



Recognition of Prior Learning and Re-Use of Credit Policy

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Introduction

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) can allow students to use their learning from outside the University to be awarded credit that contributes to their University of Essex course. Applicants for RPL provide evidence that their previous learning is relevant, current and satisfies the learning outcomes for their chosen course. If their application for RPL is successful, the credit can count towards their Essex award, up to the limits specified in this policy. An application can be made on the basis either of previous formal study, or from learning gained in other ways, such as work, community or voluntary experience. This policy also covers the re-use of credit from University of Essex awards.

This policy draws on [sector-recognised standards](#) (.pdf) and on [the QAA guidance 'Higher Education Credit Framework for England: Advice on Academic Credit Arrangements'](#) and the corresponding guidance ['Making Use of Credit: A Companion to the Higher Education Credit Framework for England'](#) (published May 2021), and uses definitions from this guidance where possible. These documents provide useful additional information about credit frameworks and how they can be applied across a range of higher education provision, along with the further guidance for staff given in the [QAA Quick Guide to Credit Transfer](#) (2024).

Scope of the policy

Recognition of prior learning occurs where previous study or other forms of learning is recognised. This could be for instance:

- credit undertaken at another university is taken into consideration to allow a student to join years 2 or 3 of a 3-year honours degree
- prior learning (for example through professional experience) is assigned a credit value to allow the student not to take specific modules that would normally be included on their course. This is particularly important for students on degree apprenticeship courses, as their training plan should ensure that they do not duplicate knowledge, skills and behaviours they already have within their apprenticeship programme
- a student uses existing University of Essex award towards another award ('re-use of credit')
- prior training and/or research towards a PGR award is compared to PGR course milestones to reduce the standard period and allow entry into the relevant stage of the PGR course.

This is distinct from entry requirements, for instance where a foundation degree is used to apply for a one-year level 6 award, which are not covered by this policy.

This policy applies to all awards at the University of Essex and its Partner institutions, both taught and research.

Definitions

Adapted from the QAA, [Making Use of Credit: A Companion to the Higher Education Credit Framework for England](#) (May 2021) (.pdf).

Credit

A means of quantifying and recognising learning whenever and wherever it is achieved. Credit is awarded in recognition of achievement of learning outcomes at a specified level.

For undergraduate, postgraduate taught and some postgraduate research provision credit, such as Professional Doctorates, credit is used and this will be the way of recording and expressing recognition of prior learning; i.e. students will be considered to have already achieved a certain amount of credit usually associated with their course.

For other postgraduate research courses where credit is not used, such as PhDs, recognition of prior learning is recorded and expressed through mapping against established research milestones and a consequent reduction of the standard period of study in recognition of the learning and outputs already achieved.

Credit accumulation

A process of achieving credits over time in relation to a course or courses of study, or formally-recognised experiential learning. Each higher education awarding body determines what credit it will accept for purposes of accumulation or transfer in relation to its individual courses.

Experiential learning

Learning that has occurred outside the context of formal education or training.

FHEQ

The [Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree-Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland](#). This is a national reference point for academic standards and is part of the [sector-recognised standards](#) (.pdf) embedded in the Office for Students regulatory framework.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) /Accreditation of prior learning (APL)

The identification, assessment and formal acknowledgement of prior learning and achievement.

Accreditation of prior learning (APL) focuses on awarding credit or other formal recognition of the prior learning and outputs (such as the reduction of the standard period for a postgraduate research student) for prior learning.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) encompasses APL. In addition, RPL recognises prior learning that has occurred in a range of educational and training contexts and/or where learning is achieved outside education or training systems. This prior learning is recognised for academic purposes either through credit or other formal recognition. These terms may be used differently in specific regulated disciplines, such as nursing and other healthcare professions.

Recognition of prior learning is referred to by the abbreviation RPL throughout this policy.

Staged awards

A 'staged award' is a discrete award that a student applies for and receives when they progress from one course to another, requiring study at a particular level and achieving a minimum number of credits, for example a Postgraduate Certificate or Postgraduate Diploma.

