Recognition of prior learning and Advanced Standing Credits

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Purpose	This policy relates to recognition of prior learning (RPL) which has taken place elsewhere.

Version number	Purpose / changes	Document status	Author of changes, role and school / unit	Date
3.0	Revised policy incorporating Advance Standing Credits (ASCs) and process enhancements	Updated	Academic Policy Officer, Education & Student Experience	May 2024

1. Introduction

In line with QAA frameworks, the University of St Andrews offers recognition of prior learning (RPL) that has taken place elsewhere, whether a further or higher education institution or a workplace. Appropriate evidence must be provided and certain conditions must be met in order for prior learning to be recognised.

1.1   Purpose of RPL

There are three different ways that prior learning may be recognised by the University:
a) Facilitating admission to a programme of study
b) Awarding credit towards a programme of study (including Advanced Standing Credits in the Faculties of Divinity, Science, and Medicine, as described in Section 3 below)
c) Permitting exemption from a required module or modules

1.2   Principles governing the recognition of prior learning

1.2.1   **Alignment with the intended programme of study:** The University will decide what prior learning may be accepted, and which type of recognition (as in 1.1) is appropriate. In general, recognition will depend on how the prior learning matches:
 a) admissions criteria and requirements, for admissions decisions
 b) the programme and level learning outcomes, for the decision to award credit
 c) individual module learning outcomes, for permitting exemption from a required module

1.2.2   **Credits used towards a previously awarded degree cannot be counted again towards a different degree or other award[1] on the SCQF framework:** Degrees and credits associated with them may be considered as part of the admissions process or to permit exemption from required modules but cannot be used under 1.1b to gain credit towards a programme of study except where this is permitted by a partnership or articulation agreement. Non-degree awards and credits associated with them may be used for any of the purposes set out in 1.1, provided that the other limits specified in this policy are adhered to.

1.2.3   **There is a maximum limit to the amount of credit awarded through RPL:** Students are expected to build on prior learning through their study at the University. Credit for prior learning may be awarded at any level but in line with the University's Senate Regulations, no more than 50% of the total credits required for the final award may be gained through RPL, whether as an exemption or as prior learning credit. More detailed limits can be found in Section 1.4 below.

1.3   Types of prior learning

1.3.1   **Certificated learning or certifiable learning:** credit gained either at a University or another suitably recognised provider. Prior learning of this type is accredited based on assessment and 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 an applicant requesting RPL.

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[1] The Senate Regulations define 'award' as 'a combination of a qualification with a title associated with an approved programme of study and assessment'.

1.3.2 **Experiential learning:** learning that has been achieved generally (but not necessarily exclusively) within a professional context. In the case of applications for RPL based on prior work-related or experiential learning, including learning that has been certificated by an awarding body but is not accredited, the applicant must evidence that relevant learning has taken place as a result of that experience.

1.4 Limitation of claims and credit decay

1.4.1 **Credit can only be awarded towards the taught components of a programme of study**. Credit cannot be awarded through RPL, nor exemptions given, towards the dissertation or research components of any degree or programme.

1.4.2 **Credit decay:** Credits gained from an accredited recognised body within five years of commencement of the programme of study at St Andrews should be taken at face value. Credits gained more than five years before the commencement of a programme of study will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. The same credit decay principles can also be applied to suitably-evidenced experiential learning.

1.4.3 **No more than 50% of the credits required for an award may be gained through RPL.** Students must also fulfil the requirements of their programme, except for any modules or credits for which they have gained specific exemption through RPL. The maximum amount of prior credit which can be put towards an award is outlined in the table below. Students must always fulfil the Senate Regulation requirements regarding the number of credits required at the relevant level to gain their intended award.

Intended Award	Maximum Credit through RPL	Minimum Credits at St Andrews
General Degree	Maximum of 180 credits No more than 30 credits at 3000 level (SCQF level 9)	At least 180 credits At least 30 credits at 3000 level
Undergraduate Honours (excluding MBChB)	Maximum of 240 credits No more than 30 credits at 3000 level (SCQF level 9) Transfer credits will not be awarded at 4000-level (SCQF level 10)	At least 240 credits At least 90 credits at 4000 level
Integrated Masters	Maximum of 240 credits No more than 30 credits at 3000-level (SCQF level 9) Transfer credits will not be awarded at 4000-level (SCQF level 10) or 5000-level (SCQF level 11)	At least 360 credits At least 90 credits at 4000 level At least 120 credits at 5000 level
PG Certificate	Maximum of 30 credits	At least 30 credits at 5000-level (depending on programme requirements)
PG Diploma	Maximum of 60 credits at 5000-level (SCQF level 11)	At least 60 credits at 5000-level (depending on programme requirements)
Taught Masters	Maximum of 60 credits at 5000-level (SCQF level 11) Credits may not be applied to dissertation/research element	At least 120 credits at 5000-level (depending on programme requirements) Dissertation/research element

MPhil with Taught Elements	Maximum of 60 credits at 5000-level (SCQF level 11) Credits may not be applied to thesis	At least 60 credits at 5000-level (depending on programme requirements) Thesis of up to 40,000 words
Doctor of Professional Practice (DProf)	Maximum of 60 credits at 5000 level Credits may not be applied to the portfolio or research elements	At least 60 credits at 5000 level Portfolio of professional projects Integrative critical analysis of up to 15,000 words

1.4.4   Credits gained through RPL will be discounted from degree/award classification.

1.4.5 Credits gained through RPL cannot count towards an exit award if a student does not achieve their intended award.

2.   RPL Process

2.1   **RPL must be requested during the application process:** Requests for RPL must be received by Admissions before the student completes their initial matriculation.

