

Recognition of Prior Learning Policy

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1. Policy Intent

- 1.1 This policy sets out the principles and overarching framework for the recognition of prior learning (both certificated and experiential learning).
- 1.2 As specified in the University [Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme](#), the University has devolved to Schools arrangement for the assessment and recognition of prior learning (RPL), within the general policy which follows.
- 1.3 RPL enables recognition of achievement from a range of activities using an appropriate assessment methodology. Provided that the learning outcomes of a given module or qualification are demonstrably met, the use of RPL is

acceptable for accrediting a module or part of a programme within the limits specified in this policy. The credit requirements for University awards are set out in the University's [Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme](#).

- 1.4 Assessment of prior learning may be requested by an applicant/student in relation to
- admission with advanced standing
 - equivalence of learning against module learning outcomes
 - Mapping equivalence of learning to meet specific Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements.
- 1.5 Where the University enters into an agreement with a partner institution(s) under which a programme is jointly conceived and delivered and leads to a joint, multiple, dual or double award, the use of credit from modules delivered at or by the partner(s) is not regarded as RPL and the stipulations in this policy do not apply. Such programmes are governed by the requirements specified in the relevant Memorandum of Agreement.
- 1.6 Articulation Agreements and Enhanced Progression Agreements are governed by the principles regarding the amount of non-Southampton credit that can be recognised - that is, up to a maximum of one third of the credit for the taught elements of a programme may be gained through RPL (paragraphs 3.4). Information about such agreements and the processes for consideration/approval can be found in the Education Partnerships Policy and guidance in the Quality Handbook.

2. Terminology

- 2.1 The terminology used in this policy is described below:
- **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL):** the process whereby applicants/students are eligible to receive recognition and formal credit for learning acquired previously through formal study and/or through work and other life experiences.

RPL has two widely recognised forms: prior experiential (or informal) learning and prior certificated learning.

- **Prior Experiential Learning (PEL):** learning derived from experience which is uncertificated and not previously assessed. For example, learning from unpaid work or paid work, community activities, leisure pursuits and other informal learning experiences.
- **Prior Certificated Learning:** learning that has previously been assessed and certified in a formal learning environment, e.g. learning arising from academic and professional awards for example Higher National Diplomas, Foundation Degrees, Open University Courses, National Vocational Qualifications, and other courses at an appropriate level.
- **Advanced Standing:** The authority for a student to enter a programme of study at a later Part than the normal entry point, with credit granted for components of the programme already achieved in recognition of previously completed studies and/or prior learning.

3. General Principles

- 3.1 To qualify for an award all students must be treated equitably regardless of the source of the learning that is being assessed.
- 3.2 Credit must be given only for demonstrated learning where equivalence of learning outcomes can be demonstrated, and not for experience alone. Learning must also be of an equivalent level and volume.
- 3.3 All students, including those seeking to demonstrate equivalence to modules on the basis of RPL in line with this policy, must meet the learning outcomes for the programme as set out in the programme specification in order to qualify for an award. RPL can be achieved through PEL and/or PCL.
- 3.4 RPL is an applicant/student led activity.
- 3.5 The use of RPL does not alter the admission criteria for a programme, including the relevant benchmark entry criteria.

- 3.6 RPL may be considered for any module within the taught components of a taught programme and not only for modules at the start of the programme.
- 3.7 In the case of non-Southampton credit, RPL may be granted by the University of Southampton for:
- up to a maximum of one third of an undergraduate programme (60 ECTS or 120 CATS) e.g. for degrees comprising 360 credits/180 ECTS, RPL would be no more than 120 CATS/60 ECTS. For Integrated Masters degrees comprising 240 ECTS/480 CATS RPL would be no more than 80 ECTS/160 CATS.
 - up to a maximum of one third of a Masters programme (30 ECTS or 60 CATS).
 - up to a maximum of one third of any shorter programme at level 7 (e.g. PGDip 20 ECTS or 40 CATS, PGCert 10 ECTS or 20 CATS).
- 3.8 School decisions to allow RPL outside the limitations above must be recommended by the School Programmes Committee for formal approval by the Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee (AQSS).
- 3.9 In the case of University of Southampton credit:
- Notwithstanding the limits set out in para 3.6 above, PCL may be recognised to enable a student to move from PG Certificate to PG Diploma to Masters within a single postgraduate programme.
 - Students wishing to transfer credit from University of Southampton short courses may only do so if the learning is deemed equivalent to meet specified programme learning outcomes and the assessment decision is endorsed by the relevant University of Southampton Board of Examiners.

Currency

- 3.10 Applications for RPL will be considered based on learning that was obtained no more than five years previously. This period commences from the

completion or certification date of when the learning took place. This currency should be assessed at the point at which the applicant/student applies for consideration of RPL.

