

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL)

1 Introduction

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the generic term used for the award of credit on the basis of demonstrated learning that has occurred at some time in the past. The term encompasses the recognition of prior certificated learning (known as RPCL) and the recognition of prior experiential learning (known as RPEL).

2 How credit gained/awarded might be used

- To provide entry with advanced standing (admission to a later stage or entry point of a particular course) to a Sheffield Hallam University award
- To provide some specific credit to be counted towards a Sheffield Hallam University award
- To gain exemption from specific modules within an approved University programme of study
- Credit awarded through the recognition of prior learning cannot be used to gain a Sheffield Hallam award in its entirety

3 The Approval Process

Decisions on whether prior learning may be accepted towards the credit requirements for a Sheffield Hallam University award are academic decisions. Each Faculty's Academic Board (or delegated authority) is responsible for considering and approving RPL matters relating to individual programmes of study (RPEL, RPCL, ISMs), including the verification, suitability, validation and delegation of authority to Admissions Tutors and/or Course Leaders to approve RPL claims in accordance with the above principles.

4 Feedback

Claimants will normally receive feedback on their claims from the relevant Faculty Board (or delegated authority) within 15 working days of their claim being submitted.

5 Monitoring and Review

The Faculty Academic Board is responsible for monitoring all RPL claims and for ensuring equitable consideration of claims. The external examiner scrutiny would take place at the Departmental Assessment Board. An annual review of RPL claims and students' progress and performance levels will be included in the Faculty annual RPL report to Academic Quality and Standards Executive Committee.

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR CERTIFICATED LEARNING (RPCL)

The University's regulations applying to RPCL are set out below.

1 DEFINITION

- 1.1 The recognition of prior certificated learning (RPCL) is a process whereby academic credit for learning that has been previously assessed and/or accredited at Higher Education (HE) level, through a formal course of study, it might¹ be used towards the credit requirements of a Sheffield Hallam University award. This is also sometimes known as credit transfer. Evidence to support a claim for prior certificated learning will involve a formal qualification or award or part of an award, with formal documentation such as a results transcript or formal certificate and/or evidence of assessment, as appropriate, from a University, College or Professional and/or Regulatory Body.
- 1.2 Through RPCL procedures, applicants to Sheffield Hallam University, or students already enrolled on Sheffield Hallam University courses, might be able to use credit gained from formal study and assessment elsewhere, or from within the University, to count towards a Sheffield Hallam University award or to transfer to a different University award. The recognition of prior certificated learning may take place either at the admissions stage of a Sheffield Hallam University programme or at any stage after enrolment.

Examples of ways in which credit derived from Prior Certificated Learning might be used:

- To provide entry to a Sheffield Hallam University award with advanced standing (admission to a later stage or entry point of a particular course) eg. an HND in a cognate discipline might allow direct entry to year 2 or 3 of a Sheffield Hallam University honours degree programme
- To provide some "specific"² credit to be counted towards a Sheffield Hallam University award, eg. relevant modules passed at another institution might replace the need to study the equivalent Sheffield Hallam University modules
- To provide entry and specific credit to be counted towards a Sheffield Hallam University award, eg. an HND in a cognate discipline may be required for entry to a one-year "top up" award of degree or honours Degree. The HND provides both direct entry to the one-year "top up" award and also provides the appropriate amount and level of credit equivalent to the first two years of an honours degree

Notes

¹ *The word 'might' is used in the context of the possibility of acceptance in the future rather than assuring the applicant of acceptance*

² *Two types of credit are widely recognised across the HE sector:*

- **General Credit:** *the overall volume and level of credit attached to quantifiable learning without this being related to a specific programme of study.*
- **Specific Credit:** *the specific volume and level of credit attached to a student's particular area of study in terms of its coherence, balance and progression.*

- Prior certificated learning might be recognised as being an equivalent alternative to the specific, required entry qualifications for a particular award (also known as recognition of prior certificated learning)

2 PRINCIPLES FOR RPCL CLAIMS

Credit awarded for prior certificated learning will be:

