

Policy and Procedure for the Recognition of Prior Learning

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to set out the University's approach to the formal recognition of learning that has been undertaken elsewhere and the process by which this prior learning could be used to contribute towards the credit requirements of a Birmingham City University award.
- 1.2 The University's Academic Regulations defines the 'Recognition of Prior Learning' (RPL) as follows:

'The process through which students can be admitted with credit to a particular undergraduate or postgraduate course through the formal recognition of prior certificated learning (RPCL) or prior experiential learning (RPEL). Students seeking admission with prior learning based on RPCL or RPEL are not permitted to register for a course leading to a University award until such admission has been approved in writing. RPL only takes place prior to entry and retrospective applications will not be considered.'
- 1.3 RPL is an integral part of the University's approach to widening access, by providing applicants and current students with flexible routes into and through courses at Birmingham City University and enabling them to use previous learning towards a BCU award.
- 1.4 This policy and its associated procedures have been designed to take full account of the Expectations for standards and quality and the Core Practices within the revised UK Quality Code in respect of the recognition of prior learning.

2. Principles

- (i) All RPL claims must be submitted and be approved prior to the start of the relevant learning on the course. Retrospective claims for RPL will therefore not be considered;
- (ii) Responsibility rests with the applicant/student to make the RPL claim; however it is the responsibility of the University to advertise and promote the RPL process to applicants/students;
- (iii) 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;
- (iv) Applicants will not normally be permitted to re-use credit from a previous completed award towards an equivalent or lower award in order to avoid the double-counting of credit [*n.b. credits achieved on a PG Cert or PG Dip award can be re-used for entry to a Master's degree. Although all awards are positioned at Level 7 of the FHEQ, the awards are not considered to be equivalent for the purposes of RPL*];

- (v) No marks are awarded for credit achieved via the RPL process, other than for the recognition and transfer of credits previously achieved at BCU, in which case the marks can be applied to the award the student is admitted to or registered for where this is considered appropriate. Classification of awards is based solely on credit achieved and marks/grades awarded by BCU.
- (vi) Credits acquired from a previous BCU qualification may normally only be used once as RPL for entry onto any future BCU qualification;
- (vii) RPL cannot be used to gain a BCU award in its entirety. A minimum of one-third of the credit required for conferment of the target award must be achieved as part of an approved course of study at BCU. For certain awards the requirement will be higher than one-third. Maximum credit limits are prescribed for each BCU award in Annexe 1. There is no limit on the amount of BCU credit a student may transfer from one BCU award to another, provided they are proceeding towards a higher award (see section 6 below) and the transfer is permissible and appropriate;
- (viii) The smallest volume of learning that can be submitted for RPL is one module (e.g. 20 credits). Claims cannot be made against part of a module and RPL will only be approved against current modules within a course of study. Modules approved under the University's Framework for the Approval of Flexible and Work-based Learning may be composed of smaller units of learning and RPL claims for credit in respect of these smaller units are permissible;
- (ix) Consideration must be given to the currency of the learning being considered via the RPL claim (see also 7.5.2 below). BCU does not set specific limits on the currency of previously-earned credit; however sector practice shows that five years is normally used as an indicator of currency. In practice, decisions will depend on the discipline area and will be taken by Associate Deans (with responsibility for quality assurance) with advice of Admissions Tutors informing decision making as appropriate;
- (x) All RPL claims are considered on the basis of the match of learning outcomes, curriculum content, level of study and credit value of the prior learning against that of the relevant BCU provision. Consideration of RPL claims is a matter of academic judgement, although claimants are normally required to demonstrate a match of at least 80% of the relevant learning outcomes for credit to be awarded;
- (xi) RPL is not appropriate for every course/module offered by BCU. The award of credit via RPL and/or entry with advanced standing may be prohibited or limited for certain courses/modules, for example due to Professional, Statutory and/or Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements.

3. Definitions

3.1 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) incorporates the following definitions:

- Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning (RPCL): this relates to learning gained through a previous course studied at higher education level that has been formally assessed and credits awarded in accordance with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ).

- Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL): this relates to learning achieved outside a formal learning environment. It may include learning gained through professional work experience, voluntary work or as part of a training course for which no formal qualification was awarded. Where the learning is recognised as appropriate in relation to the specific BCU award, a proportion of credit at the appropriate FHEQ level is awarded to the student.
- Recognition of prior learning undertaken within the University (credit transfer): this relates to learning gained through a previous course or modules studied at BCU that have been formally assessed and credits awarded in accordance with the FHEQ. It enables this credit to be recognised and included towards the credit requirements for a course or between courses at BCU.

4. Scope

4.1 This policy applies to RPCL RPEL and credit transfer used in the following situations:

- During the admissions process, to enable applicants to apply for a BCU course with credit for certain module(s) where their previous learning, either certificated or experiential, has been formally mapped against the module(s) at BCU;
- During the admissions process, to enable applicants to apply for a course with advanced standing i.e. to enter with credit for an entire level of a course or to enter partway through a level having been granted credit for the previous level(s) and partial credit for that level;
- To transfer credit for prior learning undertaken at BCU during the admissions process, when registering for an award or when transferring between BCU awards. Transfer of BCU credit can take place retrospectively and after enrolment but is subject to the timescales specified in the Academic Regulations in respect of internal course transfers. A student undertaking stand-alone modules may also register for an award and transfer credit for prior learning that forms part of that award outside of the standard enrolment periods.

4.2 This policy cannot be used in the following situations:

- After enrolment, for students who wish to make a retrospective claim for RPL towards credit on their current course;
- Articulation Agreements – ‘Articulation’ is used to describe a formal credit-rating and transfer agreement between the University and a partner organisation whereby the University makes a judgement about the extent to which an award of the partner organisation will be accepted in partial fulfilment of the University's requirements for a given award. Students who successfully complete the partner's award are guaranteed entry or entry with advanced standing to a University course;
- Formal direct entry admissions arrangements through which applicants holding specified qualifications e.g. a Higher National award or a Foundation Degree are granted direct entry to a particular level of a course. The amount of credit that such entry qualifications will attract and the precise entry point on the University course will be decided as part of the approval/periodic review of the University course.

5. Admission with academic credit for part of a course

- 5.1 Decisions about claims for RPL are always a matter of academic judgement, and may be influenced by the requirements of any relevant Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs). Certain courses may not permit RPL or may place lower limits than those specified in Annexe 1, for example due to PSRB requirements.
- 5.2 RPL claims will only be successful where the applicant can provide evidence that the learning outcomes of the module(s) or work experience they have previously undertaken are equivalent (in terms of level, content and credit value) to the learning outcomes of the Birmingham City University module(s) from which they are claiming exemption.
- 5.3 There are specific limits on the amount of RPL credit permitted for each award of the University which are detailed in Annexe 1. These limits are in place to maintain the academic standards of the University's awards and are regularly reviewed by the Learning, Teaching, Assessment and Quality Committee.
- 5.4 The minimum amount of credit that can be considered for admission with academic credit is one module and RPL credit can only be awarded for whole modules (see also section 2 (viii) above).
- 5.5 The marks for credits achieved elsewhere may not be used towards the classification of the final award at Birmingham City University. The final classification or differentiation of the award will be based solely upon the marks achieved in modules studied on the Birmingham City University course (see also section 2 (v) above).
- 5.6 Prior learning completed outside BCU that has been formally recognised by the University is identified as "RPL" on the transcript issued to students on completion of the award.

6. Credit for Learning Undertaken within the University (credit transfer)

- 6.1 Existing BCU 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. If a transfer is permissible and appropriate, there is no limit on the amount of credit from prior learning a student may transfer from one BCU award to another, provided they are proceeding towards a higher award and there is evidence that the course learning outcomes will be achieved (e.g., a student who has achieved a BCU PG Dip and wishes to return at a later stage to convert it to a Master's degree). As set out in the principles above, marks/grades awarded by BCU will normally be transferred with the credit.
- 6.2 Where an applicant or current BCU student has previously received a BCU award, some or all of the credit from this prior certificated learning may be used towards a different BCU award, provided the prior credit is relevant in the context of the new award and the award being sought is at a higher level (e.g. a student who has achieved a Dip HE at BCU wishes to return to convert it to an honours degree). In such cases, students will not be required to surrender or return any previously awarded certificates or transcripts.

