DE MONTFORT UNIVERSITY KAZAKHSTAN

A guide to

the recognition of prior learning (RPL)

This guide is intended to support academic staff in making decisions about Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) applications and to support applicants and students in making their application.

For forms, templates, and further guidance, please contact Academic Quality Services, aqs@dmu.ac.uk

2025/26

Introduction

This guide is for staff involved in the admission of applicants to the university via the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and/or who are involved with supporting students who wish to apply for RPL during the course of their studies. It is suggested that the material within the guide is adapted to suit the particular vocabulary or requirements for your subject area, while adhering to the generic university position and in particular to the principles outlined in section 1.

The guide and accompanying RPL application form will be helpful in supporting applicants and students in submitting an RPL application.

The guide should be read in conjunction with the university's academic regulations for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

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Section 1: What is recognition of prior learning (RPL)?

The purpose of RPL

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a process which facilitates entry with advanced standing to a programme at De Montfort University (DMU). This is normally achieved by the award of credit to the student, thus exempting them from studying a particular module or modules on the programme, or allowing them entry into a higher level of the programme via credit transfer. The process supports students in using their prior learning towards a higher education qualification, avoids students having to repeat learning they have already successfully undertaken, and promotes student mobility by facilitating credit accumulation and transfer. Students may make RPL applications during the application process for admission to the university and during the course of their studies.

The guiding principle of RPL and credit transfer is that it adheres to the university's regulatory framework and that decisions are made transparently, fairly and consistently across the university, ensuring equality of opportunity for all applicants and students.

The university encourages the use of the RPL process wherever possible, as a key principle of a credit accumulation and transfer scheme, but recognises that for some programmes there may be a good reason why it may not be applicable, for example programmes which must meet the requirements of a Professional, Statutory or Regulation Body (PSRB). The decision not to allow RPL should be taken by the programme management board. It should be taken to the Taught Programmes Management Committee by the Associate Dean (Education) for approval; on approval it will be recorded in in the university's programme-specific regulations register.

Opportunities for applicants/students to make RPL claims should be promoted via the university website and in literature provided to applicants/students.

The guide does not include circumstances whereby current DMU students transfer from one programme of study to another, normally at the end of a level of study. In such cases a Change of Programme form should be completed.

Definitions

Prior certificated learning

This term is used to describe learning which is at higher education level, for example professional development or work-based learning awards, but which has not led to the award of credits or qualifications as outlined within the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (FHEQ), October 2014. A process of assessment is required to determine whether the learning is suitable for recognition in relation to a specified DMU programme/module(s). If it is deemed suitable a proportion of credit is awarded, at the appropriate FHEQ level, to reflect the prior learning and achievement.

Prior experiential learning

This will involve an assessment process by academic staff. The learning gained through the experience is being assessed, rather than the experience itself. If the learning is recognised as appropriate in relation to the specific DMU programme/module(s), a proportion of credit, at the appropriate FHEQ level is awarded to the student.

Prior learning for which credit has been awarded

This is where a student has undertaken prior learning which has led to the award of credits or qualifications by a UK higher education degree awarding body according to the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (FHEQ), February 2024. In such cases the university will determine at application

stage the status of the award, including volume and level, in relation to the programme the student is applying for. This is a standard part of the admissions process and therefore does normally not require formal assessment of the student's prior learning. Students may be exempted from studying a module, or modules, based on the prior learning, but more often will be admitted directly to a higher level of the award. At undergraduate level, for example, a student may be admitted directly into level 5 or level 6 of an honours degree; credits will not be awarded in relation to specific modules, but awarded against the level or levels. At taught postgraduate level a student who has previously achieved a postgraduate certificate at another institution may be admitted directly onto a postgraduate diploma or master's route.

