

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING POLICY

Introduction

1. The University of Suffolk recognises that learning may take place in a wide variety of contexts, including via formal taught courses, self-directed study and professional or life experiences. The Recognition of Prior Learning Policy is designed to facilitate formal recognition of learning undertaken elsewhere, supporting our institutional mission to widen participation and promote equality and diversity. The Policy has been mapped to the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning \(2013\)](#). The overall aim of the Policy is to provide a framework within which decisions about Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) are valid, consistent, timely and fair.

Definitions

2. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the overarching term used for the award of credit on the basis of demonstrated learning that has occurred at some time in the past either through attending formal courses (prior certificated learning) or through paid or unpaid work, self-directed learning or other life experiences (prior experiential learning). The theme common to both prior certificated learning and prior experiential learning is that learning, and not just the experience of the activities alone, is being recognised and awarded credit.

3. Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning (RPCL) is the process for assessing, recognising and awarding credit for learning that has been previously accredited, formally recognised or certificated through a higher education institution or other higher education / training provider. This can include professional development or employment-based awards offered at higher education level that have not led to the award of credits or qualifications positioned on the [Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree Awarding Bodies \(2014\)](#) (FHEQ).

4. Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL) is the process for assessing, recognising and/or awarding credit for learning that has been achieved through experience and/or training that has not been formally assessed.

Principles

5. Credits may be given for prior learning where the level, standard, content, relevance and currency of that learning are appropriate to a particular programme of study. Credit may be awarded via RPL for:

- a) individual modules (noting that RPL can only be awarded for whole modules), where the applicant or student can demonstrate that they meet the assessment requirements for the

module through knowledge, understanding and/or skills that they already possess as a result of prior learning and/or

- b) for an entire level of study (i.e. 120 credits), where the applicant or student can demonstrate that they meet the assessment requirements for the relevant level of study through knowledge, understanding and/or skills that they already possess as a result of prior learning.

6. Applicants or students awarded credit against modules or levels of study are exempt from the requirement to study those modules or levels as part of their programme of study. Students may still be required to pay a module fee (see paragraph 31).

7. The maximum amount of credit that can be awarded via RPL is specified within the framework and regulations for the relevant type of award. Any course-specific variations to these regulations must be identified and approved at the point of course validation or re-approval and recorded on the definitive course record (for example, some awards may exclude or limit the use of RPL due to Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements). For undergraduate Honours degree and Integrated Master's courses, the regulations state that the maximum amount of credit that can be awarded via RPL should not exceed 240 credits. For all other undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses, the maximum should not exceed 50% of the credit required for the relevant award. RPL cannot be awarded for undergraduate (Level 6) or postgraduate (Level 7) dissertation or research project modules.

8. Credits for RPL are of the same value as those gained within the institution and are recorded on a student's Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR). However, unless they involve internal transfers (as discussed in paragraph 13 below), the credits are ungraded and therefore do not contribute to the overall degree classification. Credit recognition is facilitated by the Higher Education Credit Framework for England and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

9. A student granted credit towards an award on the basis of prior learning cannot subsequently use that credit towards a further award offered at the institution, unless the student is granted credit for prior learning as part of a course with a direct progression route (for example a Foundation degree course with an associated Level 6 honours degree progression route).

10. The period of time for which prior learning remains valid and worthy of credit is discipline-specific. Decisions on the 'shelf-life' of prior learning must be made at course level. Normally, learning should have occurred within the past five years.

11. Course documentation (including the definitive course record) must be explicit in stating where there are PSRB requirements that might affect an applicant or student's ability to make a RPL claim for credit against certain modules or levels of study.

12. The RPL assessment process must be applied consistently in accordance with these principles and any specific RPL requirements of individual courses, as determined at validation.

Credit gained at the University of Suffolk

13. Students who gain credit on one course at the University of Suffolk, but subsequently transfer to another University of Suffolk course and do not receive an intermediate exit award may be able to have the credit and marks transferred to the new course where there is appropriate alignment in terms of learning outcomes. For such internal transfers, the credit and marks at the appropriate level may be used to determine the final degree classification.