- 6.3 Where a student has undertaken stand-alone modules at BCU (e.g. for the purposes of continuing professional development) and subsequently wishes to register for an award which includes some or all of the successfully completed modules, for which credit has already been awarded, the credit can be recognised and applied to the award at the point of registration where appropriate. Marks and grades will be used for the purposes of classification. Credit can only be recognised and applied to existing approved BCU awards; it is not possible for students to accumulate credit for individual modules and then request to receive an award if those credits do not constitute a coherent existing award (e.g. a student cannot complete 60 Level 7 credits of stand-alone modules and request a PG Cert award, unless those 60 credits can be mapped against the learning outcomes an existing award or the successfully completed modules are all constituent modules of an existing PG Cert award).

7. Avoiding the Double Counting of Credit

- 7.1 Credit from a complete award cannot normally be used towards another award at the same or a lower level e.g. credit awarded on a completed Bachelor's degree with honours cannot subsequently be used as credit toward a different Bachelor's degree with honours course. The use of Level 6 credits as the basis of a claim for credit on a further Level 6 course is exceptionally permitted in specific post-qualifying top-up courses in the Faculty of Health, Education and Life Sciences where the courses leading to the awards are closely linked. Detail of the awards concerned and the specific conditions are set out in Appendix B (derogations) of the Academic Regulations. A further exception applies to Level 7 credit where credits achieved on PG Cert and PG Dip awards can be re-used for entry to a Master's degree even though the credit is at the same level (see also section 2 (iv) above).

8. Roles and Responsibilities and the RPL Process and Transfer of BCU Credit

A flowchart showing the RPL process is included at Annexe 2 for ease of reference.

8.1 Admissions Tutors

Admissions Tutors will be responsible for discussing with the applicant the suitability of an RPL claim, taking into consideration the applicant's prior learning. In doing so Admissions Tutors will need to consider the impact on the applicant of not participating in the learning experience of the modules for which RPL is sought. Admissions Tutors, working with Faculty RPL Co-ordinators (where appointed) and Associate Deans (with responsibility for recruitment) will complete the relevant RPL forms, including mapping, to show how prior learning maps against the module outcomes of the receiving award. Detailed mapping of prior learning where the learning has been undertaken and credit awarded by BCU will not be required in most straightforward internal credit transfers. For example, a student transferring from one course to a cognate course which includes the same modules the student has already completed or a student registering for an award with BCU credit achieved for modules that form part of the award they are registering for. More complex transfers where prior credit/learning is not directly comparable would require a mapping to show how the prior learning maps against the module learning outcomes of the receiving award. Admissions Tutors will also be expected to ensure that all RPL application forms are completed correctly, and evidence of prior learning has been received and included prior to signing them off for onward (final) approval by the Associate Dean (responsible for quality assurance) (see 8.2 and 8.3 below).

8.2 Associate Deans (with responsibility for quality assurance)

Associate Deans (responsible for quality assurance) in conjunction with Associate Deans (responsible for recruitment) will be responsible for monitoring the operation of the RPL process within the Faculty and supporting Admissions Tutors engaged in the initial assessment of claims. Associate Deans (quality assurance) will be expected to issue final approval to an RPL claim (including internal credit transfers) and may not delegate this responsibility. Where appropriate a Faculty RPL Co-ordinator, where one has been appointed, will assist the Associate Dean in carrying out this responsibility.

8.3 Faculty RPL Co-ordinator (where appointed)

Associate Deans (responsible for quality assurance) may wish to appoint a Faculty RPL Co-ordinator to assist with the day-to-day management of the process within the Faculty. This may be particularly beneficial in Faculties that receive large numbers of claims for RPL each year. The Faculty RPL Co-ordinator will be responsible for supporting Associate Deans to effectively monitor the operation of the procedure within the faculty and providing advice and guidance to Admissions Tutors engaged in the assessment of evidence and completion of RPL applications for onward submission to Associate Deans. The RPL Co-ordinator may also be expected to provide guidance to prospective students on the evidence required to support an RPL claim.

