

## **Student Guide for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)**

### **What is RPL?**

Recognition of prior learning or RPL is the term given to learning that may have taken place at an earlier point such as through your workplace, on short courses or a degree, in your community or through voluntary organisations. You cannot request RPL for the activity itself (such as 100 hours voluntary work), but you can request RPL from the outcomes of the activity – i.e. the learning that has been gained through the participation in the activity. These outcomes need to be evidenced and matched against the outcomes for the course you are applying for.

### **There are two main types of RPL**

1. Recognition of prior certificated learning (RPCL)
2. Recognition of prior experiential learning (RPEL)

You can pursue an RPCL application, RPEL application, or a mixture of the two. It is your responsibility (with the support of a member of Bishop Auckland College staff) to demonstrate how your prior learning will allow you to enter onto a College course.

### **What is Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning (RPCL)?**

Prior certificated learning (RPCL) is learning which you received certification for. 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.

### **What is the difference between advanced standing and entering onto a top up degree?**

A top up year is equivalent to the third year of a three-year BA (hons) degree programme. These are usually students progressing from a foundation degree or HND (for two years) and a BA (Hons) top up (for a further year).

Advanced standing is generally the result of a stage exemption. If you are entering onto a BA (Hons) top-up you will almost certainly not need to apply for RPL as you would usually have the qualification required. This type of progression is known as automatic progression, all other applicable entry criteria must also be met.

### **Can I apply for an exemption so that I don't have to take some modules?**

If you can demonstrate that your prior certificated learning meets the learning outcomes of one or more of the prospective programme modules, you can apply for and get a module exemption – which means you don't have to undertake that particular module. If your prior learning can be shown to match the outcomes required to complete the modules or units for a whole level, then this would allow you to enrol onto the next level – giving you a stage exemption.

However, if there is no link between the subject and field studied previously then the credit you have gained will not be able to be used.

## How do I apply for RPCL?

If you wish to use your previous certificated learning to gain a module exemption or stage exemption through advanced standing you should contact the Programme Leader (**Open University**) / Course Co-ordinator / Assessor, who will be able to talk you through what is required. You will normally be asked to complete a portfolio with the evidence needed to assess your claim for RPCL.

Your portfolio will include:

- i. Recognition of Prior Learning Application Form (available from the Programme Leader (**Open University**) / Course Co-ordinator / Assessor). This will include details of which module/elements of the programme for which you are seeking exemption, including an overview of how you have met these learning outcomes through your prior certificated learning.
- ii. Documentation from your previous certificated learning including:
  - Certificate
  - Transcript
  - Programme specification
  - Module specification
  - Any other relevant information

If you are missing any of this information you can contact the organisation who awarded your certificate. Please note there may be fees for duplicate documentation.

The Programme Leader (**Open University**) / Course Co-ordinator / Assessor will confirm whether your previous learning matches the requirements for your programme and that your prior learning demonstrates the required minimum pass mark for the module/level.

### Important Notes on RPCL:

- The minimum RPL credit claim that will be considered is for a single unit/module. If you are claiming for a module exemption then it would be advisable to check whether the number of credits you have already gained matches the number of credits of the module in question.
- Any modules that are included in your successful RPCL claim will not have a mark next to them on your final transcript but will show the code 'Ex' (for 'exempt'). **Credit will be awarded for prior certificated learning but your final grade classification will be based on the average of the marks awarded during your College programme of study only.**
- Any credits included in a claim for RPCL must have been gained within the previous 5 years. Any certificated learning gained outside this time limit will not be considered as part of a claim for RPCL.
- It is expected that you will claim for RPCL at the earliest possible opportunity – ideally during the admissions process. However, if you realise that there may be an opportunity to make a claim at any point during your course then please contact your course leader to discuss it.

### What is 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.

## Credit

Like the recognition of prior certificate learning, you can apply for RPEL to enter with advanced standing or to gain module or stage exemptions.

## How do I apply for RPEL?

If you wish to use your previous experiential learning to gain a module exemption or stage exemption through advanced standing you should contact the Programme Leader ([Open University](#)) / Course Co-ordinator / Assessor, who will be able to talk you through what is required. This is assessed by your Programme Leader ([Open University](#)) / Course Co-ordinator / Assessor who is identified at the point of admission.

Your portfolio will typically include:

- Recognition of Prior Learning Application Form (available from the Programme Leader / Course Co-ordinator / Assessor)
- Table of contents
- Detailed CV or personal profile including:
  - a. employment history
  - b. education and training history
  - c. professional qualifications
- Introduction to career goals and context of the application
- Experience, which will build on the CV
- What learning has taken place and reflection on what you learned from this experience
- Details and evidence of achievement, showing what behaviour or performance changes have arisen and been demonstrated from the learning
- Relevancy of this learning/achievement to the programme applied for
- Proof of the learning i.e. evidence that you have undertaken the learning

It is your Programme Leader's ([Open University](#)) / Course Co-ordinator / Assessor's responsibility to confirm that your previous learning maps to the programme and provides the equivalent of the required minimum pass mark for the module or stage. The programme leader will also ensure that recognition of your prior experiential learning will not disadvantage you in later studies i.e. that you have not missed core knowledge or practical skills.

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.

### **Important notes on RPEL:**

- The minimum RPEL claim that will be considered is the equivalent of a whole module. If you are claiming for a module exemption then your claim will be assessed against the learning outcomes for the whole module in question. No exemptions for parts or modules or individual components will be considered.
- Your application for RPEL should include, as a minimum, evidence of two years' experience in a relevant position, whether paid employment or volunteering.
- Any modules that are included in your successful RPEL claim will not have a mark next to them on your final transcript but will show the code 'Ex' (for 'exempt'). **No credit** will be awarded for prior experiential learning; i.e. your final classification will be based on the average of the marks awarded during your College programme of study only.
- It is expected that you will claim for RPEL at the earliest possible opportunity – ideally during the admissions process. However, if you realise that there may be an opportunity to make a claim at any point during your course then please contact your course leader to discuss it.

### **Are there limits for RPL claims?**

There are limits as to how much credit you can be awarded: no more than 50% of a programme's credit i.e. 120 credits of a foundation degree. No credit can be claimed at Level 6 or on a Level 6 programme (such as the final year of a three-year honours degree or a BA (Hons) top up year).

If your prior credit is successfully matched against units/modules or levels, any marks or grades received for those units/modules or levels are not used in your final classification for the programme, and no credit can be awarded for the dissertation/ major project element of any programme.

The Open University Regulations allow that: A student may be awarded recognition for prior learning (certified, experiential or uncertified), towards the requirements of a named award up 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%.

### **I have submitted my application, what happens next?**

Once your application has been considered, it is the **responsibility of the** Programme Leader (**Open University**) / Course Co-ordinator / Assessor's responsibility to notify you whether or not your claim was successful.

### **Do I have to pay to apply for RPL?**

You will receive a pro-rata fee reduction (i.e. one 20 credit module will equate to a reduction by 1/6th of the annual full time programme tuition fee) for the module/s or level that a successful RPL claim is made for. There is no charge for processing RPCL or RPEL claims.