Recognition of Prior Learning and Re-Use of Credit Policy

1. Applications

1. Applications for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) can take place either before a student joins the University of Essex or during the course of their study. Where the learning took place *before* the student applied to a University of Essex course, the application for RPL should be made before the student starts their study on the course into which they are seeking to transfer prior learning to wherever possible. Applications for RPL can be made during a course where required but cannot be used to replace a module in which a student has enrolled and been unsuccessful.
2. Applications for RPL should be discussed in the first instance with the Admissions team if being made by an applicant in relation to a University of Essex course which they wish to undertake; for postgraduate research students this should also be discussed with their potential supervisor if already identified. Where the application is being made by a registered student for their current course this should be discussed with their department.
3. Applications must consist of a written request, stating the University award in respect of which the student seeks RPL, and documentary evidence of the learning, in the form of transcripts, certificates or in the case of experiential learning, a portfolio of evidence, which may include a CV and employer reference alongside other contextual evidence. For RPL requests relating to entry onto a Masters by Dissertation, MPhil or PhD this application must include a mapping of previous learning/training and research output against the relevant course milestones.
4. Applicants should note that the award of specific credit via RPL towards their intended course of study at the University may not necessarily directly reflect the value/level of the credit assigned to their current/previous qualification, i.e. credit under RPL may be granted at a lower level or for fewer credits.
5. Exemptions will not be considered for prerequisites in certain disciplines where professional and statutory regulating body requirements apply.
6. Exemptions on taught programmes will only be considered for full years or for individual modules of study; not elements therein.
7. Where students transfer to a different course, any existing approved RPL will be re-assessed and a decision made as to whether RPL is possible for the new course. Options and the requirements of the award will be confirmed at the time a course change request is received or by the Board of Examiners.

8. Requests for RPL and re-use of credit for students studying at Partner Institutions will need to follow the process as agreed between the University and Partner Institution in all cases.

2. Assessment and approval of applications

1. Applications for Recognition of Prior Learning are subject to the approval of the Head of Department or School for the course against which exemption is being considered. This approval can be delegated as appropriate to an Admissions Selector, Director of Education, Graduate Director or other suitable person with appropriate knowledge of the academic requirements and content of the programme. Where appropriate, the Department may agree that the approval of more than one staff member may be required. The approver must not have been involved in the preparation of the application. Approvers may consult with other members of academic staff as appropriate, seeking the advice of the Faculty Dean where necessary. For Partner institutions acceptance of RPL is subject to the approval of the Dean or Deputy Dean of Partnerships and this approval can also be delegated where appropriate.
2. The Head or their delegate should consider and record whether sufficient information has been submitted by the applicant for RPL; further evidence can be requested where this is not the case, including via interview where appropriate. The evidence provided should then be considered to assess whether it satisfies the requirements and learning outcomes of the relevant course and the available constituent modules, if applicable.
3. Where exemption from taught courses or taught elements of research degrees is sought, consideration should be given to:
 - a. subject content and knowledge
 - b. volume of learning
 - c. level of learning
 - d. evidence of achievement
 - e. currency of prior learning. Normally learning should have been completed within the five years prior to enrolment date for the intended course of study. Where this is not the case and an exemption is sought, evidence of how the student has kept their learning current should form part of the application
 - f. any restrictions imposed by Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies, if applicable
4. Where exemption is sought from terms of study of a research degree, consideration should be given to:
 - a. confirmation of PhD status
 - b. milestones required

- c. training needs
 - d. supervisory capacity of the department.
5. For exemption from terms of study of a research degree it should also be considered that ethical approval through University of Essex processes may need to be sought and that this should be considered when agreeing the proposed period of study following RPL.
 6. The consideration of all the above factors should be documented with a decision as whether the application for Recognition of Prior Learning can be approved and, if so, a specification of the specific amount of credit (e.g. exemption from individual module(s) or exemption from year(s) or periods of study) that should be awarded towards the relevant course. The applicant will be informed of this decision in writing.

3. Permitted volumes of RPL

1. The acceptance of RPL towards University taught awards, including any re-use of credit, is a decision based on each individual case. The maximum volume of RPL outlined below (table 1) is provided for the guidance of applicants and departments but does not constitute an entitlement. The acceptance of RPL towards University postgraduate research awards (including those with taught components) is considered on an individual basis by the admitting department.
2. The Rules of Assessment specify the particular requirements for volume of credit at specific levels of the FHEQ within each University award, which must be adhered to.
3. Where individual awards have a higher credit total (e.g. Honours degrees with 480 credits) the maximum import thresholds outlined in table 1 (below) continue to apply, with the exception of the 4-year Honours degrees (480 credits) delivered by the academic partner institution Aegean Omiros College, for which the maximum import thresholds outlined in appendix A to this policy apply.

