Heriot-Watt University
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Transfer: Procedures

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These Procedures on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Transfer should be read in conjunction with the accompanying Policy on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Transfer, which sets out the scope and definitions of RPL at Heriot-Watt University. The Policy and Procedures were approved by the Senate at its meeting on 13 May 2015.
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

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1. Applications for Admission to the Start or Intermediate Stages of a Programme

1.1 The process for admission to the start or subsequent stage of a programme based on prior learning will be outlined on the University's website, prospectuses and other forms of public information available to potential applicants. General information about the University's processes for applicants with non-standard qualifications is provided on the website as part of "other routes to entry".

1.2 Criteria specific to particular programmes will be detailed and made accessible to potential applicants through relevant forms of public information, such as School website or programme handbook. In addition, information should be provided on the application process for recognition of prior learning, the timescales involved and the means by which the applicant will be informed of the outcome.

1.3 An applicant whose prior learning is recognised as being equivalent to a programme's stipulated entry requirements may be admitted to the start of that programme[1].

1.4 An applicant whose prior learning exceeds a programme's stipulated entry requirements may be admitted to an intermediate stage of that programme.

1.5 Requests for admission based on recognition of prior learning should be directed in the first instance to the appropriate Admissions Tutor within the School, who will decide on whether the application should proceed. The Admissions Tutor may recommend a subject advisor to assist the applicant in preparing an application.

1.6 Applications for admission should be accompanied by appropriate documentation and supporting statements from the applicant and, if required by the School, from at least one referee. The School will invite the applicant to demonstrate that he or she has reached the appropriate level of achievement by one or more of the following means:

- presentation of evidence of prior certificated learning which may include award certificate, a transcript of results, programme structures and course descriptors;
- presentation of evidence of prior experiential learning which may include a portfolio of evidence together with a reflective account of the learning achieved and completion of the School's RPL form (where such a form is used);
- satisfactory completion of an assessment set by the School, which may be part of the assessment taken by other learners, a structured project or an assignment specifically set for the purpose.

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[1] Exchange students and students on Individual Study Placements are not admitted through the RPL process, but rather through the University's Policy on Student Placements (Academic). See the Academic Policy Bank for the Policy, Briefing Paper and Guidelines on Exchange and Individual Study Placements at https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/academic-registry/quality/learning-teaching/policy-bank.htm

1.7   In using the above forms of evidence, the School should have a process in place for mapping these against the relevant programme learning outcomes and levels descriptors. SCQF (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework) Levels Descriptors are available on the SCQF website.

1.8   Advice on RPL claims made by applicants who hold international qualifications can be sought from Recruitment and Admissions. Additionally, further information may be obtained from the UK NARIC website.

1.9   Credit points awarded for previous stages of a programme will be recorded on the applicant's record on admission as a student of the University. The record will make clear, through the use of the grade/result EX, that these credit points have been awarded through RPL as "exemption" from the relevant stage(s). A "P" (pass) Grade is not used to award RPL credit for exempted stages.

2. Applications for Exemption from Courses

2.1   An applicant who has submitted an application for admission to a programme based on prior learning may also apply for exemption from specific courses. Exemption from courses is normally based only on prior certificated learning.

2.2   In the case of undergraduate programmes, any course exemptions based on prior experiential learning require approval by the Head of School or the Director of Learning and Teaching, who may be nominated by the Head of School to undertake this role.

2.3   In the case of postgraduate taught programmes or the taught component of research degrees, any course exemptions based on prior experiential learning require approval by the Chair of the Studies Committee (PGT programmes) or the Research Degrees Committee (taught component of research degrees).

2.4   Only full exemption from (and full credit for) courses can be given on the basis of RPL; partial credit/exemption cannot be awarded.

2.5   The process for exemption from particular courses within a programme based on prior learning will be outlined and made accessible to applicants through relevant forms of information, such as the programme handbook or the School's RPL procedure. In addition, information should be provided on the timescales involved and the means by which the applicant will be informed of the outcome.

2.6   Applications for exemption from courses should be directed in the first instance to the appropriate Admissions Tutor within the School, who may then forward the application to one or more members of academic staff with expertise in the subject area.

