



Department of Academic Quality (DAQ)

A guide to the Recognition of Prior Learning

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Valid from 2017/18 onwards

**This guide is intended to provide support to staff involved
in the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process**

For forms, templates, and further guidance about RPL, please contact:

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Introduction

This guide is for staff involved in the admission of applicants to the university via the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and/or who are involved with supporting students who wish to apply for RPL during the course of their studies. It is suggested that the material within the guide is adapted to suit the particular vocabulary or requirements for your subject area, while adhering to the generic university position and in particular to the principles outlined in section 1.

The guide should be read in conjunction with the university's Taught Programmes Academic Regulations and the Student Admissions Policy. These documents and other resources are listed in section 4: Further information.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) – an overview

What is RPL?

Purpose

RPL facilitates the credit accumulation and transfer scheme which operates across UK higher education, allowing students to enter a programme with advanced standing because of academic credit previously awarded or experience gained. Applicants may be exempted from studying a particular module(s), or be allowed to enter into a higher level of the programme. It is a process based on academic judgement.

Definitions

Prior learning for which credit has been awarded: a student has undertaken prior learning which led to the award of credit or a qualification by a UK higher education degree awarding body.

Prior certificated learning: a student has not been awarded credit but has studied a work-based or professional development programme equivalent to higher education level.

Prior experiential learning: a student has gained experiential learning which is at the appropriate level to be recognised via the award of RPL credits.

Principles of RPL

Applications

- RPL claims should be made prior to the start of the relevant learning in the programme
- Applicants may not normally re-use credit from a previous completed programme towards an equivalent or lower award
- Assessment is made against the RPL criteria and the module learning outcomes
- Consideration should be given to the 'shelf-life' of the learning being considered
- Decisions taken should be transparent and equitable

The award of RPL

- RPL may only be awarded in accordance with the university regulations
- No marks are awarded for credit achieved via the RPL process, unless the RPL is awarded for credits previously earned at DMU
- Award classification is based only on modules studied at DMU
- Credits awarded via the RPL process must be clearly displayed on documentation provided to students on graduation, for example the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)

RPL process

Enquiry

An applicant/student enquires about RPL and is provided with advice and the application form. Faculties may use this, tailored to their needs, or develop their own proforma as long as it covers the information in the generic form.

Application

The applicant/student submits the application form with appropriate evidence and a portfolio, if appropriate. In some faculties/subject areas a meeting with the applicant/student may be required to explore their claim.

Decision

The claim is considered by the appropriate staff – Admissions staff for applicants and the relevant programme leadership if the student is already studying a DMU programme. Authority to make decisions on RPL will not normally be devolved to partner institutions.

Record keeping

The decision and the reason for it should be clearly recorded on the application form. If the application involves accepting credit earned at another institution, the name of the institution and the level, volume and date of the credit achieved must be recorded.

Criteria

Validity

The achievement must be comparable with the standard and content of the programme the claim relates to. The evidence should match the learning claimed, and the learning should be appropriate to the module(s) learning outcomes.

Sufficiency

There should be evidence to cover the outcomes for the learning against which the claim is being made: 80%+ match between the student's prior learning and the module(s) outcomes.

Currency

The assessment should establish that the learning, wherever undertaken, is still current. In some subjects currency may be an issue. Programme RPL regulations may specify that learning acquired more than five years ago may need supporting by a portfolio of more recent achievements.

Authenticity

The admissions tutor/programme leader must be assured that the claim relates to the applicant's own work, for example experiential learning should be endorsed by direct evidence, including referees.

Regulations

Undergraduate and taught postgraduate regulations

There are regulations governing the award of RPL which can be found in the Taught Programmes Academic Regulations.

RPL credit limits

Only a certain proportion of RPL credits can be awarded. Students are expected to complete a significant part of their studies at DMU to gain a DMU award. For example:
 Honours degree: Students must study 120 level 6 credits at DMU
 Master's degree: Students must study 90 level 7 credits at DMU
 These limits don't apply to ex-DMU students re-entering their original programme of study.

