

## **Policy and procedure for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)**

**Approved by the University Board for Teaching and Learning on 11 January 2017, effective for entry in Autumn Term 2017.**

*[For Branch Campus operations, reference to Support Centres should be read as Personal/Academic Tutor in regards to student facing support. Administrative processes will be carried out by the Student Services team]*

*[For Branch Campus operations, students should also consult with the Quality Assurance Office of the relevant Branch Campus to discuss any additional local regulations for RP(E)L]*

### **Terms of reference**

1. This document sets out the policy and procedures in relation to the recognition of prior learning towards a University award. This document aligns with B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning of the QAA's UK Quality Code for Higher Education.
2. The University recognises two types of prior learning which contributes to a University award:
  - Prior learning where previous study with an educational organisation has been formally assessed and marked and can be expressed in terms of credit (with or without marks).
  - Prior learning which has been acquired experientially through a process of non-certified acquisition of relevant skills and knowledge, gained through relevant experience outside formal education and training systems, which is capable of being assessed.
3. This process is designed for individual applicants. Where a School anticipates that groups of applicants will seek to import credit from a partner institution on a regular basis, approval should be sought through the University's partnership approval process. This is to facilitate the movement of students and to ensure greater control over quality and standards.

### **Definitions**

4. Recognition of Prior Learning is the process whereby students can be given credit within their chosen programme of study for previous learning.
5. 'Prior Learning' is defined as previous study with an educational organisation which has been formally assessed and certified.
6. 'Prior Experiential Learning' is defined as non-certified acquisition of relevant skills and knowledge gained through relevant experience, which is capable of being assessed.

## **Policy principles**

7. It is at the discretion of the University whether an applicant may import credit. Appropriate reference to the option to import credit should be included in prospectuses.
8. Normally, the following limit shall apply to the amount of credit that can be imported:
  - For undergraduate and integrated Masters programmes, a maximum of two thirds of the total credits for the relevant award, subject to an upper limit of 240 credits. [See paragraph 47 for a more stringent limitation in respect of Prior Experiential Learning.]
  - For postgraduate taught programmes, a maximum of one third of the total credits for the relevant award, subject to an upper limit of 60 credits. [See paragraph 47 for a more stringent limitation in respect of Prior Experiential Learning.]
  - For all taught programmes, a minimum of 10 credits may be imported.These maximum limits will also apply in the case of lesser awards. See paragraph 18 for Postgraduate Research programmes.
9. Normally, any learning or assessment must have been completed in the five years prior to entry in order to be eligible for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).
10. Certificated credit obtained from another institution can be recognised in two different ways:
  - Transfer of credit and marks in substitution for specific modules within a programme
  - Credit transfer without marks in individual modules, which is normally permissible only in respect of Part 1 of undergraduate programmes. It is not normally permissible where the module contributes to the classification of a qualification.
11. Credit achieved and used as part of another award should not normally be used for RPL towards a University of Reading award, unless:
  - (a) for undergraduate programmes, the prior award is at a lower level than the University of Reading award (for example, credit from a Certificate of Higher Education can be transferred to a Bachelor's degree, whereas credit from an awarded Bachelor's degree cannot be transferred to the award of a Bachelor's degree);
  - (b) for postgraduate taught programmes, the prior award is a Level 7 award with a lower credit volume (for example, credit from a Postgraduate Certificate can be transferred to a Master's degree, whereas credit from an awarded Master's degree cannot be transferred to the award of a Master's degree).
12. Credit transferred into a taught programme must be at the same level as the University of Reading programme or Part of a programme (for example, Level 6 credit may not be used for a Level 7 programme).

13. Where credit contributing to another award is recognised for a University of Reading award, this will be indicated on the Diploma Supplement. Graduates should be careful to ensure that they make clear that credit from the previous award is subsumed within the University of Reading award. The University does not have the power to rescind awards from other universities and does not rescind its own awards where credit for a previous award is recognised within a later award.
14. RPL should neither advantage nor disadvantage a student over other students on a programme.
15. Students entering with RPL of some modules are still allowed to receive teaching amounting to 120 or 180 credits for an undergraduate or taught postgraduate year respectively. In this case they will pay the full fee. If a student enters with RPL and also takes modules amounting to 120 or 180 credits (for undergraduate and postgraduate respectively), there must be a clear agreement in writing which specifies the modules which will be included in the calculation of progression and/or classification and those which are not contributing to progression and/or classification. In these circumstances, modules which are taken, but are specified as not contributing to classification and/or progression due to credits imported through RPL, will be recorded on the Annex to the student's Diploma Supplement.
16. RPL cannot be used as an extenuating circumstance for underachievement in subsequent assessments.
17. In order for PL to be recognised, the following criteria must be met:
  - The credit maps sufficiently to the curriculum of the programme  
And
  - An applicant's performance in credit offered for transfer or in assessment of prior experiential learning is sufficient

