Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy: Higher Education

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1. Introduction

1.1 University Centre Quayside (UCQ) recognises that applicants may have acquired relevant knowledge, skills and experience through previous formal study, employment or other learning. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) may therefore be used to:

- demonstrate that published programme entry requirements have been met;
- support admission with advanced standing (direct entry);
- award academic credit or exemption in accordance with the Regulations for Validated Awards of The Open University.

1.2 All RPL decisions are made on the basis of academic judgement, evidence of achievement of the relevant learning outcomes and compliance with the Regulations for Validated Awards of The Open University.

2. Definitions

2.1 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

This term is used to describe the process whereby applicants of all ages and backgrounds are eligible to receive recognition and formal credit for learning or experience acquired in the past through formal study and through work and other life experiences.

2.2 Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)

Prior Experiential Learning denotes learning derived from experience which is uncertificated and not previously assessed. For example, learning from unpaid work or paid work, community activities, leisure pursuits and other informal learning experiences.

2.3 Prior Certificated Learning (RPCL)

Prior Certificated Learning is a process through which previously assessed and certificated learning is considered, and if appropriate, recognised for academic purposes.

3. RPL conditions

3.1 Credit is given for learning and experience, where the level, standard and content are relevant to the particular course. The award of credit is a matter of consistent application of academic judgement and must result from a transparent and demonstrably rigorous and fair decision-making process.

3.2 RPL will only be recognised against levels four and five. The level six year of a full 360 credit bachelor's degree cannot be claimed as RPL.

3.3 RPL has a minimum assessment claim (rather than numerical, based on minimum credits). Students with RPL against the academic aspect of an assessment would be required to do the work-based element (to achieve the module and meet the requirements of the CMDA, if appliable). Those with experiential evidence (meeting the needs of the practical element) would be required to do the academic aspect of the module.

3.4 The academic and/or work-based assessment of an eligible module can be claimed as RPL. For work-based assessment, this must include **all** work-based assessment components within the module.

3.5 Performance in work for which an award of credit for prior learning has been made is not taken into account in the calculation of the final award.

3.6 Credit will not normally be given for certificated learning that has taken place more than five years previous and will be allocated according to Table 1 below. Credit may not be counted twice for the same award level.

3.7 A student may be awarded recognition of prior learning, towards the requirements of a named award up to two-thirds* of the total credit requirements for that award

*two-thirds of RPL is only permitted for full, three-year bachelor's degrees (360 credits) or full master's degrees (a minimum of 180 credits) and not sub-awards, where the usual maximum is 50%.

3.7.1 Table 1

Table 1 Award	Credit required for award	Maximum credit allowed	NQF Level
Certificate of Higher Education	120	60	4
Higher National Certificate	150	75	4/5
Diploma of Higher Education	240	120	4/5
Higher National Diploma	240	120	4/5
Foundation Degree	240	120	4/5
Degree	300	150	4/5
Degree with Honours	360	240	4/5/6
Postgraduate Certificate	60 (M)	30(M)	7
Postgraduate Diploma	120 (M)	60 (M)	7
Master's Degree	180 (M)	120 (M)	7

4. Admission with Advanced Standing

4.1 Applicants may be considered for admission with advanced standing where they have successfully completed previous higher education study or other recognised learning that is considered equivalent to part of the programme to which they are applying.

4.2 Advanced standing may be awarded through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), including Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning (RPCL) and Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL), in accordance with this UCQ Recognition of Prior Learning Policy (AD-006) and the Regulations for Validated Awards of The Open University.

4.3 Applicants may be considered for exemption where they have successfully completed recognised qualifications or learning that demonstrates achievement of the required programme learning outcomes and academic credit at the appropriate level and within the required timescale.

4.4 Examples of recognised prior learning may include, but are not limited to:

- Relevant UCQ apprenticeship programmes;

- Relevant Higher National Certificates (HNCs);
- Relevant Higher National Diplomas (HNDs);
- Relevant Foundation Degrees;
- Relevant CertHE, DipHE or other recognised higher education qualifications;
- credit previously achieved at another recognised higher education provider.

