GCU
Glasgow Caledonian University

Recognition of Prior Learning at GCU

GCU RPL Policy

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v7.4

Glasgow Caledonian University's Recognition of Prior Learning Policy

1. Introduction

1.1   Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) recognises that knowledge and skills can be acquired from a wide range of learning experiences, both formal and informal. Students at GCU should enter a programme at a level appropriate to their prior learning and qualifications. Therefore, the University encourages Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as a means of providing entry to, or credit within, all of its programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Such recognition will take place within the context of the QAA's National RPL Framework for Higher Education and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). The University will support Schools in the implementation of RPL processes in all subject areas.

1.2   RPL is an important means of supporting the University's vision to be recognised as the University for the Common Good with a global reputation for delivering social benefit and impact through education, research and social innovation. RPL is an integral component of the University's commitment to widening participation through supporting the provision of flexible routes into and through programmes at GCU for all learners with the potential to benefit from higher education regardless of background. RPL supports flexible delivery such as work-based learning and part-time provision. Effective systems for RPL also support the University's strategies in relation to learning, teaching and assessment; internationalisation; employability and graduate attributes. The GCU RPL Policy is linked to the GCU Admissions Policy.

1.3   The SCQF guidelines make a distinction between two forms of recognition:

- RPL for personal/career development or formative recognition
- RPL for credit, or summative recognition

1.4   **RPL for personal/career development, or formative recognition**, is a process of recognising learning achieved outside formal education or training systems within the context of further learning and development. This form of RPL may take place as part of a guidance process. This process can be linked to confidence-building; identifying individual learning pathways; a notional mapping of learning within the context of the SCQF; supporting the transition between formal, non-formal and formal learning; and preparation for the process of RPL for credit.

1.5   **RPL for credit or summative recognition** is a process of assessing learning achieved outside of formal education or training systems which is recognised, if appropriate, for academic purposes. RPL can enable a learner to gain entry to a programme if the outcomes of their prior informal learning are judged as comparable to the entry requirements of the programme; and to gain credit within a programme if the outcomes of his/her prior informal learning are judged as comparable to the outcomes of the programme to which he/she is seeking credit.

2. Definitions and nature of RPL

2.1   The University identifies two forms of RPL:

2.1.1   **Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning (RPCL)** or **credit transfer** is a process through which previously assessed and certificated learning is considered and, as appropriate, recognised for academic purposes. It can enable a learner to transfer credit gained within one programme of study to another programme of study at the same time or a different institution. Credit can be used from a previously uncompleted or completed award. The credit that is transferred can be

used, where appropriate, as a foundation on which to build towards an award at a higher level or stage.

2.1.2   **Recognition of Prior informal Learning (RPiL)** is the process of recognising and, if appropriate, assessing and then credit-rating learning that has its source in some experience which occurred **prior** to a candidate entering his/her current programme, but where that experience was **not previously formally assessed and credit-rated** at higher educational level. Informal learning is defined as knowledge and skills gained through life and work experiences as well as through non-formal (non-certificated) learning, development and training activities or programmes.

2.2   The term **entry with advanced standing** refers to a student entering a programme later than the normal start point (e.g. directly into the second trimester or second, or subsequent, level of a programme) thereby shortening the normal period of study.

2.3   The RPL system within GCU supports the awarding of **specific credit** at an **appropriate level** towards or within **particular programmes** and discourages RPL for general credit with no clear academic goal, i.e. credit that cannot be used towards an award or to permit entry to a programme of study.

2.4   Prior learning for **specific credit against university programmes** through the RPL procedure must be:

- At higher education level (i.e. SCQF levels 7 to 12);
- Directly relevant to the award sought; and
- Supported by evidence.

3. The use of RPL within GCU

3.1   The University allows a student, or potential student, to use RPL to allow him/her to gain:

3.1.1   **RPL for Entry to the first level of a programme,** i.e. as an alternative to normal entry requirements if s/he can demonstrate appropriate knowledge and skills comparable to the specified entrance requirements. This is managed through the admissions process and enquirers should be encouraged to include evidence of their prior learning in their application to GCU.

