UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) POLICY

Version number 1.0	Status (draft/final) final	Owning Directorate / Faculty Academic Registry
Summary of any amendments:		
New policy setting out the operational procedures for Recognised Prior Learning.		
Document objectives:		
This policy outlines the scope the Recognition of Prior Learning at the University. The policy sets out: • The definition of Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning • The definition of Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning • The evidence of learning requirement to support a claim for RPL • The assessment of an RPL claim • The transfer of marks/grade and the calculation of final awards		
Intended Recipients:		
This policy applies to all prospective and enrolled students who may wish to use RPL, as well as staff who may be applying RPL to records on the student record system.		
Approving Body and Date Approved		University Teaching Learning and Quality Committee and Senate
Date of Issue		28 September 2021
Review Date:		2 years from above
Contact for review:		Head of Student Administration

Version	Date	Author(s)	Replaces	Comment
1.0	June 2021	Terry Vallance /Donna Strickland		New policy

This policy and associated regulations apply to all students in University of Plymouth sites of delivery and in all UK and international partnerships, unless non-standard regulations have been formally approved

UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) POLICY

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1.   INTRODUCTION

1.1   The University recognises the value of learning wherever it occurs, either to meet programme entry requirements or to achieve credit towards a named award. However, recognition of prior learning (RPL) will only be possible where learning, appropriate to the outcomes of the relevant entry requirements, module(s) or award level, is academically valid.

1.2   The parameters for RPL are set out in the University's academic regulations, ADM1. This RPL Policy defines the procedures and guidance for submitting and considering requests for exemption from individual modules or direct entry to the second or subsequent year of a programme based on prior certified and/or experiential learning. Where the assessment of learning is equivalent, and is 'recognised', the level and volume of credit shall be agreed and accredited to the intended programme.

1.3   Procedures relating to the admission of students, who do not meet the usual entry requirements specified for a programme of study, are set out in the University's admission policies, for taught programmes and for research degrees.

2.   TERMINOLOGY

Recognition of Prior Learning

2.1   Refers to the process whereby applicants are eligible to receive recognition and formal credit for learning acquired in the past through two widely recognised forms:

- prior certificated learning through formal study and/or
- prior experiential (or informal) learning through work and other life experiences which is uncertified and not previously assessed.

2.2   The University will decide how much specific credit to accredit via RPL, based on academic judgement following an assessment of the evidence. This assessment will consider the level, extent and perceived relevance of the learning (both knowledge and skills based) when compared with the applicant's intended programme of study at the University.

- **Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning** (APCL) - where 'recognised' learning meets the criteria above and has been awarded credit by another awarding body. The University is responsible for determining whether the credit awarded by the body is equivalent to the University's credit system. If the credit systems are equivalent, the credit may be 'transferred' at the same level and volume. Where the credit systems differ, the University shall determine the equivalent level and volume of credit to be accredited.

Applications for APCL may be for **programme credit** (credit for earlier, whole stages of a programme) or for **module credit** (credit for a specific module).

- **Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning** (APEL) - where 'recognised' learning meets the criteria above but has not been previously been allocated credit or formally certified. The University will follow the procedures detailed in this Policy to gauge the equivalent credit level and volume to be accredited.

Entry to Stage 2 or above (taught programmes) **/ Advanced entry** (research degrees)

2.3 Students may be been granted sufficient RPL that they are permitted to enter a programme at Stage 2 or above. In these cases, the normal maximum period of registration shall normally be shortened by the equivalent period and the student shall be required to complete their programme within this shortened period.

Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS)

2.4 The Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (known as CATS) enables academic credit (or 'CATS points') to be transferred between higher education institutions. Credit points may be transferred to other higher education institutions typically those with 'modular' systems such as the University of Plymouth.

2.5 Although an institution may accept and 'count in' transferred credit, students have no automatic entitlement to this. Admissions decisions, including any exemption from part of a programme, will depend on an institution's own rules. If you are considering transferring CATS points to the University of Plymouth as part of your APCL application, you should you should discuss this with the Student Recruitment and Admissions team admissions@plymouth.ac.uk

2.6 CATS is used throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland; the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) has a similar scheme, with a point system equivalent to CATS. Outside of the UK, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is a parallel scheme. To convert CATS to ECTS credit, divide the CATS points by two. For example, 120 CATS points equates to 60 ECTS credits.