4.5 Admission with advanced standing is subject to:

- successful completion of the relevant prior learning;
- the applicant meeting any additional published entry requirements for the programme;
- demonstrates achievement of the relevant programme and/or module learning outcomes;
- compliance with the Regulations for Validated Awards of The Open University; and
- approval by UCQ in accordance with the UCQ Recognition of Prior Learning Policy.

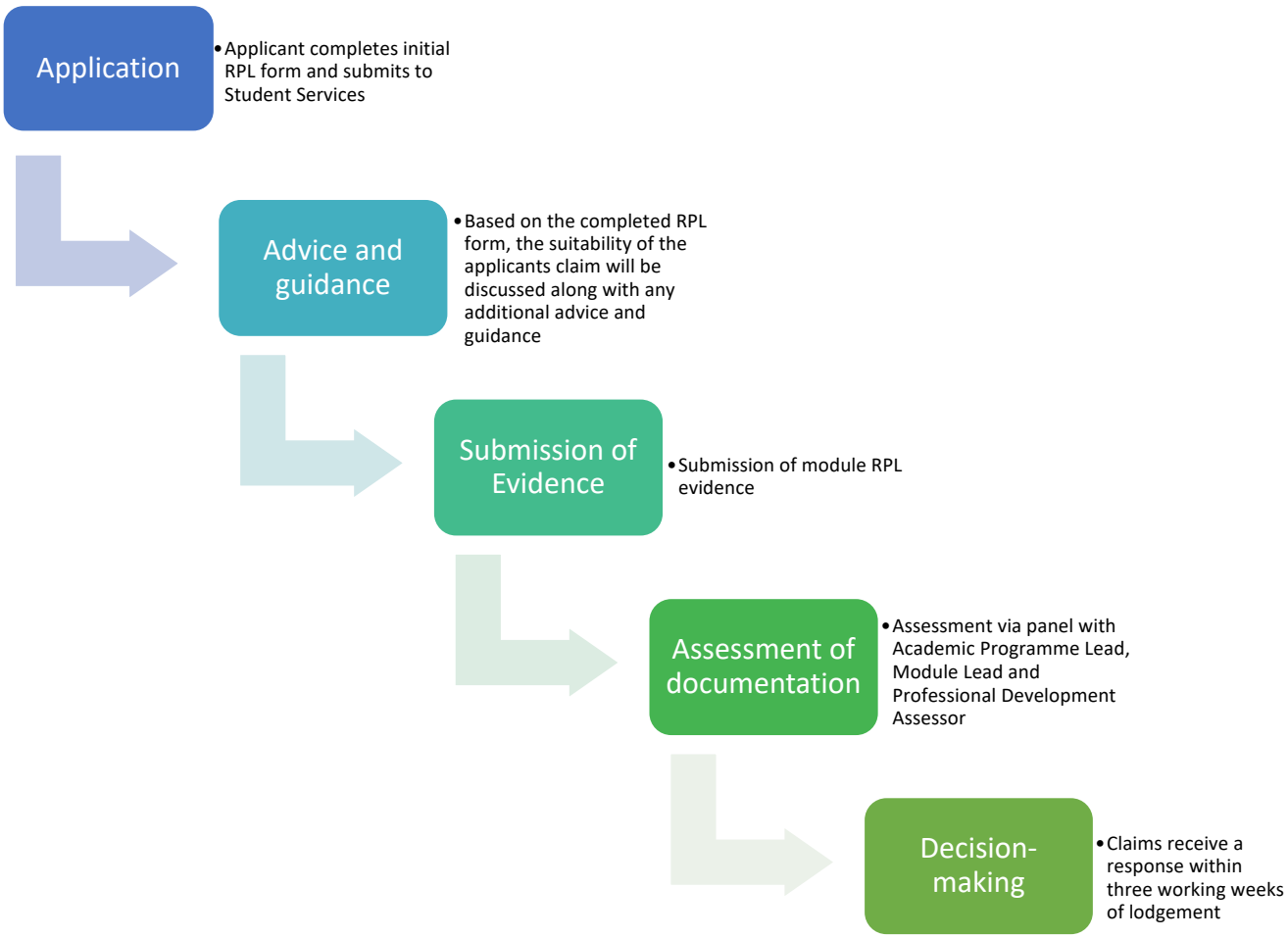
4.6 Where an application is based upon Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL), UCQ will assess the applicant's learning through the submission of appropriate supporting evidence to demonstrate achievement of the relevant learning outcomes.

