



Student Guide to RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning).

What is RPL?

Section 1

The University Centre recognises that many students, particularly mature students, enter university with an extensive range of expertise, skills and knowledge derived from a variety of professional, vocational, community, leisure and personal contexts. *RPL* provides students with the opportunity to have their prior experiential learning assessed and included within their degree.

This is distinct from *APCL* which is the accreditation of prior certificated learning (credits achieved through study). This is learning which accrues from assessed formal study – at other universities, professional courses or Open University Credits. If you have this type of learning you would like to be included within your award no further assessment of the learning is required and the procedure is quite straightforward. You should include the certification / transcript with your UCY Application form and make clear your intention to apply at an advanced point in the programme. Please note that even with *APCL* there will be a need for the assessment of credit, and if the programme of study applied for has specific differences there may be a requirement for you to attend selected modules in attaining learning, but without assessment.

What are the benefits of completing an RPL assessment ?

- It may mean that you do not have to repeat aspects of your course with which you are already familiar, or can demonstrate appropriate levels of knowledge and skill through your experiences which meet the learning outcomes of assessed modules/units.
- It may help to speed up your rate of study. Although completing an RPL assessment may be at least as time consuming as completing a taught module assessment, you will not be required to attend classes and the assessment can be completed outside of the timetabled semesters. This may be a particularly helpful means of accelerating progression for part-time students.
- As a full time student it may provide you with space in your studies to focus upon other taught modules. However full-time students should be aware that it is necessary to study a requisite number of modules in order to retain Full-Time student status as directed by Student Finance England.
- It provides formal academic recognition of learning you already hold – particularly that potentially gained from the workplace or through vocational application.



How does RPL work?

RPL differs from a taught course of study in that the learning on a taught course is planned by the lecturer who also determines how you will demonstrate that you have successfully achieved the learning outcomes set down for the course.

With RPL the situation to an extent is reversed. The learning experience was not planned for the purpose of enabling you to demonstrate achievement against specific learning outcomes. The lecturer will not have been involved in the learning and s/he will need to be provided with evidence in order to make a judgement about the appropriateness of the learning acquired through your experience.

If you attain RPL there is also the possibility of reducing the number of modules required to study, and therefore the overall cost of your University / Higher Education programme.

How do I know if I have 'relevant' learning ?

Learning for which you can claim credit will meet **three conditions**. It will be:

1. *Relevant to the academic award you are aiming for.* This means it must be broadly within your subject area (course credit) or assessable as elective credit which can be used towards an award where you have elective choice modules (normally at undergraduate level). The purpose of the elective choice modules is to provide you with the opportunity to broaden your educational experience by taking new subjects in different areas of study. Likewise the elective module element can be used to provide RPL credit from prior learning acquired outside the course subject(s) of your university award.
2. *At a similar level to the learning which would be achieved on your taught award.* For example Economics can be studied at age 16 (GCSE) but the level of engagement with the subject would not be the same as the level on an undergraduate course. RPL credit can be awarded on all levels of courses within the University Centre from Foundation to Postgraduate. Generic indicators of level are provided in the Frequently asked Questions section.
3. *Able to be demonstrated.* Just as you will receive the credit for a taught course, not for attending the classes but for evidence of learning in the form of an essay or examination, so you will need to provide evidence of the knowledge and applied understanding you developed through your experience. This may be demonstrated through a portfolio of evidence through which you make your case for credit or through a more conventional assessment format e.g. reflective essay/report or presentation. Furthermore an interview with the RPL panel may be required to confirm or query relevant details in relation to the application for RPL.



Section 2 Accreditation Opportunities

RPL Accreditation Opportunities

There are a number of types of RPL accreditation opportunities available across the institution:

1. **Module Matching:** This requires you to demonstrate that your experience has produced learning outcomes which broadly match those of existing modules. The focus of RPL is on the module learning outcomes and not the syllabus or indicative content. The work you produce should demonstrate achievement of the module learning outcomes rather than try to meet the contents of the whole syllabus.
2. **Negotiated Module Learning Outcomes:** In practice many students have learning which is relevant and demonstrable but does not match specific modules within the subject area. As an alternative to module matching, you can develop your own learning outcomes which reflect your individual learning experience and design a module or modules of your own. These learning outcomes need to be agreed by the tutor and listed on the RPL Assessment Grid. Learning outcomes are usually phrased as 'I am able to ' and are grouped together under a theme.

