



**Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and HE
Credit Framework**

Ref: PL.022-v.004

Brief Description & Purpose:	Northumbria, in line with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education 2024 principles distinguishes between Recognition of Prior Learning and the Recognition/Transfer of HE credit. Prior Learning is defined as learning (whether experiential or organised) that has not been assessed and certificated by a Higher Education institution (HEI).		
Applicable to (list cohorts):	Staff: <i>All staff</i>	Students: <i>All students</i>	Third Parties: <i>All who are in a formal relationship with the University</i>
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Notification of Log of Key Changes to the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and HE Credit Framework

The following is a log of changes relevant to this policy following endorsement by the appropriate approval committee.

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and HE Credit Framework has been revised to become a standalone policy commencing 1 September 2017.



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University Framework for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and HE Credit

1 **Advanced Entry and Exemptions based on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RP(E)L / RP(C)L) and HE Credit**

This document contains policy and guidance on Advanced Entry and Exemptions based on the recognition of prior learning or Higher Education credit.

2 **Definitions**

Northumbria, in line with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education 2024 principles relating to recognition of prior learning and assessment, distinguishes between Recognition of Prior Learning and the Recognition/Transfer of HE credit. Prior Learning is defined as learning (whether experiential or organised) that has not been assessed and certificated by a Higher Education institution (HEI). The UK Quality Code 2024 addresses recognition of prior learning within its principles based framework, particularly Principle 12 on admitting students and recognising prior learning.

3 **Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)**

Prior experiential learning relates to informal prior learning that is at an appropriate level but was not previously formally assessed and has not led to the gaining of credits rated at a particular level within the UK Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications (*UK FHEQ*) or the equivalent Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area (*QF-EHEA*). The Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL) involves an assessment process by Northumbria University academic staff that leads to recognition of achievement of learning outcomes and the award of University Credit. The essential feature of this process is that it is the learning gained through experience which is being assessed, not the experience itself.

3.1 Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL)

Prior certified learning relates to formally certificated prior learning (e.g. professional development awards, employment-based or vocational awards) that is at an appropriate level but has not led to the gaining of credits rated at a particular level within the UK Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications (*UK FHEQ*) or the equivalent Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area (*QF-EHEA*). The Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL) involves either a process of assessment or, in some cases, an evaluation of equivalency (where the standards of the award and of the awarding body are known and appropriate) by Northumbria University academic staff that leads to recognition of achievement of learning outcomes and the award of University Credit.

3.2 Recognition of HE Credit (RHEC)

The recognition and transfer of HE credit (RHEC) involves an evaluation of equivalency of achieved Learning Outcomes and Level, together with a mapping of grade scales where appropriate, by Northumbria University academic staff. Recognition of HE Credit does not involve an assessment of the student's work; as such, assessment has already been carried out by the previous HE institution, and leads to recognition of achievement of learning outcomes and the award of University Credit and, in certain cases, grades.

4 Uses of Prior Learning/HE Credit

Prior Learning and HE Credit may be used to gain entry to a programme or to gain exemption from Modules or Levels within a programme.

4.1 Types of Permitted Exemptions

There are several contexts in which exemptions may be requested and Table 1 below defines, for each context, the type of exemptions that are permitted for each basis for exemption. In the case of articulation agreements, exemptions are systematic and pre-agreed and are stated as part of the agreement. For exchange programmes, part of the exemption process is again systematic and pre-agreed, although some aspects are individually considered. For exemptions that are part of the admissions process, each request is considered individually.

As noted below, whether an agreed exemption is graded or ungraded depends on both the basis for the exemption and the context for the exemption:

- Exemptions of whole Levels gained through Prior HE Credit (with the exception of exchanges) and any exemptions gained through Prior Experiential/Certificated Learning are never graded: Northumbria provides credits to recognise learning but marks are not awarded

Exemptions from individual Modules (or levels in the case of exchanges) gained through Prior HE Credit can be recognised in one of two ways:

- Ungraded Exemption from Modules: Northumbria accepts the credit awarded by another institution
- Graded Exemption from Modules: Northumbria accepts the credit and marks awarded by another institution