- i. Demonstrated by evidence that the credit awarded is a result of formal learning and assessment.
- ii. At a specified level and amount in accordance with the QCA National Qualifications Framework (NQF), the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and The National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom (NARIC) or equivalent.
- iii. Documented or confirmed, normally by an original formal results transcript and, if relevant, an award certificate issued by a nationally recognised chartered institution such as a University, College of Higher Education, or a Professional, Statutory and/or Regulatory Body.
- iv. Of appropriate format, content and learning outcomes for the credit amount and value assigned to it, and appropriate to its use as entry to or inclusion in the target award, or both. This may require Sheffield Hallam University to check documentation such as a course syllabus, learning outcomes, evidence of assessment or other reference material to confirm suitability or equivalence.
- v. Matched to the learning outcomes, level and credit value of a single, specific module (as a minimum), multiple modules or a whole level within a specific Sheffield Hallam University target award. This applies to undergraduate and postgraduate awards.
- vi. Timely in the context of the target award and developments of the subject discipline. The learning must have taken place recently enough, for there to be reasonable expectation by Sheffield Hallam University that the learning is relevant and current to the target award and subject discipline, and that the student can apply the prior learning to the target award. Decisions on currency and relevance will be made according to the discipline of the target award.
- vii. Recorded as RPCL derived credit on a student's results transcript.
- viii. Made in sufficient time to complete all RPCL procedures before the relevant Awards Assessment Board confirms a relevant Sheffield Hallam University award.
- ix. Be included in the credit calculation to determine eligibility to progress to the next level of a course, an intermediate or final award

Credit awarded for prior certificated learning will not:

1. Carry marks or grades from another awarding institution. Mark/grades will not be shown on Sheffield Hallam University transcripts, nor be taken into account for award classifications based on numerical calculations (eg. honours degree classification or Masters awards with Distinction) unless approved at validation and specified within the Definitive Programme Documents

2. Be used to gain an award in its entirety

3. MAXIMUM PERMITTED CREDIT FROM THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR CERTIFICATED LEARNING (RPCL)

Table 3.1

UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC AWARDS FRAMEWORK				
Award	AAF Total Credit Requirements for SHU Award	Maximum credit towards SHU Award from RPCL from another Institution	Minimum credit from RPCL awarded by another Institution	Minimum no. of credits to be studied at SHU at highest level/s within target award
Level 4 Awards				
University Cert of HE	120	80	20	40
BTEC HNC	120	80	20	40
CertEd	120	80	20	40
Level 5 Awards				
University Dip of HE	240	160	20	80
BTEC HND	240	160	20	80
Foundation Degree	240	160	20	80
Advanced Dip of HE in Nursing Studies	300	200	20	100
Level 6 Awards				
Ordinary Degree	300	200	20	100
Honours Degree	360	240	20	120
Graduate Certificate	60	40	20	20
Graduate Diploma	120	80	20	40

Table 3.2

POSTGRADUATE ACADEMIC AWARDS FRAMEWORK				
Award	AAF Total Credit Requirements for SHU Award	Max credit towards SHU Award from RPCL from another Institution	Minimum credit from RPCL awarded by another Institution	Minimum no. of credits to be studied at SHU at highest level/s within target award
Integrated Masters Degree	480	320	15	160
PGCE	60	40	20	20
Pg Cert	60	40	15	20
Pg Dip	120	80	15	40
MSc/MA/MB A etc	180	120	15	60

Notes on the Maximum Permitted Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning (RPCL)

