

Recognition of Prior Learning Policy

1. Context

RPL can be used as:

- a means of gaining admission to a programme*
- a means of gaining admission part way through a programme*

*this is also referenced in the Admissions Policy.

This document has been informed by the expectations, core and common practices of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education: Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Access. This can be found at the following location and contains further guidelines, references and resources:

<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance>

1.1 Definitions

The following definitions are adapted from the QAA Guidelines on Recognition of Prior Learning:

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): a process for assessing and, as appropriate, recognising prior experiential learning or prior certificated learning for academic purposes. This recognition may give the learning a credit-value in a credit-based structure and allow it to be counted towards the completion of a programme of study and the award(s) or qualifications associated with it. RPL is used to encapsulate the range of activities and approaches used formally to acknowledge and establish publicly that some reasonably substantial and significant element of learning has taken place.

In the context of the Art Academy, RPL will be used for entry to a programme, and will be guided by the RPL procedures. This is distinct from the procedures relating to the admission of students who do not meet the usual entry requirements specified for a programme, which are guided by standard admissions procedures.

Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning (RPCL): a process through which previously assessed and certificated learning is considered, and if appropriate, recognised for academic purposes.

Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL): a process through which learning achieved outside education or training systems is assessed and, if appropriate, recognised for academic purposes. It is recognised that the process of RPEL is more resource intensive than that for RPCL. RPEL will usually involve an applicant consulting an adviser on the production and submission of an RPEL claim and building up a portfolio of evidence. An assessor, the member of staff who will exercise academic judgement in assessing an RPEL claim, will then consider the portfolio. Prior learning which may be capable of assessment and recognition may have been gained in a number of ways, including paid or voluntary work, as a result of courses attended in educational establishments or at work, through self-directed study or through leisure pursuits.

Advanced Standing: is a process where applicants can gain direct entry into level 6 of the BA, where they have previously completed a certified programme of study at level 5 in fine art, at the Art Academy, or another similar institution. Studies completed at another institution would need to be compatible with the Academy's own qualifying programme of study and learning outcomes.

2. Principles

- Credit is given for learning and **not** for experience alone, and where the level, standard and content are relevant to the particular programme. The award of credit is a matter of consistent application of academic judgement, and must result from a transparent and demonstrably rigorous and fair decision-making process.
- Students seeking RPL should be awarded credit for modules on a comparable basis.
- Credit will not normally be given for learning that has taken place more than ten years previously.
- RPL (both RPCL and RPEL) will normally only be considered for an entire level, since whilst all credit awarded will count towards the attainment of the award, it will not count towards the classification of the award. (Therefore, with respect to RPCL, the marks awarded by a different institution will not be calculated into the final award grade).
- Credit may be awarded up to two-thirds of the total credit requirements of the Bachelor's Degree with Honours in recognition for prior learning (certified, experiential or uncertified).
- RPCL for credits awarded by another institution must not have been awarded through RPL originally.
- RPCL for credits obtained at a higher level may be considered where the standard and content are relevant to the particular programme.
- The maximum credit which may be claimed for the Foundation Degree is not more than 50% of the taught programme.
- RPL is not allowed at level 6. Therefore, for those Awards with a Level 6 element, the Level 6 credits must be studied and achieved in full at the Academy (please refer to the Regulations for Awards Validated by the OU).
- The maximum amount of RPL credit which a student may claim towards an Open University award and the minimum credit which must be studied at the Academy in relation to specific awards is:

Qualification/Award	Total credits in award	RPL Allowable (Maximum)	Credit which must be studied at the Academy
Bachelor's Degree with Honours	360 credits	240 credits (at levels 4 and 5)	all 120 credits at Level 6
Foundation Degree	240 credits	120 credits	all 120 credits at level 5
Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE)	240 credits	120 credits	120 credits at level 5 or above
Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE)	120 credits	0 credits	all 120 credits

- RPL that has been awarded by the Academy will be clearly identified on students' transcripts.
- All credit awarded will be relevant to identified modules or awards. Detailed assessment of credit whether based on certificated or experiential learning, can only be made by subject specialists since the assessment can only be made in the light of detailed subject knowledge. These specialists should ensure that the experience represents the achievement of learning outcomes comparable to those which would have been achieved had the course of study against which credit is claimed been taken. In the case of RPEL, this will normally be assessed through the production of a portfolio prepared by the applicant, and should be verified by another specialist.

- It is the responsibility of the student to prepare an application and submit adequate documentation. Applicants should identify in advance whether they wish to apply for admission to a programme or for credit. Guidance and advice may be sought from the Academic Team.
- Students should be fully informed of the range of evidence that would be considered appropriate in a submission. The academic/professional evidence presented should be appropriate to the proposed programme, sufficient in length, depth and level, authentic and recent. Evidence of underpinning knowledge should be included. Where a submission of learning from experience has demonstrated learning equivalent to that of an existing module the credits and level allocated for the submission will be the same.

