

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1.1. The University recognises the value of different forms of learning wherever it occurs and this Policy sets out the University's principles for the recognition of prior learning gained through experiences or achievements and the associated assignment of credit against a University award.

1.2. Purpose

1.2.1. The Policy provides information and guidance for applicants, students, staff, employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) on the use of RPL at Keele University. It sets out the University's criteria for assessing applications for the assignment of credit for prior learning, mapped to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (FHEQ).

1.2.2. RPL is the process by which applicants of all ages and backgrounds offset their experiences and achievements against elements of a programme. It is a mechanism to improve access, enable students to transfer between institutions or programmes, and allow the successful completion of university qualifications. It follows the principle that students should not duplicate previous learning.

1.2.3. The University welcomes applications for RPL where it is permitted.

1.3. Scope and definitions

1.3.1. The Policy covers the following types of prior learning:

- **Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning (RPCL)** - learning that has been formally assessed and can be evidenced with a certificate or transcript. It is normally achieved through previous study at an education provider.
- **Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)** - learning derived from experience, such as work, which has not been formally assessed. The knowledge and skills gained through the experience must be capable of being evaluated (see section 2.3.7 for further details).

- 1.3.2. Both types of prior learning are equally valid and can be used in the following situations:
- *Admission with advanced standing* - applicants may request admission to a programme at a stage later than the normal entry point.
 - *Module exemption* - applicants may request exemption from one or more modules on the basis of credits or experience gained previously. This would normally be applied for prior to the commencement of their studies but applications will also be considered whilst on the programme.
- 1.3.3. The University also recognises credit transfer as a mechanism for allowing students to change programme and/or institution by transferring the credits they have already achieved. The process for changing programme within the University is supported by Student Services whereas transfer from another institution is managed by the Admissions team.
- 1.3.4. Admission with advanced standing includes 'progression' and 'articulation' arrangements where students transfer from an institution with which the University has a partnership arrangement via a pre-existing agreement. Further details regarding 'articulation' arrangements are covered in the Educational Partnerships Code of Practice.
- 1.3.5. This Policy applies to all taught programmes at Keele University. Information on postgraduate research degrees can be found in the Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees.
- 1.3.6. Information about RPL in respect of apprenticeship provision at Keele can be found in section 2.3.C below.

2. POLICY

2.1. Criteria

- 2.1.1. It is the learning gained that can be claimed as RPL and in all cases evidence must be presented that shows that such learning has taken place.
- 2.1.2. All RPL applications must be accompanied with evidence that satisfies the following criteria:
- a) **Validity:** evidence must be provided (either of credits or qualifications achieved or a portfolio of evidence showing relevant experience) that shows a match between the prior learning and the module(s) at Keele University.

- b) Currency: the prior learning must have been gained recently enough to make it still of value. Learning gained more than five years ago is unlikely to be considered; however, the final decision will take into account all relevant contextual information. Where applicants can demonstrate recent relevant experience, exceptions can be granted and qualifications older than 5 years can be considered under RPL or RPEL.
 - c) Authenticity: any certificates and transcripts must be clearly identified as having been achieved by the applicant/students and should be verifiable.
- 2.1.3. It is the applicant's responsibility to provide any certificates, academic transcripts or other relevant documents that are not in English with an officially certified translation.
- 2.1.4. RPL may not be permitted on certain programmes due to professional, statutory or regulatory body requirements and this will be specified in the programme-specific regulations.
- 2.1.5. RPL applications must be made by the applicant/student themselves. This is preferably done prior to the start of the programme but may be whilst enrolled as a student. *NB*: an exception to this is apprenticeship programmes where any application (and decision on whether to accept the RPL claim) must be made before starting the programme (see 2.3.12).
- 2.1.6. RPL applications may include both prior certificated and experiential learning.
- 2.1.7. There is no automatic entitlement to RPL and each application is considered on its own merits.