Prior learning undertaken outside the UK

Where a student's prior learning has been undertaken outside of the UK, the student may or may not have been awarded credit. In terms of some European awards it is straightforward to determine the equivalence of the volume and level of credit awarded to the student. Under the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) one ECTS credit is equivalent to two DMU credits. The FHEQ levels can be mapped clearly to the cycles in the Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area:

First cycle	FHEQ Level 4	
	FHEQ Level 5	Short cycle qualifications
	FHEQ Level 6	End of first cycle qualifications
Second cycle	FHEQ Level 7	End of second cycle qualifications
Third cycle	FHEQ Level 8	End of third cycle qualifications

Where prior learning has taken place at an overseas institution the central or faculty Admissions teams can advise on equivalence of qualifications in relation to RPL applications.

Principles of RPL

The following guiding principles should inform the consideration of RPL applications.

Applications

- Responsibility rests with the applicant/student to make the RPL claim; however it is the responsibility of the university, via programme teams, to advertise and promote the RPL process to applicants/students.
- RPL claims should be made prior to the start of the relevant learning in the programme.
- Applications will be made by individuals in a range of circumstances. In certain cases RPL may be defined at programme level, where completion of a certain level or levels of a specific programme will be recognised for advanced entry into onto a DMU award. In such cases entry will be automatically determined during the Admissions process and individual claims from applicants are not required.
- Applicants for RPL should receive supportive guidance during the process, including advice about the evidence that is considered appropriate, the criteria against which claims are judged, timescales and arrangements for providing feedback.
- Applicants may not normally re-use credit from a previous completed programme towards an equivalent or lower award.
- The applicant may receive credit for the prior learning they have gained from experience, but not the experience itself.
- Assessment is made against the RPL criteria (see Section 2) and the module learning outcomes. Consideration should be given to the 'shelf-life' of the learning being considered via the RPL claim. Like many other institutions, DMU does not set limits on the currency of previously-earned credit; however sector practice shows that five years is often used as an indicator of currency. In practice, decisions will depend on the subject area and will be delegated to admissions tutors and/or programme leaders as appropriate. As a guideline, a fair 'match' would include 80% attainment of the module or module(s) outcomes the claim relates to.

- The decision on each application must be clearly documented, to ensure clarify for all parties. Decisions taken should be transparent and equitable.

The award of RPL

- RPL may only be awarded within the parameters outlined in university regulations.
- No marks are awarded for credit achieved via the RPL process, unless the RPL is awarded in relation to credits previously earned at DMU, in which case the marks can be brought forward and linked to the student's current profile. Classification of awards is based only on modules studied at DMU.
- Credits awarded via the RPL process must be clearly denoted on documentation provided to students on graduation, for example the diploma supplement or Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR).

Section 2: The RPL process

The process

Faculties may introduce local variations on how to operate the Recognition of Prior Learning process. The process and staff involved may also vary depending on a variety of issues, such as:

- Whether an enquiry is received from an applicant to a DMU programme or a current student wishing to apply for RPL against a specific module within their programme. It should be noted that students must apply for RPL before they commence their studies on the module(s) in question.
- Whether the applicant/student has prior certificated learning, learning for which credit has been awarded, or experiential learning.
- Whether this is an individual 'one-off' application as opposed to a commonly-recognised route for admission by advanced standing into a DMU programme

Local arrangements will, however, normally include the following steps:

Enquiry

An applicant/student enquires about RPL and is provided with advice/guidance and the application form. A university application form is appended to this guide. Faculties may use this, tailored to their needs, or develop their own proforma as long as it covers the information in the generic proforma.

Application

The applicant/student prepares their claim on the application form, submitting the appropriate evidence and a portfolio, if appropriate. Evidence may include outline module content from previous modules studied and copies of previous transcripts, award certificates and Higher Education Achievement Reports (HEAR). In some faculties/subject areas a meeting with the applicant/student may be required to explore their claim.

Decision

The claim is considered by the appropriate staff – Admissions staff for applicants and the relevant programme leader/team if the student is already studying a DMU programme. Admissions staff will liaise with academic colleagues as appropriate. Decisions should be based on consideration of the criteria outlined below. Authority to make decisions on RPL will not normally be devolved to partner institutions (delivery organisations). Therefore any claim which relates to entry to/study on a DMU programme at a partner institution will be assessed by DMU Admissions staff or the programme leader.