4.7 Recognition of Prior Learning awarded by UCQ will be recorded in accordance with the Regulations for Validated Awards of The Open University and UCQ's transcript requirements.

4.8 It is the responsibility of the student to prepare an application and submit adequate documentation and evidence. Evidence should be included of underpinning knowledge. Applicants should identify in advance whether they wish to apply for RPL prior to programme admission.

5. Process

5.1 Process flowchart



5.2 Initial application

5.2.1 Applications and information about what is required for credit should be directed to the UCQ Student Services Team.

5.2.2 All applications must normally be submitted at least four working weeks before the student commences the programme of study against which credit is sought. Claims submitted late will not be considered unless there are extenuating circumstances. Please refer to the UCQ's Extenuating Circumstances Policy if this is the case.

5.2.3 Applicants will be required to complete an initial application form detailing the prior learning they wish to accredit. The nominated Advisor will handle queries at this stage and provide support to an individual student in respect of advice and guidance concerning a claim for RPL.

5.2.4 Depending on the applicants prior learning and experience, they may be able to submit a claim under RPCL, RPEL or a combination of both. This will be determined once the initial application claim form has been reviewed by the nominated Advisor.

5.3 Submission of evidence

5.3.1 Students will be fully informed by the Advisor of the range of evidence that would be considered appropriate in a submission. The portfolio of academic/professional evidence presented should be appropriate to the proposed programme, sufficient in length, depth and level, authentic and recent.

5.3.2 Applicants will be asked to submit for assessment:

Claims of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL)

1) Relevant certification with full academic transcript

2) A short academic writing sample prepared specifically for this application, to assess academic literacy

Claims of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)

1) Signed job description

2) Reflective account for **each** module being claimed for:
   - A reflective account outlining your roles, responsibilities and experience relating to the areas you are applying for RPL. This will include referencing theories and core reading as per the module guide. This must meet the module assessment learning outcomes.

3) Witness Testimony from Line/Senior Manager

4) Question and answer session with UCQ Assessor (to cover areas not clearly outlined within the reflective account)

5.4 Assessment of documentation

5.4.1 The role of the Advisor, the member of staff who advises a student on the production and submission of an RPL claim, must be separate and distinct from the role of Assessor, the member of staff who exercises academic judgement in assessing the claim. In order to maintain the objectivity and rigour, the Assessor(s) should be subject specialists able to evaluate the evidence offered and to establish the authenticity of the claim. All staff associated with the support, guidance and assessment of claims for the recognition of prior learning will be expected to undertake appropriate training.

5.4.2 All credit awarded will be relevant to the identified modules or awards. Detailed assessment of credit whether based on certificated or experiential learning, can only be made by subject specialists since the assessment can only be made in the light of detailed subject knowledge. These specialists should ensure that the experience represents the achievement of learning outcomes comparable to those which would have been achieved had the course of study against which credit is claimed been taken. This may be assessed by any method appropriate to what is being assessed and should be verified by another specialist.

5.4.3 Where appropriate, a second assessment of the credit awarded may be undertaken by another suitably qualified Assessor.

5.4.4 Assessors of the documentation should objectively assess claims using the following checklist:

1) Validity – That the assessment does identify the knowledge and skills it purports to assess.

