



CODE OF PRACTICE ON ASSESSMENT

APPENDIX R

Policy on Recognition on Prior Learning (RPL)

2021-22

Applicable to all cohorts

In the Code of Practice on Assessment and all Appendices the term “student” includes apprentices on degree apprenticeship programmes

Policy on Recognition of Prior Learning

1 Introduction

1.1 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the generic term used for the award of credits on the basis of demonstrated learning which has taken place in the past and was at the higher education level. Degree apprenticeship programmes are within the scope of this policy. Intercalated degrees, Erasmus agreements and approved direct entry agreements are not within the scope of this policy.

1.2 RPL encompasses:

Prior Certificated Learning (RPCL)

RPCL relates to prior learning which is at FHEQ levels 4, 5, 6 or 7, which has been formally assessed and certified by a recognised institution and for which an academic transcript or equivalent is available. This is known as credit transfer. RPCL can also include professional development awards or employment-based awards. RPCL may be graded.

Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)

RPEL relates to prior learning which has been gained through experience, which may be paid employment, volunteering, self-directed study, study for which no credit has been awarded or leisure pursuits. It is the learning arising from the experience, rather than the experience itself, that is recognised through a process of assessing and then assigning credit to that learning. RPEL is ungraded.

1.3 Prior learning that is at a lower level than the programme being undertaken may be relevant to entry and admission requirements but will not be considered under the terms of this policy.

1.4 RPL can be used for:

- admission into the second year (level 5) of a three, four or five year undergraduate programme,
- exemption of credit, within minimum and maximum allowances, in undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes¹ and in the pre-thesis stage of the online professional doctorate programmes.

RPL cannot be used for:

- exemptions from part of a module
- exemptions from individual assessment components within a module
- for any module which comprises a final project or dissertation
- exemption from Year Abroad, Year in Industry or Year in Placement in taught degrees
- exemptions that would result in professional or statutory body requirements or apprenticeship standards not being met
- integrated end-point-assessment in degree apprenticeship programmes where this is precluded by the apprenticeship standard
- for Postgraduate Awards
- for postgraduate research degrees, including the thesis stage of the online professional doctorate degrees

¹ This includes MRes programmes

2 Key Principles

- 2.1 Any current or prospective students should have access to the contact details of the nominated Department or School RPL Adviser. Schools/Institutes are responsible for making those who might be eligible for RPL aware of the opportunity.
- 2.2 Decisions to grant credit transfer and/or RPL under this policy are academic judgements based on individual students' applications. Specific credit may be awarded where the prior learning maps appropriately onto stated learning outcomes for any modules or non-modular units of learning, whether mandatory, required, optional, optional non-compensatable or pre-requisite.
- 2.3 General credit may be awarded where prior learning would enable the student to demonstrate that they have met programme learning outcomes and is recognised to be of sufficient depth and quality as to be assigned a specific level and amount, but which cannot be matched to the subject content of specific modules or non-modular units of learning.
- 2.4 The RPL must be awarded for specific amounts of learning or credits at an identified FHEQ level of learning.
- 2.5 Applications can be made for just RPCL, just RPEL or a combination of RPCL and RPEL. There is no difference between RPCL and RPEL in the amount of credit that can be claimed.
- 2.6 There are minimum and maximum amounts of credit for which a claim of RPL can be made.

The **minimum claim** permitted is equal to the smallest module within any given programme. RPL cannot be awarded for credit towards or exemption from part of a module.

The **maximum credit** for RPL or credit transfer that can be offered is normally one third of any programme.

