



# Academic Handbook Section 2H

## Recognition of Prior Learning and Credit Transfer

Version: 2

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Approved by: Academic Board

Last Updated: September 2025

### Introduction

1. This policy provides information and guidance for applicants, students, staff, employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) on the use of RPL at the Southampton Solent University. It sets out the University's criteria for assessing applications for the recognition for prior learning, mapped to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (FHEQ).
2. Southampton Solent University recognises that learning can be achieved in many ways and will award University credit to those students (please note that the term `students` refers to all learners, for example apprentices and cadets) who can satisfactorily demonstrate, in terms of currency, depth, breadth, volume and authenticity that they have achieved the equivalent of the module or level/stage learning outcomes as defined by the named award they are enrolling on or have enrolled on.
3. 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.
4. The same principle applies to the transfer of credit where a student wishes to transfer between awards at the University.

### RPL Principles

5. 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).
6. 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.
7. 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 Progression and Award Board.
8. The RPL process does not allow students to build a programme of study for themselves outside a validated award structure.

9. The University reserves the right to recover the costs of processing RPL claims.
10. 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.
11. 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 Centre for Quality Assurance on behalf of the Education Committee and stated in the Course Specification and essential course information.
12. RPL is awarded against the achievement of learning outcomes. However, credit can only be awarded for whole modules, levels and stages. In cases where a student can demonstrate partial achievement of the learning outcomes for a module, level or 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 module, stage or level as if for the first time.
13. RPL cannot be used for research degrees.

#### Definition of Terms

14. **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.
15. **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 modules approved for RPL will count towards a University award (no marks/grades will be counted).
16. **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 (via submission of a portfolio of evidence) that they have achieved the learning outcomes that are equivalent to those of the module, level or stage for which they are claiming RPL. Only the credit value of modules approved for RPL will count towards a University award (no marks/grades will be counted).
17. **Time limit / 'shelf-life' of Certified or Experiential Learning:** relates to the time scale in which the achievement of prior certified or experiential learning should be recognised in the award of RPL. Recognition and accreditation are awarded for learning achieved within five years prior to the enrolment date of the intended programme of study.
18. **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).

19. **Advanced Standing:** is where an applicant can demonstrate that they have achieved the equivalence of the learning outcomes of an earlier level/stage of an award and have the academic potential to meet the overall course learning outcomes. In such circumstances the Admissions Tutor can grant the applicant advanced standing to the next stage/level of the award. In such cases only the modules assessed at the University will count towards the final award classification. This route of entry does not involve the award of University credit and is therefore an admission rather than an RPL process. Details of admission with advanced standing are available in section 2J (The admission and recruitment of students to courses leading to academic awards).
20. **Credit Transfer:** is defined as the process by which the credit and the associated mark achieved on one award is transferred to another award. Transfer of credits and marks can only occur where the original module(s) studied are the same as the module(s) on the new award.

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

21. The University has set minimum limits on the proportion of study that a student must undertake at the University in order to be eligible for a Solent University qualification:
  - i. for 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 master's 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 level 6 and 120 credits are at level 7;
  - iii. for all other awards, a student must study at least 180 credits at the University, at least 100 credits of which are at the final level;
  - iv. PSRB exceptions may apply (for instance NMC approved programmes students can apply for RPL for up to a maximum of half the programme).
22. Where a student wishes to transfer between awards they can transfer credit up to two thirds of the credit volume of the award.

### **Making an RPL Claim**

22. 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 module or level/stage learning outcomes. Once a mapping has been conducted it can be reused for other identical RPL applications.
23. Experience cannot be the sole grounds for recognising experiential learning to award credit; the experience must be converted to the learning achieved and documented and mapped against the module, level/stage learning outcomes. The RPL Assessor shall confirm that the experiential learning which has taken place is equivalent to the learning that would have otherwise occurred had the student studied all elements of the programme of study without RPL.

24. Students must seek advice and guidance from their course leader during the process of applying for RPL. Course leaders must ensure appropriate mapping has been conducted and confirm that the relevant learning outcomes have been met.
25. If claims are prepared during term time, students should continue to study and participate in all modules until Academic Registry informs them of the outcome.
26. The University only considers RPL applications for complete modules. If the evidence provided by the student covers only some of the module/level learning outcomes, then, at the discretion of the RPL sub-committee, the student 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 provided by the course leader and presented to the RPL sub-committee.
27. All claims for RPL must be submitted to Academic Registry no later than the end of week four of the beginning of the student's academic year. Claims submitted after this date may not be accepted and students will need to study the module as normal. In exceptional circumstances, students may submit a claim for RPL at the start of semester two but must seek advice and guidance from their course leader prior to any application being made.
28. The student will be informed of the outcome of their RPL application by the end of week six.
29. Students are encouraged to make one single RPL claim at the beginning of their studies. However, they can make separate claims at the beginning of each academic year.
30. 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.

