Policy and Guidance on Recognition of Prior Learning

1. Introduction

1.1. The University is committed to widening access and flexible entry to higher education. We are fully supportive of credit accumulation and transfer and the recognition of informal (experiential) learning. The University’s Policy and Guidance on Recognition of Prior Learning has been developed to recognise this commitment and to provide a robust framework for Schools, Colleges and Student and Academic Support Services (SASS) to work within. This Policy will be applied across the University. Any deviations from the expectations described in the Policy (for example through requirements of professional, statutory or regulatory bodies) must be explicitly agreed by the Director of Policy, Governance and Legal Affairs and be supported by statements from the relevant School and College Boards.

2. Definitions

2.1. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the process for recognising either formal or non-traditional (informal or experiential) learning in order that students may access degree programmes, enter programmes at an advanced level or gain exemption from parts of programmes.

2.2. There are two types of RPL, which for the purpose of this Policy will be dealt with separately. Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL), also described as credit transfer, is the process by which assessed courses, part-qualifications and full qualifications obtained elsewhere are formally recognised by the University and will count towards one of our own awards. Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPIL, also known as Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning) is the process by which knowledge and skills gained through experience and/or non-certificated learning activities are credit-rated either to facilitate entry to a degree programme or to be counted as an element that contributes to credit for an award from the University of Dundee.

3. Recognition of Prior Certified Learning

Criteria

3.1. The basic criteria to be satisfied for RPCL are as follows:

- it should be relevant to the award to which it will contribute
- it should be at an appropriate level - mapped to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)
- that its intended learning outcomes (i.e. what the student has achieved) are broadly equivalent to those elements of the Dundee award for which credit is claimed
- that its curricular content and the volume of learning are broadly equivalent to those elements of the Dundee award for which credit is claimed
- that it is recent and thus learning is current. The expectation is that the credit will normally have been acquired within the past five years, although this figure may be adjusted where there is a justified reason for doing so.

3.2. It is the applicant’s responsibility, at the point of application for each cycle, to provide the detailed information required from a previous institution or organisation for the purposes of accreditation by the University.

Volume of credit transfer and contribution to the final award

3.3. The maximum amount of credit that can be claimed is 50% at the final level of the award. One exception to this is the final honours year (Scottish Higher Education (SHE) level 4), where 120 credits are required to be taken through University of Dundee modules. Examples of the maximum amount
of credit transfer permitted are provided in Appendix 1. Note that this is the maximum permitted by the University, and for certain programmes (for example those accredited by Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies) the amount of credit transfer allowed may be less than this. This must be made clear to prospective students.

3.4. The minimum amount of credit that can be claimed should normally be equivalent to a whole module within the relevant programme.

3.5. Transferred credit should not contribute to the classification of honours degrees, or to the award of merits and distinctions for non-honours degrees.

3.6. Total ('general') credit is the number of credits attached to prior learning without consideration of its relation to a particular programme of study. Specific credit is that proportion of the total credit which is directly relevant to the programme of study for which an RPL claim is being made. Assessors of RPL claims must ensure that an appropriate distinction between non-specific and specific credit is made.

Avoidance of double counting

3.7. Students who exit from a University of Dundee programme with an intermediate exit award and who subsequently re-join or continue in the same programme to study for the degree (or next exit award) will have the lower award cancelled. Students will be asked to hand back any intermediate award issued (for example a Certificate or Diploma) before the degree (or next exit award) is awarded on successful completion of the programme. An exception to this is where the lower award is a specific requirement for professional accreditation purposes. In these cases the student will join the degree level of the programme as if they were a new entrant and would use the lower award as exemption credit towards the requirements of the degree. This enables the student to retain the lower award without double counting credit, and the exemption credit will be shown clearly on students’ transcripts for the awards.

4. Recognition of Prior Informal Learning

4.1. The process of formal recognition of informal learning by the University either for entry to one of our awards or to count towards credit for one of our own awards is more complex than the credit transfer described above for RPCL. Credit is not awarded on the basis of experience in itself. It is awarded on the basis of what the candidate has learned from the experience. The University therefore must have robust means to assess informal learning based on evidence presented by the candidate.

