



# Student Guide to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

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## What is RPL?

If you are thinking of starting a degree at the University Centre and you have previous learning or qualifications at an appropriate level then you may be able to gain admission without the standard entry requirements, or get exemptions from studying certain modules, units or an entire year.

Recognition of prior learning or RPL is the term given to learning that may have taken place at an earlier point such as through your workplace, on short courses or another degree, in your community or through voluntary organisations.

You cannot request RPL for the activity itself (such as 100 hours voluntary work), but you can request RPL from the outcomes of the activity – i.e. the learning that has been gained through the participation in the activity. These outcomes need to be evidenced and matched against the outcomes for the course you are applying for.

There are two main types of RPL

1. [Recognition of prior certificated learning \(RPCL\)](#)
2. [Recognition of prior experiential learning \(RPEL\)](#)

You can pursue an RPCL application, RPEL application, or a mixture of the two. It is your responsibility (with the support of a member of Calderdale College staff) to demonstrate how your prior learning will allow you to enter onto a University Centre course, enter at a higher level of a degree programme or obtain exemptions from specific modules or units.

All degree programmes, including those at the University Centre, are categorised by levels on what is known as the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) in England and Wales and Northern Ireland. Programmes are made up of a specific amount of credit. Typically:

Level	For example	Credit
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• HNC</li><li>• Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE)</li><li>• First year of Foundation Degree, HND or Honours Degree</li></ul>	120
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• HND</li><li>• Foundation Degree</li><li>• Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE)</li><li>• Second year of Honours Degree</li></ul>	240
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• BA (Hons) Degree</li></ul>	360

Within each level, the total credits are divided into modules (or units on Higher National programmes). Students registered on Open University programmes will study modules worth between 20 to 40 credits (depending on the programme). For example, on each year of a foundation degree, either four 30 credit modules or six 20 credit modules are studied. Whereas, on a BA (Hons) top-up, the final dissertation or major project is likely to be 40 credits.

## What is Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning (RPCL)?

Prior certificated learning (RPCL) is learning which you received certification for. This may or may not be on relevant HE frameworks such as the FHEQ. If your previous certificated learning is not at degree level (i.e. level 4 or above) then you can work out its level using the Register of Regulated Qualifications, available through [Ofqual](#).

Examples can include:

- If you apply for HND Business with a Level 4 Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) certificate
- If you apply for HNC Business with NVQ Level 6 Business and Management
- If you withdrew from a foundation degree in Performing Arts and after completing one year and received a Certificate of Higher Education and decide to recommence the foundation degree in Performing Arts programme at Level 5 two years later. This type of RPCL is known as *advanced standing*.

## **What is the difference between advanced standing and entering onto a top up degree?**

A top up year is equivalent to the third year of a three-year BA (hons) degree programme. At the University Centre, our degrees are generally split into two parts: a foundation degree or HND (for two years) and a BA (Hons) top up (for a further year).

Advanced standing is generally the result of a stage exemption (see section below). If you are entering onto a BA (Hons) top-up you will almost certainly not need to apply for RPL as you would usually have the qualification required. This type of progression is known as automatic progression\*. Examples of automatic progression could include:

- Completing a HND Business and progressing onto a BA (Hons) Leadership and Management top-up course
- Completing the first two years of a BA (Hons) Art and Design and progressing onto a BA (Hons) Contemporary Art and Design Practice top up

*\*All other applicable entry criteria must also be met*

## **Can I apply for an exemption so that I don't have to take some modules?**

If you can demonstrate that your prior certificated learning meets the learning outcomes of one or more of the prospective programme modules, you can apply for and get a **module exemption** – which means you don't have to undertake that particular module. If your prior learning can be shown to match the outcomes required to complete the modules or units for a whole level, then this would allow you to enrol onto the next level – giving you a **stage exemption**.

For example:

- If you previously studied on a BA (Hons) Childcare and withdrew part-way through year 1, you may be able to match the credit you gained during that year to give a **module exemption** for one or two modules on the first year of the FD Early Years programme.
- If you previously studied on a BA (Hons) Childcare and withdrew after completing and passing the whole of year 1 you may be able to match the credits you gained during that year to give a whole **stage exemption**, allowing you to miss out year 1 and go straight on to year 2.

However, if there is no link between the subject or field studied previously then the credit you have gained will not be able to be used, for example:

- If you passed year one of a HND Health and Social Care programme and wanted to enrol on the second year of the FD Sound and Music Technology programme you would not be able to apply for RPCL as there is no parity between the programmes.

If you have studied professional qualifications such as those from the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) and Chartered Management Institute (CMI) you can automatically receive exemptions from studying some modules/units on named business programmes.

For Open University-validated awards more detail on the regulations is available on the College website <https://www.calderdale.ac.uk/about-us/student-handbooks-and-regulations/>.

## How do I apply for RPCL?

If you wish to use your previous certificated learning to gain a module exemption or stage exemption through advanced standing you should contact the Programme Leader, who will be able to talk you through what is required. You will normally be asked to complete a portfolio with the evidence needed to assess your claim for RPCL.

Your portfolio will include:

- i. Recognition of Prior Learning Application Form (available from the Programme Leader). This will include details of which module/elements of the programme for which you are seeking exemption, including an overview of how you have met these learning outcomes through your prior certificated learning.
- ii. Documentation from your previous certificated learning including:
  - Certificate
  - Transcript
  - Programme specification
  - Module specification
  - Any other relevant information

If you are missing any of this information you can contact the organisation who awarded your certificate. Please note there may be fees for duplicate documentation.

