Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Transfer Guide

Contents

1. Introduction

This RPL Guide outlines the principles of recognition of prior learning (RPL) and credit transfer. For information on how to process RPL claims within the university please refer to the related documents:

- RPL Process Flow Chart
- RPL Process and Guidance

For claims based on experiential learning, please use:
- RPL Recommendation Form – to submit claims to the RPL Panel
- Prior Informal Learning – Staff Guidance

A claim form is not required for claims based on certificated learning, please see the RPL Process and Guidance document for further information.

2. Recognition of Prior Learning and Credit Transfer

The University of the Highlands and Islands is committed to widening access to higher education and encourages applications from prospective students who do not have formal entry qualifications. As part of this commitment, the University supports the principle of recognising prior learning wherever it occurs. Provided it can be assessed, it may be recognised and credit awarded and / or entry to a formal programme of study allowed.

What does this mean for students?

Applicants who have already taken part in learning, either formally, for which they have received a certificate, or as informal learning (e.g. work or community based) that they did not receive a certificate for (i.e. it was not a formal course of study), could use this previous learning to:

- Gain entry to the first level of a course at the University (as an alternative to normal entry requirements)

- Gaining **general** SCQF credit towards a course – where the amount and level of SCQF credit points must be agreed

- Gaining **specific** credit within a programme for particular modules (whole modules only) or for an entire level – leading to exemption from those modules, so the amount and level of SCQF credit points is automatically agreed.

3. So what exactly is RPL?

Some definitions of the terms used

These definitions are written by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and adopted by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for use by all colleges and universities in Scotland.

Recognition of Prior [Informal] Learning (RPL): a process which acknowledges, and values publicly, learning which has been achieved outside formal education or training systems. There are two types of RPL:

1) RPL for personal reasons/career development or formative assessment: a process of recognising learning achieved outside formal education or training systems within the context of further learning and development. This process can be used to help with confidence-building; identifying individual learning pathways and to help - prepare for the process of RPL for credit.
2) RPL for credit, or summative assessment: a process of assessing learning achieved outside of formal education or training systems which is recognised, if it is appropriate, for academic or vocational purposes. This process can help applicants to gain entry to a course of formal learning if the outcomes of their prior informal learning are judged as equivalent to the entry requirements for the course. It may also help applicants to gain credit within a course if the outcomes of their prior informal learning are judged as equivalent to the outcomes of the course to which they are seeking credit. Credit can be awarded for elements of the course, i.e. full units or modules but not for parts of units or modules.

Credit Transfer or Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL): a process, through which previously assessed and certificated learning is considered and, as appropriate, recognised for academic purposes. Applicants may combine an RPL claim with a Credit Transfer claim, in seeking entry to, or credit within, a course of study.

For simplicity all types of RPL and Credit Transfer are known as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) at the University.

4. How much credit can I claim through RPL / Credit Transfer?

The University places a limit on the amount of RPL students may be credited with for a course of study. In order to ensure the integrity of any University programme award, limits on the total amount of specific credit allowed for entry to a named award with advanced standing are set. In general, credit can be awarded through RPL to a maximum of 50% of the credit points at the level at which the student wishes to exit with an award up to level SCQF 8.

Certificate of Higher Education	60	Points at SCQF Level 7
Diploma of Higher Education	120	Points at SCQF Level 7
Ordinary Degree	240	Points at SCQF Level 7 and 8
Degree with Honours	360	Points at SCQF Level 7, 8 or 9

SCQF = Scottish credit and qualifications framework

See Appendix 2 for SCQF qualifications matrix

In exceptional circumstances, for example where articulation with other external programmes exists, the limits on the amount of credit allowed may be higher than stated above.

Can students apply for RPL/Credit Transfer for more than one course?
Simultaneous double counting of credit for the same module towards more than one University award is not permitted. Once credit has been counted towards one award, it cannot be used towards another award. No grading or mark is given to modules from which students gain exemption through RPL. If RPL credit is awarded for the final year of an Honours degree this may impact on the final classification of the award.

5. How do applicants make a RPL / Credit Transfer claim?

Students should inform Admissions staff of their intention to claim RPL. Assessment of claims is made by staff and requests for RPL forwarded to the RPL Panel (at examboard@uhi.ac.uk).

