

AECC Policy and Procedures for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and credit transfer for Higher Education¹

1. Scope and Purpose

- 1.1 This policy and its procedures sets out the principles, definitions, credit allowances, and operational processes that should be followed in applications for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), and credit transfer including the evidence students are required to submit and the academic and administrative responsibilities and processes involved.
- 1.2 Procedures relating to the admission of students who do not meet the usual entry requirements specified for a programme of study, are not included in this Policy. Applicants for non-standard entry should contact Registry for advice in the first instance.
- 1.3 The College is committed to the fair and equal treatment of all individuals regardless of gender, age, disability, colour, race, ethnic or national origin, socio-economic group, sexual orientation, marital status, family responsibilities, religious or political beliefs. Where a student or staff member working with this policy has specific protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 all endeavours will be made to ensure that information is available in appropriate formats and reasonable adjustments are made to the proceedings and facilities to accommodate their needs. For further assistance please contact AECC Registry. Applicants seeking RPL shall at all times be assessed with equity and fairness.

2. Key Responsibilities and delegated authority

- 2.1 Responsibility for the management and implementation of this policy and its procedures lies with the Academic Registrar.
- 2.2 The Academic Registrar provides advice to admissions staff and co-ordinates the admissions and selection procedure at AECC.
- 2.3 The Admissions Manager acts as the point of contact for all RPL and credit transfer queries, including initial queries from applicants considering submitting an RPL or credit transfer request. The Admissions Manager will advise these applicants on their options, the processes involved and the required supporting evidence to support their claim, signposting the applicant to the relevant Programme Leader or Programmes Office for more detailed advice as necessary.
- 2.4 The Admissions Manager ensures that information about RPL and credit transfer policy, procedures and contacts are made available in the prospectus, other course documentation and the website.
- 2.5 The Programme Leader or nominee has the primary responsibility for considering RPL and credit transfer claims and making a decision on their validity.
- 2.6 Under this policy and associated procedures any College role or officeholder may act through her or his appointed nominee.

¹ Students on the Access Diploma should contact the Programme Leader for information about RPL options.

- 2.7 The candidate seeking RPL or credit transfer is responsible for providing the College with all necessary supporting evidence to substantiate their claim.
- 2.8 Academic Development and Quality Committee (ADQC) considers the effectiveness of the arrangements for RPL and credit transfer, and recommends changes to current policy to Academic Board via the Academic Audit Committee (AAC).
- 2.9 Academic Board approves new policies or amendments to existing policies relating to RPL and credit transfer.

3. Recognition of Prior Learning and Credit Transfer - definitions

- 3.1 The UK Quality Code for Higher Education differentiates between the Recognition of Prior Learning and UK credit transfer. RPL involves the assessment of students' learning through a process which leads to recognition, normally through the award of credit. Credit Transfer refers to a process where the credits or qualification have been awarded by a UK higher education degree-awarding body in accordance with the relevant higher education qualifications framework (UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Chapter B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning, October 2013).
- 3.2 **RPL - Recognition of Prior Learning** – a method of assessment (leading to the award of credit) that considers whether a learner can demonstrate that they can meet the assessment requirements for a unit through the knowledge, understanding or skills that they already possess and so do not need to develop these through a course of learning. This can take one of two forms:
 - *Recognition of prior certificated learning (RPCL)* is the process for assessing and awarding credit for learning that has been previously accredited or certificated through a training provider but has not led to an award which is defined in the UK's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Quality Code², and which has outcomes which can be mapped against the outcomes of the receiving programme;
 - *Recognition of prior experiential learning (RPEL)* is the process for assessing and awarding credit for learning that has been achieved through experience and/or training that has not been certificated or formally assessed. It is the identification and demonstration of this learning within an academic framework that leads to credit. Evidence of learning must be valid and reliable.
- 3.3 **Credit transfer** - the process of recognising/transferring the credit and/or qualification, achieved by a student/applicant on an award which is defined in the UK's QAA Quality Code³, against another programme.

