



Higher Education Recognition of Prior Learning Policy

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1. Introduction

As noted in the College HE Admissions Policy, recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a generic term for the process by which Higher Education (HE) providers recognise and, where appropriate, award credit for learning that has taken place before entry onto a programme of study. Middlesbrough College is committed to recognising the prior learning, knowledge and experience of all applicants to facilitate their access to higher education. This document provides definitions and guidance for staff and students about its RPL process and details the Middlesbrough College RPL policy.

RPL has many benefits for students, the College, the workplace and wider society. For students, RPL encourages the pursuit of HE, facilitates access at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, eliminates duplication of study, and can reduce cost/the time needed to complete a qualification. Effective RPL processes also underpin the College's Access and Participation Plan, and Learning and Teaching strategies. RPL also recognises and promotes lifelong learning, fosters workplace and employer partnerships with the College, and increases the number of skilled and capable graduates.

2. Definitions

There are two broad categories of prior learning recognised by the College:

2.1. Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning (RPCL)

RPCL refers to prior certificated learning where a student has passed courses that bear UK Higher Education credit and may be recognised by Credit Transfer.

The following types of prior learning are recognised:

- study at UK Higher Education institutions;
- credit or qualifications from non-UK Higher Education institutions;
- credit from qualifications on the Ofqual Register of Recognised Qualifications and qualifications on the database of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework;
- other certificated learning (such as professional qualifications) at Higher Education level (also see Credit Assessment);
- study at a university overseas.

RPCL may also apply to previous learning that would meet the requirements of HE-level study where no UK HE credit or Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) credit has been awarded.

2.2. Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)

RPEL is the identification, assessment, and formal acknowledgement of learning and achievement gained outside formal education or training that is not usually certificated but is considered and recognised by the College RPL Panel for:

- admission to a programme at the named point of entry;
- exemption against specific modules;
- advanced standing.

Prior Experiential Learning may have taken place in a variety of contexts including:

- HE programmes;
- work situations (paid and voluntary);
- training courses in formal (e.g. further education colleges) and informal settings, continuing professional development (CPD);

- more generally, through a variety of life experiences.

The Non-Standard Entrants Process (NSEP) encompasses the mechanism via which programme leaders can recommend to an RPL panel that applicants without the standard entry qualifications should be admitted to an HE programme at the normal point of entry without module exemption due to experience, ability, or other factors evidencing their readiness for HE study. In these cases, a recommendation should be made, including evidence, using [this form](#).

The 3 options available for RPL are shown below. RPCL and RPEL involve an application to exempt a student from one or more of the modules on the HE course associated with the application. RPEL under the Non-Standard Entrants Process (NSEP) does not involve any module exemption, it is a straightforward case for entry on to the HE course based on experience.

Recognition of Prior
Certificated Learning:
including module
exemption

Recognition of Prior
Experiential Learning:
including module
exemption

Recognition of Prior
Experiential Learning: not
including module
exemption

3. Criteria for Assessing Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

3.1. Criteria for Assessing Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning (RPCL)

Where an applicant has certificated learning that is at a lower level than the requirements for a particular programme of study, a decision to allow the applicant to join a programme *at the normal entry point* is made by judging the relevance of their learning in terms of whether it meets, or contributes to meeting, the entry requirements of the programme.

Similarly, an applicant's certificated learning may also be judged with regard to exempting an applicant from individual modules or a stage of study. A decision to accept credits gained elsewhere as *counting towards credit accumulation for the programme of study* can be made where an individual has completed the same module (or a complete course) that bears UK Higher Education credit.

All RPCL applications are considered by the College RPL Panel whose membership is approved by the Academic Board. To apply for RPCL, applicants must provide the College RPL Panel with original, official evidence of previous study. Evidence received via email or photocopy will not be accepted. If the applicant is unable to bring original documents to the HE Office, the College RPL Panel can accept formally verified copies made by a solicitor. Credits will only be awarded for periods of study that have been formally assessed and successfully completed. Credit will not be awarded for any compensated/condoned passes.

If the applicant's prior learning is not certificated, the College RPL Panel will assess the applicant's learning directly, either by requiring the applicant to take the normal progression assessments of the programme or by some other appropriate form of assessment.

3.2. Criteria for assessing Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)

A decision to *exempt an applicant from one or more individual modules within the programme of study* can also be made on the basis that the applicant has demonstrated achievement of the learning outcomes from the module through experiential learning. In assessing applications for RPEL, the College RPL Panel evaluates:

- **Level:** the evidence that is presented and the learning that is claimed must be at the appropriate level;
- **Relevance:** there should be an appropriate match between the evidence of prior learning and the applicant's intended programme of study;
- **Sufficiency:** the evidence submitted should demonstrate the achievement of the learning claimed and be sufficient to cover the learning outcomes of the module(s) on the intended programme of study;
- **Currency:** the evidence should relate to current learning. This would normally be judged as learning that has been completed within 15 years of the claim;
- **Authenticity:** the evidence of prior learning should accurately and unambiguously uphold the applicant's achievements.