- 2.7 Double counting of prior learning for credit must be avoided. Credit, whether gained at this or another institution, can only be accumulated towards one single award at any given level. For example, the credit transfer (through RPCL) of a Certificate in Higher Education or a Diploma in Higher Education with a view to completing a first degree, or a PG Certificate or PG Diploma with a view towards completing a Master's degree, would be accepted only where those credits had not already been counted towards another degree.
- 2.8 Former students of the University of Liverpool, who wish to return to complete a partially completed programme and who had received an exit award from that programme must surrender the certificated exit award. The academic standing of such applicants may be taken into account in determining an application for RPL; outcomes may differ for students who exited in good academic standing and those who exited because of failure to progress.
- 2.9 Credits are only awarded on the basis of evidence which is:
- **sufficient** to demonstrate the achievement of the learning claimed
 - **authentic** in relation to the applicant's own efforts and achievements
 - **current**, the University would normally expect the experience or qualifications to have been gained within the previous 5 years
 - **relevant** to the level and volume of credit being claimed towards the target award.
- 2.10 The University reserves the right to terminate an application for RPL if the applicant is found to have omitted relevant facts or information in connection with their application or who has falsified or plagiarised any part of their application. This applies both for applications for initial admission to a programme and for exemption from modules/non-modular units of learning on a programme.
- 2.11 When awarding credit for prior learning, due regard must be paid to the requirements of professional and statutory bodies.

- 2.12 Where a University of Liverpool programme is not modularised or credit rated, it is essential that effort is made to match a student's prior knowledge and understanding to appropriate components of the Liverpool programme. There must be clear identification of the specific components of the programme against which the prior learning is to be matched.
- 2.13 In exceptional instances group applications for RPCL may be considered, for example where a cohort of individuals seek RPL for the same certificated learning. In this instance the RPL decision will be made and recorded on an individual basis.
- 2.14 Where RPL credit has been awarded, that credit will not be used in the calculation of averages used for determining progression, the degree classification or exit awards. Such calculations shall only be made in respect of the credits actually completed at the University of Liverpool as part of the programme. Students who fail the minimum amount of University of Liverpool credits for the target award and have to be considered for an exit award must have completed sufficient University of Liverpool credits to receive the relevant exit award; this means that at least two-thirds of the taught credits of the exit award must have been completed at the UoL. If a student has not completed enough UoL credits, they may only be eligible to receive a transcript of their results.
- 2.15 All applicants for RPL must be treated equitably regardless of the source(s) of the prior learning claimed or the age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage & civil partnership, race, religious belief & non-belief, sex and sexual orientation of the applicant.
- 2.16 No charge is made for advising on and assessing a RPCL claim. A charge may be made for advising on, assessment and other processes involved in considering a claim for RPEL. The current maximum fee is £100.

3 Roles and responsibilities

3.1 Applicant

It is the applicant's responsibility to prepare and submit their application and to evidence their prior learning to the satisfaction of the University.

The student is required to:

- make contact with the RPL Adviser and obtain the required documentation (including details of admission requirements/learning outcomes for the module/ programme)
- identify their existing skills and knowledge
- match what they have learned against the requirements of the module/programme
- collate and list the evidence to support the claim
- formally submit the claim to the Adviser in accordance with required deadlines
- provide a declaration that the information and evidence provided is authentic and accurate to the best of their knowledge
- inform the Adviser of any change of contact details
- pay the appropriate fee within required timescales.

- 3.2 It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that all the evidence and supporting application material is submitted in English, except for official certification. Translations into English must be certified, with original documents available on request. Any costs incurred by the University for translation of documents into English must be paid by the applicant before the claim can be assessed.

3.3 Faculty Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor for Education

The APVC must nominate a member of staff who will act in the role of Faculty Lead for RPL.

3.4 Faculty Lead for RPL

The Faculty Lead oversees and supports the implementation of the RPL policy at Faculty level. The appointed Lead, or their nominated deputy, in consultation with the Heads of Department/School will nominate and support local Advisers and Assessors to deal with specific RPL claims.

3.5 The Faculty Lead should have the competence to advise staff and students on the production and submission of both RPCL and RPEL claims. If necessary they should undertake appropriate training in RPL principles and practice provided by the University.

3.6 The Faculty Lead should countersign all RPL Assessor decisions in the Faculty and report annually on Faculty RPL activity to the Faculty Academic Quality Standards Committee/Faculty Education, Enhancement and Assurance Committee and to the University Academic Quality and Standards Committee.

3.7 A list of nominated Advisers and Assessors should be provided by the Faculty Lead to SAS and the Admissions teams in ERMC at the start of each academic session.

