Policy and Regulations for the Recognition of Prior Learning

including the Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning (RPCL) andthe Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)

2021-22

Glossary of terms

Throughout this document the following terms will be used as defined below.

Advanced entry
Where the amount of credit an applicant is awarded via **RPL** allows the applicant to gainexemption from one or more **modules**, but not a whole level or stage of study, within a programme.

Advanced standing
Where the amount of credit an applicant is awarded via RPL allows the applicant to gainexemption from at least one whole level or stage of study within a programme.

Assessment criteria
Assessment criteria describe what the learner has to do to show that the **learning outcome** has been achieved. They are based on the intended learning outcomes for themodule and assessment tasks being assessed and specify the standards that must be met and the evidence that will be gathered to demonstrate the achievement of the learning outcomes.

Credit
A quantitative measure of the amount of learning required to achieve specified learning outcomes of a module or level within a programme of study, expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level or levels. In the University's credit framework, one credit equates to ten hours of required learning. The learning time includes class contact, directed learning, private study, preparation of assessments, revision and examinations.

Credit accumulation
Achieving academic credit over time by successful completion of units of study or byrecognition of prior learning.

Credit level
Credit is expressed in terms of an academic level of study, which relates to the relative demand, complexity, depth of learning and learner autonomy required in order to achieve the learning outcomes of a module or level within a programme. Academic levelis benchmarked to the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards, The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies, October 2014.*

Credit transfer
A mechanism which allows credit awarded by another HE provider to be recognised, quantified and included towards the credit requirements for a programme delivered bythe University, and/or between programmes offered by the University.

Credit value
The number of credits at a specified credit level, indicating the amount and difficulty ofthe learning achieved, based on notional hours of learning.

Double counting

Double counting refers to the awarding of credit for the same learning to two (or more)separate qualifications at the same level. In effect, providing two qualifications 'for the price of one'. The University does not consider double counting to be educationally desirable or defensible and so will not permit RPL to be used for that purpose.

General credit (and exemption/transfer)

Credit for prior learning, at a given level or levels, which can be used to gain exemption from studying a specified amount of credit at the given academic level(s) towards a qualification. This type of credit transfer is awarded if the prior learning is at, or equivalent to, the academic level(s) of the programme concerned and is deemed relevant to the qualification in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills. This type ofcredit exemption differs from specific credit exemption in that it does not exempt a learner from any specifically named module/s. Final award transcripts will indicate the number of credits a learner has been exempted from studying, and at what level/s, towards the qualification.

Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes are specific for a programme or module. They describe what astudent should know, understand, or be able to do at the end of that programme ormodule.

Module

A self-contained, formally structured, learning experience with a coherent and explicit setof learning outcomes and assessment criteria. The standard module is the basic course unit in the Undergraduate and the Postgraduate curriculum for which credit values are variable. In the University Professional Development framework some modules may be taken by students as "stand-alone" modules rather than as a component of a programme of study.

Notional hours of learning

The number of hours which it is expected that a learner (at a particular level) will spend,on average, to achieve the specified learning outcomes at that level.

Specific credit (and exemption/transfer)

Credit for prior learning, at a given level or levels, which can be used to gain exemption from a specific module or modules within an award of the University. To be eligible for credit transfer, the learning outcomes and academic level(s) of the prior learning must be at, or be equivalent to, the learning outcomes and academic level(s) of the module/s from which exemption is being sought, and must be considered to be broadly in-line with the learning outcomes of the chosen qualification. Final award transcripts will specify which module/s a learner has been exempted from studying, along with their credit values and levels, towards the qualification.

1. Purpose of this RPL Policy

RPL - the Recognition of Prior Learning (previously known as Accreditation of Prior Learning) is a process through which students may receive credit towards part of their chosen programme of study based on recognition, identification and acknowledgementof learning from previous experience and achievements. There are two RPL pathways through which credit can be awarded:

• **Recognition of Prior 'Certificated' Learning (RPCL)** is the achievement of learning that has been formally assessed and certificated from previous studywith a higher education organisation.

• **Recognition of Prior 'Experiential' Learning (RPEL)** is the non-certified acquisition of relevant skills and knowledge, gained through relevant experience,which can be evaluated.

The purpose of this policy is to allow flexibility for current and prospective students to use RPL procedures to their best effect while at the same time providing an overall framework within which regulatory and quality assurance issues are addressed acrossthe University.