2.2. Credit limits

- 2.2.1. The guideline to be followed when assessing RPL applications is that no more than two thirds of the credits for a programme can be exempted through RPL.
- 2.2.2. Exceptions to the guideline in 2.2.1 are only permitted where they are set out in programme-specific regulations. Any such exceptions must be clearly communicated to applicants and must take account of the following:
- a) Sufficient credit must be obtained at Keele University in order for the award to be conferred, including the final stage of a programme. For example, for undergraduate degree programmes this must include the

final year of study. **Please note that only credits awarded by Keele University will be used in the award calculation.**

- b) Any dissertation or research project (or equivalent) required by the programme must be completed as part of the studies taken at Keele (i.e. RPL cannot be used against a dissertation module). Consideration should be given when assessing RPL claims to the benefits associated with undertaking preparatory modules and building supervisor relationships at the University; therefore, it is advisable not to allow exemption against all taught credits at postgraduate level, as the award would be calculated solely using the dissertation mark.
- 2.2.3. Annex A provides a table showing the guideline credit limits for the use of RPL against the University's [Qualifications Framework](#) (Regulation E1).
- 2.2.4. Credit cannot be given for part of a module, only for completed modules.
- 2.2.5. To prevent credits being double counted, it is not permitted to re-use credit from a completed qualification towards another qualification with the same award outcome (e.g. BA (Hons)).

2.3. Considering RPL applications

Annex B provides a diagram illustrating RPL processes.

A. Admissions onto a programme with advanced standing

- 2.3.1. If applying for admission with advanced standing (i.e. to join the programme later than the normal entry point) the applicant should apply in the normal way and indicate the appropriate year of entry in the 'point of entry' section of the UCAS application form, or, for postgraduate students, in their personal statement.
- 2.3.2. The Admissions team will request any additional information from the applicant, such as details of the modules studied. Admissions will then liaise with the Admissions Tutor in the relevant School to assess the application and reach a decision. This will include an assessment of whether the learning outcomes of the exempted modules have been achieved.
- 2.3.3. If the request is approved the Admissions team will update the applicant's record on the University database.
- 2.3.4. For online programmes applicants who want to request Recognition of Prior Learning will need to complete the [Recognition of Prior Learning Application Form](#). The Enrolment Team will provide the form and assist with this process. The Form and relevant documents will be sent to the

relevant Keele Admissions Tutor to review the request. They will complete and upload the form with a decision, confirming the amended start date for the applicant (if applicable).

B. Module exemption

- 2.3.5. All applications for module exemption need to be made by the applicant using the RPL Application Form available from the University website. Where applicable, Schools may use an adapted version.
- 2.3.6. All applicants are recommended to contact the relevant Admissions Tutor to discuss their application prior to submission.
- 2.3.7. Applications for module exemption must be sent to the relevant Admissions Tutor (or equivalent) in the School for an assessment. The assessor will check that the application form has been completed and accompanying evidence has been provided. For RPEL, a portfolio of evidence would normally be required to show how learning from the experience(s) matches the learning outcomes for the modules. This is normally done by mapping the prior learning and supporting evidence against each learning outcome, explaining how the applicant's experience means that they have already covered the learning requirements of the module.
- 2.3.8. Applicants may be required to undertake some form of assessment in order to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes.
- 2.3.9. The assessor will take into account the criteria set out in this Policy along with any programme-specific regulations relating to RPL and will use academic judgement to reach a provisional decision.
- 2.3.10. The provisional decision made by the Admissions Tutor (or equivalent) will be reported to the Student Records and Examinations team in Academic Registry who will make a final check that the process has been followed correctly. Once confirmed, Student Records and Examinations will notify the applicant of the University's decision in writing and, if approved, update the student's record on the University database to show the RPL credits awarded.
- 2.3.11. RPL will be recorded with a pass against the module exempted and it will not be included in the award calculation.
- 2.3.12. Any module exemptions are reported to examination boards as part of the result profiles of each student. Where required by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs) a sample of RPL decisions may be reviewed by an external examiner.

C. Apprenticeships

- 2.3.13. For new apprentices commencing a programme there will be an initial needs assessment that the main training provider will carry out.
- 2.3.14. The initial assessment must be completed before the apprenticeship can begin and it will consider any prior learning achieved by the applicant against the knowledge, skills and behaviours set out in the apprenticeship standard.
- 2.3.15. Where RPL has been approved the content, duration and price of the apprenticeship will be amended accordingly in accordance with government regulations.
- 2.3.16. The minimum duration of an apprenticeship is 12 months with at the equivalent of 6 hours per week across the duration of apprenticeship training spent in off-the-job training. If an apprentice has prior learning that exceeds these criteria then they are not eligible for an apprenticeship.

