

Code of Practice for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

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1. Introduction

The University of Wolverhampton (UoW) Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) are designed to serve as a basic framework document for Faculties, outlining the principles of RPL and the structures and processes that Faculties should implement in order to provide consistency and transparency for RPL.

These guidelines reference the QAA Quality Code for Higher Education [Advice and Guidance on Assessment](#) - Recognition of prior learning (Guiding principles 2, 3).

Also the Education and Skills Funding Agency : [Apprenticeships: initial assessment to recognise prior learning](#).

1.1 Context

1.1.1 University context

The University strives to put students first and confirms our mission “to maximise opportunity by unlocking the talent and ability within all individual students, enabling them to realise their full potential.” It also recognises that the student journey starts before the student arrives, and that our application processes will be transparent and timely. This should apply in the same way where a student makes an application for RPL as part of their application.

1.1.2 QAA context

The QAA advice and guidance notes the following expectations:

Information on opportunities for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) is readily accessible to potential applicants and guidance and support in applying for RPL is provided.

Regulations and requirements in relation to RPL are clear and explicit. They include:

- reference to minimum and maximum limits on the award of credit or exemption through RPL
- whether and how RPL will be graded
- how credit and exemptions will be used for the purposes of progression and for the award and classification of qualifications
- processes for investigating allegations of fraudulent applications for RPL
- processes for considering appeals against RPL decisions.

Where RPL meets the requirements for learning outcomes for the relevant part of the course, it is consistent with national reference points.

1.1.3 Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) context

The ESFA have published guidance to inform training providers, employers and apprentices about the need for, and importance of, initial assessment (IA) and recognition of prior learning (PL).

2. Definitions

2.1 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) involves an assessment process on the part of academic staff at the University that leads to recognition, normally through the award of credit.

2.2 General and Specific Credit

While all assessed learning can be awarded credit, this credit can be defined as either general or specific depending on its relevance to the learning of the proposed programme of study. **General credit** is that gained as a general recognition of assessed learning at specified learning. Where credit is recognised through the admissions process as directly contributing to a programme of study, this is defined as **specific**.

2.3 Experiential Learning

Evidence for RPL can be used from any aspect of an applicant's prior **experience** including :

- Personal experience / family life
- Work activities
- Community or voluntary activities

The essential feature of this process is that it is the learning gained through experience which is being assessed, not the experience itself.

2.4 Certificated Learning

Sometimes an applicant may be able to provide documentary evidence (**certificated**) for their prior learning. Along with a higher education award, this could also be professional development awards or employment-based awards which are at higher education level but which may not have led to the award of credits or qualifications aligned to the relevant higher education qualifications framework. A process of mapping enables a decision to be made about whether the learning is suitable for recognition and includes consideration of the content studied matched against the course/modules the applicant wishes to study.

Credit transfer is where the credits or qualification have been awarded by a UK higher education degree-awarding body in accordance with the relevant higher education qualifications framework, such an award is addressed through the process of credit transfer. The Faculty to which the applicant is applying determines the status of the award/credits presented, including consideration of academic level and volume of credits in relation to the award / course for which the applicant is applying.

2.5 Progression Agreements

The processes outlined so far refer to the assessment of applications presented by individual students while **Progression Agreements** are formal agreements which are based on the consideration of status and offer that the University will grant for named award / course that may have been studied at a specific institution or be recognised within a sector or profession. The process of assessing a named award / course with the intention of establishing a progression agreement will involve a mapping exercise in the consideration of level and volume of credits that may be granted. A Progression Agreement will lead to entry onto an award / course with advanced standing i.e. where a student is exempted from part of an award / course through the recognition of prior learning. The Progression Agreement will state the awards / courses studied and to which UoW awards / courses progression is available with the associated level and volume of credits granted. The student transcript will record the number of credits recognised through the Progression Agreement.

2.6 Entry Requirements

Entry requirements: Prior learning relevant to the award of RPL is learning which is at the same level as the award / course being undertaken, as defined within the relevant national higher education qualifications framework. Where a student has relevant prior learning which is at a level lower than

the award / course that the student / applicant will be studying, then that learning will be considered as contributing to meeting the entry requirements for the course.