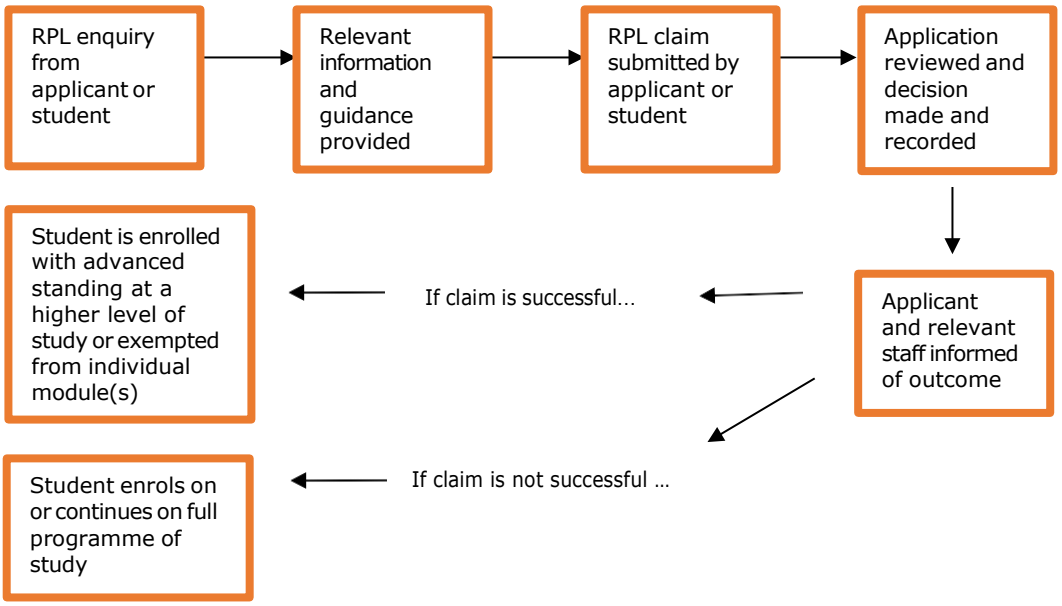
Applicants/students should be informed of the decision in a timely manner.

Recording of decision

Staff will record the decision on the application form. If the decision is not to allow the claim, an applicant will be required to study the entire programme, and a current student must study in full the module(s) their claim related to. The record should show the reasons for not approving the application.

If the decision is to approve the application, the reason for making the decision should be clearly articulated. If the application involves accepting credit earned at another institution, the name of the institution and the level, volume and date of the credit achieved must be recorded.

Flowchart of the process



Criteria for assessing an RPL application

Validity

The achievement must be comparable with the standard and content of the DMU programme the student is making the claim in relation to. The evidence should match the learning claimed, and the learning should be appropriate to the module(s) learning outcomes.

Sufficiency

There should be sufficient evidence to cover the outcomes for the learning against which the claim is being made. Normally it would be expected that there would be at least an 80% match between the student's prior learning and the module(s) outcomes.

Currency

The assessment should establish that the learning is still current, even if it was acquired some time ago. In some subject areas currency may be a particular issue. In such cases the programme RPL regulations could specify that learning acquired more than, for example, five years ago, may need supporting by a portfolio of more recent achievements.

Authenticity

The admissions tutor/programme leader must be assured that the claim relates to the applicant's own work, for example experiential learning should be endorsed by direct evidence, including referees. Where credit has previously been awarded the application/student should provide a transcript or record of achievement from the awarding institution.

Appeals against rejection of application

An applicant or student may appeal against a decision to reject an RPL application by contacting the faculty's Associate Dean (Education) within 10 university working days of the rejection being confirmed. The staff member who dealt with the application can provide the relevant contact details. The applicant/student should

clearly state the grounds on which the appeal is being made. The decision of the Associate Dean (Education) is final.

Fraudulent claims

If it is suspected that a fraudulent claim has been made, the staff member processing the application will refer it to the Associate Dean (Education) for investigation. If an applicant is found to have made a fraudulent RPL claim, for example by submitting counterfeit documentation or omitting pertinent facts such as an unspent criminal conviction, they will be subject to the penalties outlined in Chapter 1 of the General Regulations and Procedures Affecting Students: Entry, registration and student status - untrue statements and omissions. Current DMU students will be subject to the disciplinary procedure outlined in Chapter 2.