1. The above maxima are based on the principle that at least **one third of the credit** required for a Sheffield Hallam University award must be studied at the University as part of a designed and validated programme of study. The maxima from RPCL may be waived, exceptionally, in the following circumstances, subject to approval:
 - (a) a student who has been awarded an ordinary degree (300 credits) by another institution and wishes to convert it to an honours degree, subject to successfully completing a minimum of 60 level 6 credits at Sheffield Hallam University (ie. exceptionally, credit in excess of two thirds is permitted on the basis of substantial study of a single, validated award for which a nationally recognised credit rating exists). In such a case, 300 out of 360 credits might be awarded via RPCL. Similarly, a student who has achieved an Advanced Diploma of HE in Nursing Studies (300 credits) and wishes to convert it to an honours degree might be able to do so, subject to availability of the relevant modules and subject to successful completion of a minimum of 60 level 6 credits at Sheffield Hallam University (ie. exceptionally, in this case 300 out of 360 credits might be awarded via RPCL).
 - (b) a student who gains entry to the final year of a three year honours degree programme with the maximum of 240 credits from prior certificated learning but later chooses, or is required, to exit at the ordinary degree stage of the programme (ie. exceptionally, 240 out of 300 credits might be awarded via RPCL). If all other requirements for the award of an ordinary degree have been met, eligible students are recognised as having achieved sufficient level 6 learning outcomes commensurate with the amount of credit required for the award of an ordinary degree.
 - (c) a student entering a one year honours “top-up” or conversion degree with the maximum of 240 credits from prior certificated learning, but who later chooses, or is required, to exit at the ordinary degree stage of the honours top-up programme (ie. exceptionally, an ordinary degree might be awarded after the student has successfully completed 60 level 6 credits). If all other requirements for the award of an ordinary degree have been met, eligible students are recognised as having achieved sufficient level 6 learning outcomes commensurate with the amount of credit required for the award of an ordinary degree.
2. Claims can only be made against whole modules, e.g. an RPCL claim for 20 credits has to be made against a relevant 20 credit module (20 credits is currently the minimum module size for

the majority of SHU undergraduate courses; 15 credits for postgraduate courses). It is not possible to claim credit from prior certificated learning for a portion of a SHU module.

3. When applying the above regulations, the credit volume and level requirements of the Academic Awards Framework, as they apply to each award, must also be met.
4. The above maxima may apply to claims involving a combination of prior certificated learning and prior experiential learning, or claims solely involving certificated or experiential learning.

4 CREDIT FOR LEARNING UNDERTAKEN WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY

- 4.1 Transfer between awards may be specified in Definitive Programme Documents. Where no such validated transfer “pathways” exist, students may seek approval to transfer between awards and apply for the whole, or part of, the credit already achieved within the University to be accredited within the context of, and against the learning outcomes of, the new target award. In some cases this may involve the use of higher level credit being substituted for lower level credit if, and where, appropriate. If a transfer is permissible there is no limit to the amount of credit from prior certificated learning that a student may transfer from one Sheffield Hallam University award to another, **provided that they are proceeding towards a higher award**
- 4.2 Where an applicant or current Sheffield Hallam University student has previously received a Sheffield Hallam University award, some or all of the credit from this prior certificated learning may be used towards a different Sheffield Hallam University award, provided the prior credit is relevant in the context of the new award and the award being sought is at a higher level (eg. a student who has achieved a Sheffield Hallam University ordinary degree and wishes to return at a later stage to convert it to an honours degree). NB: The above does not apply to students seeking another award at the same level of award they have previously achieved at the University - these cases are subject to the regulations concerning “multiple awards” at the same level (see 5 below).

5. MULTIPLE AWARDS AT THE SAME LEVEL

The maximum amount of credit derived from prior certified learning, whether undertaken within or outside the University, which may be transferred from one award to another award **at the same level** is limited to two thirds of the total in all cases (eg. a maximum of 240 credits from an existing honours degree could be awarded towards another honours degree, subject to RPCL approval procedures). The student’s new programme of study should add significantly to the knowledge and understanding previously acquired by the student and should not simply replicate the curriculum studied in the earlier award.

6 AWARD CLASSIFICATION AND THE USE OF NUMERICAL GRADES FROM PRIOR CERTIFICATED LEARNING

- 6.1 Credit awarded for Edexcel BTEC HN awards (awarded either by the University or by another institution) may be used to contribute towards the overall credit requirements for an honours degree, subject to approval of an RPCL claim. However, HN marks/grades will not be used in the calculation of an honours degree classification.
- 6.2 Credit awarded for prior certificated learning by other institutions will not carry marks or grades. Marks/grades will not be shown on Sheffield Hallam University transcripts and numerical grades will not be used in the calculation of an award classification (either Undergraduate or Postgraduate) unless approved at validation and specified within the Definitive Programme Documents.