8.4 Timing of claims

Requests for admission with academic credit (RPL) must be made at the application and offer stage and must be approved prior to the start of the course (see also section 2 (i) above). Transfer of BCU credit can take place retrospectively and after enrolment but is subject to the timescales specified in the Academic Regulations in respect of internal course transfers. A student undertaking stand-alone modules may also register for an award and transfer credit for prior learning that forms part of that award outside of the standard enrolment periods.

8.5 Submission of a claim

8.5.1 Responsibility for making a claim for RPL rests with the applicant. The applicant will be required to submit appropriate evidence on a module-by-module basis to support the claim. Examples of evidence required are listed in section 8.6 below.

8.5.2 It is the responsibility of the Associate Dean (responsible for quality assurance) and/or the Faculty RPL Co-ordinator, where appointed, to provide advice and guidance to Admissions Tutors and course teams with regard to the submission and assessment of claims of RPL. The Associate Dean must also identify suitably experienced member(s) of the Faculty (e.g. Admissions Tutors) to advise applicants on the preparation of evidence for their RPL claim, where required.

8.5.3 Guidance for applicants on submitting an RPL claim will be provided at the admission and offer stage via the online application form and will cover the following areas:

- a brief outline of what RPL is and its potential benefits. It should be clear that the process involves recognition of learning and not the number of years' experience;
- an explanation of how to pursue a claim, with guidance on the scope and nature of the evidence to be submitted;

- information about the nature and amount of evidence that will be required, requirements about currency of evidence and any requirement for independent verification of evidence;
- a brief explanation of the roles and responsibilities of those involved with the process including who to contact for more detailed advice and support;
- details of arrangements for the submission of the claim, including the deadline;
- the timescale for considering the claim and the arrangements for notifying the applicant of the outcome;
- arrangements for the re-submission of unsuccessful claims;
- advice about the demands of the subject content and the level together with the learning outcomes so that the grounds for recognition of the learning are transparent;
- an explanation of the implications for calculation of the differentiation or classification of an award.

8.5.4 The completed RPL form must be submitted, along with evidence/appropriate work, via the University's applicant portal. The claim and supporting evidence will then be reviewed initially by the relevant Admissions Tutor and, if deemed suitable and appropriately evidenced, will be submitted to the Associate Dean (responsible for quality assurance) for approval.

8.6 Examples of evidence required for RPL

Applicants will be asked to produce evidence in support of their claim for RPL as set out under 8.5.1 above. Applicants may also be asked to attend a meeting to discuss the evidence and the timescale for its submission.

Evidence may be presented in a number of formats which will be determined by the Admissions Tutor in conjunction with the Faculty RPL Co-ordinator (where appointed) and the Associate Dean (with responsibility for quality assurance) in each case. Evidence should be presented in such a way as to clearly identify how the learning outcomes of the module(s) for which credit is sought have been met. If the claim is for credit for several modules, the evidence should be presented in such a way that it is clearly signposted to the relevant modules. Where students are transferring credit achieved at BCU from one course to another or registering for an award and transferring credit at that point the evidence will normally be available within the student records systems (SITS). If this is not the case, the student would be required to provide evidence such as a transcript and/or award certificate.

8.6.1 Certificates/module specification(s)

For RPCL claims, applicants will be asked to submit a copy of the certificate/transcript relating to the module(s) which they wish to be recognised. They will also be asked to submit a copy of the module specification and/or syllabus, wherever possible including details of the learning outcomes and subject content, to enable the Admissions Tutor to clearly identify whether the module(s) studied matches the learning outcomes of the module(s) to be recognised.

8.6.2 Portfolios (RPEL)

Applicants may be asked to prepare a portfolio of evidence to support their claim. This should contain examples of work such as reports, projects, software, presentations, publications, etc. related to the module(s) with which they wish to be accredited.

The applicant should be offered guidance on how to prepare a portfolio and the importance of clearly showing how the relevant module learning outcomes are evidenced by the contents of the portfolio.