- 3.11 In the case of PEL applications based on learning outside this time limit may however be considered where a candidate is able to demonstrate evidence of continuous application, updating and relevance to their practice and the award sought.

Requirements specific to PCL

- 3.12 If PCL is used, mechanisms must be in place to record declarations by students that the credit presented has not been used for a previous RPL application at Southampton.
- 3.13 PCL cannot be used to redeem previous failure i.e. a student who has been awarded an exit award due to failure at the higher level.
- 3.14 For programmes primarily designed to run at a single level above Level 4 (the MA, PG Certificate and PG Diploma at Level 7, the Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificate at Level 6), any PCL granted should normally be at that level: e.g., only Level 7 PCL can be used toward an MA, only Level 6 PCL for the Graduate Diploma. Exceptions to this in extraordinary circumstances must be approved by AQSS.
- 3.15 PCL can be awarded irrespective of whether the credits gained previously contributed to a final award or an exit award. In other words, it is possible to 're-use' credits that have already been used towards some other award.

PCL should only be granted for studies that have been completed, and where the credit has been formally awarded by the institution.

Grading and Contribution to Classification

- 3.16 Prior learning recognised in line with this policy will not be graded, except as specified in paragraph 3.18.

- 3.17 If the mark for the module(s) concerned would normally contribute to the student's final award classification the Final Average Mark will be based on the modules taken at the University of Southampton only.
- 3.18 In cases where a University of Southampton award is made (for instance, those who have been awarded a PG Certificate and left, but now wish to proceed to a PG Diploma) the mark for the modules concerned would normally contribute to the student's final award classification.

4. Governance

- 4.1 Schools which, because of the nature of their programmes and/or the educational background of their applicants/students, routinely receive and process RPL applications should have in place appropriate procedures to ensure that such applications are effectively assessed, monitored and recorded in accordance with this policy.
- 4.2 These procedures must be endorsed by the relevant School Programmes Committee, and approved by AQSS which must monitor which Schools have such procedures.
- 4.3 The School Programmes Committee will monitor School procedures and ensure that credit awarded is appropriate, verified and approved through the academic assessment processes.
- 4.4 Schools which do not routinely receive sufficient RPL requests to necessitate having such procedures in place (para 4.1 – 4.3 above) but wish to consider an RPL request from an individual student, on an exceptional basis, must seek advice from their Deputy Head of School (Education), Associate Dean (Education) or Head of Faculty Student Administration in the first instance. Such requests must be assessed in line with section 10 of this policy (Assessment of applications).
- 4.5 The support and assessment of RPL applications is undertaken at programme level. The outcomes of this process will be recorded.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

- 5.1 The need for specific roles and responsibilities within the School will depend on the number and complexity of RPL applications anticipated.
- 5.2 Contacts for RPL within each School must be clearly identified. These contacts may be Programme/Pathway Leads or other roles with a wider School remit. The Deputy Head of School (Education) is responsible for the quality assurance and monitoring of RPL processes at School level.
- 5.3 Colleagues designated to advise students on the preparation and submission of applications must not be involved in the assessment of the application, except where expertise in advising about applications and assessing their worth is limited to very small numbers of staff.
- 5.4 Schools which handle RPL requests as a normal part of their processes must provide appropriate staff development opportunities for staff engaged in advising on or assessing RPL applications.

6. Publicity

- 6.1 Where Schools routinely consider RPL requests this must be made clear in publicity materials, including information as to where prospective applicants for RPL can obtain advice and guidance about pursuing an application, any charges levied, and time limits for submitting an application.

7. Student advice and support

- 7.1 It is the applicant/student's responsibility to prepare and submit their application for RPL in line with the relevant school's procedures and deadlines.
- 7.2 Schools will however provide advice and support for applicants/students seeking RPL, including information on how to register for the process (where School procedures require), the types of evidence considered acceptable and the extent of evidence required. The approved procedures (see section 4 above) must be readily available to appropriate staff within Schools, as well as to potential candidates.

- 7.3 The extent of support available will be specified in advance to RPL applicants, including where there may be limits on that support (e.g. a specified number of hours tutorial guidance).
- 7.4 It may be necessary for Schools to provide additional advice for students for whom English is not their first language – for example about responsibilities for any translation required.
- 7.5 Schools must be aware that it may be necessary to make reasonable adjustments to the procedures or arrangements when appropriate, for students with additional needs.
- 7.6 Schools are encouraged to make clear in documentation that any views of an advisor on a draft application does not guarantee the outcome of the application when the request is formally assessed.
- 7.7 Where applicable it must be made clear to applicants/ students that they will need to meet the criteria required to comply with relevant UK Visa and Immigration legislation.

