

Quality System

Policy Number

POL-RPL-01

Policy Title

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy

| Written by: | Equality Impact Assessment: | Date of Policy: | Date of next review: |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
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Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy

1.0 Definition

Bishop Auckland College/South West Durham Training / The Open University (thereafter to be termed 'the Organisation').

RPL is process for recognising prior experiential learning (RPEL) or prior certificated learning (RPCL) for academic purposes. This recognition may give the learning a credit value in a credit-based structure and allow it to be counted towards the completion of a course of study and the award(s) or qualifications associated with that course of study.

The term 'RPL' is used in this policy to encapsulate the activity formally taken by the Organisation to establish that some relevant, substantial and significant element of learning has taken place. Such learning may have been recognised previously by an education provider (prior certificated learning), or it may have been achieved by reflecting upon experiences outside the formal education and training systems, (prior experiential learning). Broadly there are two RPL pathways through which credit can be awarded.

Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning (RPCL) or Credit Transfer

This is the identification, assessment and formal acknowledgement of learning and achievement which has previously been assessed and certificated prior to the entry to a course of study.

It is a process through which previously assessed and certificated learning is considered and, as appropriate, recognised for academic purposes. It can enable a learner to transfer credit gained within one programme of study to another programme of study at the same time or a different institution. Credit can be used from a previously uncompleted or complete award. Credit can be used, where appropriate, as a foundation on which to build towards an award at a higher level or stage.

Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)

This is the identification, assessment and formal acknowledgement of learning and achievement outside of formal education or training systems which may include work experience, voluntary activity or other occupational learning which is not usually certificated but is considered and recognised for academic purposes:

- As the basis for admission to a course at the named point of entry
- For exemption against specific modules within the course
- For advanced standing, i.e. being granted entry to a later stage of the course rather than the entry point on the basis that the learning outcomes of earlier stages and, by definition, relevant module outcomes, have been achieved.

Learning may take place in a variety of contexts including:

- Higher Education courses
- Training courses in formal (e.g. further education colleges), informal settings and Continuous Professional Development (CPD)
- Web-based learning
- More generally, through a variety of life experiences

Direct Entry and Entry with Advanced Standing

- Direct entry from another institution or following completion of a Foundation Degree or an HNC/HND.

- Students may be admitted to a degree programme in one of the later stages, having already completed the equivalent of the earlier stage(s) on a different programme. They will be recorded as “exempt” from the earlier stage(s), and this exemption will be reported on each issue of the student’s Statement of Achievement, thereby signalling that the credit requirements for the stage(S) have been completed.

Entry with Advanced Standing

- If you have previously studied at a higher education level before you may be able to transfer credits to a related course at Bishop Auckland College and reduce the period of study time necessary to achieve your degree.
- As a College we recognise that learning may take place in a wide variety of contexts including formal taught study, self-directed study and professional or life experience. Under the Recognition of Prior (RPL) Policy, individuals are given the opportunity to transfer credits achieved elsewhere to study at Bishop Auckland College.

2.0 Scope

This policy applies to qualifications on the Qualifications Credit Framework (QCF), National Qualifications Framework (NQF), Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) and other national frameworks, self-regulated qualifications and the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). However, where learning is evidenced only through a national examination, the student is required to sit the examination, e.g. General Qualifications such as GCSE’s GCE are not within the scope of this policy.

All degree programmes, are categorised by levels on what is known as the FHEQ in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Programmes are made up of a specific amount of credit.

As this policy can involve processing of personal data, data protection regulations will be adhered to. Please refer to the General Data Protection Regulation Policy (ref: POL-DP-01) for further information.