14. Students who withdraw from a course at the University of Suffolk, with or without an intermediate exit award, are not permitted to use the credit achieved to rejoin the course or to enrol on an alternative course with academic credit until at least one academic year has elapsed, and may not rejoin the same course if they were originally required by the Assessment Board to withdraw from that course for academic reasons including academic failure or misconduct, for reasons relating to fitness to practise, or where the maximum period of registration has been exceeded. The Assessment Board will determine whether there is a good cause to permit a student to rejoin the course or join an alternative course with academic credit and whether there should be a cap on the overall module mark for any modules that the student previously failed and needs to retake. The student must complete a minimum of 60 credits on rejoining the course or joining an alternative course in order to be eligible for a higher level award. Only the credit achieved on rejoining the course or joining the alternative course with academic credit will be used to determine the final degree classification.

Applying for RPL

15. Applicants should normally apply for RPL as part of the admissions process. Potential applicants who may be eligible for RPL should be made aware of the opportunities available, and associated timescales, as part of the recruitment and admissions process. RPL may be awarded at other points during a student's period of study at the discretion of the relevant Assessment Board (for example where an enrolled student is studying part-time and gains relevant learning experience through employment in parallel to their academic studies).

16. Applicants and students should be encouraged to submit RPL applications in a timely manner, to enable RPL decisions to be made prior to the commencement of the element(s) of the course for which they are seeking exemption. This is particularly important for applicants who are seeking exemption from an entire level of study as part of the admissions process, so that their application can be considered and approved before they commence their studies at the appropriate level. Where applicants or students are seeking exemption for individual module(s), they should attend and submit any appropriate assessment for those elements of their course for which RPL is being sought while they await the outcome of their RPL application.

17. It is the responsibility of applicants / students to apply for RPL, using the Application for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) form which is available in the applicant area and on MySuffolk. Information and guidance on applying for RPL (both written and verbal) will clearly outline the process for making an application, the evidence that is required to support applications, and the criteria against which decisions will be made. Receipt of submitted RPL applications will be formally acknowledged within ten working days, and the applicant / student will be notified of anticipated timescales for reaching a decision on their application and the means by which they will be informed of the outcome.

18. Each school or partner institution should have nominated RPL adviser(s) who are responsible for supporting applicants and students in making RPL claims, liaising with relevant members of the course team where necessary for subject-specific advice. Guidance will be provided to RPL advisers on their role and responsibilities, which should include:

- a) providing information and guidance to applicants and students on the RPL process (including signposting to advice and guidance on the potential implications of a successful RPL application in terms of a student's registration status, tuition fees and final degree classification)
- b) clarifying what is required as part of the application, including what will be considered suitable evidence of prior learning (in the case of RPEL, this should involve advising the applicant or student on the compilation of a portfolio of evidence or other appropriate form of assessment as outlined in paragraph 21)
- c) supporting the applicant or student in completing and submitting the RPL application form and the supporting evidence.

Evidencing prior learning

19. Evidence of prior certificated learning should include:

- a) copies of relevant certificates

- b) course documentation evidencing content, learning outcomes and level of study
- c) details of module results (for example via an academic transcript or equivalent).

20. Evidence of prior experiential learning should include:

- a) a systematic personal reflection on relevant learning experiences and how these have furthered their understanding of the relevant subject area
- b) clear statements about the learning achieved through these experiences and how this relates to the learning outcomes for the relevant element(s) of the University of Suffolk course for which they are seeking exemption
- c) evidence to support these statements, which might include:
 - confirmation of job responsibilities and job description by a line-manager
 - a record of achievements
 - details of specialist training / skills
 - contact details of referees who can comment on the applicant's achievements
 - other documentation to demonstrate the learning outcomes achieved.

21. Evidence of prior experiential learning is usually submitted via a portfolio, although alternative forms of assessment may also be employed to suit the particular needs of individual courses (including structured interviews, presentations, performances or other assessment tasks). Interviews, presentations or performances should be recorded so that there is a reproducible record evidencing the demonstration of prior learning.