Section 3: The RPL process for higher and degree apprenticeships

It should be noted that as the university is accessing government funding to deliver an apprenticeship, we must ensure the individual and the programme are eligible for funding by conducting an initial assessment of the individual's suitability in line with the proposed apprenticeship. Funds must not be used to pay for training for knowledge, skills and behaviours already attained by the apprentice.

The process of assessing Recognised Prior Learning in apprenticeship provision forms part of Initial Assessment during the onboarding stage of recruitment. Comparing the individual's existing knowledge, skills and behaviours with those required in the apprenticeship standard to achieve occupational competence. The assessment must quantify the content which should be omitted from the Training Plan, in the form of a volume of off-the-job training hours.

Initial Assessment must identify and document any knowledge, skills and behaviours, relevant to the apprenticeship standard, gained from the following:

- Prior education, training, or associated qualifications in a related subject sector area, including any previous apprenticeship/s undertaken

- Learning or competence gained from prior work experience, particularly where the apprentice is an existing employee, or is beginning their apprenticeship after completing another programme with a relevant work placement.

Why is prior learning important for apprenticeship programmes?

Prior learning in apprenticeships can be recognised as prior experiential and or certificated learning, which may be used for entry or credit where appropriate to the standard. It should result in an individual Training Plan that accounts for relevant prior learning and experience, reducing the content, duration and cost where training is not required. This is to ensure providers are making the best use of the “public purse when delivering apprenticeship training that is levy funded.

As an Apprenticeship Training Provider, DMU is required to evidence the outcomes of Initial Assessment, including the review of potential RPL within an apprentice's Evidence Pack. This evidence forms part ofthe audit trail of why we have claimed the funding we have for delivering to the apprentice. Without robust RPL evidence, funding is at risk of being reclaimed following an DfE audit.

Ofsted is also interested in our initial assessment and RPL processes for apprentices. These provide a baseline for programme teams to design the apprentices learning journey. Ofsted reviews how initial assessment and RPL take place to identify how well apprentices are progressing with their programme and that they aren't repeating the knowledge, skills and behaviours they already possess.

The Department of Education has provided guidance on how and why Initial Assessment of prior learning is needed, which is available here: Apprenticeship Recognition of Prior Learning .

How does DMU assess prior learning of apprentices?

The onboarding and recruitment process for apprenticeship programmes is a two-stage process, including Eligibility and Suitability. Prior learning features within both stages, however, it is considered in much greater depth during the suitability stage.

Assessing suitability for the programme is conducted by the programme team and involves input from both the apprentice applicant and their employer. The apprentice completes the relevant skills scan; a programme team member then reviews this and a Training Plan discussion is held with the apprentice and their employer to explore the responses further and confirm the employer holds the same view of the apprentice's current ability. The results of the skills scan and any supplemental diagnostic testing must evidence that the individual requires significant new knowledge, skills and behaviours in order to be occupationally competent in their job role, and that the training required meets the funding rules relating to the minimum duration of an apprenticeship and to off-the-job training (OTJT). Alongside this the apprentice will have provided evidence of any certificated learning that they have previously undertaken and this will also be discussed during the Training Plan discussion.

Following the Training Plan discussion, the programme team member will confirm the amount of prior learning and, if applicable, the reduction in cost and/or duration of the apprenticeship programme. They will also confirm if any prior learning (experiential or credit) will need to be formally claimed on behalf of the apprentice.

The reduction in cost and/or duration will be included in the written agreement with the employer and the individual training plan. As well as being including the same figures in the ILR and the employers Digital Account. Each apprentice's Individual Training Plan includes Off the Job hours which reflect that prior learning has been identified and recognised.

What evidence is needed for 'Apprentices' RPL claims?

