



University of
St Andrews

Recognition of prior learning

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01	Minor amendments to refine the RPL processes and clarify some of the policy statements.	Updated	-	June 2020
02	Changes to titles/contact details to reflect decanal restructuring	Approved	-	February 2021

POLICY ON RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

1. Definitions

Certificated/Certifiable Prior Learning

This term is used in relation to credit gained either at the University or elsewhere from another suitably recognised provider 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 offers recognition of prior learning (RPL) that has taken place elsewhere, where appropriate evidence is provided, and particular conditions are met.

Recognition of prior learning has two main purposes:

- To facilitate admission to a degree programme (undergraduate or postgraduate; full-time or part-time)
- To award credit towards a degree programme

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

2.1 Certificated / Certifiable Prior Learning (RPL through formal certifiable learning)

Prior Learning of this type is 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 certificated / certifiable 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. RPL Process

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:

- 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.

3.1 Identifying Appropriate Objectives of RPL Applications

a) Admission: RPL as (part of) required entrance qualifications

It is possible to admit candidates to 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) normally required for entry to the relevant programme.

In order for RPL to be accepted for admission to a programme of study, where this is certifiable learning, it must have been subject to valid and reliable methods of assessment. For example, 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.

For admissions purposes the qualification(s) 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.

Where experiential learning is offered in order to meet admission requirements, the experience for which recognition is being sought must be demonstrably relevant to some or all of the skills normally required for admission to the particular programme as well as being of an appropriate quantity and level. For more detail, refer to section 3.2.

b) Admission into other than Year One: RPL as contributory degree credits

It is possible to exempt candidates from 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. Furthermore, this learning must have been subject to valid and reliable methods of assessment.

3.2 Submitting Evidence

The candidate will be required to provide the University with relevant documentation as evidence in support of a claim for credit or for admission to a programme, as appropriate. It is the candidate's responsibility to provide either (i) evidence of having successfully completed any certificated learning for which a claim is to be made, or (ii) appropriate supporting evidence for experiential learning for which a claim is to be made.

Claims for certificated formal learning 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.

Supporting documentation for experiential learning will include material that varies dependent on the specific nature of the learning, but may for example include:

- 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;
- certification of professional standing with a chartered or other learned or professional body, where the body provides an explicit framework that details how professional standing relates to the achievement of particular competences or capabilities;
- a portfolio of commercial (or publicly accessible) attributable work with covering text explaining the learning outcomes that are demonstrated therein;
- professional development certificates where these include assessment;
- merit or excellence awards and honours of recognised standing.

The documentation should be sufficient in detail, depth and quality to ensure that the learning outcomes claimed can be unambiguously compared with the requirements of the relevant programme to which entry is sought. Where experiential learning is offered in order to seek contributory credits on a particular degree pathway, the evidence should also be sufficient to show alignment with the particular module contents for which alternative credit is being sought.

Candidates wishing to present claims for any form of RPL must do so at the time of application. No claims will be accepted after the student's initial matriculation.

3.3 Approving or Rejecting Claims

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 appropriateness in relation to the programme entrance criteria or the specific level and volume of credits to be awarded, as appropriate. Credit awarded through RPL will appear on the student's record.

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. Recognized prior learning applies to the specific degree pathway to which the student is admitted. Should the student wish to transfer to a different pathway, the RPL claim would be reviewed again by the appropriate RPL Officer(s) (i.e. for the new pathway).

Requests for credit must be approved by the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching).

Claims for credit against module pre-requisites must be approved by the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching) who will reserve the right to turn down the original request or approve an award of credit at a lesser or lower level.

Decisions involving experiential RPL require the exercise of academic judgment and should always involve assessment by more than one member of staff – typically the University RPL Officer and at least one School RPL Officer in the academic discipline(s) being assessed.

3.4 Limitation 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	180 credits with no more than 30 credits at 3000 level (SCQF level 9)
Undergraduate Honours and Integrated Masters	240 credits with no more than 30 credits at 3000 level (SCQF level 9)
PG Diploma and/or Taught Masters ¹	60 credits at 5000 level (SCQF level 11)

Credit for prior learning may be given at any level, other than the exceptions noted below. 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 into 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 into the University through RPL will not be included in the award of 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.

For a classified Honours degree:

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.

- i) Students must fulfil the normal requirements in relation to the number of credits and the level of credit successfully achieved.
- ii) Credits brought into the University through RPL will not be included in 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.

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 into 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.

4. Credit Decay

Credits gained from an accredited recognised body within five years of commencement of the degree programme should be taken at face value. Credits gained more than five years before the commencement of a degree programme will be reviewed on a case by case basis. Decay principles can be applied to previous credits gained as well suitably evidenced professional or voluntary experience.

5. 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 with 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. Applicants to the University will have a right of appeal to the Director of Admissions.

6. Process Review

The Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching) 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. The review will indicate:

1. The number of cases of RPL awarded, and the levels of the awards made;

2. The number of RPL applications rejected, and the reasons for rejection;
3. Any related policy issues arising for discussion.

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