3.0 Introduction

3.1 Learning obtained through life experiences or alternative means of educational provision such as work related, web-based or with different types of providers is included in this Policy. The Policy covers the process of applying for admission and advanced standing using RPL as well exemption from individual modules. Outcomes from the RPL process could be:

- **Admission with RPL**
A decision to admit to the normal entry point of a course. Where an applicant has certificated learning that is at a lower level than the requirements for the course of study, a judgement will be made as to the relevance of that learning in terms of whether it meets or contributes to meeting the entry requirements of the course.
- **Advanced Standing**
Admission to a programme at a stage other than the initial stage, on the basis that the student admitted is exempt from part of the programme, owing to equivalent prior learning that can be certified or experiential.
- **Credit Transfer**
Where an individual has completed, within the last 5 years, the exact same module as currently exists in the course, this will be dealt with as a credit transfer. This will transfer credits to the student’s new course. If an individual has completed a previous stage of a course, with the exact same modules, and is returning at a later point to complete the next stage of a course this will be dealt with as Advanced Standing (see above).

- **Exemption with RPL**

A decision to exempt the applicant from one or more individual modules within the course of study, on the basis that the applicant has demonstrated achievement of the learning outcomes of the learning outcomes from the module. If a student can demonstrate that prior certificated learning meets the learning outcomes of one or more of the prospective programme modules, they can apply for and get a unit/module exemption – which means they do not have to undertake that particular module. If their prior learning can be shown to match the outcomes required to complete the modules or units for a whole level, then this would allow them to enrol onto the next level – giving the student a stage exemption.

Exemption with RPEL

A decision to exempt the applicant from one or more individual modules within the course of study, based on prior certificated or experiential learning. (Evidence of this must be provided upon application.)

- 3.2 The Organisation is committed to the provision of vocationally relevant education on a flexible basis so as to maximise opportunities for access and progression and to encourage participants to recognise the value of, and engage in, opportunities for Continuing Professional Development.
- 3.3 The Organisation seeks to recognise prior learning, where possible, by formally recognising varied learning experiences of potential students and by awarding credit for these courses. Applicants are encouraged to identify the learning already achieved through training, work and previous educational experience. This learning is assessed against the learning outcomes of the modules claimed and credit is awarded in accordance with the Organisation's credit limit framework for RPL (please see Appendix A for maximum credit allowances).
- 3.4 Decisions to grant credit transfer and RPL under this policy are academic decisions, based on individual students' applications and academic judgement about whether or not the prior learning maps appropriately onto stated learning outcomes for units/modules at the Organisation.
- 3.5 For both credit transfer and RPL, the minimum level of assessment is a unit/module. Students cannot apply for credit or exemption from part of a unit/module.
- 3.6 **General Credit:** a decision to award credit on the basis of both certificated and non-certificated learning. This is the credit attached to any Higher Education (HE) course or to other credit rated qualifications. The rating represents the academic level of the course and the average amount of time, in notional learning hours, required to complete it. When a student's prior learning is assessed, it may also be assigned general credits (frequently a combination of the assessment of certificated and experiential learning). This general credit rating gives an indication of the academic level an individual has attained, but does not relate this to an intended course of study. Thus, if the admission requirement to a specific course is a first degree or equivalent, irrespective of discipline, a RPL student could satisfy this with the requisite number of general credits.
- 3.7 **Specific Credit:** a decision to award credits on the basis of exemption or advanced standing. When credit is claimed against a particular course of study by way of exemption or advanced standing, then "general credit" must be translated into "specific credit".
- As a measure of the amount of credit that can be allocated towards a particular course
 - In recognition of there being appropriate evidence of prior achievement available
 - To confirm that the learning outcomes associated with parts of the course of study have already been achieved
 - That the student can be exempted from those credits

Specific credit can only be established against the requirements of a named, specific course. It is relevant to exemption and advanced standing within a course and to admission decisions

at the start of a course where there is a requirement of appropriate discipline based prior learning.

4.0 Equivalent Units

- 4.1 Equivalent units are different modules/units which, when compared, are judged to be equal to or greater than the content of another. An equivalent unit needs to be of the same credit value or higher and the same level or higher.
- 4.2 Equivalent units will look different but the content will be deemed to be identical or beyond and above the content required.

If a student has achieved a QCF / NQF / RQF module/unit (either singly or as part of a wider qualification) and this module/unit is judged to be equal to or greater than the content of a module/unit in a qualification they want to progress, the module/unit that they want to progress can be claimed on the basis of having an equivalent module/unit.