2.1.1   Applicants must be informed of the nature of the evidence required to support their application. Subject-specific advice may also be offered to applicants.

2.2   **Role of RPL Officers:** Initial decisions regarding RPL will be made by the University RPL Officer, working with the relevant School RPL Officer(s).

2.2.1   **The University RPL Officer**, based in Admissions, is responsible for ensuring that decisions on RPL are communicated clearly and promptly to applicants, and for coordinating the recommendations of School RPL Officers relating to individual RPL requests. The University RPL officer has final authority on all RPL decisions.

2.2.2 **A School RPL Officer,** who is normally the School Admissions Officer, has delegated authority from the Head of School for RPL decisions in the School. The School RPL Officer is responsible for liaising with the University RPL Officer in order to provide applicants who have requested RPL with information about when and where to submit the required supporting evidence for the application.

2.3 Submitting evidence

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

2.3.1 **Claims for certificated formal learning** must be supported by a certified transcript or other certified evidence of the level and number of credits achieved from a recognised learning provider. In making a request for RPL, the applicant must provide module or course descriptions to enable the RPL Officer to assess alignment. Further information may also be requested from the learning provider.

2.3.2 **Supporting evidence for experiential learning** will include material that varies depending on the specific nature of the learning, but which may for example include:

- a discipline specific interview;
- completion of a set task;
- 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.

2.3.3 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.

2.4 Fraudulent documentation in RPL requests

As outlined in the Admissions policy, the University will not admit individuals based on fraudulent or plagiarised applications or documents and will investigate any persons found to have submitted any fraudulent material as part of their application, including requests for RPL, even when this information comes to light after an offer has been made or an individual has matriculated.

2.5 Approving or rejecting claims for RPL

Where RPL is used as part of an admissions decision, successful applicants will thereafter complete the full requirements of the degree programme to which they have been admitted, other than any modules exempted under 1.1c.

2.5.1 **Requests for credit** must be approved by the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching) or delegate.[2]

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

2.5.3 **When a request for RPL is turned down,** the applicant must be provided with a clear statement of the reasons for this decision.

2.5.4 If the applicant wishes to raise concerns about procedural error or irregularities in the application of the RPL policy, complaints will be managed according to the framework laid out in the University Complaints Handling Procedure, and in the first instance, issues of complaint should normally be addressed to the Director of Admissions. Unless maladministration against an admissions decision is claimed, the University will not investigate complaints that question an admissions decision, which the University is entitled to make.

3. Advanced Standing Credits (ASCs)

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[2] The AVP Dean of Learning & Teaching has delegated their authority to approve requests for credit under this policy to the Associate Deans and Associate Provosts. This will continue until formally revoked by the AVP Dean.

Advanced Standing Credits (ASCs) are a type of contributory degree credit awarded to certain students in the Faculties of Divinity, Science and Medicine, and in the International Education Institute to enable them to meet the credit requirements defined for their degree. This applies to:

- students admitted to the BSc Medicine;
- students admitted directly to the second year in degree programmes advertising this possibility;
- students admitted to fast-track degree or Foundation programmes advertising this possibility.

3.1 Where a student has originally applied to a fast-track programme, or for direct entry to the second year of a programme offering this route, or to the BSc Medicine, the appropriate number of ASCs are awarded during the admissions process, and will be shown on the student's academic record on arrival. There is no need for students to request ASCs; the award is automatic.

3.2 A student who has applied for first year entry to another programme may request, at their initial meeting with their Adviser of Studies, to transfer to a fast-track programme or to direct entry to second year of programmes offering this route. Such transfers will only be considered within the same subject. These requests must be submitted before the end of the re-advising period when the student begins their studies. Approved ASCs will then be shown on the student's academic record.

3.3 For undergraduate students, awarded ASCs may be retained when a student transfers to another Honours programme, or takes an additional sub-Honours year. Awarded ASCs are valid only for Honours programmes and are withdrawn when a student transfers to the BSc, MA or MTheol (General) programme, or graduates with a lower award than an Honours degree. It may be possible for postgraduate students to transfer ASCs across programmes, but this will be at the discretion of the School.

4. Review

The Academic Monitoring Group will receive from the University RPL Officer an annual report containing:

a) The number of cases of RPL awarded, and the levels of the awards made;
b) The number of RPL applications rejected, and the reasons for rejection;
c) A summary of the types of evidence that were required from applicants;
d) Progression and outcomes of students in receipt of RPL;
e) Any related policy issues arising for discussion.

Version number	Purpose / changes	Document status	Author of changes, role and school / unit	Date
01	Minor amendments to refine the RPL processes and clarify some of the	Updated	-	June 2020

	policy statements.			
02	Changes to titles/contact details to reflect decanal restructuring	Approved	-	February 2021
3.0	Revised policy incorporating Advance Standing Credits (ASCs) and process enhancements	Updated	Academic Policy Officer, Education & Student Experience	May 2024