2. Principles of this RPL Policy

The University wishes to encourage and facilitate the admission of suitably qualifiedstudents to programmes of study through the use of RPL.

The University is committed to the principles of transparency, equity and fairness in RPL andto the principle of valuing all learning regardless of the mode or place of its acquisition. The University accepts the principle that RPL is an academic activity and should only beperformed by competent academic staff. External advice and advice from professional/ regulatory bodies may be sought when appropriate to specific programmes and fields ofpractice.

The availability of RPL to current and prospective students should be advertised via appropriate University, School, and programme-level publicity. Schools will be responsible for documenting and operating their own RPL procedures which are appropriate for the needs of their programmes and students but which adhere to the general principles of this policy. In the case of collaborative partners, all RPL decisionswill be taken by the School or Off-Campus Division RPL Panel whichever hosts the Programme Assessment Board.

RPL will only be permitted where the aims and learning outcomes of a programme of study can be met and evidenced. RPL will not normally be awarded to permit a student to obtain two qualifications at the same level (double counting).

2.1 Alignment with the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education

The Quality Code sets out the following **Expectations and Core Practices for standards and quality**, which the University aims to meet when operating this policy:

Expectation for standards:
- The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards. *Effective admissions, recruitment and widening access policies and procedures enable providers to recruit students who are capable of meeting the required standards for their course.*

Core Practice for standards:
- The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers. *In practice, this means managing expectations of students, from researching prospective courses through to admissions and enrolment. Providers need to ensure that only students for whom there is a reasonable expectation that they are capable of completion are admitted.*

Expectation for quality:
- From admission through to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education. *Admissions, recruitment and widening access sets the tone of engagement for a student with their provider and the wider sector. Therefore the support a student receives from pre-entry to enrolment will be instrumental in laying the foundations for a successful educational experience.*

Core Practices for Quality:
- The provider has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system. *In practice, this means that fairness and reliability are embedded principles within admissions and recruitment, and inclusivity pervades throughout the process from outreach activity to processes and practices to enrolment.*

- The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience. *In practice, this means that there needs to be active engagement with students who have recently gone through the admissions process and those who declined, with a view to continuously improve the process for future diverse cohorts.*

- The provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students. *In practice, this means that providers adhere to the practice of having clearly articulated and transparent processes for handling complaints of prospective students that are accessible to all stakeholders. These should be monitored and reviewed to mitigate against the same issues arising in the future.*

3. Use of RPL for Admission at the Standard Entry Level of a Programme

RPL may be used for gaining entry, at the initial point of entry, to an approved University programme of study. Recognition of prior learning for admission is an admissions activity and, as such, the University Admissions Policy and Procedures should be followed. Guidance in relation to the recognition of prior

learning for admission at the standard entry point of a programme is provided on the University's Policy Zone web pages: https://www.bolton.ac.uk/student-policy-zone/ under the heading Enrolment and Admissions

4. Recognition of Prior Learning for Academic Credit towards a Programme ofStudy

4.1 RPL and Assessment

RPL may also be used for:

- gaining entry to an approved University programme of study at a point subsequent to the initial entry point (Advanced Entry or Advanced Standing);

- recognising previously accumulated credit which can then count towards an awardof the University.

In both cases, recognition takes place in accordance with the University's regulations. As with all assessment decisions, the University has a responsibility to ensure that decisions are conducted transparently, fairly and consistently.

4.2 The Recognition of Prior *Certificated* Learning (RPCL)

The recognition of prior certificated learning involves the transfer of credit, or exemption from part of a programme, for learning that has previously been assessed. Credit for prior certificated learning may be counted towards a **subsequent** award requiring furthercredits at the same and/or higher level(s) where it can be established to the satisfaction of the University that this is educationally desirable and consistent with the approved aims, intended learning outcomes and curriculum of the University award.

However:

- credit will not normally be transferable in this way where the previous and subsequent award titles are effectively the same, as per the QAA Framework forHigher Education Qualifications (FHEQ);

- credit will not normally be transferable in this way if it is considered not to be educationally desirable to do so by the University because of the similarity of the aims, intended learning outcomes or curricula of the programmes leading to the two award titles ('double counting');

Credit for previous certificated study awarded by a recognised body are equivalent tothose awarded for study at the University.

It should be noted that, depending upon the subject area, the learning for which an applicant claims recognition will need to have been undertaken within a reasonable timeframe (normally 5 years) to ensure that knowledge and techniques acquired remain current and appropriate for the programme of study applied for (see 10.1, below).