- 4.3 Use of an equivalent module/unit will not attract additional credit, as the skills knowledge and/or competences described in the module/unit will have already have been recognised in the credit system.

5.0 Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) & Credit Transfer

- 5.1 CAT is the system by which student can accumulate and transfer credits over a period of time, in differing locations and contexts in order to gain qualifications.
- 5.2 Credit transfer is the process of using credit(s) awarded in the context of one qualification or awarded by a different awarding organisation towards the achievement requirements of another qualification.
- 5.3 CAT is therefore the term used to describe the system which supports credit transfer. Credit transfer gives recognition to the fact that some units/modules are the same, irrespective of the fact that they appear in different qualifications. This recognition promotes progression within and between industries and avoids unnecessary duplication of learning.
- 5.4 Credit transfer is relevant where a unit/module in a qualification is the same as a unit/module in another qualification.
- 5.5 A practical example of credit transfer would be a student who achieves an award which is comprised of units 'A, B & C', transferring their credit to progress towards a certificate comprised of 'A, B, C, D & E'. In this case the units in the award have been nested in the certificate enabling the recognition of the previously achieved units.
- 5.6 If on the other hand a student registered for the certificate containing units 'A, B, C, D & E' without having done the award, but then withdrew from their programme of learning after completing only 'A, B & C', they could transfer their credits and consequently obtain the award.
- 5.7 Credit Allowances:
 - 5.7.1 Minimum credit allowance
The minimum number of credits that can be considered for exemption through this process is the smallest sized module within the course on which the student intends to study. This will be specified clearly when an applicant applies for RPL assessment.
 - 5.7.2 Maximum credit allowance

Claim limits have been set for the number of credits from prior learning that can be allowed against each qualification at the Organisation. The maximum amount of credit that can be claimed towards each award is set out in the table in Appendix A.

- 5.7.3 Credit already used for RPL purposes
If an applicant has attained credit for RPCL or RPEL for a previous award, the same evidence will not normally be accepted for application to a subsequent award.
- 5.7.4 Course of study exempt from RPL applications
Where a course has been designed to create a coherent learning experience for participants such that the operation of RPL will not be appropriate.

6.0 Principles of Assessing RPL

- 6.1 Any decision on allowing RPL must be considered in accordance with the relevant course regulations and requirements.
- **Valid:** does the evidence genuinely demonstrate that the demands of the learning outcome have been met? For RPL, currency of evidence will be of particular concern. Does, for example, the evidence meet up-to-date demands or is it representative of practice that has significantly changed?
 - **Relevance:** There should be an appropriate match between the evidence and the intended study presented and the learning claimed.
 - **Sufficiency:** The evidence that is submitted should demonstrate the achievement of the learning claimed and be sufficient to cover the learning outcomes of the module(s) on the intended course of study. The evidence that is presented and the learning that is claimed must be at the appropriate level.
 - **Authenticity:** The evidence should clearly relate to the applicant's own efforts and achievement.
 - **Currency:** The evidence should relate to current learning. This would normally be judged as learning that has been completed within five years of the claim. Consideration may be given to learning that was completed more than five years ago but, in such cases, evidence will be required that the learning has been kept up to date.
 - **Reliable:** The evidence obtained through RPL should be such that an assessor would arrive at the same assessment decision, were the assessment to be repeated.
- 6.2 For practice/competency-based modules additional requirements may need to be applied. Mechanisms for assessing prior learning should ensure that the learning which has taken place and is presented as RPL is equivalent to the learning that would have otherwise occurred had the student studied all elements of the module or course of study without RPL i.e. that equivalent learning outcomes have been met. Consideration should be given to whether an applicant may be disadvantaged by not engaging with the development of learning skills that they will need to achieve learning outcomes later in the course.
- 6.3 The RPL Policy, process and decisions should be transparent, rigorous, reliable, fair and accessible to individuals and stakeholders to ensure that users can be confident of the decisions and outcomes of RPL.
- 6.4 RPL is a student centred voluntary process. The individual should be offered advice on the nature and range of evidence which is considered appropriate to support a claim for assessing RPL and be given guidance and support to make his or her claim.
- 6.5 The process of RPL is subject to the same standard of quality assurance and monitoring processes as any other form of learning and assessment.
- 6.6 The College is committed to the principles of transparency, equity and fairness in RPL and to the principle of valuing all learning regardless of the mode or place of its acquisition. External

advice and advice from professional/regulatory bodies may be sought when appropriate to specific programmes and fields of practice.

