submit evidence under **4.7** and **4.8** that is older than five years should provide appropriate additional evidence to demonstrate the continued currency of the learning.
- 4.11. Applicants who wish to claim for recognition of prior experiential learning must submit a portfolio of evidence, or equivalent, to the UAC. Applicants should contact the course RPL Advisor in order to discuss the format of the portfolio and the evidence to be considered. This may include an essay or other appropriate assessment tool. Applicants who wish to apply either for experiential RPL only or for experiential RPL together with certificated learning should use the application form found here:



### [Application Form for Certified and Experiential Learning](#)

- 4.12. For certain courses, a fee may be charged for RPL. Details of any fee will be notified to the applicant by the course RPL Advisor following submission of the claim form.

## 5. STAGE 1: ASSESSMENT OF RPL APPLICATION

**Applications that are either credit transfers from a UK higher education degree awarding body or held on a list by the UAC as an approved RPL arrangement for future applicants will only need to be considered at Stage 1. The signature of the RPL Advisor is sufficient for the RPL claim to be agreed in these instances.**

- 5.1. RPL Advisor(s) will be appointed by the Head of Department. The RPL Advisor may not be the same person as the RPL Assessor if that would result in only one person approving the application.
- 5.2. The course RPL Advisor will carry out an initial assessment of the claim within 5 working days of receipt of the complete and accurate claim.
- 5.3. If the RPL Advisor is not satisfied that there is sufficient evidence, they can either:
- a) Request more evidence from the applicant; or
  - b) Reject the claim.
- 5.4. If the application consists of credit transfers from a UK higher education degree awarding body or is on the UAC approved list of RPL arrangements, only the decision of the RPL Advisor is necessary for each claim. In such cases, if the decision is that the RPL is valid, the process following approval is detailed in **7** below.
- 5.5. If the application does not fall under the criteria in **5.4** and the RPL Advisor is satisfied that there is sufficient evidence, the RPL Advisor will e-mail the form to the UAC, noting their approval, and then e-mail the form to the RPL Assessor to undertake Stage 2, as detailed in section **6** below.
- 5.6. Following receipt of the decision in **5.5**, the UAC will write to the applicant to make a conditional offer of a place, subject to the final decision of the RPL Assessor.
- 5.7. If the decision of the RPL Advisor is to reject the claim, the process to be followed is detailed in section **8** below.

## 6. STAGE 2: APPROVAL OF RPL APPLICATION

- 6.1. RPL Assessor(s) will be appointed by the Head of Department. The RPL Assessor may not be the same person as the RPL Advisor if that would result in only one person approving the application.
- 6.2. The RPL Assessor will decide within 5 working days of receipt of the complete and accurate claim by the UAC if the claim is certified learning only. For claims involving other forms of RPL, the RPL Assessor will make the decision within 10 working days of receipt of the correct completed claim by the UAC.

- 6.3. Where there are substantial numbers of complex claims and/or professional body issues, Heads of Department, in consultation with the AD(A), can arrange internal departmental meetings to consider and/or review RPL applications. The Chair of the meeting would act in the role of the RPL Assessor.
- 6.4. If the RPL Assessor is not satisfied that there is sufficient evidence, they can either:
- a) Request more evidence from the applicant; or
  - b) Reject the claim.
- 6.5. The RPL Assessor will decide whether:
- the claim for RPL is valid;
  - the evidence has been provided; and
  - the volume of credit that will be assigned to the applicant is appropriate.
- 6.6. If the decision of the RPL Assessor is that the claim for RPL is valid, the process following approval is detailed in section 7 below.
- 6.7. If the decision of the RPL Assessor is to reject the claim, the process to be followed is detailed in section 8 below.

## 7. VALID APPLICATIONS

- 7.1. If the decision is that the claim for RPL is valid, the RPL Advisor or Assessor will:
- complete the RPL form with the volume of credit that will be assigned to the applicant;
  - e-mail the completed RPL form to the UAC and the relevant academic Department Manager;
  - if the RPL Assessor wishes the RPL details to be held on the approved list by the UAC for future use, they should include this in their e-mail with full details of the arrangement to be included on the list.
- 7.2. The above will constitute approval of the RPL claim.
- 7.3. The UAC will then send an appropriate offer to the applicant. This offer may be either unconditional, for qualifications and experience already obtained, or conditional, where the applicant has not yet completed the qualification for which the RPL has been claimed.
- 7.4. Each Faculty Student Recruitment Centre has access to a report that shows the progress of all RPL applications to update their records.
- 7.5. Once the applicant has registered on the course, the Department Manager shall add the appropriate volume of credits to the student record.

- 7.6. Where a fee is charged for RPL, this will be added to the fee charged in the applicant's first year of registration.

## 8. REJECTED APPLICATIONS

- 8.1. If the decision is that the RPL application is rejected, the RPL Advisor or Assessor will:
- a) complete the RPL form with the reason for the rejection;
  - b) e-mail the completed RPL form to the UAC.
- 8.2. The UAC will inform the applicant of the rejection, the reasons for it and their right to appeal.
- 8.3. Each Faculty Student Recruitment Centre have access to a report that shows the progress of all RPL applications to update their records.

## 9. BRIDGING MODULES

- 9.1. Where an applicant is eligible for entry with RPL that covers an entire stage of a course, there may be occasions where, to meet professional body requirements, they need to take an additional module from an earlier stage of the course. Where the timetable allows, these applicants may be allowed to take a maximum of one additional 20 credit module from an earlier stage of the course in addition to the stage they have just entered. This module will be marked as "Interest Only" and will not count towards the credit requirements or any classification.

## 10. APPEALS AGAINST RPL DECISIONS

- 10.1. The only grounds on which an appeal will be considered are that:
- a) there has been a material and significant administrative error in the information received and considered; or
  - b) the decision made was perverse by reference to the evidence supplied by the applicant.
- 10.2. Applicants may not question the academic judgement of the RPL Advisor or RPL Assessor, and any requests based on such grounds alone will be dismissed.
- 10.3. Applicants who wish to appeal against the decision to reject their RPL claim can appeal in writing to the AD(A). The AD(A) shall consider the appeal together with the application for RPL originally submitted, taking advice as appropriate. The AD(A) can uphold or change the decision to reject the RPL claim. The applicant shall be informed of the AD(A)'s decision in writing together with the reasons for the decision within 10 working days of the submission of their appeal.

## 11. MONITORING AND REVIEW

- 11.1. Accurate records of RPL applications and processes must be available for scrutiny at any time by the AD(A) and by Award External Examiners at the next Board of Examiners.

- 11.2. The annual monitoring and periodic review process provides an opportunity for course/subject leaders and collaborative contacts and partners (where relevant) to comment upon RPL entry and practice and if necessary to respond to External Examiner comments.
- 11.3. The Head of Department's annual report will provide a higher-level strategic overview depending upon the relevance of RPL to the departmental provision.
- 11.4. The Faculty Recruitment Centre will provide statistical information for the AD(A) on a regular basis. If the AD(A) identifies any significant concerns between or within Departments, these should be discussed as part of the annual monitoring and periodic review process with the Head of Department. The AD(A) can request a sample of completed RPL applications to undertake audit activities at any stage. Any issues remaining unresolved or identified for broader discussion should be referred to the Academic Standards, Quality and Partnerships section.