3.8 Dean/Head of level 2 School or Institute

The Dean must ensure that the nominated Advisers and Assessors from their School/Institute undertake the required staff development before they can act in these roles.

3.9 The Dean must ensure that there is a system in place for the receipt of RPL claims, administration of the RPL processes within the School/Institute, the recording of all RPL decisions, and the communication of the outcomes to relevant stakeholders.

3.10 The Dean must ensure that monitoring takes place at School/Institute level to ensure that the criteria for RPL remain valid, reliable and objective, and are being fairly and consistently applied to all applicants. Reports on the implementation of the policy should be submitted to the Faculty Lead for RPL on an annual basis.

3.11 The Adviser

The role of the Adviser must be kept separate from the role of the Assessor. The roles, therefore, must be undertaken by different members of staff. The Adviser should be a member of staff who has the competence to advise the student on making a claim, including production of evidence and submission of the application.

3.12 The Adviser is the University nominated point of contact for a Department/School for all RPL claims and applications. The contact details of the RPL Adviser should be publicly available.

3.13 It is the responsibility of the Adviser to ensure that the student has a copy of the relevant guidance notes and to provide advice upon:

- the nature of RPL
- the credit requirements of the programme including specific learning outcomes for modules
- University procedure, including information about fee structure, limits on the amount of credit that can be claimed and the process for making the RPL claim
- formulating a claim in terms of reflection upon and demonstration of prior learning
- the RPL assessment process
- the structure and content of a draft claim, with the proviso that such advice does **not** guarantee the outcome of the RPL assessment process.

3.14 Advice may be provided on an individual or group basis. Where advice is provided in a group setting, the Adviser will ensure that adequate time is also set aside for provision of individual advice, when appropriate.

3.15 On occasion, an Adviser may advise against making an RPL claim.

3.16 It is the further responsibility of the Adviser to:

- receive and progress a claim
- if applicable, check the apprenticeship standard for any RPL requirements or restrictions
- notify Student Administration and Support (SAS) of the assessment decision
- administer the process of providing feedback to the student on the assessment decision
- administer the process for obtaining evaluations of the RPL process by successful and unsuccessful applicants
- maintain records during the RPL process. These records include:
 - if required, the agreement reached with the student on any additional work to be undertaken to be able to claim credit for a full module
 - notes of briefing and subsequent meetings / telephone conversations
 - the summary report
 - the assessment report form
 - applicant evaluation form.

3.17 **The Assessor**

The role of the Assessor must be kept separate from the role of the Adviser. The roles, therefore, must be undertaken by different members of staff. The Assessor should have the competence and responsibility to exercise academic judgment in assessing an RPL claim. It is important that the Assessor has the necessary subject knowledge to enable them to make safe judgments. Where required, the Assessor will take advice from colleagues about the subject(s) covered in the claim. In the case of apprentices making application for RPL the Assessor should consult with the workplace mentor when assessing the claim.

3.18 Each RPL claim must be assessed on an individual basis. The Assessor will:

- define the assessment criteria for the claim, based on the module and/or programme learning outcomes
- assess the submitted evidence against the defined criteria
- recommend, record and report the outcome of the assessment process within the required time-scale
- notify the Adviser of the outcome of the assessment of the claim.

3.19 When attributing prior learning to degree apprenticeship programmes the Assessor should work with the employer to consider whether the learning demonstrates the specific attainment of duties and Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSB) required in the apprenticeship. If modules at the relevant level need not be studied then they cannot be funded. Only new learning can be funded. The Assessor must therefore consider what constitutes new learning and the impact that higher level critical thinking can have on the advancement of skills and behaviours, even if an apprentice has significant experience.

3.20 **The Head of Department or level 1 School**

The Head of Department is responsible for ensuring that any student admitted to a programme through RPL receives the appropriate advice relating to subject-specific matters, particularly any departmental health and safety matters.

3.21 **Academic Quality and Standards Committee**

AQSC is responsible for overseeing generally the implementation and monitoring of the RPL policy.

