



Title: Recognition of Prior Learning and Credit Transfer
Document Type: Policy
Location: Academic Handbook Section 2H
Version: 1.6
Publication date: August 2015
Author: Academic Services
Approved by: AQC
Last updated: July 2016

## 2H: Recognition of Prior Learning and Credit Transfer

### Introduction

1. Southampton Solent University (the University) recognises that learning can be achieved in many ways and will award University credit to those students who can satisfactorily demonstrate, in terms of currency, depth, breadth and volume, that they have achieved the equivalent of the unit or level/stage learning outcomes as defined by the named award they are enrolling on or have enrolled on.
2. The University is therefore committed to the principle of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) whereby appropriate learning, wherever it occurs, may be recognised for academic credit towards an award, provided that learning can be assessed and deemed equivalent to the stated learning outcomes.
3. The same general principle applies to the transfer of credit where a student wishes to transfer between traditional awards at the University or where a student has successfully completed a professional development unit(s) and wishes to use the credit against the completions requirements of a traditional award.

### RPL Principles

4. In line with its mission, strategic plan and educational principles, the University's approach to RPL is flexible, student-centred and learning outcomes based. The academic framework defines the nature of credit and its relationship to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).
5. Credit awarded for prior certificated or experiential learning is of equal credit value to that acquired through completion of University taught provision. This includes learning achieved in the workplace as part of the University's commitment to employer engagement.
6. All applications for the award of credit through RPL, including those arising from internal transfers, are subject to formal academic scrutiny and are the responsibility of the RPL sub-committee of the relevant Unit Assessment Board.

7. The RPL process does not allow students to build a programme of study for themselves outside a validated award structure. The one exception to this is where a student is enrolling on an award offered as part of the University's Professional Development Award scheme, whereby students can negotiate an individualised learning programme.
8. The University reserves the right to recover the costs of processing RPL claims.
9. The University's approach for the award of RPL is based on the achievement of equivalent, not identical, learning outcomes. This means that the learning achieved should be equivalent in terms of the level, breadth, depth, volume and currency.
10. In addition to its own awards, the University prepares and may assess students for awards made by accredited or other bodies. In such cases, exemptions from this Policy must be approved by the Academic Registrar on behalf of the Learning, Teaching and Student Achievement Committee (LTSAC) and stated in the Programme Specification and award handbooks.
11. RPL is awarded against the achievement of learning outcomes. However, credit can only be awarded for whole units/levels/stages. In cases where a student can demonstrate partial achievement of the learning outcomes for a unit/ level/stage, an agreed assessment strategy for how they will make good the missing learning outcomes must be determined. Students sitting assessments in such circumstances will be treated in the same way as other students in respect to their right to referral. If a student is referred in such circumstances, they can withdraw their RPL claim and take the unit/stage/level as if for the first time.
12. RPL cannot be used for research degrees.

## Definition of Terms

13. **Recognition of Prior Learning:** the process by which a student's previous learning is recognised and given a credit value. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) encompasses both the recognition of prior '**certificated**' and prior '**experiential**' learning.
14. **Prior 'Certificated' learning:** relates to the process by which a student's previous certificated learning is recognised and given a credit value. Certification would normally be by a recognised educational institution, professional body or other education/training provider. Certification provided by other organisations for successful completion of in-house training awards may be considered where the level, volume, depth, breadth and currency of the learning undertaken and the outcomes achieved are clear. Such learning must have been demonstrably assessed in a robust and secure manner. Only the credit value of units approved for RPL will count towards a University award (no marks/grades will be counted).
15. **Prior 'Experiential' learning:** relates to the process by which a student's appropriate uncertified experiential learning is given both an academic value and a recognised credit value. Experiential learning is the acquisition of knowledge, skills and personal qualities acquired through life, work and study experiences that are not formally assessed. Experience in itself is not experiential learning; students must be able to demonstrate that they have achieved the learning outcomes that are equivalent to those of the unit/level/stage for which they are claiming RPL. Only the credit value of units approved for RPL will count towards a University award (no marks/grades will be counted).
16. **Direct Entry to an award by award of credit:** is where a student can demonstrate the achievement of all the level/stage learning outcomes and wishes to claim RPL for that level/stage. If approved they can be admitted onto the next level/stage and be awarded the

credit for the previous level/stage. In such cases only the credit value of the level/stage will count towards a University award (no marks/grades will be counted).