Claims based on prior certificated learning (for example HN qualifications and degree level study) do not require a RPL form, however the same standards and methods of assessing prior learning still apply. In these situations, the proposed offer is sent to Examboard@uhi.ac.uk attaching relevant evidence of existing qualifications (if not SQA). Please use this guide for information on how to assess RPL claims.

Claims for RPL based on previous experiential (i.e. not certificated) learning, or with a mix of experiential learning and formal credit, should use the 'RPL Recommendation Form', which should be completed by the programme leader. This form replaces the previous RPL Claim Form which was completed by applicants. It is available to download from the staff intranet. The new form is a recommendation form, used by the programme leader to provide details of how the claim was assessed and what their recommendation of credit is. The same standards for assessment of RPL apply.

Applications should be made in advance of the commencement of studies. In circumstances where this is not possible, students may enter the chosen programme on the understanding that if the application for RPL / Credit Transfer is unsuccessful they must complete any modules for which accreditation was not granted.

6. The role of the Programme Leader

The Programme Leader, or another staff member, provides advice to students. They provide students with RPL advice and ensure that University guidance is available to enable students to maximise their potential and effectively gather evidence required to demonstrate learning achieved. Most Programme Leaders decide to administer RPL applications on behalf of their programme. Programme Leaders may designate another member of staff to act as admissions tutor, or RPL advisor. However, the Programme Leader always signs off the recommendation form or emails the Panel with their credit award recommendation.

Staff will advise applicants and registered students on making a claim, including its production and submission. It is the responsibility of the staff to ensure that applicants and registered students have a copy of the relevant University guidance material and to provide advice and help on:

- the nature of Recognition of Prior Learning
- the credit requirements of the programme including specific learning outcomes for modules

- University procedures, including fee structure, limits on the amount of credit that can be claimed and the process of making the RPL claim
- formulating a claim in terms of reflecting upon and demonstrating learning the assessment process
- the structure and content of a draft claim. Please note that the Programme Leader's view on a draft claim does not guarantee the outcome of the assessment process.
- receive and progress a claim
- notify applicants of the assessment decision

7. Applicant responsibilities

With the assistance of the Programme Leader it is the responsibility of the applicant to prepare and submit their application. Applicants should:

- identify existing skills and knowledge
- match existing learning against the requirements of the module/course.
- formally submit the claim to the Programme Leader in line within required deadlines
- inform the Programme Leader of any change of contact details

Applicants will need to supply:
- Original certificates and academic transcripts of courses that are to be considered for credit transfer (only if applying for recognition of previous formal learning).
- After discussion with the Programme Leader, a completed RPL exercise or evidence of learning (for example, essay or portfolio) - only if claiming recognition of prior informal learning. The Programme Leader will inform applicants of what type of document should be supplied.
- A self-addressed envelope for the return of the original documents.

Once the documents are returned to the applicant it is their responsibility to retain them whilst they are completing their studies with the University.

8. How is an application assessed?

All claims are assessed according to the following principles:

- **Acceptability**. The Programme Leader will assess the claim to check that the learning presented for RPL is sufficiently related to the course content that the applicant is seeking to gain credit for.
- **Sufficiency**. This means that the programme leader will check to see there is sufficient learning, i.e. that the applicant has completed enough prior learning at the correct level to cover the claim being made.
- **Authenticity**. The assessor will want to be sure that the evidence presented for the claim is the applicant's own work. This is straightforward in the case of certificated learning, but can also be achieved for informal learning.
- **Currency.** i.e. is the learning of current relevance? Usually the learning has to have occurred in the last five years. However where the applicant has kept learning up to date in work or with further courses it can be significantly older. Please ask if in doubt.

Claims based on prior formal learning considers certificates and transcripts of the previous course. Prior learning claims based on previous informal learning will usually be assessed through an assessment exercise (for example an essay) or gather a portfolio of evidence of previous learning. Whilst this may be appropriate, it may be useful to consider other types of evidence, such as:

1. Written or recorded spoken Reflective account
2. Directed project work
3. Requesting assessment on demand
4. Observation of practical or simulated event or task
5. E-portfolio which might include digital stories, presentations
6. A combination of these types of evidence

The Programme Leader will discuss the nature of the evidence the applicant is attempting to demonstrate in order to determine the most appropriate method. They will usually also discuss this with the Student Engagement Manager to seek an appropriate method of assessment in keeping with University standards.