Table 1. Context: Permitted Types of Exemption for each Context and Basis

	On Admission including internal transfer(new programme) and resumption of study (same programme)			On Programme	Articulation Agreements
	Entry	Advanced Entry		Exchanges	
	Entry Exemption individual Request	Level Exemption individual Request	Module Exemption individual Request	Level/Module Exemption	Level/Module Exemption
Prior Experiential Learning	Exemption from Entry Requirements	Ungraded Exemption from Level(s)	Ungraded Exemption from Module(s)	Not applicable	Not applicable
Prior Certificated Learning	Exemption from Entry Requirements	Ungraded Exemption from Level(s)	Ungraded Exemption from Module(s)	Not applicable	Ungraded Exemption from Level(s)/Module(s)
Overseas HE Credit	Exemption from Entry Requirements	Ungraded Exemption from Level(s)	Ungraded or Graded Exemption from Module(s)	Ungraded or Graded Exemption from	Ungraded Exemption from Level(s)/ Ungraded or

	On Admission including internal transfer(new programme) and resumption of study (same programme)			On Programme	Articulation Agreements
	Entry	Advanced Entry		Exchanges	
	Entry Exemption individual Request	Level Exemption individual Request	Module Exemption individual Request	Level/Module Exemption	Level/Module Exemption
				Level(s)/ Module(s)	Graded Exemption from Module(s)
EHEA HE Credit	Exemption from Entry Requirements	Ungraded Exemption from Level(s)	Ungraded or Graded Exemption from Module(s)	Ungraded or Graded Exemption from Level(s)/ Module(s)	Ungraded Exemption from Level(s)/ Ungraded or Graded Exemption from Module(s)
UK HE Credit	Exemption from Entry Requirements	Ungraded Exemption from Level(s)	Ungraded or Graded Exemption from Module(s)	Ungraded or Graded Exemption from Level(s)/ Module(s)	Ungraded Exemption from Level(s)/ Ungraded or Graded Exemption from Module(s)
Northumbria Credit	Exemption from Entry Requirements	Ungraded Exemption from Level(s)	Ungraded or Graded Exemption from Module(s)	Not applicable	Not applicable

5 Criteria and Requirements

The essential recognition criteria for the consideration of an exemption request are outlined in Table 2 for both graded and ungraded exemptions.

Table 2. Recognition Criteria & Forms of Recognition

	Type of exemption	
	Ungraded exemption	Graded exemption
Prior Experiential Learning	Assessment against Level; Compatibility with Level or Module LO; Currency	Not applicable
Prior Certificated Learning	Assessment against Level; Compatibility with Level or Module LO; Currency	Not applicable
Overseas HE Credit	Standards; Level; Compatibility with Level or Module LO; Currency	Standards; Grade Scales; Level; Compatibility with Level and/or Module LO; Currency
EHEA HE Credit	Level; Compatibility with Level or Module LO; Currency	Grade Scales; Level; Compatibility with Level and/or Module LO; Currency

	Type of exemption	
	Ungraded exemption	Graded exemption
UK HE Credit	Level; Compatibility with Level or Module LO; Currency	Grade Scales; Level; Compatibility with Level and/or Module LO; Currency
Northumbria Credit	Level; Compatibility with Level or Module LO; Currency	Level; Compatibility with Level and/or Module LO; Currency

Note on currency: Requests for Recognition of Prior Learning or HE credit will not normally be accepted if more than five years have elapsed since the said learning has taken place.

5.1 Level

The level of previous study will be calibrated against the level of the level(s)/module(s) of the Northumbria programme against which advanced entry is sought (e.g., an HND will be viewed as potentially giving advanced entry against modules at level 4 and level 5). The level of the previous study should be referenced against nationally recognised qualification frameworks or against information provided by national agencies (e.g. NARIC) responsible for providing information and advice about how qualifications and skills from overseas compare to the UK's national qualification frameworks.

5.2 Volume of HE Credit

Where a student is requesting exemption from a whole level (e.g. L4) the expectation will be that, the prior learning is equal to the total number of credits within the level (e.g. 120). Where a student is requesting exemption from one or more individual Modules, it may be the case that the learning outcomes have been demonstrated elsewhere in a module or modules of a different volume of credit compared with the module or modules to be exempted at Northumbria. In this case, the normal expectation for recognition is that the equivalent credit weighting of the assessed learning outcomes should be no less than two-thirds of the credit rating of the Northumbria module(s) to be exempted.