- 6.3 Where the credit from an ordinary degree awarded by Sheffield Hallam University has been used towards a subsequent honours degree, relevant numerical grades attached to ordinary degree modules will be used in the calculation of an honours degree classification. In such cases, the University's Standard Assessment regulations for honours degree classification will apply.

7 EXCLUSIONS FROM RPCL GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND REGULATIONS

7.1 PSRB Restrictions on the use of RPCL and RPEL

Some awards may exclude the use of either prior certificated or prior experiential learning due to professional, statutory and/or regulatory body requirements or where an award is validated on the basis of requiring all students to study and be assessed for the full award, or where an award is validated on any other basis that does not permit, or restricts the use of RPCL.

7.2 Other Types of External Credit Not Defined as Prior Certificated Learning

Credit awarded elsewhere but which is not defined as prior certificated learning is outside the formal scope of these RPCL general principles and regulations. Examples are where Sheffield Hallam University students, **with the University's prior approval:**

- may study at another institution while registered for a Sheffield Hallam University award, where the external credit contributing towards the Sheffield Hallam University award is a normal element of the course (eg International Business or Language courses might stipulate or allow work or study outside the UK)
- study at another institution under a formal Exchange scheme (eg Erasmus) while registered for a Sheffield Hallam University award
- study at another institution on an ad-hoc basis, eg. a student who fails a module at the end of their Sheffield Hallam University course may wish to enrol on a similar module at another University nearer home, and if successful obtain a Sheffield Hallam University award

7.3 Course-specific Entry Requirements and Specially Approved Collaborative Articulation Arrangements not covered by this Policy

The principles and maximum amount of credit that may be awarded for successful claims for prior certificated or experiential learning (RPL) as outlined above, apply to **individual** students only. Where applicants with a particular qualification are to be admitted regularly with a standard amount of prior credit (also known as entry with advanced standing) the University expects such arrangements to be reflected in course-specific entry requirements presented at the point of course validation. Such 'standard' entry requirements will be approved in advance via appropriate quality procedures. Such arrangements apply where course entry requirements stipulate that holders of a specific, validated award and for which a nationally recognised credit rating exists (e.g. a BTEC HND award in a subject relevant to the specific SHU award), may permit entry to the later stages of a course with advanced standing.

- 7.4 Where such arrangements involve formal collaboration with an external provider, the University requires a formal articulation arrangement to be approved via collaborative approval procedures. In some cases this may involve an agreement to admit students who have successfully completed a course offered by an external provider resulting in the attainment of a qualification not generally recognised in the UK. In all cases, the overall amount of prior credit that may be recognised through a specially approved articulation arrangement will not exceed two thirds of the overall credit requirements for any SHU award, in line with the above RPL regulations. The

level and amount of credit that may be recognised from an external award leading to entry with advanced standing will be detailed in course Definitive Documents as part of course-specific entry requirements.

7.5 Translation of Marks

In the above examples the study and award of credit from elsewhere is approved in advance as part of a specifically approved award or programme; the award of specific credit is also agreed in advance, or awarded at the same time as, or after completion of, other study at the University. In such cases, it may be necessary to translate marks from study elsewhere into Sheffield Hallam University assessment marks, according to an approved marks translation formula. Where there are regular study arrangements for particular courses and with other institutions, the translation formula will be approved at validation and included in the course Definitive Documents.

Approved by Academic Board 29 April 2015

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING (RPEL)

The University's regulations applying to RPEL are set out below.

