



Union School of Theology Recognition of Prior Learning Policy

Approved UST Academic Board December 2017

Policy Review Date – January 2019

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1. POLICY FRAMEWORK

This policy has been developed in accordance with the following regulations, policies and procedures. This list is not exhaustive:

- [UST Student Handbooks;](#)
- [UST Admissions Policy;](#)
- [UST Complaints Policy;](#)
- [UST Applications Process Complaints and Review Policies and Procedures](#)
- [QAA 'UK Quality Code for Higher Education – B3 Learning and Teaching;](#)
- [Open University Handbook for Validated Awards;](#)
- [Open University Programme Regulations for Validated Awards](#)

2 THE PLACE AND VALUE OF RPL

2.1 The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) has many benefits for students, Union School of Theology (UST), local churches and wider society. For students it encourages the pursuit of higher education, facilitates access at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, eliminates duplication of study and can reduce cost and the time needed to complete a qualification. Through recognising learning wherever it is acquired, RPL can increase self-esteem and self-confidence and help with career development and planning.

2.2 RPL affirms UST's values of inclusion and responsiveness. Effective RPL processes support strategies of Widening Access and Success and Learning and Teaching. There are also clear benefits in increasing student recruitment, retention and completion rates, through supported transition and informed student choice.

2.3 RPL has real value in recognising and promoting lifelong learning and the needs of churches for people with appropriate skills and experience. It also encourages and fosters partnerships between UST and churches and Christian organisations.

3. THE PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

3.1 This policy is designed to:

- explain clearly the ways in which students might gain exemption from study for a proportion of an award through RPL;
- provide a transparent, fair, consistent and coherent approach to the treatment of recognition of prior learning;
- ensure UST and its students and their future employers have confidence in the value and basis of its awards;
- ensure compliance with external sectorial requirements;
- clarify internal procedures for RPL.

4. WHAT IS RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING?

4.1 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the process of recognising learning from experience and/or formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts. It provides the opportunity to recognise previously accredited achievement from within or outside the

FHEQ,¹ the FQHEIS,² the SCQF³ and the CQFW⁴ to count towards other qualifications. In some cases, RPL may allow for direct entry into UST's level 5 or 6. RPL also provides the opportunity for learning or achievements which have not been certificated or accredited to be assessed through the RPL process to count towards a qualification.

5. TYPES OF RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

5.1 There are a number of routes through which prior learning can be recognised and these are detailed below:

- credit transfer of credit earned at other UK higher education institutions;
- award of credit for prior study that does not already bear UK HEI academic credit, for example overseas qualifications or professional qualifications;
- direct entry to UST's BA level 5 or 6;
- recognition of prior informal, or experiential learning (RPEL), including work-based learning and portfolio assessment;
- recognition of prior non-formal learning.

6. RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING PRINCIPLES

RPL is normally demonstrated by an academic record (certificate or transcript) provided its 'age' is within the stated time limits. Outside the stated time limit carries a charge.

RPEL is non-certificated, has to be assessed by UST and carries a charge.

6.1 UST is committed to providing opportunities for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to be assessed for all individuals who wish to be considered. This means that:

- Students should be able to enter a programme of study at a stage appropriate to their prior learning and qualifications
- RPL can be an appropriate method of enabling individuals to claim credit against their learning, irrespective of where or how the learning took place
- Credit may be claimed against any qualification, at any stage, through RPL unless the assessment requirements or time limits set in qualification regulations or by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB) do not allow this

¹ Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree-Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

² Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland

³ Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

⁴ Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales

6.2 UST will consider recognising qualifications at or equivalent to higher education level, wherever acquired (including those from other countries), as a basis for credit within its own qualifications, on production of relevant certificates and transcripts and subject to current Regulations and procedures.

6.3 UST RPL policies, processes, procedures, practices and decisions will be transparent, reliable, fair, equitable and accessible to ensure that all stakeholders can have confidence in the decisions and outcomes of RPL.

6.4 Applicants for RPL should be given clear advice on the range and nature of appropriate evidence and guidance and support to make a claim. Availability and procedures should be clearly publicised to all enquirers on the UST website, in the prospectus and other relevant documentation.

6.5 The process of assessment for RPL is subject to the same quality assurance and monitoring of standards as any other form of assessment. Assessment methods for RPL must be of equal rigour to other assessment methods, be fit for purpose and relate to the evidence of learning in terms of its relevance, sufficiency, authenticity and currency.