2.7 Midlands Credit Compass

The University of Wolverhampton is one of the partners from Midlands Enterprise Universities (MEU). The MEU partners have developed a framework to make the process of transferring academic credit more transparent and to support students who are thinking about leaving university or have left university without completing their studies. MEU recognises that owing to a change in circumstance, occasionally students have to interrupt their studies or move away from their current place of study. The framework allows these students to transfer more easily between partner universities, while maintaining a verified record of achievements. The framework is called the Midlands Credit Compass and promotes a climate which is supportive of student mobility, progression and lifelong learning.

Members of the partnership we assist students that need to leave their studies, to return back into education where they can. Within the MEU, students that are leaving their current University and have achieved some academic credit are issued with information about Midlands Credit Compass and a verified record of their credit achievements. If the student then wishes to transfer to another Midlands Credit Compass University they will be given one to one assistance to transfer using their credit record.

More information on the partnership can be found on the [MEU Credit Compass website](#) with specific information on credit transfer to or from the University of Wolverhampton on our student support pages <https://www.wlv.ac.uk/university-life/student-support/midlands-credit-compass/>

2.8. Postgraduate Loan Eligibility

Students intending to fund a full Masters (either on FT or PT basis) with a Postgraduate Loan from Student Finance England are not eligible for the funding if they are awarded RPL. Students must be undertaking a minimum of 180 credits to be eligible for a Postgraduate Loan. [Eligibility criteria](#)

3. Key principles of RPL at the University of Wolverhampton

3.1 Faculty Management of RPL

Faculties are responsible for the management of RPL subject assessment and evaluation of applications and mapping of credit bearing courses to University courses / modules.

The responsibility for the Faculty's procedures for the management of RPL lies with the Faculty Academic Enhancement Committee (FAEC) which devolves the management of these processes to the Faculty RPL Board.

Each faculty will operate a Faculty RPL Board. The terms of reference and responsibilities of the Faculty RPL Board must include the following as a minimum:

- ensuring appropriate representation in consideration of RPL applications from across the Faculty and collaborative partners where considered appropriate;
- management and processing of RPL applications according to Faculty processes;
- ensuring applications adhere to the University Academic Regulations;
- ensuring the award of credit is aligned in academic level and credit value to the relevant external standards and frameworks (e.g. [QAA](#) Qualifications and Credit Framework)
- ensuring due consideration by the appropriate External Examiner of RPL applications;

- receiving feedback from the External Examiner which forms a part of the documentation presented to the Faculty RPL Board;
- confirming due process with the external contributors to the Board
- making reference to and consideration of PSRB qualifications and requirements as appropriate and inform the University Academic Enhancement Committee (UAEC) of any recommendations;
- undertaking an annual review of the RPL process and documentation;
- monitoring comments and feedback on RPL made by external examiners in their annual Module Results Board reports;
- reviewing fees on an annual basis and referring any proposals to change fee tariffs to the University's Fees and Bursaries Committee;
- managing any appeals relating to RPL applications and overseeing any follow up actions.

In addition, post graduate applicants should be made aware that they are required to study a **minimum of 180 credits** should they wish to receive funding via Student Funding England.

3.2 Role of the external examiner

All Module Results Board external examiners are allocated specific modules in their contract and as part of their role have responsibility for subject decisions on RPL. A Module External Examiner can be asked to receive and comment on samples of processed RPL applications and subsequently record any comments and feedback on the process in the RPL section of their External Examiner report.

All RPL applications are first processed in the faculty and then submitted to the external examiner for consideration. Where there are individual applications or a small number of applications the Faculty may request that the External Examiner considers, subject to their agreement, all of them in any one reporting period.

Comments from the external are recorded along with the decision of the Faculty RPL Board and the minutes of meetings submitted to the Faculty Academic Enhancement Committee.

External Examiners are asked to comment on RPL processes and outcomes in their Module Results Board Annual Report. Any actions arising from these comments feed into the University's Continuous Monitoring Processes.

3.3 Information and guidance for applicants on RPL

Faculties produce Information and Guidance on RPL for applicants. At the discretion of the faculty, where appropriate, this may also form the guidance used by staff involved in processing RPL applications. If not, separate guidance for staff will be produced.