3.1.2   **RPL for Credit within programmes of study** at undergraduate and postgraduate levels (including credit for elements of the programme, i.e. modules, or parts of a level, or for an entire level). GCU students and offer holders can apply for credit within programmes using the appropriate claim form.

3.2   Normally, all RPL for Credit claims should be made before the module(s) has commenced. Once a claimant has commenced their study at GCU RPL for Credit claims against modules must be made no later than the **end of week two of each trimester**.

3.3   RPL as an entry route and a means of gaining credit within formal programmes of study should be embedded within curriculum design and explicitly addressed at the programme approval and review stage. Where possible, learning outcomes should be expressed in a way that enables a variety of different routes for their achievement as well as the use of flexible modes of assessment.

3.4 The assessment of RPL for purposes of entry to or credit within a programme must centre on the demonstration by the applicant of the skills, knowledge and understanding required to progress successfully within the programme. Therefore, the focus is on assessing the *comparability* of the outcomes of informal learning to those of the module or programme level, rather than seeking an exact match.

3.5 A learner may combine both forms of RPL (RPCL and RPiL) in seeking entry to, or credit within, a programme of study.

3.7 Articulation from HN qualifications or equivalent to SCQF levels 8 and 9 of degree programmes is a form of credit transfer, but this progression route is managed through the normal admissions process and not through the RPL process.

3.8 Contacts for RPL within each School must be clearly identified. These contacts may be Programme Leaders; ADLTQs or delegated LTQ representatives or RPL Assessors/Advisors with a wider School remit. The Associate Dean (Learning, Teaching and Quality) is responsible for the quality assurance and monitoring of RPL processes at School level and advises the Dean and relevant staff on RPL. Please see Appendix 2.

3.9 The mechanisms for supporting and assessing RPL should be fully documented and readily available to appropriate staff within Schools, as well as to potential candidates.

3.10 RPL should be a standing item on Programme Boards in terms of monitoring the number and nature of RPL for Credit claims.

3.11 In accordance with the University's Student Performance Feedback Policy, feedback on the outcome on an RPL for Credit claim should normally be provided to the applicant within three working weeks following submission of the *fully* compiled claim for assessment/recognition.

3.12 **The use and re-use of credit**
Normally, credit for a completed award can only be used to seek advanced standing to an award at higher level. Credit for a complete award cannot normally be used towards another award at the same level, as this would constitute double counting of credit. Credit from a complete award can be used towards another award at the same level only if the following criteria are met:

- The award towards which the student is seeking credit is in a *different s*ubject, vocational or professional area to his/her prior award at undergraduate or postgraduate level
  OR
- The award is at SCQF level 11 (Masters level) and enables the student to advance his or her *existing* subject, professional or vocational area in a new or specialist direction. The student can only seek credit for an equivalent Masters level research methods module in order to avoid unnecessary duplication
  AND
- The student can seek credit for a maximum of 40 credits at Undergraduate level and 30 at Postgraduate level

3.13 The 'handing back' of completed GCU qualifications by students who exit at a level but subsequently return to register at a higher level of the same programme/pathway using the completed qualification as the basis of a credit transfer claim is implicit in the Graduation and

Awards Regulations. Advice should be sought on this issue from the Graduation and Awards Unit.

4. Credit limits and grading for RPL

4.1 There are programme limits on the amount of credit that can be awarded through RPL. Refer to Appendix 1 for details of credit limits for GCU qualifications. Application to the Exceptions Committee must be made if a programme's proposed credit limits vary from those specified. Candidates awarded credit for prior learning must achieve 50% of the credit required at the final level of their award through accredited GCU modules (which can include *planned* experiential or work-based learning). Two exceptions to this are:

4.1.1 At SCQF level 10, while direct entry is possible to this level, no credit through RPL can be awarded within this level due to the honours classification process which is based on a minimum of 120 credits achieved at GCU.