8. Charges for consideration of RPL

- 8.1 A charge may be levied for consideration of RPL. The charge may vary according to
- the nature of the request, and
 - the level of support that is required, e.g. to enable a student to put together a portfolio as determined by each School.
- 8.2 Charges will be clearly stated in publicity material and communicated to applicants prior to submission of evidence.
- 8.3 Schools have the power to remit charges in certain circumstances, e.g. a student makes a claim of hardship.
- 8.4 Where PCL is being granted for credit gained at the University of Southampton, charges may be waived at the discretion of the School.

9. Documentation and Evidence

9.1 Applicants and students must in all cases present evidence that learning has taken place and that equivalence can be demonstrated. Appropriate evidence may include transcripts, portfolios, essays written for the purpose, module outlines, interviews, work-based projects, vivas or completion of the usual assessment associated with the module(s) for which equivalence is being claimed. Evidence of learning must be:

- Authentic
- Relevant
- Reliable
- Sufficient
- Valid
- Verifiable.

10. Assessment of applications

- 10.1 The decision-making process and outcomes should be transparent and demonstrably rigorous and fair.
- 10.2 Any decision on allowing RPL must be considered in accordance with the principles set out in this policy and the requirements set out in the relevant programme regulations.
- 10.3 For applicants submitting RPL requests as part of an application through UCAS (usually for admission with Advanced Standing, under the [Student Transfer Policy](#)) the Admissions Teams will liaise with the student and relevant members of academic staff to arrange consideration of the request.
- 10.4 The evidence assessed for the module or part of programme must be sufficient to cover the learning outcomes for the module or Part.
- 10.5 Evidence that does not cover the learning outcomes fully will need to be supplemented to demonstrate sufficiency. This may necessitate the student undertaking additional assessment.

- 10.6 Mechanisms for assessing prior learning must be rigorous in ensuring that the learning which is presented as RPL is equivalent to the learning that would have occurred had the student studied all elements of the programme of study without RPL i.e. that equivalent learning outcomes have been met.
- 10.7 Schools must have procedures in place to allow for the resubmission of unsuccessful RPL applications in line with University Assessment Regulations.
- 10.8 Records must be kept about the rationale for RPL decisions. The outcomes of RPL applications (including unsuccessful applications) must be reported to School Programmes Committee via the governance arrangements and ratification of the Board of Examiners.
- 10.9 Documentation relating to RPL applications must be available for scrutiny by external examiners in accordance with normal School procedures for assessed work.
- 10.10 If an application for RPL and /or the supporting evidence provided is found to contain fraudulent or misleading claims, the University reserves the right to terminate any offer it has made. If fraudulent RPL applications are discovered after a student has enrolled the University may take action to permanently exclude the student and may also, where appropriate, inform any relevant PSRBs and/or third parties about the exclusion.
- 10.11 Schools which routinely handle RPL applications may wish to develop an RPL equivalence document which indicates where certificated credit from modules completed at other institutions have been assessed as demonstrating equivalence to University of Southampton modules. In all cases this must be maintained as current and applicable.
- 10.12 Decisions on RPL applications are a matter of academic judgement, and the acceptance of an application for any form of RPL is entirely at the discretion of the University. In line with the Regulations Governing Academic Appeals

by Students appeals against this academic judgement will not be considered.

11. Timescales

- 11.1 It is expected that all RPL applications are submitted and considered at the earliest possible opportunity. Wherever possible this should be at the point of programme commencement.
- 11.2 Applications must be submitted within 8 weeks of registration for RPL unless specific arrangements for additional assessment requirements, and/or programme regulations/structure preclude this.

12. Certification

- 12.1 If RPL is approved for a student, the student will not have to enrol for or take the modules against which credit has been given through the RPL process. Instead, their student record will record the number and level of credits for which RPL has been received.
- 12.2 The student's transcript or diploma supplement must clearly identify where Credit has been awarded for elements of a programme that have been achieved on the basis of RPL rather than study of the module(s). The modules recognised through the RPL route will be shown as having been passed but a percentage mark will not be recorded, except where paragraph 3.16 applies.

13. Enhancement

- 13.1 Schools are encouraged to share good practice in RPL developments both within their Faculties, where appropriate, and across the institution.
- 13.2 Schools are encouraged to monitor RPL activities by seeking feedback from RPL applicants about their experience of the process and by monitoring specifically the progress of students admitted using these procedures.

14. University Commitment

- 14.1 The University is committed to operating its RPL procedures in ways that ensure fairness, transparency and equal opportunities within the legal

framework of the United Kingdom. The University welcomes applications for RPL from students/applicants regardless of their background and aims to eliminate discrimination on any inappropriate ground. More information about our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is available from our [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion \(EDI\)](#) webpages.

15. Resources

- [The University's Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme](#)
- [Quality Assurance Agency Credit Framework for England](#)

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Appendix: RPL Process Diagram

