

***Policy on
HE Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)***

Approved

June 2026

By Senior Leadership Team

Policy Title	RPL Policy
Document Owner	Director of HE
Directorates and Departments affected by this Policy	All Staff
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New College Durham is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people, as well as vulnerable adults, and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.

If you require this document in an alternative format and/or language, please contact records@newdur.ac.uk

We review our policies regularly to update them and to ensure that they are accessible and fair to all. All policies are subject to equality impact assessments which are carried out to determine whether the policy has, or is likely to have, a different impact on those with protected characteristics. We are always keen to hear from anyone who wants to contribute to these impact assessments and we welcome suggestions for improving the accessibility of fairness of this and all College policies.

Other policies and procedures mentioned in this document will be published internally and externally in these locations:

[Website](#)

Student Intranet

This policy has been assessed for its compliance with the principles of the OIA Good Practice Framework.

Equality Impact Assessed: June 2026

To make suggestions or to see further information please contact:

Julie.Coverley@newdur.ac.uk

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1. Scope

The development of this policy is derived from Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) which involves a number of processes that enable a student's prior achievements to be recognised against a programme of study. The Higher Education Credit Framework for England recognises that credit can be gained over time from a programme of study or formally- recognised experiential learning and, therefore, different types of learning can be taken into account.

Credit transfer is the process whereby credit from prior learning at a HE provider is recognised, quantified, and included towards the credit requirements for a programme of academic study delivered by another HE provider.

RPL is the process that enables definition of, and where appropriate, recognition of a student's prior learning through prior certificated learning (RPCL) not gained through an academic programme or prior experiential learning (RPEL) to be used as credit for an academic purpose.

The College recognises that potential students, in particular, mature students, already possess a range of knowledge and skills. RPL provides the opportunity for this prior learning to be formally recognised and counted towards part of a programme or qualification.

The following definitions are used within this policy:

- a. Prior Certificated Learning – prior learning (such as academic programmes, professional development awards or employment-based awards) - which has been formally assessed and certified by an educational institution or education/training provider and which is at the same or higher academic level for which the student is applying;
- b. Prior Experiential Learning – learning gained through experience which can be assessed;
- c. Recognition- the assessment process used by academic staff within the College in relation to prior experiential learning or prior certificated learning that leads to recognition through the award of credit.

The policy is underpinned by The QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education, and the regulatory requirements of the Office for Students.

Each awarding body publishes regulations related to recruitment and admissions to programmes that include the opportunities for RPL.

2. Aim

The aim of this policy is to ensure that HE students have a transparent and fair Recognition of Prior Learning Policy enabling recent relevant prior certification and/or experience to be accredited when commencing a HE qualification at New College Durham. This policy should be read with the corresponding procedure.

To achieve the aim of this policy the College has established the following objectives:

- a. identify the opportunities available to students to have their prior learning accredited;
- b. set out the procedures by which students may apply for RPL;
- c. consider all applications of RPL at the College's HE Approval Committee.
- d. Provide mechanisms for students to appeal against an RPL Outcome.

RPL will normally be considered for prior study and for related experience up to a maximum of 5 years before the commencement of a registered qualification. A student may be able to combine outdated (i.e. up to 10 years prior) certificated learning with more recent experiential learning. In this case, the certificated learning should be considered as part of an RPEL claim.

Learning that has previously been accredited in the award of another qualification cannot be accepted for RPL unless the award is a recognised level in the progression to a higher award.

Where RPL is approved for one or more modules, the College does not normally reduce the programme or module fee. This is because the student remains registered on the full award and continues to have access to the wider support, academic and regulatory arrangements linked to that award.

This includes access to programme leadership, academic guidance, tutorials, learning resources, student support services, quality assurance processes, assessment board oversight, awarding body administration, regulatory reporting, and the maintenance of the student record and transcript. The RPL decision itself also requires academic review, mapping and approval to confirm that the student's prior learning is current, sufficient and appropriately matched to the relevant learning outcomes and credit requirements.

