

**MANUAL OF ACADEMIC REGULATIONS  
AND PROCEDURES 2020-21**

**RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING**

**(APPLICABLE FROM SEPTEMBER 2020)**

Academic Standards and Quality

MARP 2020-21

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**PL 1 PURPOSE, DEFINITIONS AND SCOPE**

PL 1.1 This policy and associated procedures provide guidance on the University's requirements for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) which has been undertaken elsewhere and (where applicable) on the award of Lancaster credit for this learning. They enable the University to assure itself that credit for such learning is comparable to that achieved through the teaching and learning activities required for specified modules for the Lancaster University programme on which the student will be registered.

PL 1.2 These procedures apply to individual students and not to institutional arrangements for the recognition of credit (see PL 1.6). They cover those cases where an individual wishes to receive credit for one or more modules that form part of a programme of study leading to a Lancaster qualification on the grounds that they have already achieved, via the prior learning described in PL 1.3, the required learning outcomes for the Lancaster module(s). For the different types of prior learning the procedural outcome is either:

- (a) the recognition of UK credit gained elsewhere, described as '**credit transfer**'; or
- (b) the award of Lancaster credit for cases of 'certificated learning' or 'experiential learning'; described here as the **accreditation of prior learning (APL)** for the former and the **accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL)** for the latter.

In all cases the credit is counted towards the relevant Lancaster qualification.

PL 1.3 The prior learning to be considered will fall into one or more of the following categories.

- (a) **Credit transfer:** formal learning which has led to the award of credit or qualifications by a UK higher education degree-awarding body, in accordance with the relevant higher education qualifications framework.<sup>1</sup>
- (b) **Certificated learning (APL):** formal learning at a higher education level but which has not led to the award of credit or qualifications positioned on the relevant higher education qualifications framework<sup>2</sup>; for example some professional development awards, employment-based awards or non-UK awards.
- (c) **Experiential learning (APEL):** informal learning achieved through experience and practice (for example through employment or voluntary activities) rather than through a certificated programme of study or training.

PL 1.4 Where applicants present evidence of academic attainment that would equip them for direct entry into the second year of a Lancaster undergraduate programme of study; i.e. they have completed 120 credits (or the equivalent) at the appropriate level at

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<sup>1</sup> [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#) (QAA Quality Code, Part A, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> As above.

another UK higher education institution, they will be considered jointly by the Undergraduate Admissions Office and the relevant Admissions Tutor.

PL 1.5 Requests for RPL are normally made at the same time as an application to study on the programme is made. For an undergraduate application the Undergraduate Admissions Office will act as a clearing house for this request, referring on to the department's Admissions Tutor who will direct this to the relevant personnel in the department (see section PL 3.2). A request from a postgraduate taught applicant will be received by the faculty postgraduate admissions office, who will direct this to the relevant personnel in the department. RPL claims which are made at the same time as an application to study on the programme will be dealt with as described in section PL 4; they will, however, be part of the admissions process and departments' decisions on these claims will be incorporated into the University's communications to applicants at the offer stage.

PL 1.6 This policy does not cover pre-defined institutional arrangements for the recognition of credit. Examples of such arrangements include:

- exchange agreements between Lancaster and other institutions which may apply to groups of students;
- articulation arrangements leading to a Lancaster award or a dual award;<sup>3</sup>
- progression routes and step-off qualifications predetermined as part of a programme validation.

PL 1.7 From time to time the University may approve specific department or partner procedures which may vary from the University's standard procedures and which apply only to programmes administered by that department or partner (see Appendix 1).

## PL 2 PRINCIPLES

PL 2.1 All applicants for RPL must be treated equitably regardless of the sources of the prior learning that is being considered or the age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, disability, religious belief or sexual orientation of the applicant.

PL 2.2 Normally, unless there is an approved variation, a maximum of one-third of the credits of an undergraduate programme may be awarded as RPL credits and these are normally only allowable at Level 4 of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree-Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*.

PL 2.3 Normally, unless there is an approved variation, a maximum of one-third of the credits of a postgraduate programme may be awarded as RPL credits; however the project/dissertation element would not normally be eligible for RPL credit.