2.1 Advanced Standing

Whilst RPL is not permissible for module exemption at Level 6, admission with Advanced Standing may be applicable providing a student has completed a certificated programme of study. At the Academy, this usually refers to those students who have completed our Foundation Degree and wish to complete a 'top-up' year to convert their qualification to a BA (Hons) Degree. In such cases students will be required to complete a bridging module and their BA (Hons) classification will be calculated solely on their Level 6 results, or to have opted to complete one or more of the Academy's Art History modules during Levels 4 or 5 of their Foundation Degree (as an unaccredited extra).

It is also possible for students who have completed a Foundation Degree at another institution to apply for direct entry to Level 6, providing their studies are compatible with the Academy's own qualifying programme of study and learning outcomes.

Where a student has been awarded Advanced Standing, it will be recorded on the student's transcript that level exemption was awarded. The Diploma supplement will show Advanced Standing detailing the prior qualification and institution.

Applicants wishing to be admitted with advanced standing should seek guidance and advice from the Academic Team.

3. Making an RPL claim

Applicants should make enquiries initially to the Academic Team, who will advise on the procedure for applying for RPL.

A student seeking an RPL credit will normally be required to apply for such credit at application. All requests for RPL must be made in writing and addressed to the Admissions Coordinator. It is the responsibility of the student applying for RPCL to provide necessary documentary evidence.

The learning derived from experience or study must be identified in order to be assessed. Identification must be made by the student, on the basis of systematic reflection on the experience or study and the provision of clear and evidenced statements about that learning.

The form of evidence acceptable will normally take the form of a portfolio of artwork with accompanying personal, reflective statement and examples of analytical writing for all Studio Practice modules; equivalent written work for art theory and history modules; a portfolio of relevant evidence for professional development modules.

In all instances applicants will be invited for a formal interview in support of their claim and in some a viva voce examination, the production of an artefact or performance, or a piece of written work or practical task may additionally be required. The evidence needs to demonstrate current understanding and skills.

The appropriate Programme Leader will determine the specific academic credit that would, in their view, be appropriate with regard to their respective programme or module/s and may request that the student submit additional documentary evidence. All such applications will be verified by another specialist and subject to quality assurance processes as outlined in 3.3 below.

It is the individual student's responsibility to make the claim in respect of the level of credits being sought within the claim for RPL.

The Academic Team will advise the applicant formally in writing of the decision reached.

3.1 Assessment and Decision Making

The portfolio and supporting documents will be assessed by a subject specialist assigned by the appropriate Programme Leader.

Assessment will be made by comparing the candidate's evidence against the expected learning outcomes for the relevant modules.

The evidence will be assessed against the following criteria:

Parity: that the evidence demonstrates the appropriate learning outcomes.

Reliability: legitimacy of evidence provided, in conjunction with external referees.

Authenticity: that the experiences are those of the applicant and the subsequent learning is solely through the experience being presented in the evidence.

Relevance: the learning to be accredited demonstrates up to date knowledge and experience.

Criticality: the assessment identifies the knowledge and skills it intends to be assessed against and shows critical engagement with the issues and the arguments.

Sufficiency: that the evidence is appropriate in terms of quality and quantity, demonstrating fully the achievement of the credit being claimed.

Sources: that the evidence demonstrates appropriate use of scholarly and relevant sources.

After discussions a final decision to award credit will be made by the appropriate Programme Leader.

The Academy reserves the right to exercise discretion in granting RPL credits.

3.2 Appeals

A student/ applicant may use the Academy academic appeals procedure to appeal against a decision made on an RPL claim.

3.3 Monitoring

The process of assessment for RPL is subject to the same quality assurance monitoring of standards as any other assessment. Therefore, the assessment of learning derived from experience should be open to internal and external scrutiny and monitoring. All RPEL claims should be internally verified by a second specialist but do not each require individual scrutiny by the External Examiner. However, evidence for REPL can be subject to sampling by the External Examiner along with evidence generated on the programme, in the normal way as outlined in the QA handbook.

The Academic Team will present an annual report to the Academic Quality, Standards and Student Experience Committee (AQSSEC) at the end of the academic year. This report should cover the number of REPL claims submitted and accepted by any programme, and any issues relating to the principles, process or procedure. The AQSSEC is responsible for policy and regulations relating to recognition of prior learning, making recommendations to the Academic Board. It also monitors and reviews policies and procedures for the recognition of prior learning, reporting findings to the Academic Board.

4. Guidance for RPCL

A student seeking RPCL credit will normally be required to apply for such credit at application. All requests for RPCL must be made in writing and addressed to the Admissions Coordinator. It is the responsibility of the student applying for RPCL to make the claim and to provide necessary documentary evidence.