4. AECC Terminology within this document

The terminology used in this policy is described below:

- 4.1 **Direct entry** - the term used to refer to students who are exempted from whole level(s) of an undergraduate degree on the basis of prior learning outside of the receiving programme (i.e. who enter directly into the beginning of a stage of the course other than the first). Direct Entry is

² Awards defined in the UK's QAA Quality Code: *Level 7*: Master's degrees (eg, MPhil, MLitt, MRes, MA, MSc), Integrated master's degrees (eg, MEng, MChem, MPhys, MPharm), Postgraduate diplomas, Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)/Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE), Postgraduate certificates. *Level 6*: Bachelor's degrees with honours (eg BA/ BSc/ BEng) and unclassified, Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Graduate diplomas, Graduate certificates. *Level 5*: Foundation degrees (eg, FdA, FdSc), Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE), Higher National Diplomas (HND). *Level 4*: Higher National Certificates (HNC), Certificates of Higher Education (CertHE)

³ See above

normally based wholly on RPCL or credit transfer, and is always made as part of the admissions process.

- 4.2 **Individual Unit Exemption** – the exemption of students from a unit or collection of units based on prior learning undertaken outside of the receiving programme. Individual Unit Exemption may be based on RPCL, RPEL or credit transfer. RPL will normally be considered only for units of study; not component parts thereof. Not all programmes permit Individual Unit Exemptions.
- 4.3 **Stage** - normally a complete academic year/level of the programme.
- 4.4 **Receiving programme** – the AECC programme the applicant wishes to enter.

5. Principles for Implementation

- 5.1 The College is committed to the principle that appropriate Learning, wherever it occurs, and provided it can be assessed, may be recognised for academic credit towards an AECC award. All genuine learning, however acquired, is deserving of credit towards an award provided that:
- it can be clearly identified and described;
 - its relevance and currency can be evidenced and assessed in relation to approved intended learning outcomes (ILOs);
 - it is at the same level and is appropriate to the subject of the exemptions sought.
- 5.2 All students, including those seeking to demonstrate equivalence to units on the basis of prior learning, must meet the learning outcomes for the programme as set out in the programme specification, either through studying the programme, and/or through RPL or credit transfer, in order to qualify for an award.
- 5.3 RPL and credit transfer involve academic judgement to confirm that the prior learning is equivalent to that which might otherwise have been achieved by following the validated curriculum on the programme for which credit is sought. The process to approve applications therefore focusses on establishing equivalence of learning with the receiving programme level(s)/unit(s). In some cases, nominated professional support staff may have devolved responsibility in the decision making process although academic sign-off is always required.
- 5.4 Admission to a programme or exemption from units on the basis of credit transfer will always be on the basis of prior certificated learning that has taken place at another UK higher education institution. Otherwise the principles outlined in 5.1 above apply to the relevance, level and currency of the learning for which exemptions are sought.
- 5.5 RPL and credit transfer decisions shall be based upon the identification, description and assessment of learning outcomes, where the equivalence of either specified unit learning outcomes and/or the overall equivalence of the outcomes at the end of a stage of learning are demonstrated.
- 5.6 The judgement about equivalence shall take into account validity, authenticity, currency, reliability and relevance. That is:
- ‘Relevance - is there an appropriate match between the evidence presented and the learning claimed?’
 - Sufficiency - is there sufficient evidence to demonstrate the achievement of the learning claimed?’
 - Authenticity - is the evidence clearly related to the applicants' own efforts and achievements?’
 - Currency - does evidence relate to current learning?’
- (QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education Chapter B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning (October 2013 Page 15)).*

- 5.7 There shall be opportunities for staff involved in implementing this policy to receive training in their roles, and for applicants to receive guidance and support.
- 5.8 Where evidence comes to light following approval of an application that the student may have gained his/her exemptions by fraudulent means, the Assessment Board will not ratify the underpinning credits and will not recommend that an award is made (including the award of credit) before a disciplinary process has taken place. If a student is found guilty of fraud, the student will not be granted any AECC credits.
- 5.9 External examiners have the right to request access to assessment documentation, including decisions on RPL/credit transfer.
- 5.10 The College reserves the right to direct further specific study and learning as a condition of direct entry and/or continued enrolment for those students admitted through the College's RPL procedures.

6. Limits to RPL

- 6.1 In order to ensure the integrity of the College's programmes, limits are set on the total amount of RPL credit/credit transfer allowed for entry.

Undergraduate programmes

- 6.2 The maximum volumes of credit for all RPL/credit transfer transactions involving undergraduate programmes other than integrated masters are as follows:
- i credit based on RPCL/credit transfer should not exceed two thirds of the credits for the award for which the student is registered.
 - ii credit based on RPEL should not exceed one third of the credits for the award for which a student is registered.
 - iii a combination of credit based on RPCL/credit transfer and RPEL must not exceed the stated limits for each individual category above and must total no more than the maximum limit stated for RPCL/credit transfer.