8.6.3 Interviews

Applicants may be asked to attend a special RPL interview with the Admissions Tutor in order to explore the nature and extent of their learning in relation to their claim. This may be particularly valuable when judging an RPEL claim based on learning achieved outside a formal learning environment.

8.6.4 Evidence through assessment

In some circumstances it may be appropriate to formally assess an applicant's learning through examination, tests or assignments in order to provide appropriate evidence.

8.7 Assessment of RPL claims

8.7.1 The applicant's claim against the module learning outcomes (and level descriptors, where appropriate) will be assessed by the relevant Admissions Tutor to determine whether the claim for RPL is appropriate prior to submission to the Associate Dean (responsible for quality assurance) for approval.

8.7.2 In assessing claims of RPL, the Admissions Tutor will evaluate evidence against the following criteria:

Authenticity	that the applicant completed what is claimed
Directness	that the learning was specific and can be identified and categorised
Breadth	that the learning was within a context understood by the applicant and is applicable in other situations
Standard	that the learning was at a level appropriate to the target award
Relevance and currency	<p>That the learning is relevant and sufficient to allow the applicant to benefit from the proposed course of study or, where appropriate, that the student has kept up to date with recent developments in the field.</p> <p>Where applicants have a collection of credits but not a completed award, the time limit on those that can be used towards a current award, even though the credits may have been formally ratified, will be determined by professional requirements and common practice within the discipline (see also 2(ix) above in relation to currency of credit).</p>

	<p>Prior certificated learning which took place more than 10 years ago cannot normally be used towards a current award unless applicants also submit a reflective profile demonstrating that they have maintained and updated their knowledge and skills in line with current theory and practice to update these credits.</p>
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8.7.4 The Admissions Tutor will ensure that the decision on the outcome of the RPL claim is formally recorded against the applicant's record in the student record system, thereby ensuring that the requisite credit awarded through RPL is applied to the record and, where relevant, a pro-rata tuition fee can be calculated and communicated to the applicant. If the claim is rejected, the reasons for rejection must be clearly stated in the student record system. The applicant will be invited to offer further evidence if applicable.

8.8 Determining the outcome of the claim

8.8.1 The Admissions Tutor's recommendation, together with the RPL claim and supporting evidence, will be submitted to the Associate Dean (with responsibility for quality assurance) for formal approval. The final decision will be held against the applicant's record within the online applicant portal.

8.8.2 The Admissions team will notify the applicant of the RPL decision via the online applicant portal. If the RPL claim is unsuccessful, feedback will be given to the applicant to explain the reason for the decision and to talk through, where appropriate, the possibility of resubmitting the claim, offering guidance on how the claim could be improved. The applicant should also be informed of the right to appeal.

8.9 Right of Appeal

8.9.1 Applicants who have made an unsuccessful RPL claim before enrolling have the right to make a complaint through the Admissions Complaints Procedure on the grounds set out in that Procedure.

9. Fees

9.1 For all successful RPL claims, the tuition fee for the relevant academic year will be recalculated on a pro-rata basis based on the proportion of credit applied via RPL (rounded up to nearest £1) and the final figure will be sent to the applicant as part of their individual admissions offer.

10. Quality Assurance

10.1 The Associate Dean (responsible for quality assurance), supported by Faculty RPL Co-ordinators where appointed, is responsible for monitoring all RPL claims, ensuring equitable consideration of claims and the sharing of good practice.

10.2 At its Semester two meeting each School Learning, Teaching, Assessment and Quality Committee should receive a report which shows, by course:

- the number of RPL applications received;
- the type of claim (RPCL or RPEL);

- the numbers granted and refused;
- in each case where an application was granted, the amount of credit awarded as a result and in the case of successful RPCL claims, the qualification which has been accredited.

10.3 These data should be discussed by the Committee and, where appropriate, by the Faculty Learning, Teaching, Assessment and Quality Committee (FLTAQC). The Faculty must satisfy itself that criteria for RPL are being fairly and consistently applied, and are not unintentionally growing more or less stringent over time. Issues requiring Faculty / University level attention should be reported through to the Faculty / University Learning, Teaching, Assessment and Quality Committee, as appropriate.