The College considers this approach to be fair and transparent because students are told about the financial implications of RPL as part of the process, and because approved RPL provides a direct academic benefit by recognising relevant prior learning.

In exceptional circumstances, including direct entrance to a higher level than the start of the programme, a student may request that a fee reduction is considered after RPL has been approved. The student must make this request in writing and explain the reasons clearly. The request must include enough information for the College to consider the academic, financial and regulatory implications. The request, together with any relevant supporting information, will be referred to the Chief Finance Officer for consideration and approval.

Any fee reduction will be exceptional, considered on a case-by-case basis, and recorded to ensure consistency, transparency and appropriate financial oversight

a. New College Durham Awards

Recognition of Prior Learning may normally be considered for a minimum of one module. The maximum number of credits which can be claimed by a student is 60 credits of a Certificate of HE or 160 credits of a foundation degree programme. A student may apply for direct entry to Level 5 where they can evidence that they fully meet all Level 4 learning outcomes through recognition of prior learning. In this circumstance RPL of 120 Level 4 credits would be approved

Credits imported by RPL may not be used in calculating the classification of an award of a New College Durham. The classification of an award is calculated on the basis of the marks obtained from the modules taught and assessed at New College Durham using the appropriate formula specified in Section A of the Academic Regulations for the Validated Awards of New College Durham to weight the average marks.

In exceptional circumstances a student may be awarded partial RPL against a learning outcome. In such cases applicants may be required to undertake assessment activity to successfully demonstrate achievement of the remaining learning outcomes. In these circumstances any mark achieved will be graded out of the full marking range. The module will be weighted accordingly when using the appropriate formula specified in Section A of the Academic Regulations for the Award of Foundation Degree to weight the average marks to determine a classification of award.

This provision applies only where New College Durham can verify the currency, level, volume and relevance of the prior learning and where the application of partial RPL does not compromise the approved learning outcomes, academic standards or professional, statutory or regulatory body requirements of the award.

b. Open University Validated Programmes

A student may be awarded RPL (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 or 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%.

Recognition for prior learning (certified, experiential or uncertified) is not permitted at level 6 of a Bachelor's Degree or for the thesis/dissertation module, where students are expected to complete 120 credits in order to gain the award.

Recognition for prior learning (certified, experiential or uncertified) is not permitted for the thesis/dissertation module on a post-graduate programme.

Direct entry via stage exemption (exemption to stage of a programme without award of OU credit):

The RPL policy allows candidates to enter stage 2 or stage 3 of an undergraduate

qualification on the basis of completion of an appropriate certificated qualification from a recognised UK HE programme of study.

With stage exemption of this kind, it will be recorded on the student's transcript that stage exemption was awarded, but credit for the stage(s) from which the student was exempted would not be transferred to OU validated awards.

Performance in work for which an award of credit for prior learning has been made is not taken into account in the calculation of the final award.

c. Other Awarding Bodies

Refer to the specific awarding body's policy on RPL and where appropriate the Professional Statutory Regulatory Bodies (PSRB).

d. Higher and Degree Apprenticeships

The initial assessment process will recognise any prior learning with regard to the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) set out in the relevant apprenticeship standard, before the apprentice commences the training programme and measured

against the definitions of RPL within this policy. Prior learning will be recorded in the evidence pack, together with evidence of Level 2 English and maths, or their equivalencies. This will establish the 'starting point' against KSBs, that are based on the programme's learning outcomes. Initial assessment checks how much of the apprenticeship programme study/training content the apprentices will require in order to successfully complete the End Point Assessment.

A professional qualification e.g. CMI Level 5 can be accepted as part of the evidence to support a Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL), a potential student should provide evidence of previous academic study and other activity such as management or supervision.

If RPL is granted and some modules are exempt from an apprentice's training these modules should not be funded as they will not be considered new learning (only new learning can be funded). If RPL is granted, 12 months' minimum duration and 20% off-the-job training must still be met by the remaining programme elements.

3. Process

All RPL applications are scrutinised by the HE Approvals Committee (HEAC), a sub-committee of the HE Academic Standards and Quality Board.

