



Policy and Procedure on Recognition of Prior Learning

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Contents

Purpose	3
Definitions	3
Scope	4
Points of Policy.....	5
Avoidance of Double Counting	5
Eligibility.....	6
Fees	6
Consideration of Applications for RPL.....	6
Procedure	7
Points of Responsibility	7
Application and Evidence	8
Consideration of RPL Applications for the Purpose of Programme Entry	9
Consideration of Applications	9
Decisions on Applications	9
Consideration of RPL Applications for the Purpose of Module Exemption	10
Consideration of Applications	10
Decisions on Applications	11
Appendix 1: Academic Credit Frameworks	13
Appendix 2: RPL Formal Learning Framework	14

Purpose

1. This policy articulates the principles for the management of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) that has its source in experience and/or previous formal, non-formal and experiential learning contexts.¹ It seeks to enable the University to ensure that RPL applications are considered, and decisions applied consistently across the institution.
2. The policy is informed by the Quality Assurance Agency's 'Recognition of Prior Learning: National Framework for Scottish Higher Education', and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education which sets out the following expectation in respect of institutional practice:
"Policies and procedures for application, recruitment, selection and admission to programmes are reliable, fair, transparent and accessible, including processes for the recognition of prior learning. Similar and proportionate arrangements are in place for modules and other units of study."
3. The policy complements the [University of Stirling academic regulations](#) relevant to RPL. These regulations take precedence over this policy.
4. The policy operates in parallel the RPL procedure which sets out the process through which the University of Stirling considers and makes decisions upon applications for RPL.

Definitions

5. **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL):** is the process for recognising learning that has its source in experience and/or previous formal or non-formal learning contexts.
6. **Entry Requirements:** the specified, agreed admissions criteria for a programme of study.
7. **Formal learning:** takes place within the context of programmes delivered by learning and training providers. It is assessed and credit-rated under the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), or another formal academic credit framework, and leads to formal qualifications which are recognised by the University. The academic credit frameworks commonly used by institutions in the UK in addition to the SCQF are: Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree-Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ); Credit and Qualifications Framework in Wales (CQFW); European Credit Transfer Scheme (ECTS); UK ENIC The United Kingdom National Agency for the recognition and comparison of international qualifications and skills). Further information on these frameworks is provided in [Appendix 1](#).
8. **Non-formal learning:** takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training. It may be assessed but does not typically lead to formal certification, for example, learning and training activities or programmes undertaken in the workplace, voluntary sector or trade union and through community-based learning.

¹ QAA Recognition of Prior Learning National Framework for Scottish Higher Education (2014)

9. **Experiential learning:** can be defined as taking place through life and work experiences. The learning may have been unintentional at the time of the experience, with the development of their skills and knowledge becoming evident later, unless the experience took place as part of a planned experiential or skills-based learning activity.
10. **General Credit:** academic credit which does not correspond directly to a specific University of Stirling module or unit of study but reflects the amount and level of the learning, in relation to the SCQF. General credit is only applicable to undergraduate study and the award of general credit is typically made in respect of gaining entry or advanced entry to a programme.
11. **Specific credit:** academic credit which corresponds directly to the syllabus and learning outcomes of the relevant University of Stirling provision. Where this type of credit can be awarded, it is typically awarded as an exemption from studying a particular module.
12. **Credit transfer:** the transfer of academic credit achieved at another UK higher education institution to the University of Stirling.
13. **Double counting:** Double counting refers to the awarding of academic credit for the same piece of formal learning to two (or more) separate qualifications at the same level. In effect, providing two qualifications for only one piece of learning. The University does not consider double counting to be educationally desirable or defensible and so will not permit RPL to be used where it would represent this.

Scope

14. The RPL Policy and Procedure facilitate the University of Stirling undertaking consideration of the previous learning of a student through non-formal and experiential learning and therefore operates in parallel with core Admissions Policy and arrangements, which take account of formal qualifications achieved by an applicant. RPL considerations can be taken for the purpose of either:
 - a. **Programme Entry:** Entry to year one or any subsequent year of a programme for which the applicant does not possess the necessary, prescribed entry qualifications.
 - b. **Module Exemptions:** Where an applicant meets the entry requirements for a programme, RPL can be applied for to allow an individual to be granted an exemption from a particular module of the programme (compulsory or option) through the award of specific credit
15. The University's undergraduate and postgraduate taught academic regulations include that, "An award from the University of Stirling requires that a minimum of one-third of the total credits are acquired through study at or validated by the University of Stirling. For some specific qualifications, this level may be higher". RPL will only be considered and approved by the University in line with its academic regulations, including this regulation.
16. Where an applicant seeks RPL for the purpose of programme entry or advanced programme entry, it may be necessary for the application to be considered for both general and specific credit as specific credit may be required in respect of compulsory modules.