11. Collaborative courses

11.1 Partner colleges are required to follow the RPL procedures used by the link faculty for the course and must discuss with the link tutor all applications for entry with non-standard qualifications and applications for entry with credit. The Link Tutor's recommendation, together with the RPL claim and supporting evidence, will be submitted to the Associate Dean (with responsibility for quality assurance) for formal approval.

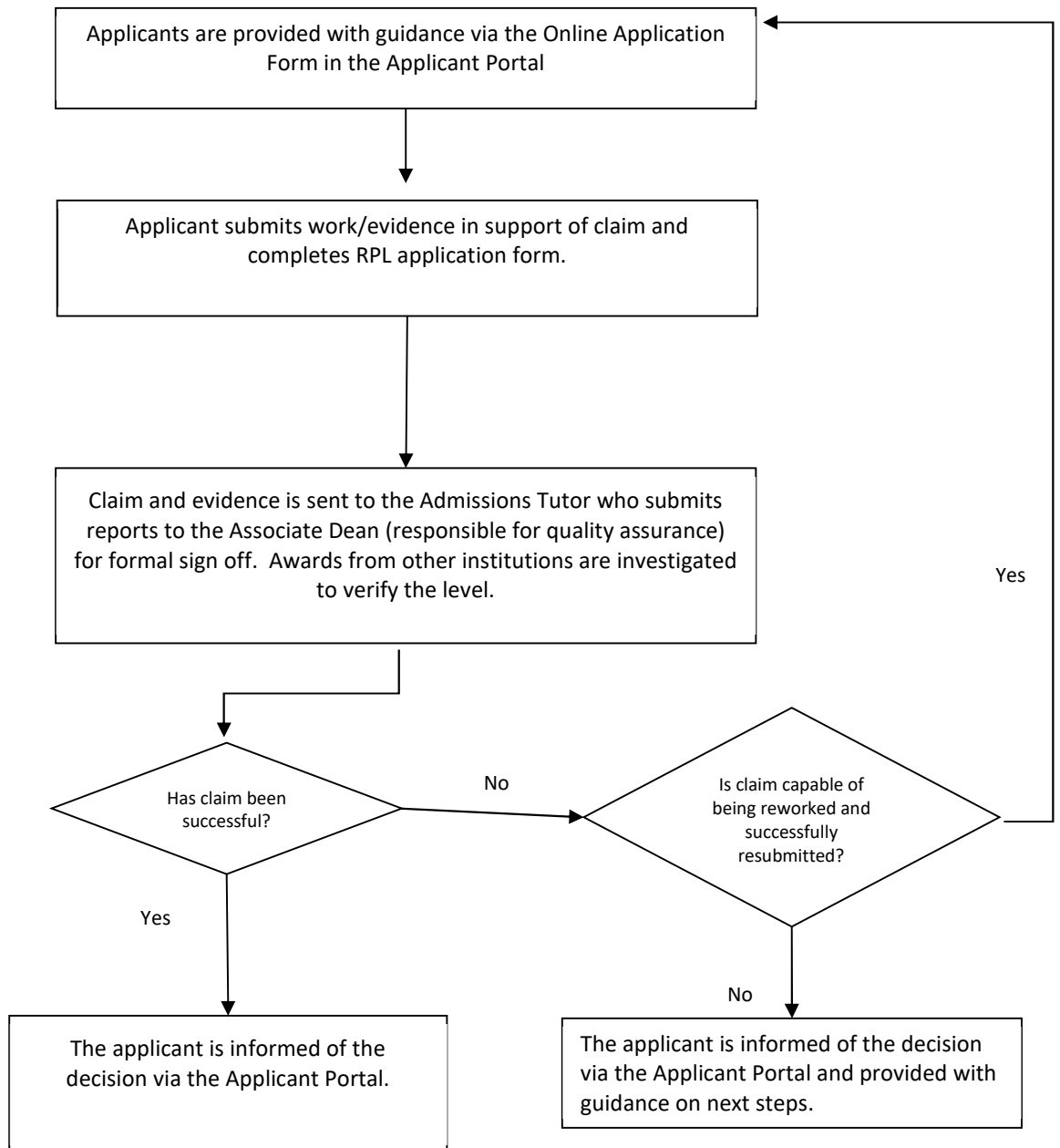
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) – Maximum Credit Limits¹

