## Policy on Recognition of Prior Learning

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### October 2014 updates to policy
- RPL officer based in Admissions rather than Registry
- Information about General Degree added (page 5-6)
- UG Honours and Integrated Masters Credit information updated (page 6)
- Information added about transfer of credits from one degree programme to another (page 8)
UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

POLICY ON RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

1. Definitions

**Advanced Standing Credit**
This term is used in relation to entrant students who may be awarded credit on the basis of credits already earned in order to facilitate accelerated progression in a programme.

**Transfer Credit**
This term is used in relation to credit gained either at the University or elsewhere which may be used to offset programme requirements.

**Experiential Prior Learning**
Experiential RPL normally refers to learning that has been achieved and recognised prior to a student first enrolling on a degree programme, generally (but not necessarily exclusively) within a professional context.

**University RPL Officer**
An individual based in Admissions whose task is to inform the Schools and the Proctor’s Office of changes to statutory or other Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) guidance related to RPL and to co-ordinate the recommendations of School RPL Officers relating to individual candidatures.

2. Introduction

The University of St Andrews recognises prior learning (RPL) that has taken place elsewhere after assessment.

RPL has three main purposes:

1. To facilitate admission to a degree programme (undergraduate or postgraduate; full-time or part-time)
2. To provide advanced standing on a named degree programme
3. To award credit for the satisfaction of a specific unit or units (normally a module or modules) of a degree programme

RPL may result from formal and certifiable academic learning or from learning gained through voluntary or professional work-related experience.

2.1 Accredited Prior Learning (RPL through formal certifiable learning)

Prior Learning must be accredited and accreditation is based on assessment. Accreditation is based on Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) equivalences between the learning expected of a typical student on the same degree programme who has not been granted RPL and a candidate requesting RPL. In assessing evidence of prior learning and making RPL decisions, University staff follow QAA guidelines to ensure that the overall
profile of study and attainment of students whose learning is accredited is equivalent to that of students who study at the University of St Andrews for the entire duration of the degree programme concerned. Assessments will consider whether a candidate can demonstrate the knowledge, understanding or skills required of the particular unit or units for which credit is to be awarded.

2.2 Experiential Prior Learning (RPL gained through experience)

In the case of candidatures for RPL based on prior work-related or experiential learning the University does not recognise experience by itself for academic purposes; instead, learning must demonstrably have taken place as a result of that experience. Experiential RPL normally refers to learning that has been achieved and recognised prior to a student first enrolling on a degree programme, normally within a professional context.

3. Points of Contact and Communication

Heads of School should delegate authority over all RPL decisions to a named member of staff, the School RPL Officer, who in the majority of cases will be an Admissions Officer as this role aligns most naturally with the subject of RPL. The School RPL Officer is responsible for liaising with the University RPL Officer in order to provide candidates information about when and where to submit their candidatures. Candidates need to be informed of the nature of the evidence they are expected to produce and the availability of any further support that the University or School may offer. Candidates may be directed to the University’s RPL Officer in the first instance or an initial enquiry may come directly to the School. The School RPL Officer and the University RPL Officer should work together in such a way that regardless of the point of contact the candidate receives full and cohesive information.

The University RPL Officer will be responsible for ensuring the decisions on RPL candidatures are communicated clearly and promptly to the candidates. Whenever a candidature is turned down, they must provide the candidate with a clear statement of their reasons. Students who have already matriculated at the University of St Andrews will have a right of appeal in accordance with the University’s Policy on Student Academic Appeals and Complaints. Applicants to the University will have a right of appeal to the Director of Admissions.

4. RPL through formal certifiable learning

4.1 Introduction

RPL may be used by individuals as:-
  a) a means of gaining entry to a degree programme;
  b) a means of gaining entry to a degree programme part way through the programme, thus shortening the time required to complete a programme of study;
  c) as evidence to gain credits for individual modules.
Matching prior learning to programmes of study requires an assessment of the extent to which there is a match between an individual’s learning and either:

a) the admissions criteria and requirements; or
b) the programme and level learning outcomes; or
c) individual module learning outcomes.