Structures

4.2. The University encourages RPIL as an entry route to higher education, and Schools and their constituent programmes should have a structured approach to RPIL that is made clear and transparent to applicants. Such structures should include:

- consideration of whether RPIL is appropriate for the discipline or requirements of relevant professional, statutory or regulatory bodies
- explicit and appropriate means of assessment that are agreed with individual candidates in advance of the presentation of their claim
- clear guidance provided in advance on the evidence required and the rationale for it
- guidance to applicants on how their evidence will be judged
- provision for support and advice in the preparation of evidence for submission, which could include a formative stage prior to submission
- a mechanism to feedback to applicants on unsuccessful or partially successful claims
• a clear statement to applicants on the fee that they will be charged for consideration of their RPIL claim
• a mechanism to record how and why decisions to recognise prior informal learning were made
• a formal mechanism developed by Schools and/or programmes to reflect on the achievements of students who have entered through an RPIL pathway, benchmarked against the achievements of students who have entered through traditional pathways.

4.3. Every School should nominate one or more RPL officer to assess RPIL claims. Deans of Schools must ensure that staff charged with assessing RPL claims are appropriately qualified to do so, and have received relevant training (e.g. through the Centre for the enhancement of Academic Skills, Teaching, Learning and Employability) as necessary.

Assessment of RPL

4.4. Different approaches may be taken depending on whether the assessment of RPIL is to consider the suitability of candidates for entry into the first part of a programme or for entry into a programme with advanced standing and with formal recognition of the credit earned though informal/experiential learning.

Methods of assessing informal learning may include some or all of the following:
• a practice-based reflective portfolio (which should be submitted electronically)
• video and/or audio material
• analytical evaluations of practice
• analysis of issues underlying practice and the learning associated with that
• evidence of planning for practice
• analysis and evaluation of training undertaken for practice
• supporting statements from managers or supervisors in relation to practice
• an assessor’s observation of practice
• taking written or oral examinations
• structured interview
• submission of assignments on appropriate topics to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes.

4.5. An appropriate structure for the submission of evidence for accreditation could be:
• a statement of credit claimed
• a detailed curriculum vitae to support a context for the claim
• a summary of the achievements (learning outcomes) claimed
• detailed evidence supporting each of those achievements which demonstrates critical reflection, knowledge and skills acquired, a process of professional development and a capacity for autonomous study.

Criteria

4.6. The basic criteria to be satisfied for RPIL claims are as follows:
• the evidence is valid and reliable
• the evidence is sufficient to demonstrate the achievements claimed
• the evidence clearly indicates the candidate’s personal efforts and attainments
• the achievements claimed are relevant to the award towards which it will contribute

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1 Fees should be agreed and approved at an appropriate level within the College in advance of the admissions cycle and communicated to Student Services who will ensure appropriate publication.
• the achievements are equivalent in depth, level and amount of learning to the successfully completed learning of the modules for which equal credit is to be granted
• the achievements can be authenticated by external referees.

The outcomes from RPIL claims must be documented. All RPIL claims are subject to approval by the relevant examination board.

5. Communication of RPL opportunities to applicants

5.1. General guidance for prospective students on RPL and how they can claim credit will be provided on the University website. Guidance and signposting for students on how to apply will be provided by Admissions and Student Recruitment Services.

5.2. Local procedures, forms and guidance for candidates should be available on relevant School and programme websites.

Approved by Senate 3 December 2014
Dr Lesley McLellan
Director of Quality Assurance
Examples of the maximum levels of credit\(^2\) that can be claimed through RPL at the University of Dundee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCQF Exit Level (total credits)</th>
<th>Maximum credit through RPL</th>
<th>Minimum credit required through study at the University of Dundee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SCQF 7, Certificate of Higher Education (120 credits)</td>
<td>60 credits</td>
<td>60 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCQF 8, Diploma of Higher Education (240 credits)</td>
<td>180 credits</td>
<td>60 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCQF 9, Ordinary Bachelor Degree (360 credits)</td>
<td>300 credits</td>
<td>60 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCQF 10, Honours Degree (480 credits)</td>
<td>360 credits</td>
<td>120 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCQF 11, Postgraduate Certificate (60 credits)</td>
<td>30 credits</td>
<td>30 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCQF 11, Postgraduate Diploma (120 credits)</td>
<td>60 credits</td>
<td>60 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCQF 11, Master/MSc (180 credits)</td>
<td>90 credits</td>
<td>90 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCQF 12, Professional Doctorate (540 credits)</td>
<td>270 credits</td>
<td>270 credits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^2\) This table describes examples of the maximum level of specific credit transfer permitted by the University. Certain programmes may have maximum levels of specific credit transfer that are lower than those specified in this table. Where this is the case, details should be clearly provided in the information provided to applicants.