PL 2.4 For postgraduate research programmes which do **not** have credit attached, it may be possible to accept an applicant's attainment in original research (PhD applicant), or a period of study for a higher degree (Masters applicant) prior to application and not otherwise accredited for a degree already awarded as contributing towards the

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<sup>3</sup> An articulation arrangement is a process whereby all students who satisfy academic criteria on a programme delivered by a partner organization are automatically entitled (on academic grounds) to be admitted with advanced standing to a subsequent part or year of a Lancaster programme. Such arrangements are subject to formal agreements between Lancaster University and the partner organization.

Lancaster programme of study. This will not involve the award of credit but may result in a shorter period of registration being approved (for further details see the regulations on registration periods for the degrees of PhD, MPhil and Masters by Research in the Postgraduate Research Regulations).

- PL 2.5 Exceptions to the normal maximum limits for RPL may be recommended as part of the course approval process through the faculty teaching committee. Such variations are subject to the approval of the Academic Standards and Quality Committee. Current approved variations are listed in Appendix 1.
- PL 2.6 Credit may only be awarded for learning which has taken place within the five years immediately prior to the start of the course unless the applicant can provide evidence that his/her learning has continued in a professional or similar context. In such cases the department may choose to set an assessment to test an applicant's current knowledge.
- PL 2.7 Credit gained from outside of Lancaster University which has already contributed to an award at another institution cannot be used to gain **an equivalent or lower level qualification** from Lancaster.<sup>4</sup>
- PL 2.8 Credit gained from outside of Lancaster University can be used for a **higher level qualification** at Lancaster. However, if the applicant has completed an end-of-cycle qualification as defined by *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree-Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*,<sup>5</sup> these credits cannot be used to contribute to the higher level Lancaster qualification.
- PL 2.9 Credit Transfer (where the student has studied a module at another UK institution) is not permitted in those cases where the module was awarded a fail mark.
- PL 2.10 Students who submit a portfolio to meet specific learning outcomes for the award of credit (see PL 4.6) cannot include learning/evidence for which they have already received credit from Lancaster or another higher education provider.
- PL 2.11 Credit cannot be awarded against fractions of modules: the minimum threshold will be one module. Credit may be awarded against compulsory or optional modules. Departments may specify that specific modules are not eligible for RPL. This should normally be done at the time of programme or module approval. Credit may not normally be awarded against the project/dissertation element of a postgraduate programme.

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<sup>4</sup> This paragraph, and the two paragraphs immediately following, relate to the re-use of credit. Credits can only be used as building blocks towards study for an end-of-cycle qualification (see footnote 5 below) not previously achieved. For example credits from a Master's qualification gained elsewhere cannot be used towards a Lancaster Master's; however credits gained from a PGCert gained elsewhere could be used towards a Lancaster Master's programme. Likewise credits gained from a CertHE gained elsewhere could be used towards a Lancaster Bachelor's programme.

<sup>5</sup> End-of-cycle qualification' refers to different levels of qualification located in the FHEQ which correspond to the award of Bachelor's ('first cycle'), Master's ('second cycle') and Doctoral ('third cycle') degrees. Other higher education qualifications are located within these cycles (e.g. the CertHE within the first cycle or the PGCert within the second cycle) but they are not deemed to be end-of-cycle qualifications.

PL 2.12 RPL credits may only be awarded where the level and standard of the prior learning are judged to be equivalent to the Lancaster module(s) for which credit is sought.

PL 2.13 Decisions on RPL are a matter of academic judgement, with the main considerations being: (i) whether the outcomes achieved through the prior learning are equivalent to the learning outcomes defined for the module(s) for which credit is being considered; and (ii) whether the prior learning attained will provide the applicant with the same or similar preparation as intended in the relevant Lancaster module or modules. It is the learning outcomes achieved by the applicant through their prior learning that should be considered, not simply the qualifications or experiences themselves. Decisions on the award of Lancaster credit should be based on clearly defined assessment criteria for the Lancaster module(s) and the standard assessment regulations relevant to the programme.

### **PL 3 RESPONSIBILITIES**

PL 3.1 Departments are responsible for considering and assessing all claims for RPL and for determining the form of evidence required in support of claims.