Assessing prior learning

22. Decisions regarding RPL are a matter of academic judgement, and may be influenced by the requirements of any relevant PSRBs. The decision-making process and outcomes should be transparent and demonstrably rigorous and fair.

23. Academic assessment and approval of RPL applications will be conducted by a formally approved RPL sub-group of the relevant Assessment Board. The RPL sub-group has delegated authority to make decisions on RPL and to award the relevant credit, with the outcomes reported to the next full meeting of the Assessment Board for information. All documentation relating to RPL applications and decisions should be made available for subsequent external scrutiny.

24. The RPL sub-group should include, as a minimum, the Chair of the Assessment Board and the Course Leader(s) concerned (i.e. for each course for which there is an RPL application). A Clerk must be in attendance to coordinate the process and ensure that there is a formal record of the meeting. Meetings may be conducted virtually where necessary to facilitate timely decision-

making. Prompt consideration of applications is particularly important for applicants wishing to seek exemption from a whole level of study as part of the admissions process, and therefore it may be necessary to have more frequent RPL sub-group meetings at the start of the academic year to accommodate this.

25. Credit can be awarded for prior learning where the RPL sub-group of the Assessment Board is satisfied that the applicant or student has demonstrated achievement of the intended learning outcomes for the relevant element(s) of the course for which they are seeking exemption, and is adequately prepared to complete the remaining elements of the course. It is recognised that for the RPL in relation to a large amount of credit (for example an entire level of study), mapping against module learning outcomes can be a barrier rather than an enabler of RPL, and therefore mapping against course level learning outcomes and/or level descriptors may provide a more appropriate and flexible form of assessment.

26. In making judgements, claims for RPL will be evaluated against the following criteria:

Relevance	Is there an appropriate match between the evidence presented and the prior learning that the applicant or student is seeking to demonstrate? Is the prior learning specific? Can it be identified and categorised? Was the learning in a context understood by the learner?
Sufficiency	Is there sufficient evidence to demonstrate full achievement of the learning claimed?
Authenticity	Is the evidence valid and reliable? Does it clearly relate to the applicant or student's own efforts and achievements?
Currency	Does the evidence relate to current learning? Does it meet course validation and/or PSRB time limits in terms of currency of prior learning?
Level	Is the prior learning at a level that is at least equivalent to the relevant element of the programme of study for which the applicant or student is seeking exemption?

Notification of outcomes

27. Applicants / students should be notified of the outcome of their RPL application (including the level and volume of credit being awarded) via a letter from the Chair of the relevant Assessment Board, in accordance with timescales communicated to the applicant or student when receipt of their application was formally acknowledged (see paragraph 17). Where the application is rejected (in full or in part), the outcome letter should include feedback on the reasons for this

decision and guidance on obtaining the relevant credit within their programme of study. The feedback should also highlight their right to make a complaint about the decision in accordance with paragraph 28 below. The feedback should be agreed by the RPL sub-group of the relevant Assessment Board as part of its deliberations.

Complaints about RPL decisions

28. A complaint about an RPL decision may only be made on the grounds that (i) correct procedure was not followed which undermined the validity of the decision and/or (ii) prejudice or bias on the part of the RPL sub-group affected the decision. Complaints concerning the academic judgement of the RPL sub-group and/or complaints based upon the informal assessment of the RPL application by members of academic staff will not normally be considered, as these are not deemed as valid grounds for complaint.

29. A complaint should be made in writing to the Office for Student Appeals, Complaints and Conduct (OSACC) within fifteen working days of notification of the outcome of the RPL application, in accordance with the procedures outlined in the Student Complaints Procedure.

Monitoring and evaluation

30. The University of Suffolk will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the Recognition of Prior Learning Policy and reflect upon the outcomes for enhancement purposes. As part of this, schools and partner institutions are encouraged to monitor RPL activities by seeking feedback from RPL applicants about their experience of the process and, where practicable, by monitoring the progress of students admitted using these procedures. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement team, in liaison with the Academic Registrar, will undertake periodic audits of RPL documentation and will seek feedback on the RPL process from Chairs of Assessment Boards and RPL advisers. Outcomes will be reported to the Quality Committee. The purpose of these audits will be to ensure that decisions regarding RPL are valid, reliable and consistent across the institution, in accordance with the requirements of this Policy.

