THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL)  
STUDENT GUIDELINES 2014

Introduction

The University of Liverpool operates an RPL scheme which recognises relevant prior learning for both access and exemption purposes. In practice this may mean that you do not have to study the same thing twice and that you may gain credit or recognition for knowledge and skills that you have already acquired. This can sometimes mean that you can progress more quickly in your studies.

This document provides further information about RPL generally, and the processes involved at the University of Liverpool.

Background Information

What is RPL?

RPL encompasses learning acquired via two different routes.

- Formal learning for which you have some sort of Certificate or other award. Where the certificated learning has direct equivalence to a programme of university study, it can sometimes be awarded credit. This accreditation process is commonly called APCL – the Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning.

- Informal uncertificated learning gained through life or work experience. Accreditation in this case is called APEL - the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning.

The Uses of RPL

By recognising learning that has taken place in the past, RPL has two key uses. It can enable someone to:

- Gain access to a programme of study for which they do not have the prescribed entrance requirements – normally set out in terms of formal qualifications, for example, entry on to a postgraduate programme without having an undergraduate degree. In this case substantial professional experience may compensate for the lack of formal undergraduate study.
• Gain credit for part of a programme without having to repeat the learning experience. For example, you may have already gained the required knowledge through work based activities.

In addition to identifying learning which has taken place in the past, the RPL process is also a valuable tool in identifying future learning needs.

**RPL Terminology**

The RPL process uses terminology associated with the measurement of learning and the structure of awards and qualifications. In discussing or formulating an RPL claim, it is helpful to be familiar with the following terms:

- **Credit** provides a means of quantifying learning and is built up using points which measure the volume of learning. Credit points are awarded at particular levels – equating to years 1, 2, 3 or M (Masters). 120 credit points at level 1 represents the first year of an undergraduate degree.

  The **level** is an indicator of the complexity and depth of the learning required.

  Although the term *course* is frequently used to describe a block of formal study, Universities commonly use the word **programme** to describe the structured pattern of teaching and learning leading to a full award. A programme is made up of modules.

  Most University study is broken down into units of learning called **modules**. At the University of Liverpool these are typically calculated in multiples of 5 credit points. Sometimes blocks of study do not equate neatly to single modules and may be equivalent to a half or double module.

- **Learning outcomes** describe the learning which should be achieved through the study of a particular module. Universities use learning outcomes to identify whether students have demonstrated, through assessment, the minimum level of learning required to pass a module and thus gain the associated credit.

- **Credit transfer** is the process by which credit gained from another institution can be assigned to a programme. In practice this is identical to APCL.

- **Specific Credit** may be awarded where prior learning matches, in terms of level, volume and content, the learning outcomes of a course or module. It therefore allows exemption from study of a module or part of a programme.

- **General Credit** may be awarded where the prior learning is recognised to be of sufficient depth and quality as to be assigned a specific level and amount (number of points), but which cannot be matched to the subject content of a particular module or programme. It is most likely to be used for admission to a course.

**Key Features of the RPL Scheme at The University of Liverpool**
Universities vary in the ways in which they implement RPL. In considering any application to this University you should be aware of the following features of its RPL Scheme:

- Although an Adviser can provide support and advice, it is the applicant’s responsibility to prepare an application and to submit adequate documentary evidence in line with required deadlines. Note that the Adviser’s view upon a draft claim does not guarantee the outcome of the assessment decision.

- The maximum credit for which RPL credit can be offered is normally one third of any given programme.

- The minimum claim allowable under the University’s scheme is equal to the smallest module within any given programme.

- There is no difference between APCL and APEL in the amount of credit that can be claimed towards an award.

- Claims for exemption should be against whole modules or components of a programme. In some cases it may be possible to “top up” your prior learning to the required level and volume. Where an Adviser thinks it appropriate, specific self-directed study may be suggested to enable you to expand or deepen your knowledge in a particular area.

- RPL credit cannot be awarded for any module which comprises a major project or dissertation.

The RPL Process at The University of Liverpool

If you think that you have already acquired skills and knowledge which may enable you to access, or gain exemption from, part of a course, you should contact the RPL Adviser in the relevant Department. The Departmental Secretary will be able to provide you with contact details.

The Adviser will provide guidance upon issues such as credit requirements, RPL regulations and procedures, the structure and content of a claim and the fees involved. Be aware that in some cases, following careful consideration, an Adviser may advise against making an RPL claim.

Once you have gathered the appropriate information, it is your responsibility to prepare and submit your application. This involves the compilation of evidence which demonstrates that the learning which has taken place matches the learning that is required.

In the case of APCL, the application will focus upon course outlines or syllabi and evidence will normally take the form of formal certificates or transcripts. Where the prior learning is experiential, the presentation often takes the form of a portfolio. Information about portfolio development and evidence is contained in an appendix to this document.
When considering APEL, it is important to remember that credit can only be awarded for demonstrated learning which can be assessed. It is the *learning* that has arisen from experience that is accredited; credit cannot be awarded on the basis of experience alone.

When applying for financial support, it is advisable to check eligibility rules in relation to study loan in advance of making an RPL application to the University.

**The Timing of a Claim**

An RPL claim for admission must conform to the timescales set by individual programmes of study.

If applying for admission to a programme, your application should normally be submitted 2 months prior to its start.

An RPL claim for exemption from part of a course can only be made either once an offer of a place has been received by a prospective student or following formal registration as a student of the University.

Deadlines for acceptance of an offer of a place cannot be extended to accommodate the timing of RPL assessment decisions.

Also, RPL credit can only be awarded in advance of the start of any module. This means that you must ensure that there is sufficient time for an assessment decision to be made before the relevant module starts.

RPL claims for exemption against other modules must be submitted within 3 months of the start of the programme.

The RPL Adviser can provide detailed guidance on timing issues.

**Submission and Assessment**

Your RPL claim should normally take the form of a portfolio of evidence. Further information about compiling a portfolio is included in the appendix to this guide. The claim should be submitted to the RPL Adviser. It should include the originals of the evidence and a Stamped Addressed Envelope for their return.

The claim will be assessed by another member of academic staff (an approved RPL Assessor) who is familiar with the relevant programme of study. You may be invited for interview to provide supplementary information or to clarify issues arising from the documentary evidence which you have already provided. In this case, the Adviser will provide guidance on what the interview will cover.

The Adviser will notify you of the assessment decision within 4 weeks of submission of your application.
The assessment decision will be one of the following:

1. the level and volume of learning achieved is sufficient for specific credit to be awarded or for admission to a programme. Note that APEL credit is always ungraded but APCL may be graded.

2. the evidence is incomplete.

3. the level and volume of learning achieved is NOT appropriate.

In the case of 2, you may re-submit a claim once only. The Adviser will provide guidance as to the additional information that is required.

Once the RPL process is complete, your application will be returned to you. Please note that you must retain the originals of all RPL related documentation whilst completing your study at the University, and until graduation.

Appeals

You have the right to make an appeal against the conduct of the RPL process but there is no appeal against the assessment decision. The RPL Adviser can provide information about the Appeals procedure.

Fees

No fee is charged for the process of advising on and assessing an RPL application for admission to a programme.

The fee for making an RPL claim for exemption from study is £100. The fee is charged for the assessment process. Initial advice is free.

You will receive an invoice from the School/Department. You should not pass the fee to the RPL Adviser.

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