PL 3.2 Departments are required to nominate an appropriate member of staff, e.g. a Part I Director of Studies, who will be able to: (i) provide initial advice and guidance to applicants; and (ii) (for credit transfer claims) make a recommendation to the department. APL/APEL claims should be referred on to an RPL Assessment Panel (see PL 3.3).

PL 3.3 For **APL/APEL claims**, departments must set up an RPL Assessment Panel to consider the claim, comprising a minimum of two appropriately qualified internal assessors who, together with the Director of Studies for the programme, will be responsible for considering and formally assessing the portfolio of evidence provided in support of the claim and for making a recommendation on the award of credit.

PL 3.4 Departments are responsible for ensuring that decisions on the award of credit through APL/APEL are ratified by the external examiners and through the relevant examination board in the normal way (see PL 4.7).

PL 3.5 The University Undergraduate Admissions Office is responsible for communicating a department's decision on the award of credit to undergraduate applicants as part of the communications at the offer stage. Faculty postgraduate taught admissions offices are similarly responsible for postgraduate taught applicants.

PL 3.6 Departments are responsible for notifying Student Registry of the outcome of successful claims for RPL and ensuring that the student record in LUSI is correct.

PL 3.7 Student Registry is responsible for ensuring that credits obtained RPL are recorded as such on the student transcript.

### **PL 4 PROCEDURES**

PL 4.1 Any claims for the consideration of RPL should, wherever possible, be made before study on a Lancaster programme commences. However, the University recognizes this may not always be possible; for example where a student gains work experience during

their studies which might lead them to wish to seek APEL for a module later on in the programme of study. Where a student does request RPL after they have commenced the Lancaster programme the department must complete the procedure and communicate the decision on this prior to the start of the academic session/term in which the relevant module is delivered.

PL 4.2 The University will not normally charge a fee for the consideration or assessment of claims for RPL except in those cases where a department runs a module specifically for the purpose of preparing applicants/students for the submission of APL/APEL claims and assessing these claims. Information on the fee payable for taking such a module should be provided to applicants/students in advance of them registering on the module.

PL 4.3 All claims for RPL will be considered on the basis of:

- (a) a sufficient match between the prior learning and the relevant Lancaster module(s) in terms of:
  - subject content and knowledge
  - level of learning<sup>6</sup>
  - volume of learning;
- (b) sufficient evidence of student achievement;
- (c) the student's preparedness for assessments later in the programme;
- (d) any particular restrictions imposed by Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies;
- (e) the overall requirements for the programme.

Fulfilment of these criteria should enable the department to judge whether or not the learning outcomes for the Lancaster module(s) have been met.

PL 4.4 All enquiries/requests for RPL should be initially considered by the Director of Studies (or appropriate nominated alternative) for the programme, who will invite the applicant for informal discussion to provide guidance on the process and on the amount of credit that might reasonably be sought (this discussion would not necessarily need to be face-to-face if circumstances make it difficult for candidates to attend in person). In the case of APL/APEL, the discussion will also enable the identification of potentially relevant learning and experience to include in the portfolio of evidence (see PL 4.6). However, whilst the department must make every effort to provide information and guidance in support of the application, it remains the responsibility of the applicant to demonstrate the relevance of any prior learning and to produce the supporting evidence.

PL 4.5 **For credit transfer claims**, there is no requirement for the formal assessment of the applicant's previous work. However in such cases the department must ensure:

- (a) that there is a valid transcript providing evidence of the credits awarded by the relevant UK higher education provider; and
- (b) that the prior learning is at the same (or higher) level than that for which the credit transfer is being claimed and has not been used for the award of an end-of-cycle qualification gained elsewhere; and

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<sup>6</sup> Departments are advised to refer to the learning outcomes of the relevant Lancaster module(s) for levelling purposes. The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications (see footnote 1) are also useful benchmarks for general statements on student attainment at particular levels.

- (c) that, having reviewed the course descriptions for the unit(s) for which credit has already been awarded, they are satisfied there is a sufficient match between these and the Lancaster module(s) in regard to learning outcomes and content.

The department will determine procedures for the approval of credit transfer claims. Outcomes from the consideration of individual claims must be auditable through the department's records of assessment.