1 DEFINITION

- 1.1 The recognition of prior experiential learning (RPEL) is the process by which an individual's prior learning, gained from experience rather than formally assessed study, may be assessed and formally recognised to provide academic credit towards a target award.
- 1.2 Through the RPEL process, the University recognises that significant knowledge, skills and understanding can be developed in a range of contexts, as a result of learning opportunities found at work (paid and unpaid) and through a variety of individual activities and interests. It is the learning, and not experience alone, which is important.
- 1.3 Assessment of an RPEL claim is based on documented evidence of the learning achieved. If learning cannot be identified and demonstrated there is nothing to assess and a claim cannot be made. Where credit is awarded, this will be of the same value as credit gained within the University on a recognised programme of study, in accordance with the credit requirements of University's Academic Awards Framework. In considering a claim for RPEL, the University will seek to establish that the learning is:
 - valid and matches the level of learning required
 - verifiable (sufficient evidence is provided to demonstrate the learning achieved)
 - authentic (evidence that the learning has been achieved by the applicant)
 - current (the evidence provided should relate to current learning)

In assessing an RPEL claim, the University is responsible for:

- the format, content and conduct of the assessment process
 - confirmation of the specific credit value and level achieved
 - confirmation of the specific award to which the credit will contribute
 - ensuring the claim is moderated internally and externally as part of the University's processes
- 1.4 The University will consider claims for RPEL only when the credit sought is intended to contribute to a specific Sheffield Hallam University award.

Examples of ways in which credit derived from the Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning may be used:

- To provide entry with advanced standing (admission to a later stage or entry point of a particular course) to a Sheffield Hallam University award
- To provide some specific credit to be counted towards a Sheffield Hallam University award
- To gain exemption from specific modules within an approved University programme of study

2 PRINCIPLES FOR RPEL CLAIMS

- i. Credit may be awarded as a result of a formal assessment process by the University, in accordance with University procedures for the assessment of RPEL claims. Therefore credit derived from an RPEL claim is credit awarded by the University.
- ii. Credit awarded through informal and experiential learning will have equal value to that gained through formal certificated learning.
- iii. Claimants will be required to successfully complete a University provided, Recognition of Prior Learning' Module. This will ensure that claims are presented in the appropriate format and content.
- iv. Evidence to support a claim for credit can be demonstrated in a number of ways and includes:
 - portfolio/e-portfolio
 - structured interview/viva
 - workplace devised artefact

This list is indicative and other relevant and appropriate evidence, may be accepted. The evidence will be used to map against the learning outcomes of the module(s) being claimed for.

- v. Credit will be awarded at a specified level and amount in accordance with the University's credit requirements as set out in the Academic Awards Framework.
- vi. Claims will be matched to the learning outcomes, level and credit value of a specific module, multiple modules or a whole level within a specific Sheffield Hallam University target award.
- vii. Learning will be timely, in the context of the target award and the subject discipline. The learning must have taken place recently enough for there to be reasonable expectation by Sheffield Hallam University that the learning is relevant to the target award and the subject discipline, and that the student can apply the prior learning to the target award. Decisions on currency and relevance will be made according to the discipline of the target award.
- viii. Where an RPEL assessment results in learning outcomes and credit to be matched against a taught module any resulting credit will not contribute to any subsequent award classification (eg. honours degree classification or postgraduate awards "with distinction").
- ix. Credit derived from RPEL will be identified and recorded on a student's transcript.
- x. Credit derived from RPEL will be accredited in multiples of 5 credit points, with minimum value of 10 credit points. This applies to undergraduate and postgraduate level.

3 MAXIMUM PERMITTED CREDIT FROM THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING (RPEL)

Table 3.1

UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC AWARDS FRAMEWORK			
Award	AAF Total Credit Requirements for SHU Award	Maximum credit towards SHU Award from an RPEL Claim	Minimum no. of credits to be studied at SHU at highest level/s within target award
Level 4 Awards			
University Cert of HE	120	80	40
BTEC HNC	120	80	40
CertEd	120	80	40
Level 5 Awards			
University Dip of HE	240	160	80
BTEC HND	240	160	80
Foundation Degree	240	160	80
Advanced Dip of HE in Nursing Studies	300	200	100
Ordinary Degree	300	200	100
Level 6 Awards			
Honours Degree	360	240	120
Graduate Certificate	60	40	20
Graduate Diploma	120	80	40