For example:

Theme: Mediation Practice - for the award of Intermediate level elective credit.

I am able to:

- demonstrate specialist skills and knowledge in non arbitrary problem solving of disputes between two or more people
 - plan and deliver training in conflict resolution skills to a variety of people in a variety of settings namely: Prison Warders, Housing Managers, Access Course Students, volunteer Community Mediators.
 - evaluate the outcomes of training programmes I have designed.
3. **Work Placement Accreditation:** UCY has a number of credit-rated work placement modules within programmes which provide the possibility for workbased learning assessment. You may have one of these in your subject area. The learning outcomes for these modules tend to be written in terms of abilities developed in context – communication, managing your work, working in teams etc.

The principles of accreditation are the same as for other forms of module matching. The work should meet the learning outcomes of the module and be appropriately evidenced. Work placement modules can be counted a subject



specific (subject) credit, or as elective module credit (in cases where your employment experience is in a different subject area).

Section 3

RPL Assessment:

The specific format of your RPL assessment will be agreed between yourself and your elected Programme Leader, and entered onto the *RPL Assessment Grid*. It may take the form of an open portfolio which may be structured along the following lines.

RPL Portfolio Framework:

1. Cover – Name
Student id. Number (if known)
Course (or course applied for)
Title – RPL Portfolio
2. Contents page.
3. Completed expression of interest form with relevant contact information
4. Number of credit points applied for and level or
Name and code of any modules matched.
5. Set of learning outcomes drawn from your experience. In the case of matched modules these will be those of the UCY programme module(s).
6. Introduction to yourself and the purpose of the portfolio (one paragraph)
7. Curriculum Vitae if appropriate
8. Personal statement outlining the relevance of your learning experiences to the learning outcomes.
9. Appendices showing direct or indirect sources of evidence to support your claim.

Personal statement

There is no set format for the personal statement. In contrast to an academic essay it will focus upon you personally and is written in the first person. Some students find it helpful to break down the text into sub-sections with the learning outcomes used as sub-heading or to produce a chronological account of activities with the relevant learning experience cross referenced to learning outcomes and evidence. The focus of this statement is upon making clear the relevance of your learning to the outcomes claimed. The important aspect relating to the statement is that it should be reflective in nature and attempt to demonstrate the application of relevant skills, knowledge and aptitude which align with the learning outcomes of modules affected by the application for RPL.



Evidence

The purpose of providing evidence is to support and authenticate/verify the claim. It is not necessary to provide separate evidence for all of your learning outcomes; one piece of evidence may be relevant to a number of learning outcomes. Evidence may consist of your own work for example documents you have written, procedures you have designed, proposals you have drafted, electronic resources etc or information gathered from others about you such as statements from employers, certificates of courses completed etc.

Assessment Criteria

1. **Validity:** is there an appropriate match between the evidence in the portfolio presented and the learning claimed?
2. **Sufficiency:** is there sufficient evidence to demonstrate achievement of the learning claimed?
3. **Authenticity:** is the evidence clearly related to the applicants' own efforts and achievements?
4. **Currency:** where evidence refers to skills such as computing and information technology – are these sufficiently current ?

The portfolio should be handed into the main UCY Reception who will log receipt and distribute to the assessing panel.

Other forms of RPL assessment.