2.4. Fees

- 2.4.1. If an application for RPL is successful the tuition fee and period of study will be adjusted to take account of the module exemptions. This will be calculated by the School assessing the RPL application and communicated clearly to the applicant when they are informed of the outcome.
- 2.4.2. The University does not charge applicants/students a fee for making an RPL application.
- 2.4.3. Any costs incurred through obtaining officially certified translations of certificates, transcripts or other relevant documents are the applicant's responsibility.

2.5. Equality statement

- 2.5.1. The University is committed to the implementation of policies to achieve equality of opportunity for all our applicants and students.

2.6. Appeal process

- 2.6.1. Complaints relating to the RPL applications must follow the Admissions Complaints and Appeals Policy (link provided in section 4).
- 2.6.2. It should be noted that appeals may not be made against the academic judgement of those making a decision on an application. Appeals may be subjected on the basis of new evidence to support the claim, a procedural

irregularity, or evidence of prejudice or bias in the decision-making process.

3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- 3.1. The University operates a devolved process for the consideration of RPL with Schools given the primary role in assessing applications.
- 3.2. Schools must make it clear to applicants/students who to contact for any queries relating to RPL on its programmes.
- 3.3. The University's Admissions team may assist with queries relating to admission with advanced standing. Contact: admissions@keele.ac.uk
- 3.4. The University's Student Records and Examinations team processes claims for module exemption on the basis of RPL, following consideration by the School. Contact: studentrecords@keele.ac.uk

4. RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- 4.1. The following University policies are relevant to the RPL Policy:
 - Admissions Policy:
<https://www.keele.ac.uk/policyzone/data/admissionspolicy/>
 - Admissions Complaints and Appeals Policy:
<https://www.keele.ac.uk/policyzone/data/admissionsappealspolicy/>
- 4.2. In addition, statements regarding the availability of RPL at programme level may be found in programme specifications:
<https://www.keele.ac.uk/qa/programmespecifications/>
- 4.3. The University's Qualification Framework can be found here:
<https://www.keele.ac.uk/regulations/regulation1/>
- 4.4. The University's degree classification rules, which includes information about the algorithms used for students entering with advanced standing, can be found here: <https://www.keele.ac.uk/qa/degreeclassification/>
- 4.5. Schools publish information about the opportunities available for module exemption or advanced standing.

5. REVIEW, APPROVAL & PUBLICATION

5.1. The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy is overseen by the University's Education Committee on behalf of Senate. University Executive Committee (UEC) is responsible for approving the policy.

5.2. The RPL Policy is published in the Policy Zone on the University's website.

6. ANNEXES

Annex A - table of guideline RPL credit limits

Annex B - RPL process diagrams

7. DOCUMENT CONTROL INFORMATION

Document Name	Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy
Owner	Ed McCauley, Quality Assurance Manager, Academic Registry
Version Number	1.0
Equality Analysis Form Submission Date	19/04/2023
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Related University Policy Documents	Admission Policy; Admissions, Complaints and Appeals Policy
<i>For Office Use – Keywords for search function</i>	RPL, Prior Learning, Policy

Annex A - Table of RPL credit limits

The guideline credit limits for the use of RPL at Keele University are shown in the table below.