Integrated Masters programmes

- 6.3 The maximum volumes of credit for all RPL/credit transfer transactions involving Integrated Masters programmes are as follows:
- i credit based on RPCL/credit transfer should not exceed 240 credits for the award.
 - ii credit based on RPEL should not exceed 120 credits for the award for which a student is registered.
 - iii A combination of credit based on RPCL/credit transfer and RPEL must not exceed the stated limits for each individual category above and must total no more than the maximum limit stated for RPCL/credit transfer.

Notwithstanding the above provisions, the minimum time a student admitted through the College's RPL procedures to an Integrated Masters programme shall be enrolled on that programme shall be two academic years of full-time study.

Postgraduate taught programmes

- 6.4 The maximum volumes of credit for all RPL/credit transfer transactions involving postgraduate taught programmes are as follows:
- i credit based on RPCL/credit transfer should not exceed two thirds of the credits for the award for which the student is registered.

- ii credit based on RPEL should not exceed one third of the credits for the award for which a student is registered.
 - iii A combination of credit based on RPCL/ credit transfer and RPEL must not exceed the stated limits for each individual category above and must total no more than the maximum limit stated for RPCL/ credit transfer.
- 6.5 These limits may be subject to restrictions imposed from time to time by relevant PSRBs. Where this applies this will be recorded in the relevant Programme Specification.
- 6.6 To be eligible for recognition and accreditation prior learning shall normally have been completed no more than five years prior to the enrolment date for the intended programme at the AECC.
- 6.7 Prior learning completed more than five years prior to the enrolment date for the intended programme, may be recognised and accredited subject to the following conditions:
- the applicant is able to demonstrate evidence of continuous application, updating and relevance to their practice (in the case of professional programmes) and the award sought; *and*
 - the Programme Leader confirms that the learning is still relevant and meets the Learning Outcomes.

7. Supplementary Assessment Regulations

- 7.1 Both RPL and credit transfer decisions are ratified by an Assessment Board. As both are based on a threshold judgement, no marks will normally contribute to the classification of the award and the credits which are awarded through RPL/credit transfer will be recorded on the student's Diploma Supplement and Transcript on a pass-fail basis.
- 7.2 All RPCL/credit transfer is granted on a pass/fail basis. Students will receive academic credit but no grades for their prior learning. RPCL credit counts towards the overall award but the final award classification will be based only on the marks achieved in the units actually studied on the relevant AECC programme.
- 7.3 In the case of candidates admitted directly to Level 6 of an Integrated Masters programme, degree classification will be based on Level 6 and Level 7 units only in the ratio 40% and 60%.
- 7.4 For students seeking to exit an Integrated Masters with a BSc (Hons) award the Honours classification will be based on Level 6 units only, in the case of candidates with admitted directly to Level 6 on the basis of RPL.
- 7.5 The number of credits on which the profile regulation is based for classification purposes is fixed as outlined in the AECC Assessment Regulations and cannot be adjusted in order to apply the '2/3rds credit rule' to the remaining units at the final level of the named award.
- 7.6 To be eligible for a named intermediate award, a student must normally have completed 1/3 of the credits which make up the award at the AECC. In the absence of eligibility for a named intermediate award, students will be awarded credits for successfully completed AECC units.
- 7.7 All successful claims for RPL must be recorded on the College's Student Records System.
- 7.8 A successful claim for RPL, once ratified by the relevant Assessment Board, will appear on a student's academic transcript for that academic year.

8. Processes for consideration of RPL/Credit transfer requests

Advice and Guidance

- 8.1 The College favours providing advice and guidance through individual contact with applicants, and guidance documentation about completing an RPL claim. As part of these discussions applicants will be advised about the nature of the evidence to be provided, the arrangements for submission and the timescales for them to do so. Applicants will also be given an indication of the time it will take for the application to be assessed, how this will be done, and how they will be advised if the application has been approved. The responsibilities of the applicant to assemble the evidence should be made clear at an early stage in discussion. Advice and guidance should be given on methods of presenting evidence to meet the specified unit ILOs. It should be made clear to applicants that any views expressed on a draft claim do not guarantee the outcome of the claim when the request is formally assessed.
- 8.2 The relevant Framework/Programme Leader will be able to provide initial advice about the unit(s) and possible level(s) for which exemptions might be considered, and are possible, within the credit allowances outlined in Section 7 of this document. In some cases, nominated administrative staff may also provide advice.
- 8.3 Where relevant, applicants should be made aware that because RPL and credit transfer credits are awarded on a pass-fail basis, they will not contribute to the classification of the award (and where the profile regulation is applied, the number of credits on which it is based cannot be adjusted in order to apply the '2/3rds credit rule' to the remaining units at the final level of the named award). See para 7.5 above.