Your Programme Leader may agree an alternative assessment to that of the portfolio if s/he considers it would provide a more effective way for you to demonstrate that your experience enables you to meet the learning outcomes stated. This might include for example:

1. **Structured portfolio** – where specific pieces of evidence to be included are specified by the RPL Assessor. This may be particularly useful where module(s) learning outcomes are often evidenced by similar types of evidence e.g. computing modules that include examples of the use of particular packages etc.
2. **Project work** – here the candidate submits some project or project report already carried out in their work and accompanies this with a summary of the learning developed in relation to relevant learning outcomes.
3. **Assessment on demand** – whereby the candidate is asked to complete the usual form of module assignment. It is important that the form of assessment is relevant to the evidencing of the individual's particular prior learning as it will have been designed for the traditional form of module delivery. This process has to be administered by the assessing RPL tutor as an RPL assessment and *cannot be*



an assessment only module registration as this would formally register you for the module and would have programme planning implications. The logistics of this process may mean this is not always a viable option.

4. RPL interview or presentation (often accompanied by written work/portfolio). This process would need to meet any requirements for double marking and moderation and records of the process would be kept for the external examiner. For this reason the interview may be audio or video taped.

Section 4

RPL Frequently Asked Questions

1. How will the RPL work affect my award classification ?

RPL will be recorded as credit on your transcript. It does not normally carry a grade but contributes to the overall credit required for an award. Your final degree classification will be made on the basis of available marks. For example where 2 of the 8 undergraduate modules at intermediate level have been awarded un-graded RPL credit, the degree calculation will be averaged across the remaining taught modules at Intermediate and Honours level.

2. Do I have to register RPL on my Enrolment Form ?

No, the only documentation you complete is outlined above.

3. What if my RPL assessment is unsuccessful ?

You will be entitled to resubmit the work to the RPL Panel one further time if additional information is required, and furthermore be notified as to what is necessary as part of the re-submission. Nothing will be recorded on your transcript. The work will not appear as failed and neither will it affect the number of individual module registrations permitted within an undergraduate or postgraduate award. If it is unsuccessful at the second submission you will need to register for taught module(s) to make up your credit.

4. Do I have to undertake my RPL at the start of my course ?

Whilst you are able to apply for RPL at any time during your studies it is the preferred and best option to apply for RPL at your point of application (for Part-Time learners), or as soon as is practical for Full-Time learners. If RPL is awarded this can reduce the number of modules you will need to take in order to be awarded with your qualification, and as such could have a significant effect on the amount of any payments / loan required to attain your qualification. As such, if this is completed before the commencement of your programme re-adjustments to payment schedules / Student Loans can be in advance without negative impacts. Re-adjustments, particularly with the case of Tuition Fee loans, can have implications for Student Finance.



5. Is there a maximum of APEL credit I can claim ?

- Undergraduate and Postgraduate students can, in principle, claim credit for up to 50% of their chosen academic programme in terms of credit; but cannot apply for RPL for any component of a Level 6 Degree top-up programme. The amount of RPL permissible will be dependent on the academic regulations of the awarding University.

6. How can I demonstrate that my learning is at an appropriate level ?

The focus is upon evidencing both your skills and knowledge. The following indicators may guide your thinking on level. They are generic descriptors of learning that may be demonstrated in an RPL application. Broadly level equates to issues of autonomy, complexity of task or context and the extent and transferability of knowledge across different applications.

- Undergraduate Certificate Level (Level 4)

Submission demonstrates relevant skills and knowledge within a prescribed framework. Emphasis is upon development of practical/technical skills and factual knowledge developed in context.

- Undergraduate Intermediate Level (Level 5)

Submission demonstrates knowledge of relevant theories, concepts or skills developed through practice/personal experience. Learning is developed with minimal direction demonstrating independence and autonomy within defined guidelines/framework.

- Undergraduate Honours Level (Level 6)

Submission demonstrates capacity to apply a critical perspective to personal experience/professional practice e.g. ability to identify assumptions evaluate positions and alternatives, generate ideas/solutions; ability to deal with uncertainty and complexity and take on responsibility..

For further information on level descriptors relating to Higher Education qualifications please refer to the SEEC Level Descriptors (www.seec.org.uk) and QAA Benchmark statements for your subject (www.qaa.ac.uk)

7. Is there a fee for this process?

If you are a self funding student you will be invoiced for the assessment process. The fee for RPL is approximately half of the taught module fee, and will be in line with the fee schedule according to your elected programme. Please discuss this with UCY Administration when enquiring or applying for RPL.