The assessment process

All applications will be assessed by two members of staff who are subject specialists in the module/unit for which credit is being claimed. Each claim is assessed on an individual basis. The assessors will:

- identify the assessment criteria — based on the learning outcomes

- assess the evidence against the defined criteria
- recommend, record and report the outcome of the assessment process within the required time-scale

The assessment outcome will make one of the following judgements:

1) the level and volume of learning achieved is sufficient for specific credit to be awarded or for admission to a course
2) the evidence is incomplete
3) the level and volume of the learning achieved is not appropriate

In the case of incomplete evidence (2), applicants may re-submit a claim only once. The initial assessment decision will be notified to the applicant by the adviser together with guidance and help on any additional information required. Feedback will be provided to applicants by the Programme Leader who will let them know the outcome of the claim and provide any further guidance if required.

9. RPL / Credit Transfer Fees

There is no charge for claims based on prior certified learning.

10. Recording RPL credit

All successful claims for RPL must be recorded on SITS. General credit (for whole/part of a level) will be represented as a 'block' of appropriate amount of credit points at the relevant level. This will also apply in the cases of advanced level entry, where a student is permitted to enter a programme at a level higher than SCQF Level 7. Specific credit matched to particular modules will be represented by an entry on the appropriate module(s) to indicate that credit has been assigned through RPL/APCL.

11. Classification of final award

No grading will be given to modules from which students gain exemption through RPL. Students should be made aware of this and any implications for the final classification of their University award.

12. Standardised RPL routes

For some programmes, one or more standardised RPL routes may be agreed, where there are likely to be a number of individuals submitting RPL claims based on the same qualification or combination of qualification(s) and experiential learning.

13. Appeals against a decision

There is no appeal regarding the academic decision. If an applicant is dissatisfied with the outcome of an application this should be discussed with the Programme Leader. If the issue is unresolved, the University student complaints policy and procedure should be followed. If a registered student wishes to appeal against an RPL claim, the appeal should be made in writing to the Quality Manager within their academic partner. Appeals will only be considered where these relate to alleged breaches of procedure. The appeal will be dealt with as laid down in the University appeals procedure within the Academic Standards and Quality Regulations.

14. Information and contacts

Staff and students requiring information on the RPL administrative process should contact the Exam Board Support Administrator at examboard@uhi.ac.uk

Academic advice or support in relation to assessing claims for prior learning is available from the Student Engagement Manager at studentengagement@uhi.ac.uk

15. Further information

The following key documents are available from the staff intranet, https://intranet.uhi.ac.uk/other-support/student-support/rpl-resources/ :

- RPL Process Flow Chart (diagram showing the process for RPL claims)
- RPL Process and Guidance (detailed explanation of how to process RPL claims)
- RPL Guide (this document)
- RPL Recommendation Form – to submit claims for experiential learning to the RPL Panel
- Prior Informal Learning – Staff guidance for assessing claims based on experiential learning

Staff may also contact studentengagement@uhi.ac.uk for RPL advice. Staff assessing claims based on experiential learning should contact the same email address for advice on evidencing prior learning.

Appendix 1: Matrix of SCQF qualifications framework

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Table				
SCQF Level	**SQA Qualifications**		**Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions**	**Scottish Vocational Qualifications**
12				Doctoral Degree	
11				Masters Degree PG Diploma or Certificate	SVQ 5
10				Honours Degree	
9			Professional Development Award	Ordinary Degree	SVQ 4
8		Higher National Diploma		Diploma of HE	
7	Advanced Higher	Higher National Certificate		Certificate of HE	SVQ 3
6	Higher				
5	Intermediate 2 / Credit Standard Grade				SVQ 2
4	Intermediate 1 / General Standard Grade	National Certificate	National Progression Award		SVQ 1
3	Access 3 / Foundation Standard Grade				
2	Access 2				
1	Access 1				

Source: SCQF 2007