PL 4.6 **For APL/APEL claims**, there must be a formal assessment of the applicant's portfolio of evidence by the appointed assessors. Applications should be submitted in the form of a portfolio consisting of:

- (a) a written request stating the module(s) for which the student is seeking APL/APEL credits;
- (b) documentary evidence of the prior learning; and
- (c) a reflective analysis of how this experience/learning demonstrates successful achievement of the learning outcomes of the module(s) for which credit is sought.

Documented evidence may include and/or be drawn from: course or descriptions, certificates of learning/records of achievement, interviews, oral assessments, diagnostic assessments, references/testimonials, learning logs, work reports, work products, records of volunteer learning and experience etc.

In some cases the student may also be invited to complete the summative assessments normally associated with the Lancaster module(s) in order to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes, or an alternative assessment or assessments may be set.

Assessment of APL/APEL should be on a pass/fail basis only.

PL 4.7 APL/APEL credit is recommended by a department's RPL Assessment Panel and ratified through external examiner and exam board procedures in the normal way. The decision must be clearly documented in the department's assessment records and the supporting evidence retained alongside the assessments for the module(s) in question. Work for APL/APEL credit should be moderated by the external examiner(s). For *ad hoc* cases of APL/APEL it is expected that the external examiner would review the individual portfolio and evidence of the department's assessment of this. Where assessment is undertaken as part of a specific RPL module (see PL 4.2), a sample of this module's assessed work should be made available to the external examiner in the normal way.

PL 4.8 RPL credits count towards the total number of credits required for the award of the Lancaster qualification aimed for and are clearly indicated as such on the student transcript. However marks for credits achieved elsewhere and for credits awarded by Lancaster on the basis of APL/APEL are not normally carried into the Lancaster programme. They are not normally used in the calculations to determine the class of degree awarded or used to help determine progression from one year to the next. However, where appropriate and possible, it is permitted to allow consideration for grades to be transferred where these have been gained elsewhere as part of a Lancaster programme, or from specific partners, or on a case-by-case basis. This will be at the discretion of the exam board.

- PL 4.9 Students must be made aware of the outcome of their claim for credit as soon as a formal decision has been taken by the department and at the latest prior to the start of the academic session/term in which the relevant module is delivered.
- PL 4.10 Where an APL/APEL claim has not been successful, applicants will have the right to one reassessment opportunity, as if they had failed the module.
- PL 4.11 As applications for RPL are a matter of academic judgement; there will not normally be any right of appeal against the decision reached unless there has been a procedural irregularity.
- PL 4.12 A student granted credit through RPL will not be allowed to study the module(s) for which credit has been awarded.
- PL 4.13 Special consideration needs to be given to students who have been granted the maximum permissible amount of credit on their entry to a programme and subsequently fail to obtain the minimum number of credits from Lancaster to complete the programme and have to exit with a lesser qualification (where one is available). In such cases the department is required to ensure that the student has completed sufficient Lancaster credits to exit with the lower qualification. If the student has not completed sufficient Lancaster credits, they may only be eligible to receive a transcript of their results.



## **APPENDICES TO RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING**

### **APPENDIX 1: APPROVED VARIATIONS TO UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES FOR THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING**

1. From time to time, the University may approve specific department or partner RPL procedures which may vary from the standard University procedures and which apply only to programmes administered by that department or partner. Exceptions to the normal maximum limits for RPL may be recommended as part of the course approval process through the faculty teaching committee. Such variations are subject to the approval of the Academic Standards and Quality Committee. Current approved variations are listed below.
2. **Centre for Education, Training and Development (CETAD) – Postgraduate taught programmes:** a maximum of one-half of the available credits for the programme of study may be gained via RPL (not including the dissertation element). *(Approved 19 July 2014)*
3. **Organisation and Educational Development – Postgraduate taught programmes:** a maximum of one-half of the available credits for the programme of study may be gained via RPL (not including the dissertation element). *(Approved 12 July 2017)*
4. **Postgraduate Diploma in Medical Education:** a maximum of one-half of the available credits for the programme of study may be gained via RPL (Credit Transfer only). *(Approved 17 July 2018 by Chair's Action)*