The re-use of credit

Relevant credit achieved can be re-used towards a higher award, subject to the RPL limits. It is important that the re-use of credit is accepted in relation to staged or complementary awards, for example where credits achieved from a foundation degree can count towards the achievement of an honours degree.

Useful resources

Publication	Web link
Sally Lloyd, Senior Officer, Taught Programmes	slloyd@dmu.ac.uk x7303
Guide to the recognition of prior learning	www.dmu.ac.uk/scheme-regulations
Taught Programmes Academic Regulations	www.dmu.ac.uk/academic-regulations

How is RPL recorded?

Student record system

The credits awarded via RPL will be recorded on the student record system, against the level to which it applies, or against the individual module(s).

Assessment boards

The credits awarded via RPL will be shown on the assessment board reports so board members can see how a student's profile has been formed and that a student has sufficient credits to progress or be given an award.

Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)

Students achieving a DMU award will receive a Higher Education Achievement Report. The HEAR will include details of the credits undertaken by the student, clearly identifying where and when RPL credits were awarded.

Section 1: What is Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

The purpose of RPL

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a process which facilitates entry with advanced standing to a programme at De Montfort University (DMU). This is normally achieved by the award of credit to the student, thus exempting them from studying a particular module or modules on the programme, or allowing them entry into a higher level of the programme via credit transfer. The process supports students in using their prior learning towards a higher education qualification, avoids students having to repeat learning they have already successfully undertaken, and promotes student mobility by facilitating credit accumulation and transfer. Students may make RPL applications during the application process for admission to the university and during the course of their studies.

The guiding principle of RPL and credit transfer is that it adheres to the university's regulatory framework and that decisions are made transparently, fairly and consistently across the university, ensuring equality of opportunity for all applicants and students.

The university encourages the use of the RPL process wherever possible, as a key principle of a credit accumulation and transfer scheme, but recognises that for some programmes there may be a good reason why it may not be applicable, for example programmes which must meet the requirements of a Professional, Statutory or Regulation Body (PSRB). The decision not to allow RPL should be taken by the programme management board. It should be taken to the Taught Programmes Management Committee by the Associate Dean (Academic) for approval; on approval it will be recorded in the university's programme-specific regulations register.

Opportunities for applicants/students to make RPL claims should be promoted via the university website and in literature provided to applicants/students.

The guide does not include circumstances whereby current DMU students transfer from one programme of study to another, normally at the end of a level of study. In such cases a Change of Programme form should be completed.

Definitions

Prior certificated learning

This term is used to describe learning which is at higher education level, for example professional development or work-based learning awards, but which has not led to the award of credits or qualifications as outlined within the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (FHEQ), October 2014. A process of assessment is required to determine whether the learning is suitable for recognition in relation to a specified DMU programme/module(s). If it is deemed suitable a proportion of credit is awarded, at the appropriate FHEQ level, to reflect the prior learning and achievement.

Prior experiential learning

This will involve an assessment process by academic staff. The learning gained through the experience is being assessed, rather than the experience itself. If the learning is recognised as appropriate in relation to the specific DMU programme/module(s), a proportion of credit, at the appropriate FHEQ level is awarded to the student.

Prior learning for which credit has been awarded

This is where a student has undertaken prior learning which has led to the award of credits or qualifications by a UK higher education degree awarding body according to the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (FHEQ), October 2014. In such cases the university will determine at application stage the status of the award, including volume and level, in relation to the

programme the student is applying for. This is a standard part of the admissions process and therefore does normally not require formal assessment of the student's prior learning. Students may be exempted from studying a module, or modules, based on the prior learning, but more often will be admitted directly to a higher level of the award. At undergraduate level, for example, a student may be admitted directly into level 5 or level 6 of an honours degree; credits will not be awarded in relation to specific modules, but awarded against the level or levels. At taught postgraduate level a student who has previously achieved a postgraduate certificate at another institution may be admitted directly onto a postgraduate diploma or master's route.