6.6 RPL takes place within the context of the FHEQ, SCQF, CQFW and equivalent frameworks.

7. RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING POLICY PROCESS

7.1 General

7.1.1 Recognition of prior certificated learning, including direct entry, is normally part of the admissions process.

7.1.2 Recognition of prior certificated learning should be awarded prior to qualification registration.

7.1.3 UST does not allow credit for qualifications below HE level (i.e. below FHEQ level 4 or SCQF level 7). In order to be eligible for study exemption, prior learning must match or exceed the level of the module(s) or stage against which credit is being awarded.

7.1.4 Applicants may be awarded module exemption, general credit exemption, or stage exemption.

- Module exemption is awarded when there is an adequate match between the learning outcomes of the applicant's prior study and those of the UST's module(s) in question, and when the quantity of prior learning and the level demonstrated matches or exceeds that of the UST module(s).

- General credit exemption is awarded within a specific OU validated qualification on the basis of the applicant's prior learning. It is awarded on the basis of the quantity of learning and level demonstrated. Programme regulations will specify when it can be used. Decisions on general credit exemption are based on the learning outcomes of the qualification as a whole or on the learning outcomes of a stage within the qualification, rather than on the detailed learning outcomes of individual modules.
- Stage exemption allows an applicant into UST level 5 or 6 of an undergraduate qualification. It is awarded via general credit exemption, module exemption or a combination of both; or, when a student has completed certificated qualification(s) of a UK higher education institution equivalent to a stage of UST study, 5 (subject to the appropriateness of the qualification(s)) 6, or by Direct Entry. With Direct Entry, no further credit can be sought for the prior study.

7.1.5 Where module exemption, general credit exemption or Direct Entry is used, grades or marks are not awarded for the prior learning involved. Only credit gained through UST study, or in some cases collaborative credit schemes, will count towards the classification of the qualification.

7.2 Module exemption and general credit exemption.

7.2.1 Credit will only be awarded against whole modules.

7.2.2 Credit cannot be awarded by module exemption or general credit exemption for credits that were awarded for prior study by compensation or condonement.

7.2.3 The minimum credit claim that will be considered is the smallest credit-bearing module size within the qualification towards which the RPL claim is being made at the time the application is made.

7.2.4 The total and maximum amount of credit for which RPL can be claimed is contained within programme regulations. The maximum proportion of 'external' credit which can be awarded against any qualification is up to two-thirds of the total credit requirements for that award. Two-thirds of RPL is only permitted for full three-year Bachelor's degrees

⁵ Completed stage of a UK HE recognised programme of study, including but not limited to CertHE, DipHE, Fd, HND, HNC or international equivalences.

⁶ Appropriateness of qualification is assessed by academic judgement.

(360 credits) or full Masters degrees (a minimum of 180 credits) and not sub-awards where the usual maximum is 50%.

Where an award consists of credits from across different levels, a minimum of 120 UST credits must be studied at the highest level of the award. The marks gained for any UST modules undertaken within five years of the date of registration on the new award shall be included in the calculation of the final award classification. Students granted RPL cannot, under any circumstances use these module marks to replace marks for modules for which they were previously registered on an award-bearing programme.

7.2.5 RPL credits will not be awarded for the final stage of a qualification.

7.2.6 When RPL credit is awarded a student may not gain further credit towards their intended qualification by studying any UST module where there is a significant overlap between the learning outcomes of the module in question and the learning outcomes of the prior study for which credit is being awarded.

7.2.7 Credit at or above the level of the final stage can be 'counted down' to lower level/s. Credit at FHEQ Level 6 and 7/FQHEIS Level 9 - 11 (or equivalent) can be 'counted down' to UST level 5 and 6. Credit at FHEQ Level 5/FQHEIS Level 8 (or equivalent) can be 'counted down' to UST level 4. Credit that can be 'counted down' is as stated in the programme regulations.

7.2.8 The maximum amount of credit that can be 'counted down' to a lower level within a qualification is 30 credits. For postgraduate credit 'counted down' within an undergraduate qualification this maximum is reduced to 30 credits.

7.2.9 Credit that is counted down within a qualification will normally be distributed against the lowest available level within that qualification.

7.2.10 If the prior study includes credit that was gained at an external institution on the basis of recognition of learning prior to study at that institution, the prior RPL will be assessed in its own right and will only be taken account if it complies with policy for module and general credit exemption.

7.3 Precedent awards and progression/articulation agreements

7.3.1 Programme Committees will be responsible for agreeing and approving precedent awards of credit for RPL or for Direct Entry against all qualifications.

7.4 Direct Entry (stage exemption without award of credit)

7.4.1 RPL policy allows for candidates to enter stage 2 or stage 3 of an undergraduate qualification on the basis of completion of an appropriate certificated qualification from a recognised UK HE programme of study.