**17. Advanced Standing:** is where an applicant can demonstrate that they have achieved all the learning outcomes of an earlier stage/level of an award, for the Admissions Tutor to grant them advanced standing to the next stage/level of the award, without the award of University credit. In such cases only the units assessed at the University will count towards the final award classification. This route of entry does not involve the award of credit and is therefore an admission rather than an RPL process. Details of admission with advanced standing are available in Policy 2J the Admission and recruitment of students to courses leading to academic awards.

**18. Credit Transfer:** is defined as the process by which the credit and the associated mark achieved on one award or professional development unit are transferred to another award. Transfer of credits and marks can only occur where the original unit(s) studied are the same as the unit(s) on the new award.

### **RPL and Credit Transfer Limits**

19. The University believes that it provides a distinctive student learning experience, characterised by its educational principles and practices and the ethos and values of its awards. As such, it has set minimum limits on the proportion of study that a student must undertake at the University in order to be eligible for a Southampton Solent University qualification:

- i. for traditional awards with only one level, e.g. masters or top up degrees, students can apply for RPL for up to a maximum of one third of the credit points and would be required to study the remaining two thirds of the credits at the University (including their thesis/ dissertation where relevant);
- ii. For Integrated Masters awards students can apply for RPL for up to a maximum of 240 credits and would be required to study the remaining 240 credits at the University of which 120 credits are at a Level 6 and 120 credits are at Level 7;
- iii. for all other traditional awards, a student must study at least 120 credits at the University, at least 80 credits of which are at the final level;
- iv. for professional development awards, students must have studied a minimum of 30 credits at the University.
- v. where a student wishes to transfer between traditional awards they can transfer credit up to two thirds of the credit volume of the award.
- vi. where a student has studied professional development units and subsequently wishes to enrol on a traditional award they may transfer credit or claim RPL up to 50% of the credit volume of the award.

### **Making an RPL Claim**

20. Claims for RPL must be in the form of a portfolio. The form of the portfolio, which must be in English, will vary depending on the nature of the claim, but the evidence supplied must be mapped against specific unit or level/stage learning outcomes. For example, a certificate is not sufficient on its own; the learning demonstrated by the certificate must be mapped against the unit, level/stage learning outcomes. (NB once a certificate has been mapped, the

same mapping can be used for other students with that certificate who want to claim RPL for the same unit). In the case of experiential learning, experience per se is not grounds for awarding credit; the experience must be converted to the learning achieved and documented and mapped against the unit, stage/level learning outcomes. Students are encouraged to seek advice and guidance from the Student Hub prior to submitting an application for RPL.

21. If claims are prepared during term time, students should continue to study and participate in all units until Academic Services (AS) informs them of the outcome.

22. The University only considers RPL applications for complete units. If the evidence provided by the student covers only some, but not all the unit/level learning outcomes, then the student, at the discretion of the RPL sub-committee, may be offered the opportunity to make good the missing learning outcomes and achieve the credit which will be classified as RPL. In these cases, a proposal for making good the missing learning outcomes should be prepared in conjunction with the appropriate members of academic staff, i.e. unit leaders and/or level tutors, and presented to the RPL sub-committee.

23. All claims for RPL must be submitted to the Assessment Office no later than the end of week four of the beginning of the student's academic year and the student informed of the outcome (subject to external examiner's approval where relevant) by the end of week six. Claims submitted after this date will not normally be accepted and students will need to study the unit as normal. Exceptionally, a student may wish to transfer between awards after this date and such cases can be considered at the discretion of the Chair of the RPL sub-committee.

24. If students wish to make a claim for RPL, they are encouraged to make a single claim at the beginning of their studies, but can make a claim at the beginning of each academic year.

25. Those students studying on an employer based programme of study should be briefed on RPL processes and supported in making a claim where appropriate as part of their induction process.

### **Assessing an RPL claim**

26. Determining whether a student has demonstrated achievement of the learning outcomes is an academic judgement. The overall level of achievement should be equivalent to that required to pass a unit.

27. The evidence provided for RPL claims will be judged on:

- i. **Acceptability:** is the learning evidenced (content) equivalent (a close match) to the stated unit, level/stage learning outcomes and is the evidence valid and reliable;
- ii. **Sufficiency:** is there sufficient evidence that the learning is at the right level, volume and breadth to meet the learning outcomes claimed;
- iii. **Authenticity:** is the evidence clearly related to the claimant's own efforts and achievements; and
- iv. **Currency:** does the evidence provided meet the currency requirements of the award and accrediting body where relevant.

28. Claims should be assessed by an appropriate member of academic staff using the above criteria and a recommendation made to the RPL sub-committee.