17. Where an applicant seeks RPL for the purpose of module or module element exemption, it is necessary for the application to be considered for specific credit. Where an exemption from a module is granted, this will not reduce the tuition fee for the programme, for which the applicant will remain liable if admitted. In addition, there may be student funding eligibility implications as a result of this. The approval of an RPL application for module exemption **may** enable a student to complete the programme within a reduced period of study, however this is dependent on the structure of the programme applied for. An award of specific credit is normally matched against a whole module. On an exceptional basis only, where previous academic credit partially matches the learning outcomes of a module, a partial exemption may be granted.

Points of Policy

Avoidance of Double Counting

18. Double counting of prior learning for credit must not take place. Credit, whether gained at the University of Stirling or another institution, can only count towards one single award at any given level and would be accepted only where those credits had not already been counted towards the award of another degree qualification. For example:
- a. An applicant has been awarded a Certificate of Higher Education. They apply to the University for admission to an undergraduate Bachelor degree and request RPL for the Certificate of Higher Education and to enter into year 2. The applicant has not undertaken any other degree programme since being awarded the Certificate and as such has not used the Certificate of Higher Education as RPL previously. Since the Certificate has not already been counted towards a degree award, it can be used as RPL, and therefore as academic credit towards the attainment of the Bachelor degree qualification.
 - b. An applicant previously completed an HND qualification and then used this to gain advanced entry admission to another university, into year 3 of an undergraduate degree programme. They went on to be awarded the degree qualification for this programme, based on the credits awarded through the RPL for the HND and the credits achieved at the university they were admitted to. The same person then applied to the University of Stirling to be admitted to another undergraduate degree programme, again seeking RPL for the HND that they completed and entry to year 3. The applicant's request for RPL cannot be approved because to do so would result in the applicant being granted academic credit from one HND twice and therefore the HND credits being double counted.
19. Students who exit from a University of Stirling programme with an exit award and who subsequently wish to re-join or continue in the same programme to complete the qualification will have the exit award cancelled. Students will be required to surrender any exit award issued (for example a Certificate or Diploma) before the degree qualification (or a higher-level exit award) is awarded on successful completion of the programme. In such cases, the student would join the degree level of the programme using the exit award as exemption credit towards the requirements of the degree qualification. This enables the student to retain their academic credit without double-counting.
20. An exception to this is professional or vocational qualifications – there will be no requirement for such qualifications to be surrendered.

Eligibility

21. In all cases, and regardless of the purpose, an application for RPL will only be considered by the University at the point of application for admission to the University. Applications are not considered beyond the point of admission.
22. All applications must be submitted with a fully completed [Recognition of Prior Learning Application Form](#) and with appropriate supporting evidence. It is the applicant's responsibility to provide the necessary documentation and evidence which the University considers to be required to support an application for RPL.
23. Prior learning may be eligible for RPL providing the following criteria are met:
 - i. **For programme entry:** the content, learning outcomes and level of the relevant previous learning meet the entry requirements for the relevant year of a programme; the amount and level of prior learning that the applicant can clearly and robustly demonstrate and evidence as having previously achieved is appropriate; and the regulatory requirement that a minimum of one-third of the total credits contributing to a University of Stirling award are acquired through study at or validated by the University of Stirling will be met (for some specific qualifications, this level may be higher).
 - ii. **For module exemption:** the content, learning outcomes and level of the relevant previous learning equate to those of the module or element for which an exemption is being applied; and the amount and level of prior learning that the applicant can clearly and robustly demonstrate and evidence as having previously achieved is appropriate.

AND

- iii. The use of the previous learning as RPL would not represent double counting.

Fees

24. The University does not normally charge applicants a fee for the consideration of RPL. However, where the University determines that the consideration of an application would represent a significant level of time and or work, it may be deemed necessary to charge a fee. Such a fee would be calculated on the basis of the volume of work to be undertaken on the consideration and the fee amount would be notified to the applicant in advance of the assessment of their application.

Consideration of Applications for RPL

25. Consideration of applications for RPL is undertaken on a case-by-case basis. All applications for RPL are considered in line with the Recognition of Prior Learning Procedure which forms paragraphs 35 to 64 of this document.