### **Postgraduate research**

18. In respect of postgraduate research programmes, maximum exemption of registration will normally be
  - one year for full-time study and two years for part-time study.

This exemption may apply to either registration or taught elements of a postgraduate research programme. Any exemptions shall be at the discretion of the School and the Dean of Postgraduate Research Studies. Where a postgraduate research applicant wishes to seek exemption, applicants should liaise with their School Head of Postgraduate Research and final approval should be sought from the Dean of Postgraduate Research Studies.

### **Credit transfer: application and curriculum mapping**

19. Applicants should apply for RPL as early as possible during the application process to the University. Normally applicants must have had RPL approved

before the relevant module they wish to transfer credit against commences. Where credit transfer is a condition of admittance to the University, approval must be confirmed prior to a formal unconditional offer letter being issued. If applicants are unsure whether they will qualify for RPL they should contact Admissions for informal advice. The RPL application process is outlined in Appendix 1.

20. Where an applicant wishes to request credit transfer, they should complete the appropriate RPL form ([Annex 1](#)) and submit it to the Admissions Office. This form will be passed on to the Programme Director for a decision. All enquiries should be directed to Admissions in the first instance.
21. Exceptionally, a currently registered student may wish to request that credit be transferred into their programme. In this case, the student should complete the appropriate RPL form and submit it to a Support Centre/Henley School Office. This form will be passed on to the Programme Director for curriculum mapping. This process must be completed by the end of week 4 and the student must continue to take the full 120 credits or 180 credits (for undergraduate and postgraduate respectively) for that year until the request has been approved.
22. The application should provide as much detail as possible about the credit which they wish to import (normally a module description, including learning outcomes and credit weighting) and specify which modules (and their credit size) the applicant wishes to be replaced by transferred credit. In all cases authenticated evidence (scanned copies of the original) should be submitted.
23. Initial consideration of an application should be made by the Programme Director who should take one of the following actions:
  - Ask the applicant for more details where there is a lack of information in the application
  - Proceed with Curriculum Mapping where an application meets the criteria in paragraph 16
  - Recommend rejection to the SDTL based on the criteria in paragraph 16Where the SDTL is also the relevant Programme Director, they should delegate the Programme Director role to an appropriate member of staff.
24. If the application proceeds, staff in the School, normally the Programme Director, will conduct a curriculum mapping exercise for the imported credit and add their comments to the form.
25. Curriculum mapping should include consideration of:
  - Learning Outcomes achieved through the completion of the credit
  - How well the learning maps onto:
    - i. Specific UoR modules
    - ii. Part and Programme Learning Outcomes
  - Level of the learning in relation to the [University credit and qualifications framework](#) and how this maps to the relevant Programme
  - Credit weighting and how this maps to the relevant Programme