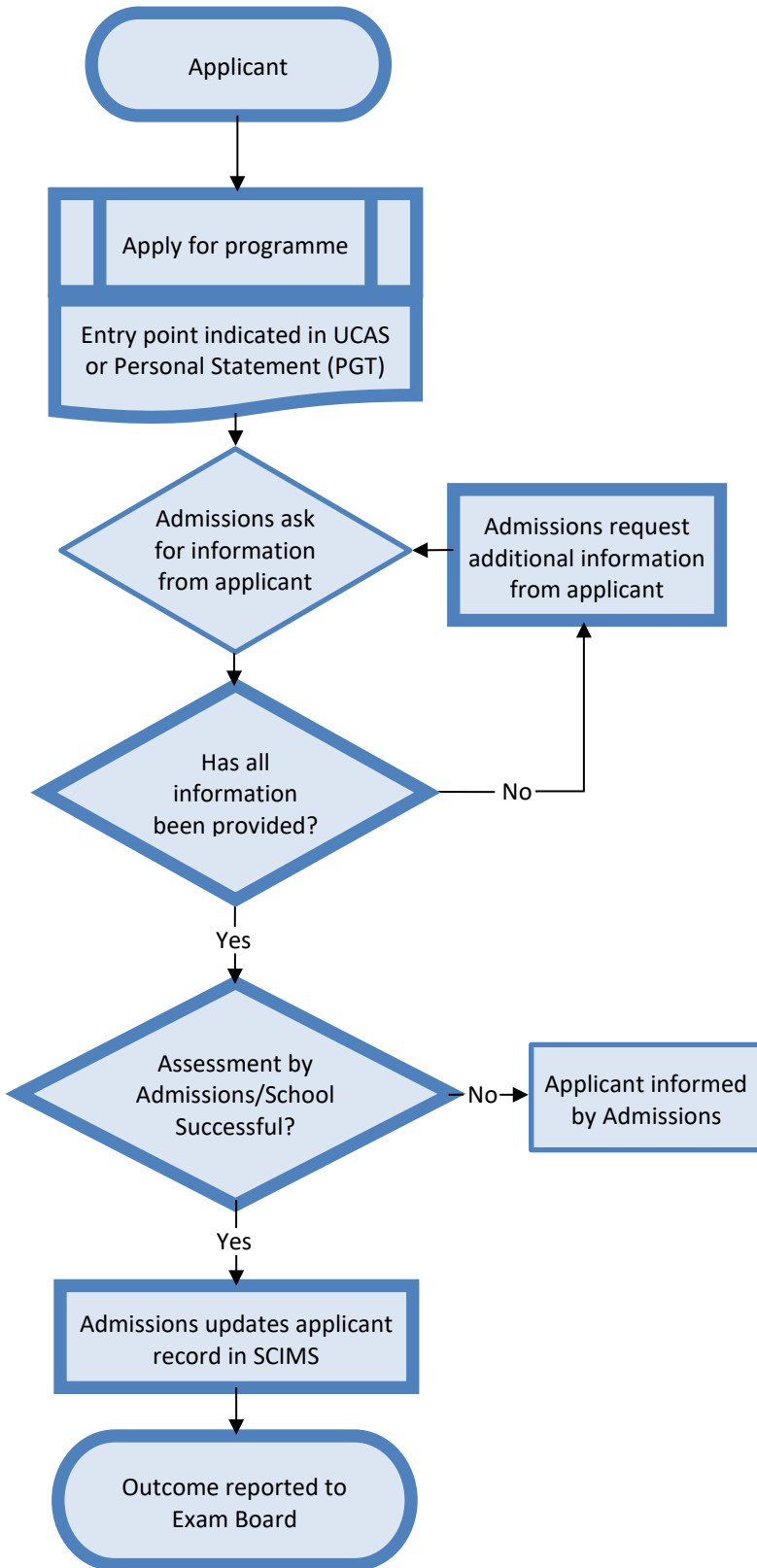
Notes:

- Exemptions to these credit limits must be considered with reference to the RPL Policy section 2.2.
- The dissertation or research project (or equivalent) cannot be exempted under RPL