> *Examples:*
> *A student who has successfully completed a Higher National Certificate (HNC) applies to a Bachelors degree in the same subject at the University. Following assessment, it is agreed that they will not have to take the first year (Level 4) of the programme as their HNC meets the learning outcomes for that level of study on that programme. Note that if the learning outcomes had not matched, the student might not have been able to obtain credit for the entire first year, despite having a qualification worth the same volume of credit as the first year of the undergraduate degree programme.*
>
> *A student who had previously completed a Bachelors degree could not use that Bachelors degree to obtain another qualification of the same type, subject matter and level at another or the same institution. So, a business degree from institution X would not entitle a student to use RPL to obtain another business qualification at the same level at institution Y.*

4.3 The Recognition of Prior *Experiential* Learning (RPEL)

RPEL involves an assessment process that leads to recognition, normally through theaward of credit. Evidence of the learning is therefore required which goes beyond simply verifying the learning experience.

Assessment of RPEL takes place at a School level. The School should satisfy itself that the applicant has sufficient knowledge and ability to have a reasonable expectation of completing the programme successfully. If a school is not satisfied that the experiential learning is equivalent to the standard of unit(s), it may require the applicant to undertakean appropriate method of assessment. In the case of collaborative partners.

5. Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies and RPL

Recognition of Prior Learning for a University award that attracted professional body recognition may be considered. There may be instances where the RPL does not meet the requirements of a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB) and yet the requirements of the University for the award can be met. In such cases, an application for RPL may be granted on the basis that the award is disaggregated from professional body recognition and that the student is willing to accept this position.

6. Process for Making a Claim for RPL

6.1 Claims for the Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning

In RPCL, the claimant has a certificate to evidence that the learning has been formally assessed by a recognised body or authority. It is the responsibility of the University to determine the status of such certification (including consideration of its content, volume,currency and level) as it relates to the programme of study to which the claimant is applying. The applicant has the responsibility of supplying relevant information as requested.

Documentary evidence forms the basis of a claim for RPCL and the process involves thestages laid out below. Where the evidence is fully documented and can be verified, the assessment of evidence may be carried out by the Admissions Tutor or Programme Leader for the programme.

(a) The Process

The main steps in the RPCL process are:

Step 1: compile the evidence

This may include (but is not restricted to) academic transcripts, certificates andacademic references, mapping of aims and learning outcomes.

Step 2: submit the RPCL claim

The claimant submits the compiled evidence together with an RPL claim form to the RPL Advisor, Admissions Tutor or Programme Leader (as determined by the relevantprogramme authorities).

Step 3: the assessment of claims for RPCL

The RPCL claim is assessed by an RPL Panel (as outlined by the Assessment Board regulations) organised at School/Division level and ratified by the relevant AssessmentBoard.

The claimant is then informed of the outcome.

6.2 Claims for the Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning

A claim for RPEL places the responsibility on the (prospective) student to make a specific claim for recognition of prior learning, often drawing on his or her own unique setof circumstances which need to be precisely identified and expressed and for which appropriate forms of supporting evidence need to be produced.

The learning is then assessed in terms of its equivalence to that expected on a module or programme leading to an award of the University. The member(s) of staff assessing the claim, the RPEL Assessor(s), may require additional written assessment, demonstration activities or an interview in order to make a satisfactory assessment. It is important that the claimant is able to establish that they have the requisite knowledge tosupport their claim. The portfolio of evidence of such learning will form the basis of the claim for RPEL and will be taken through the steps laid out in section 6.2 (b) below.

(a) The Criteria

In order to gain credit via RPEL, the learning against which a claim is made will need to meet the following criteria:

- learning must be clearly differentiated from experience. (It is the claimant's knowledge, capacity for reflection, understanding and skills

which are assessedfor credit, not the experience in itself);

- learning must be at a level appropriate to the programme offered by the University;

- knowledge, understanding and skills must be current. While experience may have occurred at any time, the claimant must be able to demonstrate that theacquired learning is up to date and has current applicability;

- learning must be generally transferable outside the specific situation in which itwas acquired. The learning should not be tied to one particular perspective butshould show an ability to relate to a broader outlook;

- learning must be capable of being demonstrated to, and assessed by, an expertin an appropriate subject area.