### **RPL Application Requirements**

31. Applications for Certified learning should include:
  - i. A certified copy of a transcript and award certificate;
  - ii. A Course/Programme Specification, or syllabus with module descriptors/learning outcomes where appropriate.
32. Applications for Experiential learning should include a portfolio of evidence with contents that reflect the nature of the experiences and the learning that has resulted, would generally include the following:
  - i. A brief CV to provide overview and background for the claim;
  - ii. Full evidence (such as practice-based documents/reports/formal training/employer testimonials) and an analysis on the relevance of the learning achieved against the module(s)/level/stage learning outcomes for which the claim is being made.
  - iii. PSRB courses may require additional entry criteria to be met before admittance and enrolment onto programme (e.g. NMC approved programmes require Value Based selection process or oversight by an external examiner)

## Assessing an RPL Claim

31. 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 module.
32. The evidence provided for RPL claims will be judged on:
  - i. Acceptability: is the learning evidenced (content) equivalent (a close match) to the stated module, level or 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.
33. Claims should be assessed by the course leader using the above criteria and a recommendation made to the RPL Sub-committee.

## RPL Sub-Committee

34. The RPL sub-committee will consider all applications (modules and levels) relating to RPL and has the full-delegated authority of the relevant Progression and Award Board (PAB) to make decisions on the award of credit.
35. The composition of the RPL sub-committee is:
  - i. A Chair from the Panel of PAB Chairs (appointed by the Academic Registrar);
  - ii. Two members of academic staff;
  - iii. Clerk from Academic Registry (appointed by the Academic Registrar).
36. Members of academic staff who have assessed the claim may be requested to attend where further information is required.
37. The sub-committee will only be considered quorate when all members are present and meetings can take place on campus, virtually or via correspondence,
38. The sub-committee will review the evidence and, if required, any additional material provided by the student to determine whether to:
  - i. award the credits as claimed;
  - ii. accept the claim and (if required) the strategy for making good the missing learning outcomes;
  - iii. reject the claim; or
  - iv. refer the claim for further information.
39. Academic Registry is responsible for ensuring that the student's record is updated and that the student is formally informed of the outcomes from the sub-committee.

40. The decision of the sub-committee is final and will be reported to the relevant Progression and Award Board. Where the application has been rejected, students should have the opportunity to receive feedback as to the reasons for the rejection.

### **Transfer of Award**

41. Students may transfer between awards and transfer the credit and the marks achieved to the new award where the same modules are components of both awards. In doing so they are withdrawing from one award with accumulated credit (where relevant) and enrolling on another award. Students should be aware that they would be unable to re-enrol onto a course from which they have previously withdrawn.
42. Students must take into consideration any funding and/or visa implications that may arise if they transfer to another course.

### **Transfer of an award without any credit**

43. At the discretion of the 'receiving' award course leader, existing students may transfer within the first four weeks of the beginning of their award to another award. Students must make good the missing learning activities and any assignments. These need to be clearly identified on the internal transfer form.
44. At this stage, students will have no credits to transfer and, therefore, the RPL procedure is not applicable. This type of transfer will be processed through the internal course transfer procedure which is undertaken by Academic Registry.

### **Transfer of an award with accumulated credit**

45. Students at a later stage in their studies, i.e. after four weeks of the beginning of their award, and wishing to transfer between awards at the University should discuss the possibility with the relevant award course leaders who will determine:
  - i. which modules can be transferred (credit and marks transferred);
  - ii. which modules 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 module on the new award (credit only); and
  - iv. what learning outcomes the student is missing and must make good, before RPL is awarded.
46. Students transferring to other awards that require the use of RPL must follow the RPL procedure and have the agreement of the relevant award course leaders.
47. 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 Credit Transfers on Transcripts**

48. All transfers of credit must be formally documented and recorded through the RPL procedure.
49. Credit awarded by means of RPL will be assigned against the equivalent modules and will be recorded as 'Pass' and included on the student's transcript.
50. Transferred credit, which carries a mark, will be recorded in the normal way.

#### **Appeal Against an RPL Decision**

51. 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**

52. The Education Committee will monitor the operation of the University's RPL Policy.