Where a student's prior learning has been undertaken outside of the UK, the student may or may not have been awarded credit. In terms of some European awards it is straightforward to determine the equivalence of the volume and level of credit awarded to the student. Under the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) one ECTS credit is equivalent to two DMU credits. The FHEQ levels can be mapped clearly to the cycles in the Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area:

First cycle	FHEQ Level 4	
	FHEQ Level 5	Short cycle qualifications
	FHEQ Level 6	End of first cycle qualifications
Second cycle	FHEQ Level 7	End of second cycle qualifications
Third cycle	FHEQ Level 8	End of third cycle qualifications

Where prior learning has taken place at an overseas institution the central or faculty Admissions teams can advise on equivalence of qualifications in relation to RPL applications.

Principles of RPL

The following guiding principles should inform the consideration of RPL applications:

Applications

- Responsibility rests with the applicant/student to make the RPL claim; however it is the responsibility of the university, via programme teams, to advertise and promote the RPL process to applicants/students.
- RPL claims should be made prior to the start of the relevant learning in the programme.
- Applications will be made by individuals in a range of circumstances. In certain cases RPL may be defined at programme level, where completion of a certain level or levels of a specific programme will be recognised for advanced entry into onto a DMU award. In such cases entry will be automatically determined during the Admissions process and individual claims from applicants are not required.
- Applicants for RPL should receive supportive guidance during the process, including advice about the evidence that is considered appropriate, the criteria against which claims are judged, timescales and arrangements for providing feedback.
- Applicants may not normally re-use credit from a previous completed programme towards an equivalent or lower award.
- The applicant may receive credit for the prior learning they have gained from experience, but not the experience itself.
- Assessment is made against the RPL criteria (see Section 2) and the module learning outcomes. Consideration should be given to the 'shelf-life' of the learning being considered via the RPL claim. Like many other institutions, DMU does not set limits on the currency of previously-earned credit; however sector practice shows that five years is often used as an indicator of currency. In practice, decisions will depend on the subject area and will be delegated to admissions tutors and/or programme leaders as appropriate. As a guideline, a 'fair match' would include 80% attainment of the module or module(s) outcomes the claim relates to.

- The decision on each application must be clearly documented, to ensure clarity for all parties. Decisions taken should be transparent and equitable.

The award of RPL

- RPL may only be awarded within the parameters outlined in university regulations.
- No marks are awarded for credit achieved via the RPL process, unless the RPL is awarded in relation to credits previously earned at DMU, in which case the marks can be brought forward and linked to the student's current profile. Classification of awards is based only on modules studied at DMU.
- Credits awarded via the RPL process must be clearly denoted on documentation provided to students on graduation, for example the diploma supplement or Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR).

Section 2: The process

The process

Faculties may introduce local variations on how to operate the Recognition of Prior Learning process. The process and staff involved may also vary depending on a variety of issues, such as:

- Whether an enquiry is received from an applicant to a DMU programme or a current student wishing to apply for RPL against a specific module within their programme. It should be noted that students must apply for RPL before they commence their studies on the module(s) in question.
- Whether the applicant/student has prior certificated learning, learning for which credit has been awarded, or experiential learning.
- Whether this is an individual 'one-off' application as opposed to a commonly-recognised route for admission by advanced standing into a DMU programme

Local arrangements will, however, normally include the following steps:

Enquiry

An applicant/student enquires about RPL and is provided with advice/guidance and the application form. A university application form is appended to this guide. Faculties may use this, tailored to their needs, or develop their own proforma as long as it covers the information in the generic proforma.