The information and guidance produced for applicants should include, as a minimum:

- the role and purpose of RPL;
- what will and will not be accredited;
- how and when an application should be made;
- the responsibilities of the applicant in making the application for RPL;
- the responsibilities of the faculty in processing applications for RPL;
- the submission process for completed applications;
- the nature of support and advice available;
- any costs to students associated with applying for RPL;
- the nature of evidence required to support an application for RPL and how this should be collated and presented;

- advice relating to the permission for the use of materials and documents that are the property of an organisation rather than that of the individual themselves;
- advice on data protection issues and professional and legal confidentiality issues;
- how RPL applications will be processed;
- how and when the outcome of applications will be communicated to the applicant (including resubmission if permitted);
- how and when the feedback on both successful and non-successful applications will be communicated to the applicant;
- how guidance on resubmission of non-successful applications, if permitted, will be communicated to the applicant;
- information on any fees associated with RPL applications, to include the fee tariff, methods and conditions of payment;
- information on how course fee reductions are applied;
- application form/s.
- how to make an appeal;
- how to make a complaint.

The application form template/s for RPL should facilitate the student's statement of:

- the total number and level of credits for which RPL is being sought;
- the credits or module(s) against which the evidence is being supplied;
- the evidence that is being submitted for the purposes of supporting the application for RPL, for example work-based portfolio, interviews, artefacts, projects, certification and so on;

An example template which could be used either as is or as a basis for considering claims is included in [Appendix 1](#)

3.4 Academic Considerations of RPL

As the recognition of prior learning is a matter of academic judgement, the Faculty will need to ensure that the assessment of applications for RPL are consistent across and between whatever points the assessment is made.

Four key criteria apply to this consideration:

- **Currency:** does the evidence of prior learning relate to current learning – normally no more than 5 years ago?
- **Authenticity:** is the evidence clearly related to the applicant's own efforts and achievements?
- **Sufficiency:** is there sufficient evidence to demonstrate fully the achievement of the learning claimed?
- **Acceptability:** is there an appropriate match between the evidence presented and the learning being demonstrated? Is the evidence valid and reliable?

3.5 RPL in the University Academic Regulations

Section 2.3 of the [University's Academic Regulations](#) relate to "Entry with Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)" and should be referred to when considering applications to taught courses.

Sections 2.6, 4.5 and 4.6 of the [Professional Doctorate Regulations](#) relate to RPL and should be referred to when considering applications to a Professional Doctorate.

The regulations confirm the minimum number of University of Wolverhampton credits students must study and pass, and so the maximum number of credits which may be considered as RPL.

According to the published academic regulations, RPL is not permitted for entry to research courses including the Medical Doctorate (MD).

3.6 Roles and responsibilities of staff involved in processing RPL applications

Faculties will articulate the expected roles and responsibilities of staff who are involved in processing RPL applications.

Faculties will have a documented process for RPL, with clear lines of responsibility for advising on and processing applications for RPL, including where functions are managed by Professional Services staff.

For example, advice may be offered primarily by course leaders/admissions tutors or by designated RPL advisers. Faculties may wish to have course / subject RPL advisers to support an applicant's submission of a portfolio. In relation to the RPL Application Form, Faculties may require it to be counter-signed by a designated member of staff before being processed.

The Faculty will ensure that appropriate arrangements are provided for the training and support of staff, including collaborative partner staff who engage with the support, guidance and assessment of RPL applications.

3.7 Monitoring of the RPL process

Faculties will have effective systems and processes in place for obtaining feedback from applicants and students on RPL applications and decision-making processes. Faculties will manage responses to comments received and identify actions required through the University's Continuous Monitoring process.

3.8 Managing Complaints and Appeals regarding RPL

Any complaints and appeals received with regard to RPL are managed through the [Admissions Complaints Procedure](#) for applicants and for current students through the [Academic Appeals Procedure](#).

3.9 Additional information on RPL for apprenticeships

This section should be read in conjunction with the guidance provided by the Education and Skills Funding Agency¹. The quotes that follow are all taken from this online guidance.

“Before an apprenticeship begins, the main training provider must assess the individual's prior learning to establish the ‘starting point’, or baseline, of the apprentice. This informs how much of the apprenticeship training content the individual requires. It checks that the apprenticeship is an appropriate training programme for the individual.”