7.4.2 With stage exemption of this kind, it will be recorded on the student's transcript that stage exemption was awarded, but credit for the stage(s) from which the student was exempted would not be transferred to UST. UST would award credit only for study carried out at UST, or for credit awarded through additional module or general credit exemption.

7.4.3 If the prior qualification, on the basis of which stage exemption has been awarded, includes credit that was gained at the external institution on the basis of recognition of learning prior to study at that institution, it will only be taken account by UST up to a maximum of 20 credits.

7.5 Time limits

7.5.1 The maximum age of credit shall be five years, unless:

- The application to use 'older' credit is accompanied by a demonstration that the learning has been brought up to date in the workplace, via continuing professional development which is shown to be directly relevant to the new award
OR
- The 'older' credit is accompanied by some form of assessment e.g. a reflective portfolio.

The maximum age of credit brought into a programme, added to a student's maximum registration period, gives the total time span of credit on an award. The maximum registration period will vary according to the amount of credit brought into the award, as detailed below:

Master's Degree

Amount of RPL sought – 60 credits; maximum age of credit 5 years; maximum registration period – 3 years; time span of credit – 8 years

Amount of RPL sought – under 60 credits, maximum age of credit – 5 years; maximum registration period – 4 years; time span of credit – 9 years

Bachelor's Degree

Amount of RPL sought – 120 credits; maximum age of credit – 5 years; maximum registration period – 4 years; time span of credit – 9 years

Amount of RPL sought – 60 credits; maximum age of credit – 5 years; maximum registration period – 5 years; time span of credit – 10 years

Amount of RPL sought – under 60 credits; maximum age of credit – 5 years; maximum registration period – 6 years; time span of credit – 11 years

Study exemption (module, general credit or stage) will only be awarded if the prior study has been completed within a timescale appropriate to the UST qualification.

Where such time limits are shorter, they will be stated in programme regulations.

Graduate Diploma

RPL is not possible in the Graduate Diploma because it is a level 6 programme of 120 credits.

7.6 Recording of RPL

7.6.1 Where a student has been awarded credit in recognition of prior learning, this will be recorded on the student's diploma supplement or HEAR alongside credit awarded for direct UST study.

7.6.2 Where a student has been awarded direct entry, this will be recorded on the student's transcript. The diploma supplement, or HEAR will show direct entry detailing the prior qualification and institution studied at, in addition to the credit awarded for the OU stages completed.

7.7 Prior experiential or work-based learning (RPEL/WBL)

7.7.1 Credit for prior experiential learning, whether non-certificated or awarded by a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB), but not simultaneously awarded by another recognised HEI is awarded through an approved assessment process, agreed at qualification level.

7.7.2 Assessment processes for RPEL/WBL must be approved in programme regulations and laid out in the relevant qualification specifications.

7.7.3 The award of credit for RPEL/WBL may be given as an entry qualification, credit transfer or an assessed component of a qualification.

RPL Applications

- An applicant seeking to make a claim for RPL should complete the form 'Application for Recognition of Prior Learning' in consultation with the relevant Programme leader. All such claims should be supported by transcripts or certificates.

- In cases where a student produces a piece of work in support of a claim for Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning this work must be submitted electronically and put through the Turnitin system.
 - Application for recognition of credit already achieved shall normally be made immediately upon registration for the student's programme of study.
 - RPL is normally part of the admissions process, in which a RPL Assessor decides on the claim. The RPL Assessor is normally the Programme Leader or Academic Dean. The decision would be communicated to the applicant before the conclusion of the application process.
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8. APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS

8.1 Appeals and complaints regarding RPL claims and decisions follow the relevant [UST Complaints Policy](#).

8.2 Decision-making responsibility for RPL appeals rests with the Academic Dean.

9. GOVERNANCE AND REVIEW

9.1 This policy is a component part of the [Moderation Policy](#).

9.2 The RPL policy will be reviewed annually by means of reports submitted to the Academic Board by Programme Committees as part of the annual quality review cycle.

9.3 Monitoring and Evaluation of the RPL process will be undertaken annually by the Programme Committees.

9.4 The reviews and recommendations deriving from them will be submitted to the Quality Assurance Committee for scrutiny and approval. These will then be reported to the Academic Board.

APPLICATION FORM

- 1. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) And
- 2. Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)

Please refer to the RPL policy when completing the application form.

This form should be completed with support from the relevant Programme Leader for the award that you wish to study at Union School of Theology.