Application

The applicant/student prepares their claim on the application form, submitting the appropriate evidence and a portfolio, if appropriate. Evidence may include outline module content from previous modules studied and copies of previous transcripts, award certificates and Higher Education Achievement Reports (HEAR) or diploma supplements. In some faculties/subject areas a meeting with the applicant/student may be required to explore their claim.

Decision

The claim is considered by the appropriate staff – Admissions staff for applicants and the relevant programme leader/team if the student is already studying a DMU programme. Admissions staff will liaise with academic colleagues as appropriate. Decisions should be based on consideration of the criteria outlined below. Authority to make decisions on RPL will not normally be devolved to partner institutions (delivery organisations). Therefore any claim which relates to entry to/study on a DMU programme at a partner institution will be assessed by DMU Admissions staff or the programme leader.

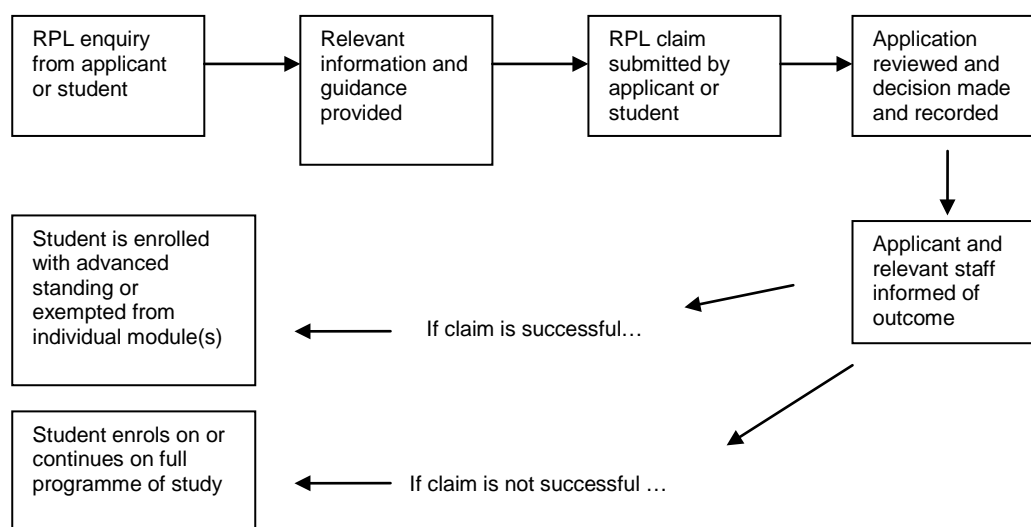
Applicants/students should be informed of the decision in a timely manner.

Recording of decision

Staff will record the decision on the application form. If the decision is not to allow the claim, an applicant will be required to study the entire programme, and a current student must study in full the module(s) their claim related to. The record should show the reasons for not approving the application.

If the decision is to approve the application, the reason for making the decision should be clearly articulated. If the application involves accepting credit earned at another institution, the name of the institution and the level, volume and date of the credit achieved must be recorded.

Flowchart of the process



Criteria for assessing an RPL application

Validity

The achievement must be comparable with the standard and content of the DMU programme the student is making the claim in relation to. The evidence should match the learning claimed, and the learning should be appropriate to the module(s) learning outcomes.

Sufficiency

There should be sufficient evidence to cover the outcomes for the learning against which the claim is being made. Normally it would be expected that there would be at least an 80% match between the student's prior learning and the module(s) outcomes.

Currency

The assessment should establish that the learning is still current, even if it was acquired some time ago. In some subject areas currency may be a particular issue. In such cases the programme RPL regulations could specify that learning acquired more than, for example, five years ago, may need supporting by a portfolio of more recent achievements.

Authenticity

The admissions tutor/programme leader must be assured that the claim relates to the applicant's own work, for example experiential learning should be endorsed by direct evidence, including referees.