- 6.7 RPL may only be considered where the requirements of a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB) are met and RPL is permitted by the PSRB.

7.0 Funding

Please note that for publicly funded programmes of training, a reduction in funding from the relevant funding body is applied in relation to the proportion of the qualification for which RPL has been used. It is therefore important that records of RPL assessment decisions are carefully recorded and retained to enable calculations to be made about how funding for individual students may be affected and to provide a clear audit trail.

8.0 Process

- 8.1 Students wishing to avail themselves of this method of accreditation must negotiate the procedure with the Programme Leader (Open University programmes only) / Course Coordinator / Assessor in agreement with the Head of School.
- 8.2 Students will complete a Recognition of Prior Learning Request form (ref C-RPL-01) and forward to Programme Leader (Open University programmes only) / Course Coordinator / Assessor / Head of School for consideration.
- 8.3 If RPL is to be considered for a student, the Head of School (Open University programmes only) / Course Coordinator / Assessor / Head of School must notify the Head of Planning and Data (registry) prior to funding being claimed and a copy of the Recognition of Prior Learning Request Form (ref C-RPL-01) forwarded to Registry.
- 8.4 The RPL assessment should be carried out as an entire process. This means that the Programme Leader (Open University programmes only) / Course Coordinator / Assessor should:
- Plan with the student
 - Make a formal assessment decision
 - Feedback assessment decisions to the student, confirming decision and giving guidance on the available options (particularly in situations where the decision has been not to award credit)
 - Maintain appropriate records
 - Ensure that students are aware of their right to access the academic appeals process should they feel the assessment decision was unfair
- 8.5 The Programme Leader (Open University programmes only) / Course Coordinator / Assessor must ensure that all learning outcomes and assessment criteria being claimed are covered and that records of assessment are maintained in the usual way. The process must be subject to the same quality assurance requirements as any other assessment method.
- 8.6 The Programme Leader (Open University programmes only) / Course Coordinator / Assessor must retain the Recognition of Prior Learning Report Form (C-RPL-01) and supportive documents of credit recognition in accordance with the Organisation's Quality Records Schedule and Awarding Organisation requirements.

9.0 Process for Making a Claim for RPL

- 9.1 Claims for the RPCL

In RPCL, the student has a certificate to evidence that the learning has been formally assessed by a recognised body or authority. It is the responsibility of the Organisation to

determine the state of such certification (including consideration of its content, volume, currency and level) as it relates to the programme of study to which the student is applying.

Documentary evidence forms the basis of a claim for RPCL and the process involves the stages laid out below. Where the evidence is fully documented and can be verified, the assessment of evidence may be carried out by the Programme Leader (Open University programmes only) / Course Coordinator / Assessor for the programme.

The main steps in the RPCL process are:

Step 1: compile the evidence

This may include (but is not restricted to) academic transcripts, certificates and academic references, mapping of aims and learning outcomes.

Step 2: submit the RPCL claim

The student submits the compiled evidence together with an RPL claim form (C-RPL-01) to the Course Coordinator / Tutor / Programme Leader (Open University programmes only) (as determined by the relevant programme authorities).

Step 3: the assessment of claims for RPCL

The RPCL claim is assessed by Programme Leader (Open University programmes only) / Course Coordinator / Head of School / HE Development Manager and ratified by the relevant Module / Academic or Assessment Board. The student is then informed of the outcome.