Provision of Evidence

- 8.4 For RPL or credit transfer to be agreed, both the validity and authenticity of the evidence presented must be verified. The evidence must be linked to the expected learning outcomes of the relevant AECC programme and must be at an appropriate level and of an appropriate volume.
- 8.5 For certificated learning/credit transfer, sufficiently detailed documentation must be provided so the range and level of learning and attainment can be assessed for both scope and level, and mapped against the exemptions sought. The evidence required is likely to include, but is not limited to:
 - the original award certificate
 - transcript (or equivalent)
 - programme specification
 - unit specifications
 - programme handbook
 - detailed syllabus.
- 8.6 Evidence for RPEL applications will take the normally form of a portfolio of evidence. The evidence must clearly identify where the ILOs of unit(s) or level(s) have been met and demonstrated in order to claim credit. In addition, evidence must be presented to demonstrate the learning that has taken place, and not simply the experience that has been acquired by the applicant. Acceptable evidence may include, but is not limited to:
 - a logbook maintained as part of a programme, company training scheme or for a professional body
 - job descriptions
 - supervisors' or employers' reports
 - a portfolio of work done in a training position including the learning from this work.
 - letter from the current line-manager or employer.

8.7 It is a student's responsibility to collate, provide and present the evidence to enable the College to assess the RPL/credit transfer application. Applications must be submitted to Registry. All evidence must be provided in English. If translation from another language is required, the translation must be prepared by a registered translator, and include a statement of confirmation from the translator/translation company that it is an accurate translation of the original document, together with the translator/translation company's contact details. It is the student's responsibility to meet any costs associated with the provision of evidence.

Assessment of applications

8.8 Assessment of the evidence is based on academic judgement and will normally be made by the Framework/Programme Leader in liaison with relevant academic colleagues. In some cases, nominated professional support staff may have devolved responsibilities in the decision making process. However, academic sign-off is required for all decisions. No decision can be made before appropriate supporting evidence has been received.

8.9 Using information provided by the student and assessment, the assessors must decide whether the certified learning or evidence of experiential learning is equivalent to the units and/or level for which exemption is sought. The Assessors shall:

(i) when considering evidence for prior certified learning:

- confirm (against a transcript of credit or award certificate) that credit has been awarded by an authorised agency or institution;
- confirm (against a transcript of credit or award certificate) that the learning activity has been given a credit rating (eg 15 CATS credits at level 5), or judge the level and amount of credit on the basis of the year and volume of study at another UK institution, or confirm the level and volume of study successfully undertaken in an overseas university or similar institution;
- assess the evidence submitted against the requirements and learning outcomes of the relevant degree programme and the constituent modules; taking into account validity, authenticity, currency, reliability and relevance (see para 4.6).
- confirm that the learning has been in a subject area relevant to the programme of study.

(ii) when considering evidence for experiential learning:

- assess equivalences of competence between learning at work (for example) and having gained a specific qualification.

8.10 Applications for Individual Unit Exemption(s) (where this is permitted) will be assessed in relation to the ILOs of the specific unit(s) for which they require exemption. Students who apply for Direct Entry will be assessed in relation to the ILOs of the specified level(s) for which they require exemption.

8.11 Applicants may if necessary be asked to provide further or clearer evidence in order for the application to proceed.

8.12 If a number of Direct Entry applicants apply from the same institution, then this information may be obtained once, held on file within Registry and referred to in all future identical cases. The file must be updated as appropriate to ensure currency of the information.

8.13 Approval of claims will be deemed to have taken place after the academic decision has been made when the formal record of the assessment activity has been completed, and the assignment of credit (where appropriate) has been recorded on the Student Record System. Accurate records shall be maintained about why decisions are made, and the evidence about how the learning outcomes have been met must be available for scrutiny by external examiners and for archive purposes. The results must be communicated promptly to students.

