

Heriot-Watt University

Policy on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Transfer

This Policy on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Transfer replaces the former policy on Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), which was approved by the Senate in June 2003 and incorporated as Regulation 46: Accreditation of Prior Learning (SM/03/61.1). The regulatory aspects of the Policy are likewise contained in the revised Regulation 46: Recognition of Prior Learning and Credit Transfer.

This Policy on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Transfer should be read in conjunction with the accompanying Procedures on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Transfer, which set out: processes for evaluation RPL applications; restrictions on RPL and approval procedures.

The Policy was developed by the Academic Registry and progressed via the Student Learning Experience Committee through to the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Studies Committee and thereafter the Senate Business Committee. The Policy was approved by the Senate at its meeting on 13 May 2015 (SM/15/56.1).

A revision to the Procedures was approved by the Postgraduate Studies Committee on 6 September 2016, whereby applications for RPL on graduate and postgraduate programmes (both taught and research degrees with a taught component) no longer require approval by the Chair of Postgraduate Studies Committee and can be approved by the School in the same way as undergraduate RPL (see Procedures, para 7.2).

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The re-presentation of the Policy as a separate policy document, rather than being contained solely within a Regulation, reflects one of the outcomes of the 2013/14 review of the University's governance arrangements, whereby each of the categories of Ordinances, Regulations, Policies and Procedures was clarified and differentiated (see *The University's Constitutional Framework*; approved by the Court in December 2012; revised version, May 2014 and December 2015; <http://www.hw.ac.uk/documents/constitutional-framework.pdf>).

The replacement of the term "Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)" with that of "Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)" reflects the terminology changes introduced by the Quality Assurance Agency across the UK HE sector, and by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) across all forms of educational provision in Scotland.

The University's Policy on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Transfer meets the requirements of the UK Quality Code, [Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning](#). The Policy also meets the purposes of the emerging [Scottish Higher Education National Framework for the Recognition of Prior Learning](#), the development of which is being co-ordinated by QAA Scotland. Modifications to the University's Policy may be required once the National Framework is finalised. The Policy has also been informed by the SCQF's [RPL Toolkit](#) and its [Guidance on Credit Transfer](#).

The Policy on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Transfer should be read in conjunction with accompanying Procedures on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Transfer.
<https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/learning-teaching/policy-bank.htm>

The regulatory aspects of the Policy on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Transfer are also contained within Regulation 46: Recognition of Prior Learning and Credit Transfer
<http://www1.hw.ac.uk/ordinances/regulations.pdf>

Scope and Definitions

1.1 This Policy on the Recognition of Prior Learning and Credit Transfer applies to all undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes across all modes and locations of study. The Policy likewise applies to research degrees which feature a taught element of study. A paragraph referring to this Policy has been incorporated into each of the Regulations:

- Regulation 2: Admissions
- Regulation 3: Modular First Degrees
- Regulation 3, Schedule 1 A: Degree of Bachelor in Combined Studies
- Regulation 4: Postgraduate Diplomas and Graduate Diplomas
- Regulation 18: Postgraduate Certificates and Graduate Certificates
- Regulation 34: Degree of Master of Business Administration
- Regulation 37: Degree of Doctor of Engineering (EngD)
- Regulation 38: Certificates and Diplomas of Higher Education
- Regulation 41: Degree of Doctor of Business Administration
- Regulation 44: Mixed-Mode Study – Modular First Degrees
- Regulation 48: Higher Degree of Master (Taught)

1.2 In accordance with definitions used by QAA Scotland and by SCQF, Recognition of Prior Learning and Credit Transfer describe the "process for recognising previous learning that has taken place in informal, formal or non-formal contexts: for example, in the workplace and through life experiences. Once recognised through this process, prior learning can be used to gain credit or exemption for qualifications, and/or for personal and career development". RPL is also known as "advanced entry"; "advanced standing"; "accreditation of prior learning (APL)."

1.3 Two forms of prior learning may be recognised:

- 1.3.1 **Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning (RPCL):** the recognition of prior learning which has been previously assessed and/or accredited by an appropriate awarding body as being equivalent to a particular level within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. In this context, the recognition of prior learning is based on credit transfer, as the applicant is given exemption from an entire stage of study and/or individual courses based on an existing qualification. For example, an applicant with an HND worth 240 SCQF credits may be admitted directly to Stage 3 of a relevant HWU programme. Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning is also commonly known as ***Credit Transfer***.
- 1.3.2 **Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL):** the process of assessing and then credit-rating learning which has its source in some experience which occurred prior to the point of entering the current programme, but where that experience was not previously formally assessed and credit rated at a particular level within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.

In this context, learning may be gained through experiences or training programmes in the workplace, community or voluntary sector, or more generally through life experiences and events. RPEL involves applicants reviewing and reflecting upon their learning experiences, and then documenting these experiences through a process which enables the University to determine whether an applicant can be given admission to a programme of study or exemption from one or more stages or a programme. It is the learning gained through experience which is assessed as part of RPL, not the experience itself.

For Heriot-Watt University, given its subject profile, Recognition of Prior Learning is based most commonly on certificated learning, ie an existing academic qualification. Where experiential learning is used, this is likely to be presented in conjunction with an existing qualification.

- 1.4 Recognition of Prior Learning and Credit Transfer may be used in two ways:
- (i) to gain admission to the start, or to subsequent stages, of a programme;
 - (ii) to gain exemption from individual courses within a programme.
- 1.5 Recognition of prior learning through the award of credits is a matter of academic judgement about the nature of an applicant's prior achievement, not a mechanistic or automatic process of credit transfer. Such a judgement is at the discretion of the receiving School. Schools are not obliged to recognise all, or indeed any, of an applicant's prior learning.

Academic Registry
September 2015; updated October 2016

Policy approved by the Senate, 13 May 2015