Unless this is a late enrolment, the claim must have been determined and approved before the student is enrolled.

In a case of late enrolment a claim for RPL will need to be retrospectively approved by the HEAC. A student must be informed that their application for RPL will only be recognised once approved. It is advised for the case of a late enrolment that a student attends modules where RPL is being claimed until such time approval is confirmed.

Students must make sure that all evidence submitted for RPL is genuine, accurate and belongs to them. This includes certificates, transcripts, employer evidence, professional qualifications and any other supporting documents.

If the College has concerns that evidence may be false, altered, misleading or cannot be verified, the RPL application will be paused while checks are completed. The College may ask the student for further information or may contact the issuing institution, awarding body, employer or professional body to confirm the evidence.

If the evidence cannot be verified, or if it is found or reasonably suspected to be fraudulent or deliberately misleading, the RPL application will be rejected. The matter may also be considered under the relevant College student conduct, disciplinary, admissions, fitness to practise or academic misconduct procedure.

Successful RPL applications are registered against the student's record in the Student Management Information System (SMIS) which informs Assessment Board reports. RPL progression data is contained within programme level achievement data which is analysed as part of the annual monitoring process.

4. Review

This Policy will be under review annually and it will be formally reviewed every three years by SLT.

Changes are submitted for approval via the HE Academic Standards and Quality Board and reported to Academic Board.

The HE Development Unit (HEDU) reviews the RPL procedure alongside the RPL policy.

5. Student Entitlements

Under the terms of this policy all students at the College are entitled to:

- a. apply for RPL providing they meet the regulations of the awarding body, and apprenticeship and PSRB requirements where relevant;
- b. have made available to them prior to the commencement of their period of study, details of the RPL regulations and process that apply to their programme of study;
- c. appeal against the outcome of the RPL process on the grounds of non-observance of approved processes and/or improper use of the process.

6. Student Responsibilities

This policy requires students to fully acknowledge and actively engage in fulfilling their responsibilities by:

- a. making themselves familiar with the RPL regulations that apply to their programme of study;
- b. following College processes associated with RPL and submit applications within the required timescales;

- c. seeking support from appropriate College staff in a timely manner.

7. Teaching Staff Responsibilities

The policy requires teaching and support staff to ensure that:

- a. they have a detailed understanding of the regulations governing RPL;
- b. students are provided with details of the programme to enable them to apply for relevant RPL;
- c. they provide support and guidance to students seeking RPL.

8. College Management Responsibilities

College Management should ensure that:

- a. all College staff are conversant with this policy and the demands it places upon them;
- b. staff development is made available to staff to support them in implementing this policy and to understand the procedures which underpin the policy;
- c. the policy is implemented consistently in-line with awarding body requirements.

9. Standards by which the Success of this Policy can be Evaluated

The following standards/measures will be considered when evaluating the success of this policy:

- a. student feedback, including questionnaire responses, showing overwhelming evidence that students know what is expected of them and that they have received support and guidance from staff;
- b. positive reports from key stakeholders e.g. awarding bodies, external examiners on the conduct of process;
- c. staff feedback on the effectiveness of staff development opportunities.

10. Responsibility for Implementing this Policy

Responsibility for the implementation of this policy resides at all levels of the College specifically:

- a. the Principal and Chief Executive has overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy;
- b. the Vice Principals (responsible for Higher Education and Curriculum and Quality) and Heads of School are responsible for overseeing the implementation of Sections 4, 5 and 6;
- c. Curriculum Managers and Programme Leaders are responsible for ensuring that Programme Teams collaboratively address the requirements of this policy;
- d. teaching staff/assessors are responsible for meeting Students' entitlements as

described in Section 3;

- e. the Vice Principals are responsible for producing and presenting to the Principal a detailed staff training programme each year in order to meet the requirements of this policy statement.

11. Associated Documentation

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following supporting/related documentation:

- a. Recognition of Prior Learning Procedure (HEQMP 8/1)
- b. Application for Recognition of Prior Learning (HEQMP 8/1/1)
- c. HE Admissions Policy
- d. HE Admissions Appeals Procedure.