Fees

31. Fees for claims for RPL are set out in the Tuition Fee Policy which is updated annually and is available on the University of Suffolk website and MySuffolk.

APPLICATION FOR RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL)

This form should be used to apply for recognition of prior certificated learning (RPCL) and/or recognition of prior experiential learning (RPEL), in accordance with the University's Recognition of Prior Learning Policy. The form should be completed by the applicant/student in collaboration with the nominated RPL Adviser for their course. Once completed, the form should be passed to Registry Services (or to the HE Office within partner colleges) for approval by the RPL sub-group of the relevant Assessment Board.

Applicants/students are advised to consult the student guide to making an RPL application, and to contact Student Services (or to the HE Office within partner colleges) for advice on the potential implications of an RPL application in terms of registration status and tuition fees.

PART ONE: PERSONAL DETAILS AND NATURE OF CLAIM

To be completed by the applicant/student in liaison with the RPL Adviser

Name	
Student ID number (if known)	
Address	
Email address	
Telephone number (home)	
Telephone number (mobile)	
Course	
Department	
RPL Adviser	
Type of prior learning <i>Please tick relevant box (or both boxes if your claim is a combination of both types of prior learning)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Certificated <i>Learning that has been accredited, formally recognised or certificated through a higher education institution or other higher education / training provider</i>
	<input type="checkbox"/> Experiential <i>Uncertificated learning that has been achieved through experience and/or training that has not been formally assessed</i>

Summary of prior learning

Please describe the nature of the prior learning for which you are seeking recognition, including subject area, level (in accordance with the levels within the [Framework for Higher Education Qualifications](#)), volume (in terms of credit) and date undertaken. Please provide as much detail as possible.

Supporting evidence of prior learning

Please list the evidence that you are submitting with this form to support your application for recognition of prior learning

Applicant/student declaration

I confirm that the information given in this form and within supporting documents is complete and accurate to the best of my knowledge.

Print name	
Sign name	
Date	

PART TWO: EVALUATION OF CLAIM

To be completed by RPL Adviser in liaison with the student

Alignment of prior learning with course content and learning outcomes

Please summarise how the prior learning aligns with the relevant element(s) of the course for which the applicant/student is seeking exemption (including equivalency of level, volume, subject content and learning outcomes)

Currency of prior learning

Please confirm whether the prior learning remains current in terms of the content of the course (noting that prior learning should normally have taken place within the last five years and should meet the requirements of any relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body)

Modules / levels against which it is recommended that credit is awarded

Please list the modules that it is recommended that the applicant/student be awarded credit in recognition of prior learning. Where it is recommended that the applicant be awarded credit for an entire level of study (i.e. entry with advanced standing), alternatively please tick the relevant box(es) below.

Module Title	Module Code	Credits	FHEQ Level
Total credits			

Or (for recognition of whole levels of study)

FHEQ Level <i>(please tick all levels that apply)</i>	Level 4		Level 5	
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RPL Adviser recommendation

I recommended to the Assessment Board that credit is granted in recognition of prior learning in relation to the module(s) and/or level(s) of study outlined above.

Print name	
Sign name	
Date	

PART THREE: ASSESSMENT BOARD APPROVAL

Approval by RPL sub-group of Assessment Board

Please add any comments below, including limitations on credit awarded, requests for additional information or any further requirements (e.g. interview)

Signed (Chair):	Date:
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Once approved, this form should be retained on the student's record. The student will receive formal notification of the decision of the RPL sub-group of the Assessment Board, and the outcome will be reported to the full meeting of the Assessment Board.

For office use only

Input on SITS by:	Date:	Student notification sent:
Fee payable:	Date sent to Finance:	Student invoice sent: