




Quality System

Policy Number

POL-RPL-02

Policy Title

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy for Higher Education Programmes

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Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy

1.0 Introduction

The Bishop Auckland College Group (thereafter known as “The Organisation”) recognises that many prospective students may have acquired prior knowledge and skills for success on a programme of study through previous educational achievement, work or other life experiences, but have not achieved commensurate academic qualifications. This learning can be used either as entry to programmes or to exempt students from modules of learning.

The organisation’s provision for RPL seeks to ensure that applicants are admitted to the highest level of award for which they are qualified, are able to benefit from the credits for which they wish to apply, and that they are awarded the maximum amount of relevant credit to which they are entitled by virtue of their prior learning achievements.

Credit may be awarded on the basis of achieved learning and on the basis of experience. Credit may be awarded for all learning, wherever that learning occurs. It must first be identified and then assessed in terms of its amount, level, relevance, status and currency.

Credit may only be given in line with the limits imposed by individual awarding bodies or validating partner institutions in recognising the proportion of learning eligible through the accreditation process. In addition, the organisation will ensure that for each awarding body or validating partner institution, the implications for progression and award of interim qualifications, and classification or grading of final results, are clear and transparent to staff and applicants.

Learning from planned experience as part of the programme of study relating to an award, where the learning may be more structured and systematised, is to be distinguished from learning from prior experience in terms of credit transfer.

Prior learning is not graded and therefore not included in classification decisions at any Examination Boards.

2.0 Definitions

2.1 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

The term ‘RPL’ is used in this policy to encapsulate the activity formally taken by the Organisation to establish whether 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.

2.2 Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning (RPCL) or Credit Transfer

RPCL is the means by which previously assessed and certificated learning is considered and, as appropriate, recognised for academic purposes. This learning may or may not be credit-bearing. RPCL may potentially be achieved either through another academic organisation or through industry recognised or regulatory qualifications.

2.3 Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)

RPEL is the means by which learning achieved outside education or training systems is assessed and, as appropriate, recognised for academic purposes. Credit is awarded not on the experience itself but on what the student has learned from that experience. Therefore, there needs to be evidence of assessment of this learning that reflects the learning outcomes of the level/module(s) claimed for accreditation.

2.4 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

2.5 Direct Entry and Entry with Advanced Standing

- Direct entry from another organisation 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 transcript, thereby signalling that the credit requirements for the stage(s) have been completed.

2.6 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 the organisation and reduce the period of study time necessary to achieve your award.
- As an organisation 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 the organisation.

3.0 Principles:

3.1 The RPL Policy enables an individual to apply to incorporate previous relevant theoretical and/or practical learning into a programme of study and be accredited for this learning. Accreditation is a means of considering all relevant formal certificated learning and experiential learning for credit towards a named award or modules of an award. Units or modules of learning, theoretical or practical that are accepted for accreditation must be of compatible value to the programme content and academic level.

When a request is made for RPL, the programme team, led by the programme leader (Open University programmes only) / Course Coordinator / Assessor / Head of School, must also ensure evidence satisfies the following criteria:

- **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.

- 3.2** 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.
- 3.3** 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.
- 3.4** 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.
- 3.5** The process of RPL is subject to the same standard of quality assurance and monitoring processes as any other form of learning and assessment.
- 3.6** The organisation 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.
- 3.7** 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.

4.0 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 higher education 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.

5.0 Maximum Volume of RPL considered

Normally a maximum of 50% of credits for any award may be set against the Recognition of Prior Learning Policy.

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.

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 RPL.

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.

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.

The maximum volume of RPL is indicated in the table below with examples of approved exceptions to the usual 50% maximum. This is for guidance only and does not constitute an entitlement. Applicants would be required to claim for RPL unless covered by Advanced Standing or Articulation Agreements

| Award | Credit Required | Max Credits | Min Credits |
|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|--|
| Honours Degree | 360 | 240 | 120 credits at Level 6 or above |
| Ordinary Degree | 300 | 150 | 150 with at least 120 at Level 6 |
| Foundation Degree | 240 | 120 | 120 credits with at least 60 at Level 5 |
| DipHE | 240 | 120 | 120 credits including at least 60 at Level 5 |
| HND | 240 | 120 | 120 credits with at least 60 at Level 5 |
| HNC | 120 | 60 | 60 credits at Level 4 or above |
| CertHE | 120 | 60 | 60 credits at Level 4 or above |
| Masters | 180 | 120 | 60 credits at Level 7 (including the Dissertation) |
| PgDip | 120 | 60 | 60 credits at Level 7 |
| PgCert | 60 | 30 | 30 credits at level 7 |