26. Applications for RPL must be made by individual applicants. Applications cannot be made by a member of staff of the University of Stirling or another person on behalf of an applicant.
27. In order for prior learning to be recognised by the University and for the University to award credit on the basis of this learning, evidence must be provided by the applicant that is in line with the University's requirements, as set out in paragraph 42.
28. Where prior learning is recognised by the University, it is not the experience or participation that is recognised but the learning that has arisen from the experience or participation.
29. Where the University considers an application for RPL and decides that prior learning can be recognised, the University of Stirling decides whether to award either general and/or specific credit in recognition of the prior learning.
30. In all cases, the award of credit through RPL is ungraded and does not count as credit undertaken at University of Stirling. This may have implications on a student's eligibility to gain awards with Merit or Distinction for undergraduate and postgraduate level awards. Potential RPL applicants should check the requirements for award of Merit or Distinction by referring to the University Regulations and any programme specific requirements applicable to the programme of study in which they are interested. The University of Stirling Regulations can be accessed [here](#).
31. RPL cannot be used in respect of programmes of study which are subject to professional accreditation unless this is specifically permitted by the relevant accrediting body and the University.
32. Where the University decides that credit can be awarded for prior learning, the credit cannot be used twice. For example, credit cannot be used to **both** gain entry/advanced entry to the programme and to receive further exemption for a module or modules that form part of the programme.
33. The transfer of credit from a previously completed qualification would normally only allow a student to move to a higher certificate/stage of a programme and would not be incorporated within a programme of the same level.
34. Students who return to the University of Stirling to undertake an award on the basis of RPL will be required to surrender the formal certification previously issued by the University of Stirling in respect of the Recognised Prior Learning.

Procedure

Points of Responsibility

35. All RPL applications are received and considered by the Admissions Team in the first instance.
36. Applications on the basis of previous formal learning are considered by the Admissions Team using the [RPL Formal Learning Framework](#).

37. For any application that is not within a subject's Entry Requirements, the Admissions Team will refer the application to the Programme Director or relevant Faculty academic staff who will then consider and make a decision on the application.
38. The Admissions Team is responsible for the communication of all RPL application decisions to the applicant.
39. Where an application has been successful, the Admissions Team is responsible for liaising with the other relevant University teams to ensure that the outcome is accurately captured in the student record. All decisions made regarding RPL must be recorded (with justification and documentation) by Admissions and the record retained in the University's admissions and student record systems in line with data retention policy. The student's academic history record will be amended by Student Administration on confirmation of RPL award approval.

Application and Evidence

40. Where an applicant wishes to apply for RPL, the Recognition of Prior Learning Application Form requires to be completed and submitted to the University with accompanying evidence as required by the University.
41. RPL applications must be submitted at the point of application for admission to the University.
42. It is the applicant's responsibility to provide the necessary documentation and evidence which the University considers to be required to support an application for RPL. The evidence in all cases must be submitted on the basis that it is suitable as an item of evidence and also that it effectively supports the application. Evidence must therefore be:
 - a. **Relevant:** the evidence must effectively demonstrate that a student has achieved prior learning in areas relevant to the programme of study for general credit or specifically related to the learning outcomes of a module for specific credit. Learning should also be at the appropriate level.
 - b. **Sufficient:** the evidence must demonstrate that the prior learning is equivalent to the number of credits being assessed in the relevant module in the case of exemptions or is sufficient to equate to a year of study for advanced entry.
 - c. **Authentic and Verifiable:** the evidence provided must be in English or accompanied by formally translated into English versions, it must also be verifiable, for example prior learning must be demonstrated by an original transcript or certification and experiential learning must be evidenced through e.g. a reference from a line manager.
 - d. **Current:** evidence must be recent and demonstrate that the learning is up to date according to discipline standards. Learning / award must have taken place within five years of the proposed point of admission to the programme of study or the module for which an exemption is being granted.
43. Items of evidence which may support an RPL application could include:
 - Transcripts clearly showing the relevant SCQF levels and ratings (or equivalent)
 - Certificates
 - Employer references

- CV
 - Reflective accounts
 - Portfolio of work/evidence
44. Where an applicant wishes to apply for the award of specific credit as Recognition of Prior Learning, it is necessary for the University to consider if there is adequate matching between the learning already completed and the University of Stirling programme/module being applied to.
45. Applicants for recognition of prior experiential learning are required to provide additional substantial evidence of their understanding and ability to engage in professional and academic activities that equate with the SCQF level of the proposed programme of study. The items of information that are likely to be required include:
- a portfolio of evidence of the prior experiential learning
 - references, testimonial and reports
 - a reflective account or diary describing the learning achieved
 - completion of a designated project or written assignment
 - an interview or written statement to demonstrate achievement in the subject or module for which equivalence is being claimed or admission sought. The University may require that the interview takes place in person.