	FHEQ Level of Final Award	Total Credit	RPL Limits	
Award			Maximum Credit Permitted via RPL	Minimum Volume of BCU Credit to be Achieved for the Award
Foundation Certificate	N/A	120	60 Level 3	60 Level 3
Undergraduate Awards				
Certificate of Higher Education	4	120	60 Level 4	60 Level 4
Higher National Certificate	4	120	60 Level 4	60 Level 4
Diploma of Higher Education	5	240	120 Level 4	120 Level 5
Higher National Diploma	5	240	120 Level 4	120 Level 5
Foundation Degree	5	240	120 Level 4	120 Level 5
Bachelor's Degree	6	300	120 Level 4 80 Level 5	40 Level 5 60 Level 6
Bachelor's Degree [BMus]	6	360	120 Level 4 120 Level 5	120 Level 6
Bachelor's Degree (with Honours)	6	360	120 Level 4 120 Level 5	120 Level 6
Bachelor's Degree (with Honours) [BMus (Hons)]	6	480	120 Level 4 120 Level 5	240 Level 6
Integrated Master's Degree	7	480	120 Level 4 120 Level 5	120 Level 6 120 Level 7
Graduate Certificate	6	60	20 Level 6	40 Level 6
Graduate Diploma	6	120	60 Level 6	60 Level 6
Top-up Degrees				
Bachelor's Degree	6	60 [of 300]	Not permitted	Not applicable
Bachelor's Degree (with Honours)	6	120 [of 360]	Not permitted	Not applicable
Professional Studies and Post-Experience Awards				
Certificate in Professional Studies	4	60	20 Level 4	40 Level 4
Diploma in Professional Studies	5	60	20 Level 5	40 Level 5
Diploma in Education and Training	5	120	60 Level 5	60 Level 5
Advanced Diploma in Professional Studies	6	60	20 Level 6	40 Level 6
Postgraduate (Taught) Awards				
Postgraduate Certificate	7	60	20 Level 7	40 Level 7
Postgraduate Certificate in Education	7	60	20 Level 6 or 7	40 Level 6 or 7

¹ The maximum credit limits above apply to the recognition of prior learning completed outside BCU. Recognition of prior learning undertaken within the University (credit transfer) is not subject to these limits – in accordance with the provisions set out in 2 (vii) above.

Postgraduate Certificate in Education [Post-Compulsory Education and Training]	7	120	60 Level 7	60 Level 7
Postgraduate Diploma	7	120	60 Level 7	60 Level 7
Postgraduate Diploma in Education	7	120	60 Level 7	60 Level 7
Master's Degree	7	180	120 Level 7	60 Level 7
Master's Degree [MArch and MMus]	7	240	120 Level 7	120 Level 7
Master's Degree [MFA]	7	360 ²	120 Level 7	240 Level 7
Master's Degree [MFA]	7	300	120 Level 7	180 Level 7

² The final intake for the 360 credit version of the MFA was September 2018. From the September 2019 intake it was replaced by the 300 credit version shown directly below it in the table.

Flow Chart of the RPL Procedure

Document Control Statement

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Division / Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing and Communications – Recruitment, Partnerships and Admissions Quality Enhancement and Inclusion – Quality Assurance and Enhancement 		
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Amendments since approval	Detail of revision	Date	Approved by
	Recognition of BCU credit for transfer purposes added to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Section 2 (Principles) Section 3 (Definitions) Section 4 (Scope) <p>New Section 6 (Credit for Learning Undertaken within the University: credit transfer) added.</p> <p>Minor editorial revisions to other sections to reflect the addition of credit transfer.</p>	19 January 2022	LTAQC (19 January 2022) ARPC (3 February 2022)