Table 1: Maximum permitted volumes of recognition of prior learning from sources outside the University of Essex

Award	Maximum credits which may be imported	Minimum credits to be taken on University of Essex validated courses	Level(s) at which credits can be imported	Total credits for award
Certificate of Higher Education	60	60	4	120
Diploma of Higher Education	120	120	4	240
Foundation Degree	120	120	4	240
Graduate Certificate	30	30	6 and below	60
Graduate Diploma	60	60	6 and below	120
Honours Degree	240	120	4 and 5	360
Integrated Masters	240	240	4 and 5	480
Integrated PhDs	90	30 Year one of Integrated PhDs can range from 120-180 credits; in all cases the maximum import of 90 credits applies	7	120-180 taught credits plus PhD of equivalence to 540 credits at level 8
Masters Degree	90	90	7	180
PGCHEP (Postgraduate)	30	30	7	60

Award	Maximum credits which may be imported	Minimum credits to be taken on University of Essex validated courses	Level(s) at which credits can be imported	Total credits for award
Certificate of Higher Education Practice)				
PhD by Programme	To be determined by course	To be determined by course	To be determined by course	To be determined by course
Postgraduate Certificate	30	30	7	60
Postgraduate Diploma	60	60	7	120
Professional Doctorates	300	240 which must include the thesis	8	540
Research degree	The Standard Period should not normally be reduced to any less than three terms	The Standard Period should not normally be reduced to any less than three terms	The Standard Period should not normally be reduced to any less than three terms	The Standard Period should not normally be reduced to any less than three terms

4. Re-use of credit (including from staged awards)

1. Credit awarded by either the University of Essex or an external institution can be used as the basis for an application for RPL, in accordance with the limits set out in section 3. The credits can be used for an application for a new qualification at a higher, equivalent or lower level. Credit can be re-used more than once, as long as other criteria are met.
2. Where a University of Essex student, including those studying at Partner Institutions, successfully satisfies the requirements for a staged University of Essex award (see definitions) then this can be re-used to form the basis of an application for RPL towards:

- The next staged award, for example, 120 credits from a Postgraduate Diploma (maximum) could be used towards a Masters award, or 60 credits from a Postgraduate Certificate (maximum) could be used towards a Postgraduate Diploma
 - Converting a conferred University of Essex Ordinary degree to a Degree with Honours. Students must count all relevant credit contained in the Ordinary degree towards the requirements of the named degree with Honours. For each new award applied for, a minimum of 60 credits of unique study at level 6 is required and can only be used once
3. Where a student re-uses credit from a staged award in this way, it should be considered that they are being admitted to a new course, using RPL credit: the maximum period of study should therefore be considered to apply to the new course without reference to the prior study completed.
 4. If a student was unable to complete the original target award that they applied for (such as a Bachelors degree) and was granted an 'exit award' (such as a Diploma of Higher Education) and wished to re-use credit in this way, they would need to be considered under the Readmissions Policy.

5. Calculation of degree results

1. In calculating the final taught degree result of a student who makes a successful RPL application, any courses or modules from which the student is exempted on the basis of RPL will be excluded from calculated averages or other methods used to determine the student's final degree result unless the application consists of re-use of University of Essex validated credit. This does not apply to postgraduate research provision where the work recognised via RPL would form part of the final output.

Appendix A: Summary of requirements for admission via Recognition of Prior Learning to the 4-year Aegean Omiros College undergraduate courses

Aegean Omiros College offers undergraduate courses with a standard 3-year structure in most cases but for some areas in which students can work as practicing professionals after graduation the degrees are 4-year in length, with two years at level 4. For the 3-year degrees the standard policy applies, but for the 4-year degrees the following is applied. The import of credit is allowed for levels 4 and 5 only.

Award	Total Credits required for Award	Maximum APEL credits which may be imported	Minimum Essex credits required for Award
Honours Degree	480	360	120
Ordinary Degree	420	320	100
Diploma of HE	360	240	120
Certificate of HE	120 to 240*	60 to 180*	60

* Due to the 4-year courses having two Level 4 years of study, a Certificate of Higher Education can be awarded as an Exit Award following the completion of both Year 1 (Level 4) of study or Year 2 (Level 4) of study.

Document Control Panel

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