4 The process for making a claim for RPL

- 4.1 Normally, an RPL application for admission should be made at least 2 months prior to the start of the programme. The use of RPL does not alter the admissions process for the programme. Deadlines for acceptance of an offer of a place will not be extended to accommodate the timing of RPL assessment decisions.
- 4.2 Applicants already registered on a programme of study and wishing to apply for credit exemption would normally be expected to apply during the preceding academic session or not less than 2 months before the commencement of the affected module(s).
- 4.3 An RPL application for exemption can be made:
- once a potential applicant has demonstrated that they are likely to meet the admission criteria for a programme
 - if requesting RPL for specific credit against the first modules in a programme of study, the application must be in time to allow the award of RPL credit **before** that module has commenced.
 - following registration as a student in accordance with paragraph 4.2 above.
- 4.4 Once a full application documenting the claim has been received, the applicant should receive the decision within 4 working weeks.
- 4.5 For RPCL claims the applicant must, through the use of syllabi, programme and/or module descriptions, formal certificates, transcripts etc., demonstrate the match between their prior learning and the module or programme in question. An applicant would not normally be expected to complete any assessment in addition to submitting the application.
- 4.6 For RPEL claims the applicant must demonstrate that learning has taken place through the prior experience. The coherence, balance and progression of that learning should be demonstrated through critical reflection. An applicant may be required to complete an assessment such as a reflective writing exercise in addition to submitting the application.
- 4.7 An applicant should submit with their application the originals of the evidence listed and a pre-paid means for their return e.g. stamped addressed envelope. Once the RPL process is complete the accompanying documentation must be returned to the student. It is the responsibility of the applicant to retain the original documentation and the RPL claim portfolio, whilst they are completing their study as a student of the University, and until graduation.
- 4.8 Schools/Departments may make use of an assessment interview routinely or to supplement documentary evidence presented by the student.

5 The RPL assessment process

- 5.1 The claim will be forwarded to the Assessor by the Adviser. The Assessor will make one of the following judgements:
1. That the evidence is incomplete. An applicant may resubmit a claim on one further occasion only. The initial assessment decision shall be notified to the applicant by the Adviser together with guidance on the additional information or evidence required.
 2. That the level and volume of learning achieved is sufficient for specific credit to be awarded or for admission to a programme. The assessment decision should be verified by the relevant Board of Studies and reported to the Faculty RPL Lead. The Adviser will inform the student of the outcome of the RPL claim and send them a statement of any credit awarded. The Adviser will also send a statement of any credit awarded to Student Administration and Support (Student Records), and if relevant to Admissions.

3. That the level and volume of learning achieved is NOT appropriate. The assessment decision should be verified by the relevant Board of Studies and reported to the Faculty RPL Lead. The Adviser will inform the student of the outcome of the RPL claim and the reasons for the decision.
- 5.2 When assessing the evidence against the requirements of the intended learning outcomes of the programme or module/non-modular unit of learning, the Assessor should consider:
 - Subject content and knowledge
 - Volume of learning
 - Level of learning
 - Evidence of achievement
 - Any restrictions imposed by Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies, if applicable
- 5.3 The Assessor should verify the date of the prior learning to confirm that it has taken place within the previous five years.
- 5.4 Where an applicant is not yet registered (i.e. if RPL is allowed for exemption from a module as part of the admissions process) then the Adviser should notify SAS. If the RPL is not linked to a specific module, the RPL will be recorded as a credit value only.
- 5.5 There is no right of appeal regarding the academic decision. Appeals can only be made in the event of a perceived procedural irregularity and should be submitted in writing to the Academic Compliance Team in Student Administration and Support (appeals@liverpool.ac.uk) within ten working days of receipt of the decision. The Academic Compliance Team will ask the appropriate Faculty Lead for RPL to consider the appeal and a response will normally be provided to the student within four weeks of submission of the appeal. There will be no further right of appeal within the University but a student who remains dissatisfied with the outcome of their appeal may request a Completion of Procedures letter from the Academic Compliance Team to take a complaint, if eligible, to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (the OIA).

6 Monitoring

- 6.1 The Faculty Lead for RPL should provide in the annual report to FAQSC/FEEAC and UAQSC any feedback from applicants on the RPL processes and on the progression and achievement of students for whom RPL has been awarded.