6.0 RPL Application Process

6.1 The table below summarises the RPL process:

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| Stage 1 | Applicant discusses interest in RPL with Programme Leader (Open University programmes only) / Course Coordinator / Assessor / Head of School prior to enrolment and registration. |
| Stage 2 | Applicant completes Section A of the C-RPL-01 Recognition of Prior Learning Request Form and submits via email (including all relevant supporting evidence) to the Quality Office on quality@bacoll.ac.uk |
| Stage 3 | Quality Office logs receipt of application and forwards to appropriate Programme Leader (Open University programmes only) / Course Coordinator / Assessor / Head of School for consideration. |
| Stage 4 | The Programme Leader (Open University programmes only) / Course Coordinator / Assessor / Head of School, considers application and all relevant supporting evidence. They must then complete Section B of the Recognition of Prior Learning Request form (ref C-RPL-01) following decision. A copy of the Recognition of Prior Learning Request form (ref C-RPL-01) is then to be submitted to the Quality Nominee (QN) for ratification. The QN then reports on the nature, outcomes and volume of RPL applications at HE Quality & Standards Committee. |
| Stage 5 | Programme Leader (Open University programmes only) / Course Coordinator / Assessor / Head of School will inform applicant of final decision via email. |

6.2 Assessment of RPL Applications

Assessment will require additional evidence. This evidence may include:

- Certification (academic/professional).
- Practice-based documents.
- Reports on observations of practice.
- Media files (audio/video) with commentary and analysis related to achievement of learning outcomes.
- Analytic and evaluative description of practice.
- Statements from supervisors in relation to aspects of practice.
- Full and up to date curriculum vitae.
- Letter of endorsement from the employer
- Evidence of experiential learning assessment

Most importantly, evidence must be presented to demonstrate that the applicant is familiar with the appropriate knowledge base of the learning claimed. This should include 'reflective expertise', which includes the ability to sustain analytical review and the application of relevant concepts to the planning and evaluation of practice.

6.3 Fraudulent Applications for RPL

In all applications for RPL, applicants will be required to submit the full range of evidence as outlined above.

Should for any reason the organisation suspects that a claim for RPL may be fraudulent, the organisation reserves the right to contact the awarding body or validating partner institution awarding the credit to confirm the validity of the evidence.

If, following investigation, an allegation of a fraudulent claim is proven, the application will be immediately withdrawn and the applicant notified that they will not be offered a place within the organisation.

7.0 Outgoing students

Higher Education students who exit the organisation are issued with a HEAR or Diploma Supplement (for OU qualifications) which details the modules taken, their credit value and the marks for each element of assessment associated with the module, the award gained (including intermediate awards achieved).

This is the case regardless of whether the course of study has been partially or fully achieved. Programme specifications are available from the organisation's website which current and ex-students can access to support admission to another organisation. The decision to accept credit from the organisation is at the discretion of the receiving organisation.

8.0 Resubmission and Appeals of unsuccessful claims for RPL

8.1 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).

8.2 Appeals in relation to unsuccessful claims

Student may request a review of the decisions of the RPL assessment under the Organisation's Academic Appeals Procedure (BAC-C-07) if it is believed they meet the grounds outlined in those processes.

9.0 All applications for RPL are logged by the quality administrative team. This ensures that we have a record of all students who applied, and the outcome of the request. The person within the institution who would be responsible for monitoring and evaluating the process would be the QN. They would undertake an audit / evaluation of the process at least twice within an academic year. This would include checking the rigour of the end-to-end process from application to enrolment on a programme. Auditing will be summarised, including strengths and any areas for development. Where there are areas for development or concerns these will be immediately raised to the Head of Quality and Higher Education, and the appropriate Head of School, and Programme Leader. The summary report will be presented to HE Quality & Standards Committee. As Head of Quality and Higher Education is Chair of this committee, and a member of HE Academic Board, any issues can be raised to this board where required. The policy is reviewed bi-annually to ensure that it remains fit for purpose.

10.0 Documentation

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

For further information contact:

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