- For example: A student could be exempted from a 20-credit block based on achievement in a 15 credit block taken elsewhere, but not based on a 10-credit block.

For most UK HE Credit recognition and for EHEA HE Credit recognition the credit equivalence with Northumbria credit should be clear under the relevant UK Credit Framework or the European Credit Transfer System (e.g. 60 ECTS = 120 UK Credits). For International HE institutions the volume of credit this should be referenced against nationally recognised qualification frameworks or against information provided by national agencies (e.g. NARIC) responsible for providing information and advice about how qualifications and skills from overseas compare to the UK's national qualification frameworks.

5.3 Compatibility with Level or Module Learning Outcomes

As indicated above the recognition and transfer of Prior Learning or HE credit will require consideration of the previous programme of study against the Level or Module Learning Outcomes of the Northumbria Programme against which advanced entry is being sought:

- where exemption is sought from whole levels (e.g. Level 4 or Levels 4 and 5 in a Bachelor Degree) Prior Learning or HE credit is mapped against either Level Learning Outcomes for Knowledge and Understanding (minimum University Requirement) or (in cases where programmes feel that Level Learning Outcomes are insufficient) all of the Module Learning Outcomes for Knowledge and Understanding within the appropriate Level(s)
- where exemption is sought from individual modules within levels (e.g. 60 L7 Credits in a Master Degree) Prior Learning or HE credit is always mapped against Module Learning Outcomes for Knowledge and Understanding

Within this process, the emphasis is on mapping Knowledge and Understanding (KU) Outcomes. The framework aims to maintain a balance between the compatibility of previous study with Northumbria programmes and the equitable treatment of students entering from different route-ways. The focus should be on making a broad judgement that students will be able to cope with the demands of the programme in terms of both content and level and have the potential to succeed.

6 Limitations for Exemptions

In addition to the limits on the type of exemption (graded or ungraded) as defined in Table 2 the following further limitations apply on the volume of exemption.

6.1 Minimum Exemptions

The minimum claim for exemption based on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) or HE credit is equal to the relevant whole module within any given programme.

6.2 Maximum Exemptions

The maximum claim for exemption based on recognition of Prior Learning or HE credit is as follows:

- UG Awards (including Integrated Masters, Master of Architecture): students are required to complete all credits at the highest level of the award at Northumbria (e.g. 120 L6 Credits on a standard 3FT Honours Degree)
- PG Cert Awards: students are required to complete a minimum of 30 credits (L7) at Northumbria
- Other PGT Awards (including PG Dip, MA, MSc, MRes, MBA, MFA): students are required to complete a minimum of 60 credits (L7) at Northumbria. The dissertation or research component of a PGT programme, if the programme includes such a component, must be completed at Northumbria (or, for a Joint Award, one of its partner institutions)
- Professional/Taught Doctoral Awards (generally comprised of 120-180 L7 Credits and 360 L8 Credits: students are required to complete a minimum of 360 credits (L8) at Northumbria

Northumbria has an approved list of qualifications with the credit structure and the maximum permitted exemptions is shown below in Table 3.



Table 3. Maximum credit allowed for RPL/HE Credit Transfer

Northumbria has approved list of qualifications with the credit structure and the maximum permitted amount of credit that can be awarded/recognised for RPL/HE Credit Transfer is shown below:

Level	Award	Credit (Level) for Award				Maximum RPL credit that may be awarded/recognised
		L4	L5	L6	L7	
4	Certificate	60				0
4	Certificate of HE	120				0
5	Diploma		60			0
5	Diploma of HE	120	120			120 (L4-year 1)
5	Foundation Degree	120	120			120 (L4-year 1)
6	Advanced Diploma			60		0
6	Advanced Diploma of HE	120	120	60		120 (L4-year 1) 120 (L5-year 2)
6	Graduate Certificate			60		0
6	Graduate Diploma			120		0
6	Professional Grad. Cert. in Education			120		0
6	Ordinary Degree	120	120	60		120 (L4-year 1); 120 (L5-year 2)
6	Honours Degree	120	120-240	120		120 (L4-year 1) 120/240 (L5-year 2/3)*
7	Integrated Master Degree	120	120-240	120	120	120 (L4-year 1) 120/240 (L5-year 2/3)* 120 (L6-year 3/4)
7	Master of Architecture			120	120	120 (L6-year 1)
7	Postgraduate Certificate in Education			0-80	40-120	60**
7	Postgraduate Certificate				60	30
7	Postgraduate Diploma				120	60
7	Masters Degrees (inc. MFA, MBA)				180/240	120/180
8	Professional Doctorates (e.g. DBA)				120-180 (+360L8)	180