4.1 General Principles

- If an applicant wishes to join Level 5 or Level 6 programme on the basis of Credit Accumulation Transfer System (CATS), they should have 120 or 240 credits respectively.
- The credits must not have been awarded through RPL by another institution.
- The applicant must meet the standard admission requirements which are applicable for Level 5 and 6 programmes.
- Only the credits are transferred to the chosen programme, not the grades.
- The credits may be from a higher level of study, where relevant (but must not be double counted).
- The final grade obtained and the qualification achieved will be decided only on the basis of the grades received for the programme taken at the Academy.

4.2 Criteria

In judging specific RPCL credit to be awarded, the staff concerned will wish to consider whether:

- The combination of RPCL and modules to be studied at the Academy will together constitute a coherent programme of study which will meet the programme specification.
- The RPCL is sufficiently equivalent to the learning outcomes of module(s)/Level(s) for which the student may consequently be awarded credit.
- Sufficient information is available on the academic value and Level of previous study.

Since the Academy hopes to keep good working relationships with other institutions, the applicant must obtain a non-objection certificate from the institution, if they are undertaking their studies at the time of their application.

All RPCL decisions must be recorded and clearly identified in all papers considered by the Examinations and Progression Board and in the student transcript.

4.3 Recognition of Credits from non-accredited institutions abroad

There may be cases where a student wishes to transfer their credits from an overseas institution which is not accredited or recognised by a university or an accrediting agency of the country (though it may be approved by the government). In such cases, the following additional criteria must also be met in order to process credits transfer:

- The applicant must request an official transcript of marks from their previous institution to be sent directly to the Academy, bearing the seal of the institution and the signature of the Principal.
- If the transcript is provided in a foreign language, the applicant must arrange to send the official translation of the required documents in English. Photocopies will not be accepted.
- The applicant must send to the Academy copies of their certificate received from their previous institutions, duly signed and stamped by a solicitor to verify that it is the exact copy of the original document.

- The Academy may ask the applicant to provide samples of syllabi from their previous institutions to verify the compatibility, comparability and applicability of the programmes.
- If the name of the applicant has changed since they completed their study, they must provide evidence such as marriage certificates or government documents.

4.3.1 Procedure

- The applicant has to provide the relevant and necessary documents outlined above during their application process. Incomplete application will not be considered for credit transfer.
- The Programme/ Pathway Leader will assess the application and relevant documents to ensure that the applicant has fully and satisfactorily met the general policies and the criteria for credit transfer, as outlined above.

5. Guidance for RPEL

The Academic Team will provide applicants with a list of learning outcomes for the appropriate modules for which they request RPEL. In their application candidates will have to show that they have met these learning outcomes in order for the claim to be successful.

The exact submission required will depend on the modules being claimed for (see section 3). Advice in this regard will be provided by the Academic Team.

The evidence will need to be submitted by an agreed date, in advance of the formal interview (normally two weeks).

Applicants will be notified of the outcome within the same timescale as all other (non RPL applicants).

If the judgement is that RPEL credit cannot be awarded, the student will be required to take the modules concerned in the usual way as laid out in the programme specification/module descriptors.

All RPEL decisions must be recorded and clearly identified in all papers considered by the Examination and Progression Board and in the student transcript.

The value (number of credits) and Level (in terms of the FHEQ Levels) of credit to be awarded to a student should normally be determined by the Programme Leader (in consultation with the module leader(s) of modules for which credit may be awarded and the Director of Academic Quality, Standards and Student Experience).

Credit awarded will count towards the attainment of the award, but it will not count towards the classification of the award (i.e it will not be graded). The final grade obtained and the qualification achieved will be decided only on the basis of the grades received for the programme taken at the Academy.

6. Recognition of prior learning for internally awarded programmes.

The Academy offers recognition of prior learning for certain elements of internally awarded programmes. Where students do not have a formal qualification in the relevant subject, they are required to complete an assessment prior to credit being awarded.

7. Equal Opportunities

Applicants will be considered impartially. The Academy makes every effort, in accordance with its Equal Opportunities Policy, to ensure that students are not unlawfully discriminated against because of the Equality Act 2010 'protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race (including colour, ethnic/national origin or nationality), religion or belief, sex (gender) and sexual orientation.

8. Data Protection

All student and RPL applicant records are kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). RPL applicants are entitled to a copy of all their personal data held by us. Please refer to the Data Protection Policy for details.

9. Policy review

This policy will be reviewed every four years, unless QAE monitoring, changes to OU regulations, or wider sector changes trigger interim review(s). The policy review will take into consideration the report findings as described in 3.3.

Policies and documents that supplement and reference this document:

Quality Handbook
Student Handbook
Tutor Handbook
Academic Appeals Policy
Regulations for validated awards of the Open University

Document name	Recognition of Prior Learning Policy	Document owner	Darren Nairn
Date originally created	May 2018		
Version	5	Review date	November 2022
Author of amendments	Darren Nairn	Next review date	November 2026
Changes (list sections)	1,2, 3, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1, 4.2, 5, 9		
Approved by	Academic Board	Date of approval	November 2022