Evidence of general learning at an equivalent level may be deemed sufficient to enable entry or accelerated entry, but pre-requisite knowledge in some key areas may be deemed essential for some degree programmes. A specific quantity of credit may be given for RPL in relation to a programme of study if a candidate successfully demonstrates that he/she has already acquired the knowledge which a specific module (or modules) is designed to provide. This could result in accelerated completion of a degree programme. The amount of credit countable towards an award will depend on how closely prior learning matches the candidate’s proposed degree programme. **Credits used towards a previously awarded degree cannot be used for RPL purposes.**

### 4.2 Admission to a Degree Programme

a) Admission into Year One

It is possible to admit candidates to a degree programme where a candidate can demonstrate that their previous formal learning experiences have resulted in relevant learning that is broadly equivalent (in terms of content, volume and level) to the learning achieved at the level(s) normally required for entry to the relevant programme.

In order for RPL to be accepted for admission to a programme of study it must have been subject to valid and reliable methods of assessment. Qualifications offered through Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) are mapped within SCQF according to the level of the outcomes of learning and the volume of learning, described in terms of the number of credits. Some professional qualifications and short courses have been rigorously assessed by HEIs and have been awarded a general credit rating.

**For admissions purposes the qualification presented is taken as an alternative to a specified qualification within the admissions regulations.** (For example, an HNC as an alternative to a group of Advanced Highers or A levels.) The University RPL Officer provides full guidance on the nature of qualifications and their SCQF equivalences.

b) Admission into other than Year One

It is possible to admit candidates to later stages of a degree programme where a candidate can demonstrate that their previous learning experiences have resulted in relevant learning that is broadly equivalent (in terms of content, volume and level) to the learning achieved at the level(s) for which the credit will be given and must have been subject to valid and reliable methods of assessment. RPL credit awarded against the total credit required of first and/or second years of a degree programme will usually be the minimum total ordinarily expected of the year(s) being offset.
c) Credit transfer post-admissions

Although RPL credit is expected to be claimed upon entry, it is possible for credit to be transferred into a programme of study at a stage after admission providing it is at the appropriate level and the subject content fits with the study to be taken at the University.

4.3 Evidence of Prior Learning

The candidate will be required to provide the University with relevant certifiable documentation. This will be accepted as evidence in support of a claim for credit. It is the candidate’s responsibility to provide evidence of having successfully completed any certificated learning for which a claim is to be made. Claims should be supported by a certified transcript, Diploma Supplement or other certified evidence of the level and number of credits achieved from an HEI, SQA approved centre or other recognised learning provider.

Candidates wishing to present claims for RPL as part of the admissions process should normally do so when they apply.

Candidates wishing to present claims for RPL to facilitate accelerated completion of the degree programme should do so immediately after acceptance of the offer of a place before the commencement of the selected programme of study.

4.4 Approval of Claims

a) All claims for credit must be submitted to and assessed by the School RPL Officer and, where appropriate, in consultation with the University RPL Officer. The assessment will consider the specific level and volume of credits to be awarded.

b) Claims for the use of prior learning for the purposes of admissions will be approved by the School and successful candidates will thereafter complete the full requirements of the degree programme to which they have been admitted.

c) Claims for credit against individual module(s) of a degree programme or to accelerate the completion of the Evening Degree Programme or part-time day-time study for the General Degree must be approved by the Dean of the relevant Faculty.

d) Claims for credit against module pre-requisites must be approved by the Dean of the relevant faculty who will reserve the right to turn down the original request or approve an award of credit at a lesser or lower level.

4.5 Quantity and Levels of Claims

An individual will be expected to build on prior learning through study at the University of St Andrews; therefore, the maximum amount of prior credit which can be given towards an award is as follows:
General Degree

up to 180 credits at 1000 level (SCQF level 7) or 2000 level (SCQF level 8) or above with no more than 30 credits at 3000 level (SCQF level 9) or above.

No more than a total of 180 credits can be transferred.

Undergraduate Honours and Integrated Masters

120 credits at 1000 level (SCQF level 7) and up 180 credits at 2000 level (SCQF level 8) or above with no more than 30 credits at 3000 level (SCQF level 9) or above

No more than a total of 180 credits can be transferred.

PG Diploma and/or Taught Masters

60 credits at 5000 level (SCQF level 11)

Credit for prior learning may be given at any level. However, no more than 50% of the total number of credits required for the final award may be awarded as exemption or prior learning credit. If a candidate is studying for a classified Honours Degree, any approved credit through RPL brought in to the degree programme will be discounted from the calculation of the Honours Classification. Transfer credits will not be awarded at 4000 level (SCQF level 10) for students who are proposing to complete a classified Honours or Integrated Masters degree.