2.7   An applicant must provide evidence of having achieved the specified learning outcomes of the course and of having successfully completed a similar course at the same SCQF level at another institution. Such evidence should include a transcript with assessment results and a course descriptor.

2.8   Applications for course exemption should be accompanied by supporting statements from the applicant and, if required by the School, from at least one referee.

2.9   Credit points awarded for course exemptions shall be recorded on the applicant's record on admission as a student of the University. The grade/result is presented as EX, ie "exemption". A credit-bearing grade in the A-E range is not used to award RPL credit for exempted courses.

3. Evaluation of Applications for Recognition of Prior Learning

3.1   An application for the recognition of prior learning will be assessed by the appropriate members of staff such as the Admissions Tutor, Programme Director or Course Co-ordinator, in terms of:

- relevance – there is an appropriate match between the evidence presented and the learning claimed, and the learning relates directly to the learning outcomes of the programme or courses for which credit is being claimed.

- sufficiency - the learning has reached a level to allow the applicant to fulfil the aims of the programme; there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate the achievement of the learning claimed.

- authenticity - the applicant has provided reliable evidence of having personally completed what is claimed, and the evidence clearly relates to the applicant's own efforts and achievements.

- currency - that the learning is sufficiently recent to allow the applicant to fulfil the aims of the programme. Where experience from more than five years prior to the claim is referred to in a substantial way, the applicant should provide evidence of having kept up to date with recent developments in the intended area of study.

3.2 Applicants who are applying for recognition of prior learning must have demonstrably reached the academic standards required for the programme and intended award. There must be a reasonable expectation, in approving an application, that the applicant will be able to complete the programme successfully and within the normal duration.

3.3 The process of recognising prior learning must be appropriately documented. A record of the evaluation must be kept on the student's file in the School and made available on request to the Progression Board or External Examiners.

4. Awarding Credit and Allocating Levels

4.1 The process of credit-rating and allocating levels to prior learning is undertaken in accordance with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, of which all Heriot-University awards are part:

- Each undergraduate course is credit-rated at 15 SCQF points and is allocated to one of five levels (SCQF levels 7 to 11, corresponding to each stage of an up to five-year undergraduate degree). Graduate courses are typically rated at SCQF Levels 10 or 11.

- Each taught postgraduate course is credit-rated at 15 SCQF points and is allocated to SCQF Level 11.

4.2 In the case of claims for access, admission and exemption based on certificated learning, the allocation of credits and levels will depend on the extent to which the applicant's previous learning covers the requisite content and reaches the academic standard required of other learners admitted by standard routes. The learning outcomes and assessment criteria of the HWU programme and/or courses concerned, when matched with the applicant's previous qualifications and matched against the relevant SCQF level descriptor, will facilitate this process.

4.3 The allocation of credits and levels to claims for access and admission based solely on experiential learning or on a combination of certificated and experiential learning is a more complex process. In such cases, the effective, informed judgement of the assessor is fundamental. The following indicators can assist the assessor in this process:

- SCQF Levels descriptors
- SQCF Qualifications descriptors
- Pre-requisites
- Learning outcomes
- Assessment criteria
- QAA subject benchmarks

4.4 RPL is not a mechanistic and automatic process of credit transfer - credit is the tariff awarded at the end of a *successful* assessment process. Recognition of prior learning is above all a matter of academic judgement about the nature of the individual's prior achievement, not about the amount of credit which the applicant comes with. Such a judgement is at the discretion of Heriot-

Watt University as the receiving institution and, as such, the University is not obliged to recognise all, or indeed any, of an applicant's prior learning[2].

5. Restrictions on Prior Learning

5.1 Any programme-specific restrictions on the recognition of prior learning need to be specified in the appropriate programme documentation, such as programme website or handbook, and made clear to potential applications at the point of enquiry. Programme-specific restrictions must meet the University minimum criteria, as detailed below.

Undergraduate Programmes: University-Level Minimum Criteria

5.2 The minimum criteria in terms of restrictions applicable to undergraduate programmes are as follows:

5.2.1 At least 50% of the credits required for the stage at which a student enters a programme must be completed at the University in order to qualify for the award associated with that stage. For example, a student who is given advanced entry to Stage 3 must complete successfully and be awarded the credits for at least 50% of Stage 3 credits to qualify for the award of an Ordinary Degree.