3. SCOPE

Evidence of learning

3.1 Applicants for RPL shall provide the following evidence that learning has taken place to demonstrate equivalence. All evidence of learning shall be:

a) **Written in English**

b) **Sufficient** - Keep in mind that evidence presented (eg portfolio or syllabus) should be concise and contain sufficient evidence for the purpose intended.

c) **Current** - How recent the learning and/or experience is can determine its value, certain skills and knowledge, for example, can quickly become redundant.

d) **Authentic** - For certain evidence to be accepted it may require endorsement or a reference from relevant sources eg employers or validating institutions.

e) **Relevant** - The specifications of a job or the learning outcomes of a particular qualification will determine the relevance of the evidence.

3.2 The procedures for recognising prior learning shall ensure that the learning, which has taken place and presented as RPL, is equivalent to the learning that would have otherwise occurred i.e. that the learning outcomes of the modules accredited or programme elements exempted have been met.

Criteria, conditions and restrictions

3.3 When considering evidence for APCL, the University's assessment will:

a) Confirm (against a transcript of credit or award certificate) that credit has been awarded by an awarding body recognised by the University of Plymouth;

b) Confirm (against a transcript of credit or award certificate) that the learning activity has been given a credit rating (for example, 20 CATS credits at level 5) at another UK institution, or confirm the level and volume of study successfully undertaken in an overseas university or similar institution;

c) For research degree milestones (Project Approval and Confirmation of Route), confirm that prior activities and outcomes align with University of Plymouth criteria (as per Research Degrees Handbook). This will entail an applicant's current or previous institution supply evidence of the student's progress and enrolment history, indicating support for the transfer of the registration, with particular regard to Intellectual Property issues.

d) Assess the evidence submitted against the following:
   i) The programme requirements and level learning outcomes; and
   ii) The module learning outcomes for Core modules at level 5 and above, as appropriate. This requirement may be extended to include the learning outcomes for Optional modules where these are pre-requisites for modules that the applicant wishes to take on admission to the programme
   iii) The assessment criteria for research degrees milestones (Programme Approval and Confirmation of Route).

e) Confirm that the learning has been in a subject area relevant to the programme of study.

3.4 When assessing evidence as per c) above for prior certified learning at level 4, the University's assessment will only assess the evidence noted under c (i). When assessing evidence as per c) above for prior certified learning at level 5 and above, the University's assessment will assess the evidence noted under both c (i) and c (ii).

3.5 When considering evidence for APEL learning, the University's assessment will assess equivalences of competence between learning at work, for instance, and having gained a specific qualification.

3.6 The award of specific credit via RPL towards an intended programme at the University of Plymouth is not guaranteed and may be lower than the value/level of the general credit assigned to the current/previous qualification by the awarding body.

3.7 Certain disciplines due to professional, statutory or regulatory body requirements, place additional restrictions on where and when learning takes place and how learning outcomes are achieved. Therefore, RPL may not be permitted to specific University programmes, which will be explicit in the Programme Specification.

3.8 Applications for exemptions to study may not be granted where a student has previously registered for and failed part of a University of Plymouth award and wishes to seek readmission to the same or similar award, where modules may be shared or are comparable.

3.9 As set out in the University's regulations, recognition and accreditation for prior certified learning, which occurred more than five years prior to the enrolment date for the intended programme, will not be accepted. Experiential learning completed more than five years prior to the enrolment date for the intended programme, for example as part of a job role, may be recognised and accredited subject to the following conditions:

- the Programme Lead or School PGR Coordinator confirms that the learning is still relevant and meets the Learning Outcomes or the assessment criteria (Project Approval and Confirmation of Route) for research degrees; and
- the applicant is able to demonstrate evidence of continuous application, updating and relevance to their practice (in the case of professional programmes) and the award sought;

3.10 Specific limits on the maximum amounts of RPL transferred to a University programme are set out in the University's regulations.