9.2 Claims for the RPEL

A claim for RPEL places the responsibility on the (prospective) student to make a specific claim for RPL, often drawing on his or her own unique set of circumstances which need to be precisely identified and expressed and for which the appropriate forms of supporting evidence need to be produced.

The learning is then assessed in terms of its equivalence to that expected on a module or programme leading to an award of the Organisation. The member(s) of staff assessing the claim, the RPEL Assessor(s), may require additional written assessment, demonstration activities or an interview to achieve a satisfactory assessment. It is important that the student is able to establish that they have the requisite knowledge to support their claim. The portfolio of evidence of such learning will form the basis of the claim for RPEL.

In order to gain credit via RPEL, the student's learning will need to meet the following criteria:

- Learning must be clearly differentiated from experience (it is the student's knowledge, capacity for reflection, understanding and skills which are assessed for credit, not the experience in itself)
- Learning must be at a level appropriate to the programme offered by the Organisation
- Knowledge, understanding and skills must be current. While experience may have occurred at any time, the student must be able to demonstrate that the acquired learning is up to date and has current applicability
- Learning must be generally transferable outside the specific situation in which it was acquired. The learning should not be tied to one particular perspective but should show an ability to relate to a broader outlook
- Learning must be capable of being demonstrated to, and assessed by, an expert in an appropriate subject area

The main steps in the RPEL process are:

Step 1: establishing the learning experience

This may include (but is not limited to) work, education, home and family, voluntary work, political activity, travel, leisure interests or reading and research.

Step 2: identifying the learning which has taken place

This involves the careful examination and reflection of prior experiential learning to identify:

- The knowledge gained and applied
- The skills acquired and used
- Other relevant aspects (e.g. feelings, attitudes, key elements of experience)

Step 3: expressing the learning and preparing precise learning claims

The portfolio put forward for RPEL is expected to contain specific claims relating to the student's learning. It is important that claims are expressed in a way which indicates as precisely as possible the nature and the level of learning.

Step 4: compiling a portfolio which contains the learning claims and supporting evidence to substantiate these claims

A portfolio of experiential learning is a collection of material compiled by the student to gain academic credit. It describes the learning which they have derived from their experiences. The portfolio includes claims to that learning, with supporting evidence, which allows the claims that can be assessed.

Each portfolio will be an individualised statement of experiential learning and although there are no specific models or criteria, successful claims will include portfolios that contain both direct and indirect evidence:

- Direct evidence may include project reports, databases, case study notes, correspondence, conference papers, work plans
- Indirect evidence may include statements from employers, customers or clients, documentation on courses undertaken, appraisals references, letters of validation from people who are in a position to judge the value and quality of the learning

Step 5: the assessment of claims for RPEL

The recognition of prior experiential learning involves an assessment process on the part of the Organisation's academic staff that leads to recognition. The RPEL claim is assessed by Programme Leader / Course Coordinator / Head of School Module or Unit Board. The student is then informed of the outcome.

Checks are made to evaluate each item of evidence to ensure that the learning is appropriate to the learning objectives of the academic award being sought. Normally an assessment interview will be held to test claims to learning. Module Tutors / Programme Leader / Course Coordinator / Assessors might ask the student to undertake an assessment exercise to substantiate aspects of the learning claims. These exercises could be written assignments, demonstration activities or examinations, possibly taken from the module(s) for which credit is being claimed. Where further evidence is required, the opportunity will normally be given to produce this. If successful, the board will assign credit points at the appropriate level to the experiential learning. This credit rating will be subject to the approval of the appropriate Module or Unit Board.

10.0 The Role of Module/Unit Boards

Once claims for PRL have been submitted and assessed they should be presented to an Academic / Module / Unit Board to ratify the RPL decision. The usual policies and procedures relating to mitigating circumstances and academic misconduct apply.