(b) The Process

The main steps in the RPEL process are:

Step 1: establishing the learning experience

This may include (but is not limited to) work, education, home & family, voluntary work,political activity, travel, leisure interests or reading & research

Step 2: identifying the learning which has taken place

This involves the careful examination and reflection of prior experiential learning toidentify:
- the knowledge gained and applied;
- the skills acquired and used;
- other relevant aspects (e.g. feelings, attitudes, key elements of experience).

Step 3: expressing the learning and preparing precise learning claims

The portfolio put forward for RPEL is expected to contain specific claims relating to the claimant's learning. It is important that claims are expressed in a way which indicates asprecisely as possible the nature and the level of learning.

Step 4: compiling a portfolio which contains the learning claims and supportingevidence to substantiate these claims

A portfolio of experiential learning is a collection of materials compiled by the claimant togain academic credit. It describes the learning which they have derived from their experiences. The portfolio includes claims to that learning, with supporting evidence,which allows the claims to be assessed.

Each portfolio will be an individualised statement of experiential learning and althoughthere are no specific models or criteria, successful claims will include portfolios that contain both direct and indirect evidence:

(a) direct evidence may include project reports, databases, case study notes,correspondence, conference papers, work plans.

(b) indirect evidence may include statements from employers, customers or clients; documentation on courses undertaken; appraisals, references; letters of validation frompeople who are in a position to judge the value and quality of the learning.

Step 5: the assessment of claims for RPEL

The recognition of prior experiential learning involves an assessment process undertaken by the University's academic staff that may lead to recognition. The RPEL claim is assessed by an RPL Panel (as outlined by in Annex A and the Assessment Board regulations) organised at School/Division level and ratified by the relevant Assessment Board.

Checks are made to evaluate each item of evidence to ensure that the prior learning is well matched the learning objectives/ outcomes of the equivalent FHEQ level and/ or credit values sought.

Normally an assessment interview will be held to test claims to learning. Assessors might ask the claimant to undertake an assessment exercise to substantiate aspects ofthe learning claims. These exercises could be written assignments, demonstration activities or examinations, possibly taken from the module(s) for which credit is being claimed. Where further evidence is required, the opportunity will normally be given to produce this. If successful, the RPL Panel will assign credit points at the appropriate level to the experiential learning. This credit rating will be subject to the approval of theappropriate Assessment Board.

7. The Role of Assessment Boards

The RPL Panel has designated authority from the relevant Assessment Board. Once claims for RPL have been submitted and assessed they should be presented to the Chair of the relevant Assessment Board to ratify the RPL decision either during a meeting of the Board or by the Chair under delegated authority. The usual policies and procedures relating to mitigating circumstances and academic misconduct apply.

8. Notification of RPL Outcomes

Following the RPL Panel's decision, the claimant should be advised of the outcome of their claim, and receive feedback on their submission. All claimants shouldreceive summative feedback and where appropriate formative feedback on their application for RPL, whether their claim is successful or not. Assessment forms a key part of the learning process and RPL claimants who do not take part in the usual assessment process for a module or level of the programme should not be disadvantaged. RPL claims are an alternative assessment tool and Schools should ensure the RPL claimants gain as much from the assessment process for their RPL claim as they would through engaging with the usual assessment process for themodule or level.

9. Resubmission and Appeals of Unsuccessful Claims for RPL

9.1 Resubmission of an unsuccessful claim

RPL claimants whose claim for credit is unsuccessful may be permitted one resubmission at the discretion of the Assessor(s).

9.2 Appeals in relation to unsuccessful claims

Claimants may request a review of the decisions of the RPL assessment under the University's Complaints and Appeals Process for Applicants, if it is believed they meet the grounds outlined in paragraph 1.6.2 of that document.

Note:
Decisions based on academic judgement cannot form the basis of an appeal. Submission of an appeal is only possible once the decision on a claim for RPL has been confirmed by an RPL Panel.

10. LIMITS ON CREDIT RPL CLAIMS

10.1 Applications can be made for RPL against any level of a University award subject to any limitations detailed in the programme specification (e.g. limits imposed by course teams or professional bodies) and as stated below. Formal certificated learning that has occurred **up to five years prior** to the start date of the award will normally be considered. The smallest unit of recognition will be one module.