2) Reliability – That the assessment can be repeated with the same outcome.

3) Sufficiency – That the evidence provided is appropriate in terms of quality and quantity.

4) Authenticity - That it is the applicant's own experience and subsequent learning for which accreditation is being sought.

5) Relevance – That the learning to be accredited represents up to date knowledge and skills.

5.5 Decision-making

5.5.1 Normally, claims will receive a response within three working weeks of lodging of the application. If refused, information regarding why this decision has been made will be provided to the applicant within this timeframe.

5.5.2 Should you have any queries regarding your application you can contact academic registry at registry@ucq.ac.uk

5.5.3 Should an application be unsuccessful the applicant will be notified in writing explaining the outcome in general terms. If the applicant is not satisfied with this response, they may appeal the decision through the Appeals Procedure (AC-001). This procedure is available from the UCQ website https://ucq.ac.uk/policies/. Appeals will be dealt with by a member of UCQ's Academic Council.

6. Monitoring

6.1 The assessment of learning derived from experience should be open to internal and external scrutiny and monitoring within institutional quality assurance procedures for moderation of assessment. All RPL claims should be internally moderated, and a sample presented for external examination.

6.2 It is important that the Programme Team monitor the progress of students admitted with RPL, so that information is built up on the suitability of particular qualifications or patterns of experience for the granting of advanced standing or credit exemption.

7. Document history

ISSUE NO.	DATE	PAGE	REVIEWER	DETAIL OF AMENDMENT
9	30/05/2025	All	Tara Henderson	Periodic review conducted. Minor formatting updates made; S6 Document History added; Section numbering updated accordingly.
10	23/01/2026	4, 6	Tara Henderson	4.3.2: Signed job description replaced by: *A short academic writing sample prepared specifically for this application, to assess academic literacy;* 3.8.3 added
11	27/07/2026	3-5	Tara Henderson	Revised Introduction; Added S4 Admission with Advanced Standing;

8. Initial equalities impact assessment

Department: All	**Completed by:** Tara Henderson, Head of Policy & Governance	**Date of initial assessment:** 02/02/2021
Area to be assessed:	AD-006 Recognition of Prior Learning Policy	
Existing or new policy/procedure:	Existing	
What evidence has been used to inform the assessment and policy? (please list only)		
External guidance and requirements: ➢ Consultation with OU Expert Reader ➢ OU/UCQ General Regulations **Internal guidance and requirements:** ➢ Consultation with Vice Principal		

1. Describe the aims, objectives or purpose of the policy/procedure		This policy sets out UCQ's arrangements for application of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for higher education students.		
2. Which stakeholders/groups are intended to benefit from this policy/procedure?		All higher education students		
The Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to have 'due regard' to the need to:- (1) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimization (2) Advance equality of opportunity between different groups; and (3) Foster good relations between different groups		**3. Could the policy/procedure have a disproportionately negative effect impact in terms of the aims set out in (1) to (3) of the Act on any of the protected characteristics?:-** **High** **Medium** **Low** **No effect**	**4. Briefly explain how the policy/procedure furthers or prevents the aims set out in (1) to (3).**	**5. If there is a disproportionately negative impact on any protected characteristics, can it be justified on the grounds of promoting equality or any other reason? If yes, please explain.**
Protected characteristics	**Age**	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Disability	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Gender	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Gender reassignment	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Marriage and Civil Partnership	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Pregnancy and Maternity	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Race	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Religion or Belief	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Sexual Orientation	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable

6. Has there been any consultation/engagement with the appropriate protected characteristics?	Not applicable as no negative PC impact identified

7. What action(s) will you take to reduce any disproportionately negative impact, if any?		None required
8. Based on the information in sections 1 to 7, should this policy/procedure proceed to Full Impact Assessment? (recommended if one or more 'High' under section 2)		No
Assessor signature:	**Approved by:** **Michelle Elliott**	**Date approved:** 02/02/2021