4. RPL Credit Allowances and Restrictions

4.1. Minimum Credit Allowance

Credit cannot be awarded for a fraction of a module because applicants must be able to demonstrate the ability to meet all of a module's learning outcomes. For this reason, the minimum number of credits that can be considered for exemption through the RPL process is the smallest-sized module within the programme on which the student intends to study. Typically, this value is 20. This restriction is noted on the RPL application form.

4.2. Maximum Credit Allowance

A student may be awarded recognition for prior learning (certified, experiential or uncertified) towards the requirements of a named award up to two-thirds of the total credit requirements for that award. Two-thirds of RPL is only permitted for full, three-year bachelor's degrees (360 credits) or full Masters degrees (a minimum of 180 credits) and not sub-awards, where the usual maximum is 50%.

4.3. Restrictions of Credit Allowance

Credit for prior learning (certified, experiential, or uncertified) is not permitted at Level 6 where students are expected to complete 120 credits to gain the award.

Students directly entering a validated qualification Level 6 'top-up' programme, comprising 120 credits and designed to build upon a lower credit bearing award, may not enter the programme with credit.

Credit already used for RPL purposes (RPCL or RPEL) on a previous programme of study is not normally accepted for a subsequent programme.

Some courses have statutory, regulatory, or professional body restrictions on entry criteria, which may take precedence over College RPL policy. These restrictions are noted in the entry criteria for the programme on the [College Website](#).

Each programme of study sets a time limit for the acceptability of the currency of qualifications used to claim credit allowance: this value is normally five years.

4.4. Calculation of Final Award Classification

Calculation of a final award classification including an award of credit for prior learning is subject to the individual RPL regulations of the awarding body. Applicants will be guided through this aspect of the application process but are also advised to read the relevant section of their awarding body regulations, which will be signposted through the application process.

5. Applying for RPL

The application form is included here in Appendix 1. Before completing the form, applicants should first discuss their application with their programme leader.

All completed application forms should be emailed to heoffice@mbro.ac.uk. Forms should be delivered before the programme of study begins. However, the relevance of prior learning may only become clear to an applicant after programme commencement, and therefore applications may be made within the first six weeks of the official start date of the programme.

6. RPL Decisions and Applicant Appeals

All RPL Panel decisions are communicated to the applicant within two weeks of the panel meeting. If an RPL is rejected, the applicant will be informed in writing by the Chair of the RPL Panel and the applicant will be referred to the programme leader to determine a way forward with the application.

6.1. Applicant Appeals Procedure

To safeguard the interests of applicants, the College has established a procedure for use when an applicant believes that their application has not been dealt with in accordance with the College's policies, principles, and procedures. An applicant who wishes to lodge an appeal should refer to the Admissions Appeals Procedure document.

7. RPL Record

Details of a student's RPL are recorded on a supplement (also known as a transcript) included with the qualification certificate.

8. RPL Monitoring and Evaluation

RPL decisions relating to course admission and credit allowance are reported to Academic Board in October and February of each year. The RPL process is monitored and its efficacy evaluated by the Academic Board.

9. Appendix 1: Application for RPL Form

Available [here](#).

10. Appendix 2: RPL Panel Agenda Template

RPL Panel Agenda



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Date, Time, Location

Item No	Title	Responsible
1	Apologies*	Chair
2	Confirmation of RPL applications to be reviewed during this meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Student name</i> • <i>Student name</i> 	Chair
3	Review of application: <i>student name, RCPL/RPEL</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student name, programme, and level • Module(s) under consideration • Credit value • Learning outcomes • Evidence • Confirmation of application accepted/rejected by PL • Confirmation of application accepted/rejected by Panel • Confirmation of outcome and next steps 	PL/Panel/Chair
4	Review of application: <i>student name, RCPL/RPEL</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student name, programme, and level • Module(s) under consideration • Credit value • Learning outcomes • Evidence • Confirmation of application accepted/rejected by PL • Confirmation of application accepted/rejected by Panel • Confirmation of outcome and next steps 	PL/Panel/Chair
5	AOB	

11. Appendix 3: RPL Panel Minutes Template



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Recognition of Prior Learning Panel

Minutes of the meeting held on *Date/Time*

Panel Members:		In Attendance:	
Students' Details:			
Name of Student			
Title of Programme			
Level of Programme			
1. Minutes of the Hearing			
Introduction			
Explanation by the programme team of Relevant Learning Outcomes			
2. Outcome of Panel			
3. Evidence and Documentation			
As attached.			

Revision History		
Version	Date	Detail
1.0	September 2017	
1.1	September 2018	Document edited for clarity and to homogenise presentation. Document and Form edited to incorporate feedback from OU RPL Manager.
1.2	December 2021	HEO address updated, RPL panel agenda/minutes templates attached
1.3	May 2022	Checked for accuracy
1.4	July 2022	Reference to RPEL under NSEP included, with image.
1.5	May 2023	Section 4.4 added to explain the link between RPL and the final award classification
1.6	November 2023	Section 4.4 clarified
1.7	January 2024	Links to non-standard entrants process added.