- 8.14 All submitted evidence from the student and a full record of the RPL/credit transfer decision-making process, should be held on the student file.

Recording of RPL/credit transfer claims

- 8.15 The College uses a standard RPL assessment form to record RPL claims. This form provides the formal record of the decision made and will be used to:
- inform students of the decision made, including feedback for unsuccessful applicants
 - update student records
 - form part of the relevant range of evidence retained for scrutiny by external examiners.
 - offer evidence of good practice on a sample basis to auditors and/or assessors
 - identify any issues for subsequent discussion by the Academic Registrar and relevant academic colleagues to inform policy and procedural review.
- 8.16 Return of a completed form to Registry constitutes formal approval (or otherwise) of an RPL/credit transfer claim. Registry will record details of successful RPL claims on the Student Record System.

Informing the applicant of the outcome

- 8.17 Students applying for RPL/credit transfer will be informed of the decision by Registry if the decision is made at the point of application, or by the relevant Programmes Office if the decision is made at the point of enrolment or thereafter.
- 8.18 Copies of an unsuccessful application should be retained on the applicant or student file.

Ratification of the decision by the Assessment Board

- 8.19 The assessment of prior learning involves academic judgement about relevant knowledge, understanding and application at an agreed standard. In recognition, however, that decisions about RPL/credit transfer have to be made prior to, or shortly after the start of the programme of study, the role of the Board shall be to confirm that the procedures set out in this document have been followed, and to report retrospectively on any judgements that have been taken correctly through the approved procedure, but appear to be anomalous.
- 8.20 Details of the decision, and the credits awarded, will be reflected on the relevant Board report at the next scheduled meeting of the Assessment Board for ratification.

9. Fees

- 9.1 Charging an additional fee for RPL/credit transfer could be construed as providing a barrier to entry and contrary to our, widening participation (WP) strategies. It shall be normal practice within the College to consider for RPL/credit transfer those with appropriate certificated or, where appropriate, experiential learning and it is a natural extension of this to provide RPL/credit transfer at no additional cost to any standard application fee.

10. Appeals or complaints

- 10.1 Applicants may not appeal against the academic or professional judgement of those making the decision on an application. However, applicants for RPL/credit transfer who consider that
- there is evidence of a procedural irregularity connected directly with the selection process; or
 - the decision of the College is, on the basis of the information available, unreasonable; or
 - there is evidence of prejudice or bias on the part of those involved in the selection process;

should address this through the AECC - Recruitment, Selection and Admissions - Appeals and Complaints: Policy and Procedure.

11. Monitoring and Review

11.1 Student Progress Groups shall be made aware of RPL/credit transfer decisions, and may monitor the progress of students who have been so processed. The Student Progress Groups (via Programme Steering Groups) may make recommendations on the implementation and practice of RPL. Assessment Boards shall (as already indicated) be made aware of RPL in respect of individual students.

12. Links to other AECC documents

- College Admissions Policy
- Student Charter
- Dignity Diversity and Equality (DDE) Policy.
- AECC - Recruitment, Selection and Admissions - Appeals and Complaints: Policy and Procedure

All the above documents are available on the public website for prospective students, the VLE for current students and on the Staff Information Portal (SIP) for staff.

Version:	1.0
Approved by:	Academic Board
Originator/Author	Academic Registrar
Policy Owner	Academic Registrar
Reference source	QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education Chapter B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning (October 2013) Examples from other institutions used as source material (in particular Bournemouth University, University of Southampton, Leeds Beckett University, University of Winchester)
Date approved	28 June 2017
Effective from	1 July 2017
Review date	Spring 2020
Target	Admissions Team , Programme Leaders, Programmes Offices, students and prospective students
Policy location	SIP/VLE, public website
Equality analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No major impact. There is provision in the policy for reasonable adjustments to be made to arrangements where required. – With respect to gender reassignment restrictions to access to information regarding gender reassigned persons may need to be taken into account with regard to verification of previous certificates which may have been issued in a prior name – With respect to age, although setting a time-limit on the completion of prior learning prior to the enrolment date for the intended programme at the AECC could potentially disadvantage older applicants, there is provision within the policy for learning completed earlier to be recognised under specific conditions. – There may be additional costs for applicants whose evidence of prior learning needs to be translated into English – however this translation is essential in order for an effective assessment of the applicant's case to be made. (There are no other financial costs to students in submitting an RPL application).