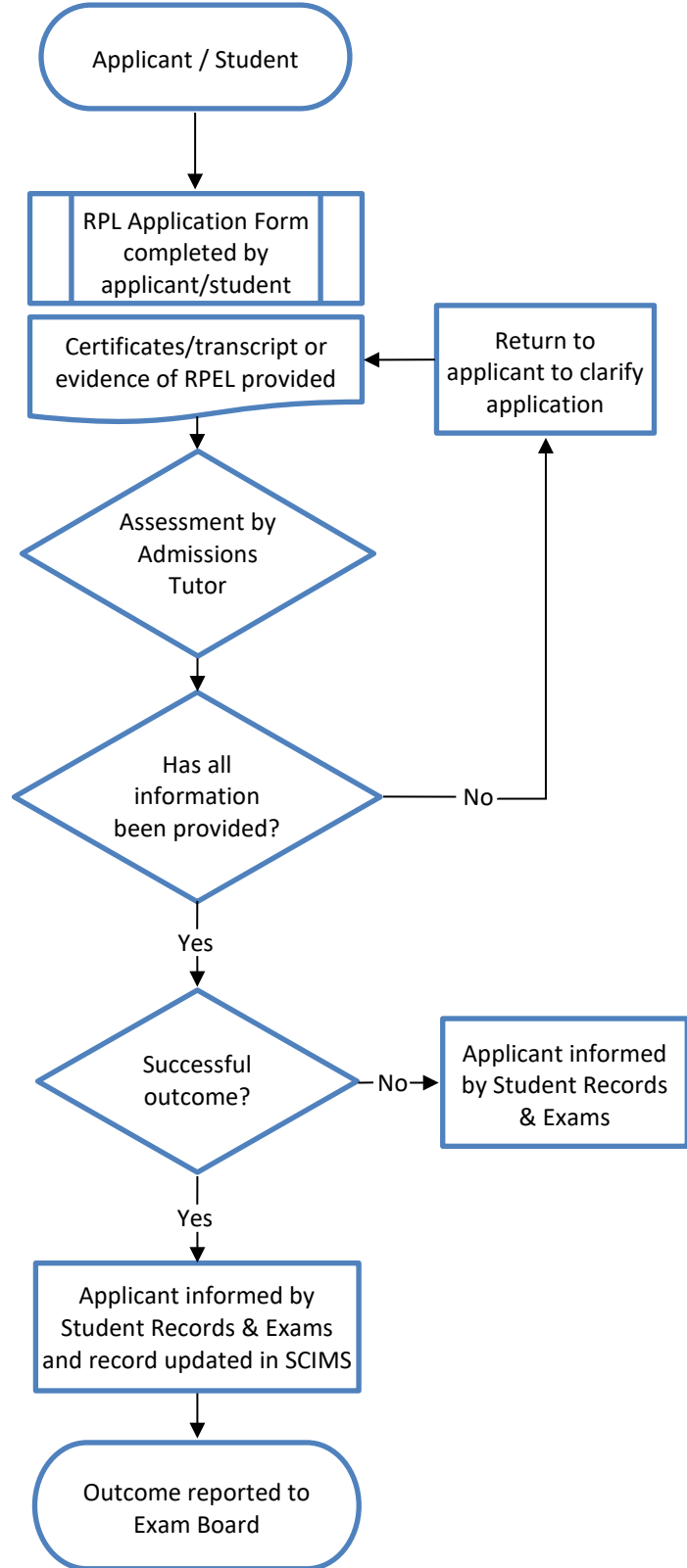
Award type	FHEQ Level	Total credits for the award	Total credits normally permitted for exemption under RPL
Professional taught doctorate	8	540	120
Master's degree	7	180	120
Integrated Master's degree	7	480	240
Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip)	7	120	60
Postgraduate Certificate (PGCert)	7	60	0
Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)	7	60	0
Bachelor's degree with honours	6	360	240
Intercalated Bachelor's degree	6	120	0
Foundation degree	5	240	120
Diploma of Higher Education	5	240	120
Certificate of Higher Education	4	120	60

Annex B - RPL process diagrams

Admission onto a programme with advanced standing



Module exemption



Annex C – Case Study examples

Example 1: shared modules across Levels 6 and 7

Q: A student on a professional regulated programme completes their undergraduate degree and enrolls on a postgraduate programme in the same subject area. These programmes include a compulsory module delivered at both Level 6 and Level 7 with common content related to professional competencies, with PSRB requirements meaning that the L7 module cannot be studied by students who have completed the L6 version. How should this be dealt with?

A: Module exemption must be used in this instance and recorded on the student's transcript against the Level 7 module. The original mark would not be reused as it had already been included in a previous award calculation; instead it would be recorded as a pass.

Example 2: currency of learning

Q: there is an applicant enquiring about returning to top up their PG Diploma to an MSc award, which is permitted in the regulations on a particular programme. They completed their PGDip in September 2018 and wishes to return either to the January 2023 or September '23 intake. With the rule on currency of learning set at five years, when does the time start: is it from when they started their PGDip, i.e. September 2017, or when they finished in 2018? And do they have five years to start the MSc or does it need to be completed within this time period?

A: The decision to be made is whether to accept the applicant on the programme based on when the qualification was achieved, and five years is set as a suitable benchmark for retaining the currency of learning. Therefore, as the qualification was achieved in 2018 this would fall within the time period to allow enrolment onto the MSc in 2023. It is also worth noting that there is scope in the policy to go beyond the five years where there is a rationale for doing so based on contextual factors (e.g. evidence of ongoing CPD).