4.1.2 At SCQF level 11 (Masters level) where a maximum of 66.7% of specific credit (120 credits) can be awarded, recognising that all other quality and educational requirements must be met. This enables applicants with postgraduate diplomas, the learning outcomes of which satisfy those of the Masters degree to which they seeking entry, to gain full recognition of their prior credit and undertake 60 credits at GCU.

4.2 RPL is ungraded and does not count as credit undertaken at GCU which has implications for a student's eligibility to gain awards with Merit or Distinction for undergraduate and postgraduate level awards. Potential RPL applicants should be aware that awards with Merit and Distinction at GCU are considered solely on the basis of achieving all credit points required for consideration of the award with Merit/Distinction through completion of GCU modules. Applicants can review the University's Assessment Regulations, including the requirements for the award of Merit and Distinction, at the following location:

https://www.gcu.ac.uk/academicqualityanddevelopment/academicquality/regulationsandpolicies/

5. The RPiL process

5.1 There are three stages to the RPiL process:

  i. Initial advice and guidance
  ii. Support
  iii. Recognition (assessment)

5.2 Each stage should be integrated within programme and School quality assurance mechanisms.

5.3 Staff involved in supporting and assessing RPiL require to be trained and supported, as well as adequately resourced to enable them to carry out this role effectively. RPL support and assessment activity should be explicitly included in the workload model. The roles and responsibilities of the applicant and the staff involved in RPL guidance, support and assessment need to be clearly defined and understood (refer to Appendix 2).

5.4 RPiL will involve the applicant in:

- Reflecting on experiences
- Identifying the learning within these experiences
- Providing evidence of the learning claimed

5.5   The key premise of RPiL is that:

- Recognition is given for learning, not for experience alone
- The learning that is recognised should be transferable and not just context-specific
- Credit awarded as a result of RPiL is of the same value as credit gained through formal learning
- The applicant is responsible for identifying and demonstrating their prior learning with appropriate guidance and support from staff.

5.6   Where possible, streamlined approaches to support and evidence-gathering will be used to ensure the process is accessible to learners and more resource-efficient for staff without undermining the integrity of the process or the outcome.

5.7   The Assessor's assessment decision on RPL for Credit claims is passed to the RPL Moderator and finally Head of Department as appropriate in line with the School RPL system for sign-off. Where appropriate and required for PSRB purposes, External Examiners may be involved in the decision making process.

5.8   Prior informal learning which has been successfully credit-rated should be clearly indicated on a student's profile. Information on credit gained through RPL on the Student Management System will be used to monitor and report on the process as well as facilitate tracking of the progression of successful claimants.

6. Appeals and complaints

6.1   In line with the University's assessment regulations, appeals cannot be made against the assessment decision on RPL. Appeals can only be based on the grounds of **material administrative error, regulatory irregularity or other material irregularity**, for example, that the assessments were not conducted in accordance with current regulations for the programme.

6.2   In line with the University's Complaint Handling Procedure, section 2.1, a complaint is defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more individuals about the standard of service, action or lack of action by or on behalf of the Institution'. Complaints in relation to RPL decisions will, therefore, only be considered on the basis of the University's definition. An appeal about an academic decision on assessment or admission is **not** a complaint.

7. Fees for RPL

7.1   Credit transfer claims and RPL for entry without credit/advanced standing to a programme incurs no fee.

7.2   Fees are normally charged for the process of RPiL support and assessment for self-funding (i.e. non-SFC-funded) students making RPiL for Credit claims for credit within programmes of study. With regards to RPiL for entry without credit/advanced standing there will be no fee, as it is viewed as part of the admissions process.

7.3   The costing model is based on the time and level of support the RPiL for Credit claim requires for credit within a programme or where formal assessment is involved. Students will be advised of this costing model and a record of all support sessions (meeting, online chat, email, phone etc.) kept. The fee should accompany the claim on submission of the fully compiled claim, comprising of the evidence of prior informal learning for assessment/recognition. The model will apply to all students who are required to generate evidence to demonstrate that their learning from experience is comparable to the learning required for a specific module(s) or level in order to gain credit within their programme.