3.11 All successful applications for programme or module credit as either APCL or APEL must be recorded as such on the University's student record system as part of its statutory reporting to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

3.12 The University reserves the right, as set out in its Admission policies (for taught and research degree programmes) and in the Student Contract, to terminate an application for or withdraw a student form the University, if an RPL application is found to contain information or omissions that are false or misleading.

Transfer of marks/grades and calculation of final awards

3.13 As stated in the University's regulations, a successful claim for APCL **programme credit** will normally be awarded without numerical marks unless the University is familiar with the marking scheme and academic standards of the credit-awarding institution. In such cases, the proportion of the degree calculation assigned to the level of study for which marks are absent will be assigned to the next highest level of study.

3.14 A successful claim for APCL **module credit** will not normally be approved with marks attached unless a student can demonstrate that:

   a) the learning was directly applicable to the module against which the claim was being made; and
   b) the University was familiar with the marking scheme and academic standard of the credit-awarding institution. In such cases where marks are transferred, they will be used to calculate the final aggregate percentage in the proportions shown in the University's regulations (AWD1).

3.15 Credits awarded through RPL will be clearly identifiable on the student's transcript. In all cases, the RPL approval process for all successful APCL or APEL claims shall include confirmation of how the final aggregate mark award will be calculated.

4. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

4.1 Applications for RPL will consist of a written request, clearly stating the intended University programme for which the student seeks RPL. Applicants must also include details of the specific modules or part of the programme for which they wish their application to be considered and submit:

For Certified learning:
   a) a certified copy of a transcript and award certificate, if appropriate;
   b) a Programme Specification, curriculum or syllabus with module descriptions (including Learning Outcomes), where appropriate;

For Experiential learning:
Applicants are required to submit a Portfolio, the content of which shall vary in accordance with the nature of the experiences and of the learning that has resulted from that experience but shall normally include the following elements:

   a) the statement of the claim;
   b) a brief CV to provide a context for the claim;

c) reflection on the relevance of the learning to the programme against which the claim is being made;

d) full evidence.

Please refer to Appendix 1 for information about the types of evidence required and a general methodology of the process.

4.2 In order to prepare the Portfolio, normally an applicant will be allocated a mentor by their Faculty/Programme who may be subsequently involved in the assessment of the evidence but will not be the sole assessor. The mentor will advise the applicant of any additional programme-specific criteria and what evidence shall be required for this. For all research degrees excluding Professional Doctorates, the mentor is likely to be the applicant's nominated Director of Studies.

4.3 The procedure for considering requests for the accreditation of prior experiential learning will include the following stages:

a) agreement of assessment work to be submitted (eg portfolio, presentation, submission of artefacts, examinations);

b) agreement of submission date, within the parameters set out section 5 below and taking into account the deadlines for transfer as set out in the academic regulations (SRE2.1);

c) agreement of any arrangements for face-to-face or online meetings (including monitoring progress towards submission, reviewing drafts etc);

d) clarification of arrangements for assessment (including assessment criteria, internal and external moderation);

5. TIMESCALES

5.1 Applicants wishing to be awarded credit for RPL will be advised, in the first instance, to discuss the matter with the following who will ensure that the applicant is informed of the University's RPL policy and procedure:

For undergraduate & postgraduate taught programmes	Admissions Team admissions@plymouth.ac.uk
Continuing Professional Development in the Faculty of Health	Professional Development Unit pduadmissions@plymouth.ac.uk
For research degree programmes	Doctoral College team doctoralcollege@plymouth.ac.uk

5.2 As set out in the University's regulations, applications for programme credit (for taught programmes) should be made as part of the admissions process prior to enrolment on their intended programme of study. Students who apply after the

start of their programme may be disadvantaged, eg they may not be reimbursed for tuition fees already paid for modules from which they are subsequently exempted. Applications received more than 4 weeks after enrolment on a programme shall not be considered.

5.3   Applications for module credit should be made prior to enrolment on a module, but may exceptionally be accepted after two weeks of the start of teaching on the module.

5.4   Applications for RPL shall normally be considered and a decision communicated to the applicant within 15 working days of receipt.