The programme leader will confirm whether your previous learning matches the requirements for your programme and that your prior learning demonstrates the required minimum pass mark for the module/level.

## Important Notes on RPCL:

- The minimum RPL credit claim that will be considered is 20 credits. If you are claiming for a module exemption then it would be advisable to check whether the number of credits you have already gained matches the number of credits of the module in question.
- Any modules that are included in your successful RPCL claim will not have a mark next to them on your final transcript but will show the code 'Ex' (for 'exempt'). No credit will be awarded for prior certificated learning; i.e. your final classification will be based on the average of the marks awarded during your University Centre programme of study only.
- Any credits included in a claim for RPCL must have been gained within the previous 16 years. Any certificated learning gained outside this time limit will not be considered as part of a claim for RPCL.
- It is expected that you will claim for RPCL at the earliest possible opportunity – ideally during the admissions process. However, if you realise that there may be an opportunity to make a claim at any point during your course then please contact your course leader to discuss it.

## What is Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)?

Prior experiential learning is a broad term that covers learning undertaken outside of formal qualifications. It can occur in many places, but the key environments include the workplace, in voluntary roles or in community settings.

For example:

- If you have undertaken successful marketing and communications activities for a charity for a number of years, you may gain credit exemption from studying a Level 4 marketing module on a Business programme or a community engagement module on the HNC Social and Community Work programme.
- If you are a self-taught artist who exhibits and sells portraits you may apply for credit exemption from a project-based module on the FD Art and Design Practice programme.

Like the recognition of prior certificate learning, you can apply for RPEL to enter with advanced standing or to gain module or stage exemptions.

## **How do I apply for RPEL?**

If you wish to use your previous experiential learning to gain a module exemption or stage exemption through advanced standing you should contact the Programme Leader, who will be able to talk you through what is required. This is assessed by your Programme Leader, who is identified at the point of admission.

Your portfolio will typically include:

- i. Recognition of Prior Learning Application Form (available from the Programme Leader)
- ii. Table of contents
- iii. Detailed CV or personal profile including:
  - a. employment history
  - b. education and training history
  - c. professional qualifications
- iv. Introduction to career goals and context of the application
- v. Experience, which will build on the CV
- vi. What learning has taken place and reflection on what you learned from this experience
- vii. Details and evidence of achievement, showing what behaviour or performance changes have arisen and been demonstrated from the learning
- viii. Relevancy of this learning/achievement to the programme applied for
- ix. Proof of the learning i.e. evidence that you have undertaken the learning

It is your programme leader's responsibility to confirm that your previous learning maps to the programme and provides the equivalent of the required minimum pass mark (i.e. 40) for the module or stage. The programme leader will also ensure that recognition of your prior experiential learning will not disadvantage you in later studies i.e. that you have not missed core knowledge or practical skills.

## **Important notes on RPEL:**

- The minimum RPEL claim that will be considered is the equivalent of a whole module. If you are claiming for a module exemption then your claim will be assessed against the learning outcomes for the whole module in question. No exemptions for parts or modules or individual components will be considered.
- Your application for RPEL should include, as a minimum, evidence of two years' experience in a relevant position, whether paid employment or volunteering.
- Any modules that are included in your successful RPEL claim will not have a mark next to them on your final transcript but will show the code 'Ex' (for 'exempt'). No credit will be awarded for prior experiential learning; i.e. your final classification will be based on the average of the marks awarded during your University Centre programme of study only.

- Any experiential learning included in a claim for RPEL must have been undertaken within the previous 16 years. Any experiential learning gained outside this time limit will not be considered as part of a claim for RPEL.
- It is expected that you will claim for RPEL at the earliest possible opportunity – ideally during the admissions process. However, if you realise that there may be an opportunity to make a claim at any point during your course then please contact your course leader to discuss it.

## **Are there limits for RPL claims?**

There are limits as to how much credit you can be awarded: no more than 50% of a programme's credit i.e. 120 credits of a foundation degree. No credit can be claimed at Level 6 or on a Level 6 programme (such as the final year of a three-year honours degree or a BA (Hons) top up year).

If your prior credit is successfully matched against modules or levels, any marks or grades received for those modules or levels are not used in your final classification for the programme, and no credit can be awarded for the dissertation/ major project element of any programme.

The Open University Regulations allow that:

A student may be awarded recognition for prior learning (certified, experiential or uncertified), towards the requirements of a named award up 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 Masters degrees (a minimum of 180 credits) and not sub-awards, where the usual maximum is 50%.*

For Open University-validated awards more detail on the regulations is available on the College website <https://www.calderdale.ac.uk/about-us/student-handbooks-and-regulations/>.

## **I have submitted my application, what happens next?**

Once your application has been considered, it is the programme leader's responsibility to notify you whether or not your claim was successful. Information from your claim will be passed to Data Services for inputting, and the Board of Examiners, which decided your progression and award will also be notified. RPL will be identified on your transcript of study that you will receive annually.

If your evidence is deemed insufficient you can re-submit your portfolio and seek extra guidance from the programme leader.

## **Do I have to pay to apply for RPL?**

You will receive a pro-rata fee reduction (i.e. one 20 credit module will equate to a reduction by 1/6<sup>th</sup> of the annual full time programme tuition fee) for the module/s or level that a successful RPL claim is made for.

There is no charge for processing RPCL or RPEL claims.