- Any requirements of Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs)
26. Where credit is being transferred in respect of 120 credits of Part 1, a single 120 credit University of Reading module for the transferred credit assigned to the student with an appropriate mark. In all other cases, wherever possible, the University of Reading modules assigned to students for credit transfer should be mapped as closely as possible to individual modules with a corresponding credit weighting ‘received’ from an external institution (i.e. the consolidation of ‘received’ modules into one or more large ‘composite’ modules causes difficulty in the classification process and should therefore be avoided). This information would normally be provided by the applicant.
27. For the credit transfer from UK institutions, marks will not normally be amended.
28. Where a grade of pass rather than a numerical grade has been applied at the institution from which credit is being transferred, the University of Reading’s normal policy will apply. Further details are available in the following Sections of the [Assessment Handbook](#):
- Section 15.1: Progression
  - Section 17.3 Awards: Bachelor’s
  - Section 18.3 Awards: Integrated Master’s
  - Section 19.3 Awards: Postgraduate Master’s, Postgraduate Diploma, Postgraduate Certificate
  - Section 22.3 and 22.6 Awards: Foundation Degrees
  - Section 23.2 Awards: Ordinary Bachelor’s Degree
  - Section 24.1.2, 24.1.5, 24.2.2 and 24.2.5 Awards: Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate
29. On completion of the curriculum mapping exercise, the Programme Director who should take one of the following actions:
- Recommend approval to the SDTL based on the criteria in paragraph 16
  - Recommend rejection to the SDTL on the ground that the credits proposed to be imported do not map sufficiently to the UoR curriculum (paragraph 16)
30. A signed copy of the form (regardless of the recommendation), signed by the Programme Director, should be submitted to the School Director of Teaching and Learning (SDTL) for consideration with reference to the criteria in paragraph 17.
31. Where the SDTL rejects the application, the SDTL should contact Admissions (for applicants) or the relevant Support Centre/Henley School Office (for current students) for decision to be communicated to the applicant.
32. Where the SDTL approves the recommendation, a signed copy of completed forms to the Senior Quality Support Officer (Programme Specifications and Programme Approval), who will confirm that the recommendation is consistent with University policies and forward to the relevant Teaching and Learning Dean for final approval.

33. Where a decision to reject an application has been made by the Programme Director, SDTL or TLD, this should be communicated as follows:

- For prospective students, to the Admissions Office who will in turn inform the student.
- For current students, to the relevant Support Centre/Henley School Office who will in turn inform the student.

Alternatively, where it is felt that further work is required on the application that could lead to approval, the SDTL may send the application back to the Programme Director or the TLD may send the application back to the SDTL. Re-submission will follow the same process as initial submission.

34. For information on marks/credit equivalencies University staff or applicants should consult the Admissions Office. Where appropriate, the University will be guided, but not bound by the principles laid out in [The European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions](#).

#### Prior Experiential Learning (PEL): application and curriculum mapping

35. Where an applicant seeks to have prior experiential learning (PEL) recognised in the place of modules they should complete the relevant PEL form ([Annex 2](#)) with as much detail as possible, and submit it to the Admissions Office. Admissions will pass the application to the School Programme Director for scrutiny and approval through the process outlined in Annex 2.

36. Initial consideration of an application should be made by the Programme Director who should take one of the following actions:

- Ask the applicant for more details where there is a lack of information in the application
- Proceed with Curriculum Mapping where an application meets the criteria in paragraph 16
- Recommend rejection to the SDTL based on the criteria in paragraph 16

Where the SDTL is also the relevant Programme Director, they should delegate the Programme Director role to an appropriate member of staff.

37. If the application proceeds and it is intended that PEL is used to assign credit within a programme, there must be one or more pre-existing or specially created modules within the programme to which credit for PEL can be assigned. Staff in the School, normally the Programme Director, will be responsible for assessing the ways in which the PEL equates to relevant modules or parts, taking into consideration:

- Learning Outcomes achieved through the completion of the credit
- How well the learning maps onto:
  - i. Specific UoR modules
  - ii. Part and Programme Learning Outcomes
- Level of the learning in relation to the [University credit and qualifications framework](#) and how this maps to the relevant Programme

- Credit weighting and how this maps to the relevant Programme
  - Any requirements of Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs)
38. The School must assure itself of an applicant's ability to meet the required Learning Outcomes. Schools are advised to choose or create an appropriate assessment linked to the module or programme learning outcomes to gauge the applicant's abilities. This assessment should be agreed with the relevant Teaching and Learning Dean in advance.
39. Assessment may include one or more of:
- Submission of a portfolio of prior work
  - An Essay
  - A Reflective Account on why they believe their experiential learning should exclude them from taking modules or a whole part.
  - A Written Examination
  - Where the School chooses to set an assessment, it must be approved by the School Director of Teaching and Learning and the assessment criteria must be clearly communicated to the applicant with an appropriate deadline. This assessment is best discussed with the applicant in advance.
40. Any assessment should be assessed by two internal markers (one of whom should not be the Admissions Tutor). The normal rules and marking criteria regarding assessment and, where necessary, reassessment will apply.
- Where an applicant passes the assigned assessment, this shall be indicated in the documentation which goes forward to the decision process.
  - Where an applicant fails the assigned assessment, applicants shall be provided with feedback on failed assessment and be provided with the opportunity for reassessment should an applicant fail at first attempt. Normal reassessment fees shall apply.
41. On completion of the assessment exercise, the Programme Director who should take one of the following actions:
- Recommend approval to the SDTL based on the criteria in paragraph 16
  - Recommend rejection to the SDTL on the ground that the credits proposed to be imported do not map sufficiently to the UoR curriculum (paragraph 16)
42. A signed copy of the form (regardless of the recommendation), signed by the Programme Director, should be submitted to the School Director of Teaching and Learning (SDTL) for consideration with reference to the criteria in paragraph 17.
43. Where the SDTL rejects the application, the SDTL should contact Admissions (for applicants) or the relevant Support Centre/Henley School Office (for current students) for decision to be communicated to the applicant.
44. Where the SDTL approves the recommendation, a signed copy of completed forms to the Senior Quality Support Officer (Programme Specifications and Programme Approval), who will confirm that the recommendation is consistent