Also

“The ESFA does not mandate how prior learning should be recorded, only that the initial assessment must be documented in the evidence pack and summarised on the commitment statement. Initial assessment is subject to audit checks and funds may be recovered where initial assessment has not taken place, has not been evidenced or a price reduction has not been made to reflect the prior learning.”

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeships-recognition-of-prior-learning/apprenticeships-initial-assessment-to-recognise-prior-learning>

It will be at the discretion of the faculty as to whether all prior learning contributing to a place on an apprenticeship programme is considered at Faculty RPL Boards or managed by Chair's action or by correspondence in order not to delay the processing of apprenticeship applications. Regardless of this, in order to comply with ESFA audit requirements :

- where prior learning **is awarded** as contributing to a place on an apprenticeship programme this should be recorded in the minutes of the RPL Board and recorded in the apprentice's evidence pack;
- in all other cases where potential prior learning **is considered, but not awarded** as contributing towards a place on an apprenticeship programme the outcome should be recorded in the apprentice's evidence pack.

3.10 Curriculum Mapping for advanced standing

Advanced standing is the entry of a student to a University of Wolverhampton award at a point beyond that which is normal for a student undertaking the full credit diet of the course pertaining to that award; for example an advanced standing entry point for a Bachelor's or Master's course may be Certificate/Diploma level.

Curriculum mapping for advanced standing can relate to an individual student's application for a University of Wolverhampton course or to another institution's course for consideration for advanced standing to a University of Wolverhampton award, and students from that institution, at admission stage, are to be assessed for advanced standing on the basis of that mapping. Reference should be made to the formal contract, where this exists. This mapping document may be included as an appendix in Articulation and Progression Agreements.

Outcomes of curriculum mapping conducted by the Faculty are recorded and the information communicated to the Registry's Admissions Unit and where they are related to the production of a contract to the Quality and Collaboration Unit.

For a template which can be used to record curriculum mapping of provision from another institution see [Appendix 2](#)

More information on Articulation Agreements may be found in the Working in Partnership section of the Quality Handbook

3.11 Academic Governance reporting on RPL

The minutes from RPL Boards should be received at the next available meeting of the Faculty Academic Enhancement Committee. Chairs may agree with the Officer to include RPL as a standard agenda item at FAEC.

An annual update on RPL should be approved at FAEC and submitted to UAEC for the final meeting of the academic year. This brief report should note how RPL is operating in the faculty, what is working well and any areas for improvement. Faculties may wish to include a data appendix. For example outlining how many claims were considered, approved and rejected.

Appendix 1 – RPL mapping template (example)

Applicant information (as applicable)	
Name of applicant	
Address	
Contact details	
Other	

Process

Mapping undertaken by :	
Name(s)	
Nature of consultation / evidence received	

Mapping

Evidence received	Level	Credits	Contact Hours	Corresponding UoW provision as applicable	Comments
					Tab to enter rows

Summary of outcome

Actions arising			
Conclusion			
Signature		Date	

Faculty Approval

Mapping approved for forwarding to RPL Committee	
Name of Approving Committee / Board	
Date of meeting	
Committee / Board Chair's signature	

Guidance for completion

Partner Information	Include as a minimum the name, address and contact details of the applicant. Other information may be included if this will aid the process. This section could be redacted when presented for approval.
Level	This should be at level 3-7 in line with the FHEQ .
Credits	This should be in line with the University's expectations around the number of hours studied which is that 1 credit is equivalent to 10 notional study hours.
Contact hours	This could be used to determine the credit rating of provision based on 1 credit being equivalent to 10 notional study hours.
Corresponding UoW provision as applicable	Where it is required that the provision is mapped to University provision, the module leader, module code and title should be included here with an indication of partial or total mapping.
Comments	This section may include points to be considered in formulating the overall conclusion.
Process	This section should indicate who has been involved in the mapping process (names and roles) along with an outline of the extent of consultation with others including unit / module / course leaders and external input e.g. comments from an external examiner.
Actions arising	This section should include any actions to be addressed before a conclusion can be made or actions to be monitored at the next stage of the approval process.
Conclusion	This should include if the outcome of the mapping is partial or total. If the mapping is partial, the actions section above should indicate what needs to be done for total mapping to be achieved.
Signature	This report should be signed by the academic member of University staff (a subject specialist) who has undertaken the mapping exercise.
Name of Approving Committee / Board	This may be the RPL Board or FAEC. If the mapping is approved by Chair's action, the outcome should be noted in the minutes of the next available meeting of the RPL Board or FAEC.