10.2 The maximum credit claimable through an RPL process is normally two thirds of the total credits for an undergraduate qualification and half of the total credits for a taught postgraduate qualification, although lower thresholds may be applied in some instances, as illustrated in figure 1. Exceptions to these rules for specific programmes may be approved by Senate from time-to-time through the programme approval process, where there is a strong academic case to do so. In determining the precise volume of credit exemption applied, due regard will be paid to the overall educational experience and ensuring that there is experience of the taught component of a taught programme.

10.3 RPL may not normally be claimed against any component of a 'top-up' degree programme at FHEQ Level 6.

Note:
No RPL credit will be awarded for the dissertation element of an Undergraduate or Master's programme.

Figure 1. Normal limits on RPL Credit for intended awards (note that this table does not apply to exit qualifications)

Award Type	Minimum credits	Total permitted volume of RPL credit
Postgraduate level award		
Professional Doctorate	540	220
Master's Degree	180	90
Postgraduate Diploma	120	60
Postgraduate Certificate	60	30
Undergraduate level award		
Bachelors degrees with honours	360	240
Graduate Diploma	100 at FHEQ level 6 or higher (min. 80 at FHEQ level 6)	50
Foundation Degree/ Dip HE	240	160

11. Marks Awarded for RPL and Impact on Degree Classifications

11.1 Where a student is awarded credits as a result of a claim for RPL, no marks will normally be awarded.

11.2 Where no marks are awarded the classification will be based purely on the modules taken at the University of Bolton.

12. Fees for RPL Claims

Fees may be charged for an RPL claim depending on the circumstances in which theclaim is being made.

12.1 Fees **will not normally** be charged for:

- All applications for RPCL;

- RPEL claims used purely for admissions purposes (but not for advanced standing). Charging a fee for RPEL in this circumstance could be regarded asproviding a barrier to entry and therefore against the principles of widening participation.

12.2   Fees **will be** charged in the case of applications involving RPEL that are intended to result in the award of credit against one or more modules and thatapply to:

- **Part-time** and **full-time undergraduate** students;

- **Part-time** and **full-time postgraduate** (including research) students andprofessional programmes.

12.3   RPEL fees are charged for the process rather than the outcome. Where incurred,fees are payable:

- **In advance** of submitting the formal application for RPEL;

- At the rate of 20% of the module fee for which specific credit is being claimed;

- At the rate of 20% of the total level fee for the named programme.

Notes:

- No refunds will be made for unsuccessful claims;

- An application for RPCL or RPEL may have implications on student funding andfinancial support arrangements.

ANNEX A: MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE OF RPL PANELS

Membership:

Head of School / Division or their nominee (Chair)
Two senior members of academic staff from the School

Note: A senior academic shall be an academic at the level of senior lecturer or higher.

In attendance:
Relevant Programme Leader (RPL Assessor)
Member of Academic Support Services (Secretary)

The quorum shall be two members, one of whom must be the Chair. The RPL assessor may not be a member of the RPL Panel.

Terms of reference:

1.   RPL Panels shall operate in accordance with the General Responsibilities of Assessment Boards, as outlined in section 2 of the *Regulations for the Organisationand Conduct of Assessment Boards*.

2.   RPL Panels shall consider the recommendations of the RPL assessor in respect of applications for RPCL and RPEL and determine whether credit exemptions should be applied and, if so, at what level and quantity this should be.

3.   The RPL Panel should make their recommendation to the Chair of the relevant Assessment Board for further action, including acceptance, rejection or further detailor information.

Frequency of meetings:

Meetings should be held as frequently as required to expedite a swift response to applications for RPCL and/or RPEL. Meetings may be held virtually provided a record is keptof proceedings.

POLICY AND REGULATIONS FOR THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING	
Policy ref: SEO/App1	
Version number	02
Version date	23 May 2016, updated August 2021
Name of Developer/Reviewer	Greg Allen, Academic Registrar
Policy Owner (Group/Centre/Unit)	SEO
Person responsible for implementation (postholder)	Heads of Schools, Recruitment and Admissions Team.
Approving committee/board	Senate
Date approved	23rd May 2016
Effective from	September 2016
Dissemination method e.g. website	Website
Review frequency	Periodically
Reviewing committee	Senate
Consultation history (individuals/group consulted and dates)	Drafts of the regulation have been considered by: Education Committee Senate
Document history (e.g. rationale for and dates of previous amendments)	A major re-write of the previous Recognition of Prior Learning regulations and policies took place in 2016. In August 2021, the document was updated, following changes in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and to reflect technical updates.