For a General degree:

i) Students must fulfil the normal requirements in relation to the number of credits and the level of credit successfully achieved.

ii) Credits brought in to the University through RPL will not be included in the award of the distinction.

iii) Students wishing to complete a General degree must achieve at least 180 credits at the University of St Andrews of which at least 30 must be at 3000 level.

iv) Credits transferred in at 3000 level or above should not exceed more than 30 credits.

For a classified Honours degree:

i) Students must fulfil the normal requirements in relation to the number of credits and the level of credit successfully achieved.

ii) Credits brought in to the University through RPL will not be included within the Honours Classification calculation.

iii) Students wishing to complete a classified degree must achieve 240 credits at the University of St Andrews of which at least 90 must be at 4000 level.

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1 There is no RPL in relation to the dissertation element of a Postgraduate Masters Programme. Calculation of a Postgraduate Diploma with Distinction or the progression to the Masters element of a postgraduate programme will normally be based on credits achieved at the University of St Andrews within the taught element of a Postgraduate programme.
iv) Credits transferred in at 3000 level or above should not exceed more than 25% of the final classification credits.

For an Integrated Masters degree:-
i) Students must fulfil the normal requirements in relation to the number of credits and the level of credit successfully achieved.

ii) Credits brought in to the University through RPL will not be included within the Honours Classification calculation.

iii) Students wishing to complete an Integrated Masters degree must achieve 360 credits at the University of St Andrews of which at least 90 must be at 4000 level and at least 120 at 5000 level.

5. RPL gained through Experience

The University of St Andrews reserves the right to award credits for prior experiential learning to candidates to degree programmes where it is deemed appropriate to the programme or qualification concerned.

5.1 Admission to Year One

The primary consideration is whether the claimed prior learning is broadly equivalent to the quantity and level of learning that would otherwise have been assessed during the degree programme or other certificated learning that forms part of the normal stated entrance requirements for that programme. In making this judgement it is necessary to refer to the aims and learning outcomes of the degree programme or its component modules or the normal requirements for admission to the programme. The experience for which recognition is being sought must be demonstrably relevant to some or all of the skills normally required for admission (for example: analysis, managing data, rigorous method and philosophical context), as well as being of an appropriate quantity and level. SCQF descriptors must be used to help ascertain parity.

5.2 Method of Assessment

Appropriate forms of assessment might include: a portfolio of work; a discipline specific interview; completion of a set task; completion of the usual assessment for the course to which the prior learning is claimed to be equivalent; a reflective account or a diary of the learning achieved. The exact nature of the assessment will be decided in consultation with the University RPL Officer who will follow QAA guidance. Decisions concerning experiential RPL require the exercise of academic judgement, and should always involve more than one member of staff, the University RPL Officer and at least one School RPL Officer in the academic discipline(s) being assessed.

5.3 Approval and Review

While Schools have a primary responsibility for making academic judgements about RPL, the University (at Faculty level) retains two responsibilities in order to establish equity of treatment across Schools. These are:
(i) For each award where RPL is relevant, the Dean of the relevant Faculty (in consultation with the School to which the candidature is being made) will specify any limits on the currency of prior learning (eg whether prior experiential learning must have been completed within a certain number of years of the candidate’s first enrolment for a degree programme).

(ii) The Deans will receive from the University RPL Officer an annual review of all RPL decisions per award and the evidence that was required from each candidate prior to the decision.

6. Credit Decay

Credit awarded should take account of any need to re-evaluate the credit value due to significant changes and developments that may have affected the discipline since the certificated credit was gained and which would therefore affect a candidate’s ability to complete successfully the remainder of their chosen degree programme. An annual review by the Deans in consultation with the RPL Officers of discipline specific “credit decay” in advance of the next academic year will ensure the integrity of year-on-year credit values in these disciplines. Credits gained within five years of commencement of the degree programme from an accredited recognised body should be taken at face value. Credits gained between more than five years and within ten years before the commencement of the degree programme may be accepted for up to 50% of their face value. Credits gained more than ten years before the commencement of degree programme are not acceptable.

7. Credits used towards a previously awarded degree

Credit used towards a previously awarded degree is non-transferrable between degree programmes. Full transcripts of credit used towards the completion of a previous award should be carefully checked to establish whether any part of the award was based on credit from previous learning from another qualification. Advances standing credit can only be used for progression purposes. Credits used for RPL purpose in one degree programme cannot be assumed to be transferred to another degree programme.