11.0 Notification of RPL Outcomes

Following the Board's decision, the student should be advised of the outcome of their claim, and receive feedback on their submission. All students should receive summative feedback and where appropriate formative feedback on their application for RPL, whether their claim is successful or not. Assessment forms a key part of the learning process and RPL students who do not take part in the usual assessment process for a module or level of the programme should not be disadvantaged. RPL claims are an alternative assessment tool and Schools should ensure the RPL claimants gain

as much from the assessment process for their RPL claim as they would through engaging with the usual assessment process for the module or level.

12.0 The Decision Making Process

Exemption for modules or part of a course of student should normally be dealt with before the applicant begins a course, but since the relevance of prior learning may only become clear to an applicant after the course has commenced, such applications may normally be made within the first four weeks of the official start date of the course and will be ratified at the next Module / Unit Board. Where any decisions are pending, RPL applicants will be expected to study all parts of the course until the decision is available.

13.0 Resubmission and Appeals of unsuccessful claims for RPL

13.1 Resubmission of an unsuccessful claim

RPL student whose claim for credit is unsuccessful may be permitted one resubmission at the discretion of the Programme Leader (Open University programmes only) / Module Tutor / Assessor(s).

13.2 Appeals in relation to unsuccessful claims

Student may request a review of the decisions of the RPL assessment under the Organisation's Academic Appeal Regulations, if it is believed they meet the grounds outlined in those processes.

14.0 Documentation

14.1 C-RPL-01 – Recognition of Prior Learning Request Form

For further information contact:

**Gavin Henderson
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Appendix A

Maximum Credit Allowances

| Award | Maximum Credit Available |
|--|--|
| University Certificate in Professional Development (UCPD) or University Certificate in Continuing Education (UCCE) | Normally none (unless the credit studied forms part of a defined UCPD or UCCE award). In such cases 10 credits may be claimed. |
| University certificate in Advance Professional Development (UCAPD) or University Certificate in Advanced Continuing Education (UCACE) | 30 credits |
| Certificate in Education (CertEd) | 60 credits |
| Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) | 60 credits |
| Higher National Certificate (HNC) | 60 credits |
| Higher National Diploma (HND) | 120credits |
| Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE) | 120 credits |
| Graduate Conversion Diploma in Psychology | None |
| Foundation Degree | 120 credits |
| Ordinary Degree | 150 credits at Levels 4 and 5 |
| Professional Graduate Certificate | See specific course document |
| Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (leading to a recognised teaching qualification) | See specific course document |
| Degree with Honours | 240 credits at level 4 and 5 only |
| Post graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE/PGCE4) | 30 credits |
| University Certificate in Postgraduate Professional Development (UCPPD) or University Certificate in Postgraduate Continuing Education (UCPCE) | None |
| Postgraduate Certificate (PgCert) | 30 credits |
| Postgraduate Diploma (PgDip) | 60 credits |
| Master's Degree | 120 credits |
| Professional Practitioner Qualification | See specific course document |

Notes:

- In the case of DipHE, the maximum credit awarded for **claims based predominantly on experiential learning** would normally be **capped at 120 credits less than the total credit requirement for the award**, and credit would not normally be awarded towards the project/dissertation at the final stage of a degree with honours.
- Claims for credit which relate to HNC/D awards should be made on a unit by unit basis by student providing a portfolio of evidence of prior achievement of the specified learning outcomes of the HNC/D units concerned.
- Students entering a validated qualification level 6 'top-up' programme comprising 120 credits and designed to build on a lower credit bearing award may not enter the programme with credit (*refer to the Regulations for Validated Awards of The Open University – section 19.3 on calculation of classification*)
- Credit for prior learning (certified, experiential or uncertified) is not allowed at the final stage (credit level 6) of a Bachelor's Degree or for the thesis/dissertation module on a Master's programme.
- A student may be awarded recognition for prior learning (certified, experiential or uncertified), towards the requirements of a named award up to two-thirds* of the total credit requirements for that award. **two-thirds of RPL is only permitted for full, three-year bachelor's degrees (360 credits) or full Masters degrees (a minimum of 180 credits) and not sub-awards, where the usual maximum is 50%.*
- No RPL can be awarded against any Level 6 Ordinary Degree or Degree with Honours.