Consideration of RPL Applications for the Purpose of Programme Entry

Consideration of Applications

46. In respect of all RPL applications, when considering an application, the volume and level indicators of the SCQF will be respected.
47. Full consideration of applications will be undertaken by the University as quickly as possible, however the time required to do this will vary, depending on matters such as the range and volume of information to be considered, any complexity in the consideration, etc.
48. Where an application for RPL is within a subject's Entry Requirements, the Admissions team will consider the application and decide upon the outcome of the application in line with this policy and procedure.
49. Where an application for RPL is not within a subject's Entry Requirements, the Programme Director or relevant Faculty academic staff member will consider and decide upon the application on the basis of:
- a. The programme the applicant wishes to be admitted to; and
 - b. The prior learning the applicant wishes to be considered and recognised in support of their entry to the programme.

Decisions on Applications

50. Having considered the application, the Programme Director or relevant faculty academic staff member will make one of the following decisions:

- a. The level and volume of learning achieved is sufficient and RPL can be awarded. In these circumstances, the Admissions Team will take action to implement the outcome as per paragraph 39.
 - b. The evidence is incomplete or not appropriate (See 51).
 - c. The application does not demonstrate that the level/volume/outcomes of learning achieved is appropriate to be recognised, and therefore that the application is unsuccessful (See 52).
- 51. Where it is concluded that the evidence submitted by the applicant is incomplete and/or does not meet the criteria of acceptable, sufficient, authentic or current, the Admissions Team will advise the applicant of the issues that have been identified with the evidence, and that the applicant may make a re-submission within a period specified by the University. The University has discretion to require an applicant to make a new application rather than a re-submission where this is considered as necessary/appropriate.
- 52. Where an RPL application is unsuccessful, the outcome will be communicated to the applicant by the Admissions Team, including a summary reason for the decision on the application. The communication will also advise that appeals cannot be made against the decision; however, an RPL applicant may request that the team or staff member who made the decision on the application undertakes a review of their decision if they consider that the decision was taken without all of the submitted information having been fully considered. Where an applicant wishes a review to be undertaken, they must advise clearly as to the information they consider to have been excluded from the consideration of their application, and the impact they see this to have had on the consideration and outcome of their application.
- 53. Where a review of a decision is undertaken, the team or staff member who made the original decision on the application will make one of the following decisions:
 - a. The original decision was appropriate and should stand.
 - b. The original decision should be revised.
- 54. The decision made on an RPL application as a result of a review will be final.
- 55. Where an RPL application is made in respect of PGR study, and the relevant Faculty academic staff member approves a reduction in the minimum period of study, this will be confirmed to the applicant in writing at point of admission, with the expected end date of study amended accordingly in the student record.

Consideration of RPL Applications for the Purpose of Module Exemption

Consideration of Applications

- 56. In respect of all RPL applications, when considering an application for RPL the volume and level indicators of the SCQF will be respected.

57. Where the application is within a subject's Entry Requirements the Admissions Team has authority to consider and make a decision on an application, in line with this policy and procedure.
58. Applications for module exemptions out with the agreed Entry Requirements will be considered on a case-by-case basis, and normally by the Programme Director and Module Coordinator, or other relevant academic staff who must be satisfied that the learning outcomes of the module to be exempted have been met at the appropriate SCQF level through either formal or experiential learning.
59. The Programme Director and Module Coordinator/other relevant academic staff will consider and decide upon the application, taking all the available information into account. This will include a range of matters as appropriate to the application and will generally include:
 - a. mapping the learning outcomes of the qualifications or learning previously attained and the University of Stirling modules for which specific credit is sought.
 - b. Consulting with the Head of Division and/or other academic members of staff as appropriate.
 - c. Considering the application in the context of the SCQF.