5.2.2 Schools may require a larger proportion of credits to be completed than those specified in 5.2.1 above. School-specific requirements will be specified in the appropriate programme handbook, website or other form of publically available documentation.

5.2.3 The structure for each programme of study shall specify the award criteria, along with the method of calculating the degree classification, to be applied in the case of students who are admitted, under the terms of this Policy, to the final stage of a programme.

Taught Graduate, Taught Postgraduate Programmes and Research Degrees with a Taught Component: University-Level Minimum Criteria

5.3 The minimum criteria in terms of restrictions applicable to taught graduate and taught postgraduate programmes and research degrees with a taught element are as follows:

5.3.1 At least 50% of the credits for each graduate or postgraduate award available within a programme must be completed at the University in order to qualify for that award.

5.3.2 At least 50% of the credits associated with the taught element of a research degree must be completed at the University in order to be deemed to have successfully completed the taught component.

5.3.3 Schools may require a larger proportion of credits to be completed than those specified in 5.3.1 and 5.3.2 above. School-specific requirements will be specified in the appropriate programme handbook, website or other form of publically available documentation.

5.4 Credits from an award already held by an applicant can contribute to a higher award, but cannot be used towards a lower award in the same discipline, nor can credits be used for an award of the same type in the same discipline.

5.4.1 For the purposes of clarification, the "same type of award in the same discipline" restriction means that, for example, an applicant with the award of an MSc in Business Management cannot use credits towards an MSc in Business Management with a specialism (eg in HR Management). Likewise, an applicant with a BSc Honours in Computing cannot be given credits towards a BSc Honours in Computer Science; an applicant with an Ordinary degree in Computing could, however, be admitted to the final stage of the BSc Honours in Computer Science programme, as this is a higher award.

5.4.2 The "same type of award in the same discipline" restriction must be made explicit to applicants at the point of enquiry, particularly where the title of a HWU programme/award

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[2] See page 4 of Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning of the UK Quality Code regarding the role of the institution to which a student is applying in determining the status of prior learning/awards, including volume and level.

could be interpreted as implying that the HWU programme was substantially different the applicant's existing qualification.

      5.4.3   For the purposes of clarification, if credits are being used from an existing HWU award towards an additional, higher HWU award in the same discipline (eg PG Certificate to MSc or Ordinary to Honours), then the previous award will be rescinded.

6. Fees for Processing Applications

6.1   No fees are to be levied by a School in processing applications for admission or exemption based solely on prior certificated learning.

6.2   A School may charge applicants a fee for processing claims for admission or exemption based on prior experiential learning or on a combination of prior certificated and experiential learning. Any such fees levied will be retained by the School.

7. Approval Procedures

7.1   The appropriate Admissions Tutor within the School, or the Admissions Tutor in conjunction with the Programme Director or Course Co-ordinator, will determine the number and level of credits to be awarded through the recognition of prior learning.

7.2   For all programmes (undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate taught and research degrees with a taught element), recommendations for approval should be made by the Admissions Tutor to the Head of School or, if nominated by the Head of School, to the Director of Learning and Teaching. The Admissions Tutor will inform the applicant of the decision of the Head of School or Director of Learning and Teaching.

7.3   If an application for admission to an intermediate stage is approved, credits for the earlier stages of the programme will be awarded. See paragraph 1.9.

7.4   If an application for exemption from specific courses is approved, credits will be awarded for the exempted courses. See paragraph 2.9.

7.5   The Head of School or Director of Learning and Teaching may, on recommendation of the Admissions Tutor, require particular courses be undertaken instead of certain optional or elective courses so that the applicant has the pre-requisite knowledge and experience comparable to those who have progressed from earlier stages. Credits will be awarded for any such courses successfully completed.

7.6   If an application for recognition of prior learning is not approved, the Admissions Tutor should provide feedback to the applicant, outlining the reasons for rejection and providing, where appropriate, advice on other opportunities.

8. Record of Prior Learning

8.1   Online results and the formal, official Transcript of Assessment Results issued to graduating students by the Academic Registry will specify those stages and courses for which credits have been awarded through recognition of prior learning.