8. Review and evaluation

8.1   The policy, procedures and process of RPL at GCU will be subject to periodic review and evaluation, informed by quantitative and qualitative evidence, in order to enhance practice.

Appendix One: Credit limit table

There are programme limits on the amount of credit that can be awarded through RPL. Candidates presenting claims for prior learning must achieve **50% of the credit required at the final level of their award** through accredited GCU modules (which can include *planned* experiential or work-based learning).

Programme (SCQF exit level, total credits)	Maximum credit through RPL	Minimum credit required through GCU modules
UG certificate of HE (L7, 120 credits)	60 credits	60 credits
UG Diploma of HE (L8, 240 credits)	180 credits	60 credits
Bachelors degree (L9, 360 credits)	300 credits	60 credits
Honours degree (L10, 480 credits)	360 credits	120 credits
PG certificate (L11, 60 credits)	30 credits	30 credits
PG Diploma (L11, 120 credits)	60 credits	60 credits
Masters degree (L11, 180 credits)	120 credits	60 credits
Prof Doctorate (L12, 540 credits)	270 credits	270 credits

For example, students wanting to exit with an ordinary degree can claim up to 300 of the 360 credits of an ordinary degree.

There are two exceptions to the credit limit regulation:

1/ At SCQF level 10, while direct entry is possible to this level, no credit through RPL can be awarded within this level due to the honours classification process which is based on a minimum of 120 credits achieved at GCU.

2/ At SCQF level 11 (Masters level) where a maximum of 66.7% of specific credit (120 credits) can be awarded, recognising that all other quality and educational requirements must be met. This enables applicants with postgraduate diplomas, the learning outcomes of which satisfy those of the Masters degree to which they seeking entry, to gain full recognition of their prior credit and undertake 60 credits at GCU.

RPL is ungraded and does not count as credit undertaken at GCU which has implications for a student's eligibility to gain awards with Merit or Distinction for undergraduate and postgraduate level awards. Potential RPL applicants should check the requirements for award of Merit or Distinction by referring to the University Assessment Regulations and any Programme Specific Regulations applicable to their programme of study. The GCU Assessment Regulations can be accessed via the GCU website at the following location: https://www.gcu.ac.uk/academicqualityanddevelopment/academicquality/regulationsandpolicies/

Application to the Exceptions Committee must be made if a programme's proposed credit limits vary from those specified above.

Appendix Two: Roles and responsibilities

Admissions
- Coordinates and records RPL for Entry (previously described as non-standard entry) at university level through admissions process; referring applications indicating RPL to school/programme staff for support and assessment where appropriate.

Curriculum, Quality & Accreditation Team
- Coordinates and monitors RPL for Credit within programmes process at university level; processing RPL for Credit claims; recording outcomes of claims.

Associate Dean of Learning, Teaching and Quality/ delegated LTQ representatives
- Coordinates and monitors RPL process at School level.
- Provides information and advice relating to RPL policy and procedures at School level.

RPL Assessor/Advisor (most often Programme Leader)
- An academic member of staff who makes an academic judgement on RPL for Entry and supports and assesses RPL for Credit claims.
- Supports applicant/student in preparation of application based on RPiL and RPL for Credit claims.
- Agrees nature of application/claim and time-scale with student in collaboration with the ADLTQ/delegated LTQ representative.

RPL Moderator (must be Programme Leader if they did not act as Assessor)
- To moderate Assessor's decision prior to Head of Department's sign off on RPL for Credit claims.

Head of Department
- Reviews Assessor's/Moderator's decision on RPL for Credit claims.

Programme Coordinator
- Notifies student of outcome of RPL for Credit claims.
- Notifies Finance Office of successful RPL for Credit claims if claimant is fee-paying to allow correct issuing of tuition fees.
- Adds credit to student's profile through University Management Information System for successful RPL for Credit claims.

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