## **RPL Sub-Committee**

29. The RPL sub-committee will consider all applications (units and levels) relating to RPL. The Academic Registrar will appoint the chair of the RPL sub-committee from the Chairs of Assessment Boards.

30. The sub-committee will consist of the Chair and the Programme Group Leader(s) of awards where a claim is being made. A member of the Assessment Team, nominated by the Head of Student Achievement, will act as clerk. Members of academic staff who have assessed the claim should attend.

31. The sub-committee has the full-delegated authority of the relevant Assessment Board to make decisions on the award of credit. Dependent on whether a unit or a level is being considered, the relevant external examiner must ratify any award of credit that counts towards the classification of an award.

32. The sub-committee will review the evidence and, if required, the additional material provided by the student and determine whether:

- i. to award the credit/ level as claimed;
- ii. to accept the claim and the strategy for making good the missing learning outcomes;
- iii. to reject the claim; or
- iv. exceptionally to refer the claim for further information.

33. AS is responsible for ensuring that the student's record is updated and that the student is formally informed of the outcomes of the sub-committee.

34. The decision of the sub-committee is final, subject to the normal appeal procedures, and will be reported to the relevant Assessment Board. In order to provide guidance for future sub-committees, the Assessment Board may give a view as to the appropriateness, or otherwise, of its decisions. Where the application for RPL has been rejected, students should have the opportunity to receive feedback as to the reasons for the rejection.

## **Transfer of credit**

35. Under the terms of the definition in paragraph 18 students may transfer between awards and transfer the credit and the marks achieved to the new award where the same units are components of both awards. In doing so they are withdrawing from one award with accumulated credit (where relevant) and enrolling on another award.

36. Similarly, a student who has accumulated Professional Development Unit (PDU) credits may subsequently opt to enrol on a traditional award which includes the same units as they have completed successfully as PDUs. In such cases both the credit and the marks awarded may be transferred. This option must be exercised within the normal registration period for the traditional award.

37. Students enrolled on a traditional award cannot 'convert' credit achieved on that award into a professional development unit or Professional Development Award.

38. Students wishing to transfer between awards can do so at any time, where they have the agreement of the relevant award/programme leader(s).

39. Where University staff are working with employers to design and validate both employer based PDUs and a traditional award composed of the same units any potential credit transfer factors should be identified and agreed in advance as part of the approval process.

40. All transfers need to be formally documented and recorded through the RPL procedure.

41. When an existing student wishes to make a fresh start and, prior to or at the commencement of the academic year, requests a transfer to level 4 of an undergraduate award (including Integrated Masters awards) or to a different master's award, without transferring any credit or making any RPL claims, this type of transfer comes under the admissions process. Further details are set out in Policy 2J *The admission and recruitment of students* to courses leading to academic awards.

42. At the discretion of the 'receiving' award course leader, students may transfer within the first six weeks of the beginning of their award. Students must make good the missing learning activities and any assignments. These need to be clearly identified on the internal transfer form. At this stage, students will have no credit to transfer and, therefore, the RPL procedure is not applicable.

43. Students at a later stage in their studies wishing to transfer between awards in the University should discuss the possibility with the relevant award course leaders who will determine:

- i. which units can be transferred (credit and marks transferred);
- ii. which units are appropriate for the award of RPL as the learning outcomes are equivalent (credit only);
- iii. what learning can be awarded RPL as the learning demonstrated is equivalent to the learning outcomes on a unit on the new award (credit only); and
- iv. what learning outcomes the student is missing and must make good, before RPL is awarded.

44. Students transferring to other awards that require the use of RPL must follow the RPL procedure. Transfers and award of credit can occur at any time of the year on the basis of Chair's action, where the Chair of the sub-committee is convinced that:

- i. the transfer is in the interests of the student;
- ii. it is clear what credit is being transferred and what credit can be awarded by RPL; and
- iii. there is a credible and realistic assessment plan for any missing learning outcomes.

### **Recording of RPL and Transferred Credit on Transcripts**

45. Credit awarded by means of RPL will be assigned against the equivalent units and will be recorded as 'Pass' and included on the student's transcript.

46. Transferred credit, which carries a mark, will be recorded in the normal way.

### **Query/Appeal Against an RPL Decision**

47. Where a student believes they have grounds for appeal as specified in the University Academic Appeal Policy (2M), they should follow the procedures outlined in that policy.

### **Monitoring and Review**

48. The LTSAC will monitor the operation of the University's RPL Policy.