It is the applicant’s responsibility to provide certified copied of original documentation, such as official transcripts of results and evidence to demonstrate experiential learning outcomes.

SECTION 1: ALL APPLICANTS

Please indicate the application you are making by ticking ONE option below:

Undergraduate Entry

Claiming RPL for entry to year 2 or year 3 of an undergraduate course.

Claiming RPEL for entry to year 1 or year 2 of an undergraduate course.

Postgraduate Entry

Claiming RPL for exemption of study for certain modules on a postgraduate course.

Please indicate the course you are applying to at Union School of Theology:

Full Award Title:

Personal Details

Forename(s):

Surname:

Mobile:

Landline:

Email:

Address:

SECTION 2: FOR RPL APPLICANTS

Please indicate below academic qualifications already certificated.

Note that in addition to this section, you must also attach official copies of transcripts/certificates to provide proof of prior certificated learning.

Please consult the RPL Policy and the Programme Leader at Union School of Theology should you require any advice.

Level and Name of Qualification:

Number of Credits Awarded:

Month and year qualification awarded, e.g. June 2001:

Name and address of awarding University or College:

Please detail if your study was modular, unitised or certificated, as evidenced in the official transcripts or certificates you supply:

Descriptive outline of the certificated qualification or credits declared above: (50 words max.)

Additional Evidence

Please see the learning outcomes for the module(s) you wish to RPL and indicate where and how you have achieved them through your prior studies (relevant module outcomes will be supplied).

SECTION 3: FOR RPEL APPLICANTS ONLY

Evidence of Experiential Learning

You will need to fulfil the requirements 1) to 5) below on separate sheets, providing verifiable evidence to support your application, and attach them to this form.

Requirements will include:

1. A statement of claim for credit.
2. A summary of the learning claimed.
3. A reflective essay on the learning claimed in relation to the target programme and the outcomes achieved.
4. A summary of evidence against each element of learning, cross-referenced against the full evidence.
5. Full evidence as appropriate.

The criteria for evaluation of the experiential learning you have evidenced will be based on:

The RPEL portfolio will be assessed against the following criteria:

- **Parity:** evidence that the portfolio demonstrates the appropriate learning outcomes.
- **Reliability:** legitimacy of evidence provided, in conjunction with external referees.
- **Authenticity:** that the experiences are those of the applicant and the subsequent learning is solely through the experience being presented in the portfolio.
- **Relevance:** the learning to be accredited demonstrates up to date knowledge and experience in a cross-cultural situation.
- **Criticality:** the assessment identifies the knowledge and skills it intends to be assessed against and shows critical engagement with the issues and the arguments.
- **Sufficiency:** that the evidence in the portfolio is appropriate in terms of quality and quantity demonstrating fully the achievement of the credit being claimed.

- **Sources:** use of scholarly and relevant sources.

Please consult the RPL Policy and the Programme Leader at Union School of Theology should you require any advice.

Additional Evidence

Please list on a separate page and/or attach any additional evidence, if applicable, that you may have in relation to this RPEL application.

SECTION 4: ALL APPLICANTS

By signing below, I declare the above facts to be correct, and I understand that Union School of Theology can approach the awarding body (such as a University or College) or employer, if it chooses, for verification of the submitted qualifications or experience.

Signed:Dated:

UNION SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY PROGRAMME LEADER & ACADEMIC DEAN APPROVAL

It is the Programme Leader's responsibility to ensure this form is countersigned by both parties.

By signing below, I verify that this application for entry, or advanced standing, through RPCL/RPEL, is approved and fulfils the criteria according to the Union School of Theology RPL Policy.

Credits to be awarded (if applicable):

Entry point (e.g. Autumn Term, Year 2):

Date for study to commence:

Programme Leader

Academic Dean

Signed:.....

Signed:.....

.....

.....

Name:.....

Name:.....

.....

....

Dated:.....

Dated:.....

....

....

Administration

The Programme Leader should undertake the following steps:

Step One

Copy of this form (if claim approved) to be sent to Registry so the student's record can be amended and so the results will be included on the student's transcript.

Step Two

Copy of this form (if claim approved) to be sent to Finance for information or action. The student may be billed.

Step Three

If the claim gives exemption from individual modules the relevant Examination Board should be notified of the outcome of the RPL claim. The Programme Leader should confirm the outcome of claim with the applicant, and provide any further guidance to the student on their programme of study.

To be completed by Finance:

Fees payable for assessing currency of transcript for certified RPL

£220 per claim

No charge is made when the transcript was issued within the last five years.

Fees payable for modules assessed through uncertified or experiential RPL

modules X £220 per 20 credits = £