Decisions on Applications

60. Having considered the application, the Programme Director and Module Coordinator, or other relevant academic staff will make one of the following decisions:
 - a. The level and volume of learning achieved is sufficient and RPL can be awarded in the form of specific credit. In these circumstances, the Admissions Team will take action to implement the outcome as per paragraph 39.
 - b. The evidence is incomplete or not appropriate (see paragraph 61).
 - c. The application does not demonstrate that the level/volume/outcomes of learning achieved is appropriate to be recognised, and therefore that the application is unsuccessful (see paragraph 62).
61. Where it is concluded that the evidence submitted by the applicant is incomplete and/or does not meet the criteria of acceptable, sufficient, authentic or current, the Admissions Team will advise the applicant of the issues that have been identified with the evidence, and that the applicant may make one re-submission within a period specified by the University. If a re-submission is not made within this time period, the application will be cancelled by the University.
62. Where an RPL application is unsuccessful, the outcome will be communicated to the applicant by the Admissions Team, including a summary reason for the decision on the application. The communication will also advise that: in line with the University's assessment regulations, appeals cannot be made against the decision; however, an RPL applicant may request that the team or staff member who made the decision on the application undertakes a review of their decision if the applicant considers that the decision was taken without all of the submitted information having been fully considered. Where an applicant wishes a review to be undertaken, they must advise clearly as to the information they consider to have been excluded from the consideration of their application, and the impact they consider this to have had on the consideration and outcome of their application.

63. Where a review of a decision is undertaken, the team or staff member who made the original decision on the application will make one of the following decisions:
- a. The original decision was appropriate and should stand.
 - b. The original decision should be revised.
64. The decision made on an RPL application as a result of a review will be final.

Appendix 1: Academic Credit Frameworks

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)

<https://scqf.org.uk/interactive-framework/>

This is the credit framework used in Scotland and underpins the academic standards of all programmes delivered by Colleges and Universities in Scotland, meaning that a 20 credit Level 7 module from another Scottish institution is comparable to a 20 credit Level 7 module at the University of Stirling.

Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree-Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) and Credit and Qualifications Framework in Wales (CQFW)

<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/qualifications-and-credit-frameworks>

<https://beta.gov.wales/credit-and-qualifications-framework-cqfw>

The FHEQ is the qualification framework for England and Northern Ireland, it also includes Wales which also has its own framework, the CQFW. Both allow the benchmarking of qualifications across the UK.

European Credit Transfer Scheme (ECTS)

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

This scheme uses the same principle as the SCQF, FHEQ and CQFW but is Europe wide, allowing qualifications across Europe to be compared.

National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC)

<https://www.naric.org.uk/naric/>

NARIC is an organisation that compares international and UK qualifications and is used by Universities to assess applications from students who have previously studied out with Europe.

Appendix 2: RPL Formal Learning Framework

Prior Learning	Evidence	<u>Maximum</u> Potentially Possible RPL (Specific or General Credit)
Undergraduate		
Degree-level qualification achieved within 5 years in a subject where the learning outcomes match the UoS programme	Original degree certificate	320 credits (Specific) (e.g. direct entry to year 4)
Degree-level qualification achieved within 5 years where the learning outcomes do not match that of the UoS programme	Original degree certificate	120 credits (General) (e.g. direct entry to year 2)
HND or partial degree study awarded within 5 years and where the curriculum and learning outcomes provides UoS equivalent preparation for the proposed programme	Original certificate and/or transcript	240 credits (Specific) e.g. direct entry to year 3)
HND or partial degree study awarded within 5 years and where the curriculum and learning outcomes does not provide UoS equivalent preparation for the proposed programme	Original certificate and/or transcript	No credit – entry qualification only.
Postgraduate Taught		
A postgraduate qualification, at level 11 ² or partial study will be considered if awarded within the last five years and if learning outcomes match those of the proposed higher award	Original certificate and/or transcript	60 credits at SCQF 11 (Specific)
A postgraduate qualification, at level 10 or partial study will be considered if awarded within the last five years and if learning outcomes match those of the proposed higher award		30 credits at Level 10 (Specific)

² A postgraduate TQFE qualification (with evidence to indicate that it was awarded at the equivalent of Level 11) will be considered both within and outwith the five year period, if the applicant has continued his/her GTCS registration and professional practice. The credit transfer may be considered for an award of up to maximum of 90 credits at level 11.

Postgraduate Research		
Applications for candidates wishing to transfer to the University of Stirling having been registered at another education institution for a higher degree by research achieved within 5 years may apply for a reduction in the maximum period of study only.	Applicants should provide evidence of current registration and also provide full details of relevant research undertaken to date, supported by academic references.	The minimum period of study at the University of Stirling may not be reduced to less than one year (full-time) or two years (part-time).
Professional Doctorate		
A postgraduate qualification, at level 11 will be considered if awarded within the last five years and if learning outcomes match those of the proposed higher award	Original transcript/certificate	120 credits at SCQF level 11