* 4FT Honours Degrees/5FT Integrated Masters containing 120 credits of work/study abroad placements

** Participants must successfully complete a minimum of 40 L7 credits at Northumbria for the award of Postgraduate Certificate in Education

6.3 Other Limitations

Prior Learning or HE credit cannot be awarded where Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements are not met.

These limits may be subject to Programme specific limitations and appropriate compatibility of the prior learning with the module for which exemption is sought and/or award applied

for, which may have specific subject requirements. Programmes may apply to have the maximum credit value considered for variation.

Granted exemptions should be clearly identified on a student's transcript through the use of "RPL/HE Credit Transfer" modules of the appropriate Level and Volume (e.g. "RPL/HE Credit Transfer" - 120 Credits - L4 - Pass).

7 Fees

No charge will be made for RPL/RHCE claims for admissions. Where a student is exempted from a full level of study at Northumbria fees will not be charged, where a student is exempted from individual modules within a level the programme fee for the relevant year may be charged pro rata to the amount of credit being studied.

8 Application Process: Individual Applicants

8.1 On Admission individual application for RPL/HE Credit Transfer advanced entry (exemption from whole levels) via UCAS

Applicants seeking exemption from a year(s) of study, and applying via UCAS, are not required to make a separate claim for RPL. The applicant must indicate their preferred year of entry in the 'point of entry' section of the UCAS application form. Once this has been received, applicants will be contacted to provide a transcript/list of units completed at a previous institution. The transcript/list and application will then be sent to the course academic for a comparison. They will confirm if previous units of study are similar enough for a place to be offered a place through Advanced Entry.

8.2 On Admission individual application for RPL/HE Credit Transfer advanced entry (exemption from whole levels) from International Students via International Development Office

Applicants seeking exemption from a year(s) of study, and applying via the International Development Office (IDO), are not required to make a separate claim for RPL. The applicant must indicate their preferred year of entry in the 'point of entry' section of the application form. Once this has been received, applicants will be contacted to provide a transcript/list of units completed at a previous institution. The transcript/list and application will then be sent to the course academic for a comparison. This process is pre-agreed for a number of listed routes. They will confirm if previous units of study are similar enough for a place to be offered a place through Advanced Entry.

8.3 On Admission individual application for RPL/HE Credit Transfer advanced entry (exemption from whole levels or individual modules) not via UCAS

Applicants seeking exemption from less than a whole level of study, or UK Domiciled applicants not applying via UCAS, are required to complete an RPL/HE Credit Transfer application form. The applicant must indicate the models for which exemption is being sought on the University application form application form and provide a transcript/list of units completed (where appropriate) at a previous institution. The information will then be sent to the course academic for a comparison. They will confirm if previous learning is appropriate for exemption.

9 Articulation Agreements

In the case of articulation agreements, exemptions are systematic and pre-agreed and are stated as part of the agreement.

10 Evaluation of Exemptions

The granting of exemptions should be a process that is clear, transparent and equitable. Guidance for applicants/students concerning exemptions should be clear on:

- criteria used to assess requests
- the nature and range of evidence considered appropriate to support an exemption request
- the process for submission and consideration of exemption requests

The evaluation process for Recognition of HE Credit will involve consideration of the application and supporting evidence by the relevant Programme Leader (this decision making process may be devolved, e.g. to International Development Office). The criteria to be addressed for the particular basis and context of the case are defined above.

The assessment process for Recognition of Prior (Certified or Experiential) Learning involves consideration of the application and assessment of the supporting evidence by the relevant Programme Leader and moderation by a second appropriate member of academic staff.

Version No.	Reviewer	Date	Changes
003	Governance and Enhancement Administrator	23/08/2024	Administrative changes to include updated cover sheet to be in line with Policy guidance and include a change log
004	Governance and Compliance Manager/Registrar	09/11/2025	Administrative changes to update references from Chapter B UK Quality Code to principles of UK Quality Code for Higher Education 2024