with University policies and forward to the relevant Teaching and Learning Dean for final approval.

45. Where a decision to reject an application has been made by the Programme Director, SDTL or TLD, this should be communicated as follows:

- For prospective students, to the Admissions Office who will in turn inform the student.
- For current students, to the relevant Support Centre/Henley School Office who will in turn inform the student.

Alternatively, where it is felt that further work is required on the application that could lead to approval, the SDTL may send the application back to the Programme Director or the TLD may send the application back to the SDTL. Where additional work is undertaken, it is possible for an amended application to be resubmitted. Re-submission will follow the same process as initial submission.

46. Where an assessment of PEL is undertaken and an applicant successfully meets the criteria, a numerical mark will not be assigned to the module. The applicant will be assigned a pass grade for the module and the module will not be included in the calculation of progression or the degree classification.

47. PEL will normally be limited to a maximum of an upper limit of 120 credits for undergraduate programmes and an upper limit of 60 credits for postgraduate programmes.

48. It is recommended that an applicant is interviewed prior to being asked to produce assessed work. At this interview the applicant can be asked to consider their past learning and present learning needs in light of the learning outcomes of the programme they wish to study. Advice and guidance at this pre-entry stage is crucial and it is recommended that Schools are aware of this policy and assign an individual to offer advice and tutorial support throughout the process.

## **Post-decision Process**

49. In the case of applicants, the decision will be forwarded to the Admissions Office who will notify the applicant. When the student's record is created, the Admissions Office will inform the Support Centre/Henley School Office who shall in turn liaise with the Examinations Office to update the student's records by entering the transferred credit and marks onto their electronic student record. Where an award has been imported (e.g. PGCert or CertHE), this should be indicated on the student's record with an associated mark. In the case of current students, the Support Centre/Henley School Office will notify the student and enter the transferred credit on the student's electronic record.

50. The data entered on RISIS will contribute to the Diploma Supplement, which will indicate any modules or awards, and any associated marks, that have been used in credit transfers. This includes lesser awards such as PG Certs and PG Dips.

51. The External Examiner should be notified by the Programme Director where credit has been achieved through RPL.

## Fees

52. Where an application is successful, the programme fee for the relevant year may be reduced pro-rata to the amount of credit being studied (unless the student still chooses to receive teaching amounting to the full 120 or 180 credits for the year).

## Appeals

53. The applicant will have the right of a single appeal to the next highest responsible authority.

- Rejection by the SDTL: to the TLD
- Rejection by the TLD: to the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Teaching and Learning

54. Appeals will not be considered where the grounds of the appeal relate to the academic/professional judgement of those making the decision on the application. Appeals against a decision may be submitted on the grounds of procedural irregularity, the emergence of new material information, or evidence of bias or prejudice.

55. Applicants who wish to appeal against a decision should do so within five working days from when the decision email is sent promptly and must write to the relevant person (as stated above), providing specific details of the grounds for the appeal.

| Version | Section | Keeper | Reviewed      | Approving authority | Approval Date | Effective From | Next review |
|---------|---------|--------|---------------|---------------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|
| 1       | CQSD    |        | Every year    | UBTL                | 11/1/2017     | 2017/18        |             |
| 1.1     | CQSD    | RJS    | Every 3 years | UBTLSE              | 6/12/22       | January 2023   | Autumn 2025 |