Appendix 2 - Mapping Document for Collaborative Provision

Partner information (as applicable)	
Name of partner	
Address	
Contact details	
Other	

Process

Mapping undertaken by :	
Name(s)	
Nature of consultation / evidence received	

Mapping

Collaborative provision	Level	Credits	Contact Hours	Corresponding UoW provision as applicable	Comments
					Tab to enter rows

Summary of outcome

Actions arising			
Conclusion			
Signature		Date	

Faculty Approval

Mapping approved for forwarding to QCU	
Name of Approving Committee / Board	
Date of meeting	
Committee / Board Chair's signature	

Guidance for completion

Partner Information	Include as a minimum the name and address of the partner and if possible the named contact and their email details. Other information may be included if this will aid the process.
Collaborative provision	This can be listed by module, short course or however the collaborative provision is delivered
Level	This should be at level 3-7 in line with the FHEQ .
Credits	This should be in line with the University's expectations around the number of hours studied which is that 1 credit is equivalent to 10 notional study hours.
Contact hours	This could be used to determine the credit rating of provision based on 1 credit being equivalent to 10 notional study hours.
Corresponding UoW provision as applicable	Where it is required that the provision is mapped to University provision, the module leader, module code and title should be included here with an indication of partial or total mapping.
Comments	This section may include points to be considered in formulating the overall conclusion.
Process	This section should indicate who has been involved in the mapping process (names and roles) along with an outline of the extent of consultation with University and partner staff including unit / module / course leaders and external input e.g. comments from an external examiner.
Actions arising	This section should include any actions to be addressed before a conclusion can be made or actions to be monitored at the next stage of the approval process.
Conclusion	<p>This should include if the outcome of the mapping is partial or total. If the mapping is partial, the actions section above should indicate what needs to be done for total mapping to be achieved.</p> <p>This section should also indicate if it proposed that the mapping will result in the awarding of a named University award or credit.</p>

	The final version submitted to QCU to inform the Memorandum of Understanding should confirm the mapping process is complete and approved.
Signature	This report should be signed by the academic member of University staff (a subject specialist) who has undertaken the mapping exercise.
Name of Approving Committee / Board	This may be the RPL Board or FAEC. If the mapping is approved by Chair's action, the outcome should be noted in the minutes of the next available meeting of the RPL Board or FAEC.

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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)²

Q : Where a student has enrolled onto level 6 of a top up degree, will their level 4 and 5 study show on their transcript?

A: Your students level 4 and 5 study represented the entry requirement for the top up degree, so will not be shown on their transcript. If they had joined level 6 of a three year course, then their level 4 and 5 study would have been determined through RPL and would have been included on their transcript.

Q : Where a student has enrolled on a course with a Foundation Year, can they use their BTEC and A levels to claim RPL?

A: Any achievements at level 3 are classed as entry requirements onto a course with a Foundation Year and so cannot be claimed as RPL.

Q : Does any RPL awarded affect the amount of student loan that can be claimed?

A: For an **undergraduate student** on a full time UG course the tuition fees/loan amount will still be £9250.00. If the amount of RPL means that they are studying less than 100 credits they may be classified as part time or temporarily part time, dependent upon when they are studying the remaining modules.

Post graduate applicants are required to study a minimum of 180 credits should they wish to receive funding via Student Funding England.

² Please contact QCU if you have any FAQs to add to this list

Online Examples of how to Complete an RPL Submission

Example Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) Portfolio

https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/documents/quality-assurance/codes/taught/pdf/AnnexR_APEL_Portfolio_Example_2014.pdf

Compiling your Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Portfolio

<https://www.port.ac.uk/student-life/help-and-advice/applying-to-uni/recognition-of-prior-learning/rpl-portfolio-tips-and-guidance>

Examples of how to map evidence to learning outcomes

See from page 20 onwards

<https://www.cit.ie/contentfiles/RPL%20material/CIT%20RPL%20Guidelines%20for%20Students%20sw.pdf>

Sample Learning Portfolio

<https://www.racp.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/sample-learning-portfolio.pdf?sfvrsn=4>

Putting together a portfolio of evidence

https://www.qualifax.ie/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=166&Itemid=190