5.5   If, after considering the application, the University's assessment requires further evidence, the applicant will be informed of an appropriate deadline for submission taking into account the modules or research degree milestones for which the applicant is applying for exemption/accreditation and any other relevant factors.

5.6   Applicants must not assume RPL credits or exemptions have been granted until they have received an official statement to that effect.

5.7   Applicants should also note that any reduction in the number of credits being studied may prevent them from having the status of full-time students in one or more years of study. Applicants will be informed of any student funding, council tax exemptions and other implications of a change in full-time status.

6.   APPROVAL PROCESS AND CONFIRMATION OF DECISION

6.1   The University will assess an application for RPL according to the criteria listed in section 3.3. An RPL Assessor, normally the relevant Programme Leader (or nominee) in the case of taught programmes or Professional Doctorates, or the School PGR Coordinator and/or the Deputy Director of the Doctoral College in the case of other research degrees will conduct the assessment. The RPL Assessor may request additional information from the applicant or consult with colleagues, if required, before making a recommendation.

6.2   Their recommendation shall then be forwarded, for final approval, to the relevant Head of School (for taught programmes) or the Director of the Doctoral College (for research degree programmes).

6.3   As set out in 4.2, staff designated to advise students on the preparation and submission of portfolios may be subsequently involved in the assessment of the evidence but shall not be the sole assessor.

6.4   A decision shall normally be made and communicated to the applicant/student within 15 working days of receipt of the application. If the Assessor requires further information, the applicant shall be advised within 15 working days of the submission and a deadline agreed for the new information to be submitted, in accordance with section on Timescales above.

6.4 The applicant shall be notified of the decision by one of the following:

a) the Student Recruitment and Admissions Team in the case of all new applicants not enrolled at the University;

b) the relevant Faculty Registrar in the case of students already enrolled on a taught programme; or the Doctoral College in the case of students already on a research degree programme.;

6.5 A copy of the authorised Approval Form and all supporting evidence/documentation shall then be forwarded to the Faculty Registrar or Doctoral College (or equivalent), either electronically or in hard copy. The Faculty Registrar, Doctoral College or equivalent will ensure that the applicant/student's Programme or Module record is updated as appropriate, with the documentation retained until the completion of the programme.

6.6 Where the RPL application is partially or fully rejected, the letter confirming the decision shall include details of any shortcomings.

7. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

7.1 The University is committed to delivering to its applicants a high quality, efficient and fair admissions service and encourages its applicants to tell it where there is cause for concern and a case for improvement. Complaints may relate to the operation of the University's application process and/or its outcome, or the actions or behaviour of a member of staff involved in the RPL process. The outcome of a complaint that is upheld could include an apology or an undertaking to revise procedures. It will not usually result in reconsideration of the candidate's application. Students who wish to complain may do so in accordance with the Complaints Policy.

7.2 Applicants may not appeal against the academic or professional judgement of those making the decision on an application. However, the University shall consider a request from an appellant that the decision to reject their RPL application be reviewed on the grounds that:

a) There exists new evidence, which can be corroborated, and could not have been brought to the attention of the University prior to the selection process;

b) There is evidence of a procedural irregularity connected directly with the selection process undertaken by the University;

c) That the decision of the University, on the basis of the information available, is unreasonable;

d) There is evidence of prejudice or bias on the part of those involved in the assessment process.

Appeals must be made in writing within 10 working days of the date of the University's notification to the applicant of the RPL decision, in line with the University's [Appeal process](#).

APPENDIX 1: GENERIC PORTFOLIO CRITERIA FOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Guidance for Applicants
What is a Portfolio?

A portfolio is an organised folder of information (normally electronic) compiled by an applicant with support from University staff. It will contain details of experiences and accomplishments. It may also contain evidence that the individual has reliably demonstrated the skills, knowledge and understanding to be given recognition to gain exemption, or to gain qualifications or credit towards qualifications.

A Portfolio can be used to gain accreditation and/or exemption or to decide what continuing education is appropriate. It needs to be, concise, well presented and relevant

Key Features of a Portfolio

The folder should contain details of your:
- Skills
- Knowledge
- Understanding
- Achievement

These features can come from:
- Paid employment
- Voluntary work
- Domestic work
- Hobbies and interests
- Education and training