Table 3.2

POSTGRADUATE ACADEMIC AWARDS FRAMEWORK			
Award	AAF Total Credit Requirements for SHU Award	Maximum credit towards SHU Award from an RPEL Claim	Minimum no. of credits to be studied at SHU at highest level/s within target award
Integrated Masters Degree	480	320	160
PGCE	60	40	20
Pg Cert	60	40	20
Pg Dip	120	80	40
MSc/MA/MBA etc	180	120	60

Notes on the Maximum Permitted Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)

1. The above maxima are based on the principle that at least **one third of the credit** required for a Sheffield Hallam University award must be studied at the University as part of a designed and validated programme of study. Unlike the recognition of prior certificated learning, credit gained from a claim for prior experiential learning is assessed and awarded by Sheffield Hallam University. The maxima from RPEL may be waived, exceptionally, in the following circumstances, subject to approval:
 - (a) a student who gains entry to the final year of a three year honours degree programme with the maximum of 240 credits from prior experiential learning but later chooses, or is required, to exit at the ordinary degree stage of an honours programme (ie. 240 out of 300 credits may be awarded via RPEL). If all other requirements for the award of an ordinary degree have been met, eligible students are recognised as having achieved sufficient level 6 learning outcomes commensurate with the amount of credit required for the award of an ordinary degree.
 - (b) a student entering a one year honours “top-up” or conversion degree with the maximum of 240 credits from prior experiential learning but who later chooses, or is required, to exit at the ordinary degree stage of the honours top-up programme (ie. exceptionally, an ordinary degree may be awarded after the student has successfully completed 60 level 6 credits at the University). If all other requirements for the award of an ordinary degree have been met, eligible students are recognised as having achieved sufficient level 6 learning outcomes commensurate with the amount of credit required for the award of an ordinary degree.
2. Claims can only be made against whole modules, e.g. an RPEL claim for 20 credits has to be made against a relevant 20 credit module (20 credits is currently the minimum module size for the majority of SHU undergraduate courses; 15 credits for postgraduate courses). It is not possible to claim credit from prior experiential learning for a portion of a SHU module.
3. When applying the above regulations, the credit volume and level requirements of the Academic Awards Framework, as they apply to each award, must also be met.
4. The above maxima may apply to claims involving a combination of prior experiential learning and prior certificated learning, or claims solely involving experiential or certificated learning.

4 APPLICATIONS FOR ADVANCED STANDING

4.1 Professional doctorates

Applicants who wish to transfer their registration to Sheffield Hallam University may be considered for advanced standing. Entry to the research phase of a professional doctorate programme will depend on the applicant's recent study or experience. These programmes of study normally comprise of four complementary studies modules, studied during the first two years of the programme, where candidates are taught in a cohort. Applicants, who have already completed the equivalent of these modules at another university, may gain advanced standing entry to the research phase of the programme, which starts in year 3.

Applicants must also show evidence of having the necessary range of skills to enable them to successfully complete the research phase of the programme within the specified regulatory timeframe.

4.2 MPhil/PhD

An applicant seeking to transfer their research degree registration to Sheffield Hallam University from another UK Higher Education Institution is required to provide evidence of their timely progress and attainment at the requisite level. The evidence will include a copy of the applicant's annual progression/assessment report giving details of: the aims and objectives of the research project; the establishment of an appropriate methodology; a literature review and a statement of intended contribution to the relevant subject discipline. This is to ensure the applicant is performing at the appropriate level and is able to complete a successful thesis within the specified regulatory timeframe.

Any suitable applicant who seeks to transfer to a Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) research degree programme prior to successfully completing an interim upgrade assessment at their previous institution will be required to undertake such an assessment at SHU. The deadline for this assessment will be agreed as part of the admissions process. The purpose of this assessment is to ensure that the applicant is performing at the appropriate level and is in a position to successfully complete their thesis within the specified regulatory timeframe.

An applicant may seek to transfer their research degree registration to the University from a non-UK University. To be considered applicants will need to provide evidence that they are performing at the appropriate level and are able to complete a successful thesis within the specified regulatory timeframe.

Approved by Academic Board 29 April 2015