Section 3: For reference

Regulations regarding the use of credit

There are limits to the volume of RPL credit which can be awarded to students, as the university has specific requirements about the proportion of credits which must be studied at DMU in order to receive a DMU award. These are specified in the RPL section of the Taught Programmes Academic Regulations. The limits outlined in the regulations don't apply to previous DMU students who may have left the university with an exit award and wish to return to their previous programme to achieve a higher award. In such cases a student will only be required to study for the credits they need to achieve the award.

Credits achieved via the RPL process are excluded from the calculation of awards, for example honours degree classification, distinction, merit, except in the case of previous DMU students returning to the same programme.

Prior learning as covered by this guide refers to learning at the same academic level as the programme a student is applying for, or undertaking. Where a student has relevant prior learning which is at a level lower than the programme, the learning will be considered in terms of its suitability to meet or contribute to meeting the entry requirements for the programme. Recognition in this circumstance is outside the remit of this guidance document and forms part of the admissions process, and staff should refer to the university's Student Admissions Policy. However, the principles in this guide may be useful to staff in advising applicants preparing a portfolio as part of the admissions process where they do not meet the standard entry requirements.

Advice on the re-use of credit

At DMU relevant credit achieved can be re-used towards an award at a higher level of study, subject to the RPL limits outlined within the regulations (see above). It is important that the re-use of credit is accepted in relation to staged or complementary awards, for example where credits achieved from a foundation degree can count towards the achievement of an honours degree.

What happens to the RPL credits? – student record system and the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)

Student record system

The credits awarded via RPL will be recorded on the student record system.

Assessment board

The credits accrued via RPL are displayed on assessment board reports so that board members can make the appropriate progression and award decisions.

Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)

Students achieving a DMU undergraduate or taught postgraduate award will receive a **Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)**. The HEAR will include details of the credits undertaken by the student, clearly identifying where RPL credits have been awarded.

Section 4: Further information

The following documents/ links may be of interest:

De Montfort University Taught Programmes Academic Regulations: www.dmu.ac.uk/academic-regulations

Student Admissions Policy: current version available on the DMU website.

QAA Quality Code for Higher Education, Chapter B2: Recruitment, selection and admission to higher education (October 2013): <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-b>

QAA Quality Code for Higher Education, Chapter B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning (October 2013): <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-b>

The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (2014): <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2843>

Review of credit accumulation and transfer policy and practice in UK higher education (The Higher Education Academy, 2013): <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/node/7613>

Appendix 1: Recognition of Prior Learning application form

How we can contact you:

Name:	Daytime Tel:
DMU P Number:	Home Address:
Email address, or other contact notes:	

Your proposed or current study details at DMU:

Title of DMU programme:

Your proposed RPL request:

To help us understand your request, please give details of how you think RPL could help with your study progression. Please indicate your credits achieved, date of achievement, and name of educational institution where these were obtained. Evidence may include outline module content from previous modules studied and copies of previous transcripts, award certificates and Higher Education Achievement Reports (HEAR) or diploma supplements.
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Your present activity (if applicable):

Present educational module profile - please list modules you have taken and successfully passed. Please include outlines of module content if possible.
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
Present employment:

Your conclusion:

Having read the RPL Guidance, I believe my RPL profile best matches (please tick):
RPL (credited learning) <input type="checkbox"/>
RPEL (experiential learning) <input type="checkbox"/>
Combination of RPL/RPEL <input type="checkbox"/>
Admission by advanced standing <input type="checkbox"/>
I declare that, to the best of my knowledge, all the information given here and on any accompanying documentation is correct. I enclose my CV.

Signed: Date:

Official use

Form received on: (date)
Decision made on: (date)
Applicant/student informed on: (date)
Entered onto student record system (if applicable) on: (date)

Outcome:

The student will:

- not claim any module exemption
- claim admission by advanced standing
- claim RPL for module(s)
- claim RPEL for module(s)

Brief rationale for approval/non-approval

(if credit is being accepted which has been awarded at another institution, please include the name of the institution and the date and details of the credit awarded)