To satisfy the apprenticeship funding rules for initial assessment and recognition of prior learning an apprentice's evidence pack must include:

- **Evidence that you have assessed and agreed with the employer, the individual's current competence against the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to achieve the standard and identified and quantified relevant prior learning and experience.**

  At DMU this means that every apprentice is required to have a:

  - Signed Skills Scan
  - Signed Training Plan discussion form which confirms that:
    - an apprenticeship is the most appropriate training programme for the applicant.
    - the proposed training programme aligns with an approved apprenticeship standard, at the most appropriate level for the applicant;
    - the applicant's job role has a productive purpose and that there is a direct link between this job role and the chosen apprenticeship standard;
    - the employer will provide their apprentice with the appropriate support and supervision to carry out both their job role and their apprenticeship (including the end-point assessment), particularly if the apprentice is working flexibly, including working from home;
    - the employer will release the apprentice for all off-the-job training required by the training plan;
    - the employer will be providing the apprentice with opportunities to embed and consolidate their knowledge, skills and behaviours gained through off-the-job training in the workplace
  - Copies of relevant prior qualifications
  - Copies of RPL claim form and RPL's appearance on the apprentices HEAR report

- **Evidence to show how you have adjusted the apprenticeship content, duration and price to reflect prior learning.**

  On completion of the skills scan and training plan discussion with the employer and the applicant, the programme leader will need to provide the percentage of prior learning that has been identified and recognised as well as the number of Off the Job Learning Hours this equates too.

  Reductions must have used the formula set out below:

  (Number of Off the Job Learning Hours – Number of hours prior learning identified) /10
  = % New number of Off the Job Learning Hours to complete.

  100 - New number of Off the Job hours = % Prior Learning Off the Job hours.

  % Prior Learning Off the Job Hours * 0.5 = revised % for price adjustment.

  For example, it has been identified through the skills scan that Apprentice A has 300 prior Off the Job hours against a typical standard of 1,000 Off the Job hours.

  (1000-300)/10=70
  100-70=30

  30%*0.5=15%

  Funding band maximum-15%= Price for learner

  .

  The number of hours should be recorded on the training plan discussion form which will enable the cost (Total Negotiated Price – TNP) to be included in the written agreement/contract with the employer, the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) and on the Digital Account Service (DAS), meaning it is important it is correctly calculated.

What are the implications of not recording apprentices prior learning properly?

If prior learning is present but is not properly recognised this means the apprentices eligibility for their programme will be questioned by the DfE during an Audit as the provider (in this case DMU) will have received more levy funding then they were entitled too. This funding would be recouped by the DfE during an audit due to non-compliance.

Not establishing and responding to an apprentices prior learning properly will also be questioned by Ofsted during an inspection. Ofsted expect providers to be able to clearly and accurately determine an apprentice's starting point and progression. If prior learning is not establish properly then apprentices may be relearning knowledge, skills and behaviours they have already acquired which will not offer a good student experience.

How does this link with the "traditional" university process for RPL awards?

Following the completion of the Training Plan discussion and Skills Scan review, it will be clear whether there is any prior learning to claim. At this point, claims for entry or credit will be processed in line with the wider university process. This may mean that additional evidence is requested from the applicant to substantiate statements raised in the Training Plan discussion. However there will be no requirement for apprentices to complete the standard RPL application form.

In particular all RPL that enables advanced entry or credit for individual modules should be confirmed by an Assessment Board to allow the credit to appear on the apprentice's transcript. Programme leaders should consult with your Faculty Office regarding how you notify them of claims to go to assessment boards.

Section 4: Midlands Credit Compass

What is the Midlands Credit Compass?

The Midlands Credit Compass is a credit transfer facility set up by Midlands Enterprise Universities to support students wishing to transfer between participating universities in the Midlands.

What is the impact on RPL applicants?

The Midlands Credit Compass (MCC) is a framework to make the process of transferring academic credit more transparent and to support students through the transfer process between participating universities. This means that additional support is available both to DMU students wishing to transfer and to students from the other MCC institutions considering transferring to DMU. This support includes:

- A named key contact at the university you would like to transfer to
- A response to your initial enquiry within five working days
- Support through the application process
- Support available if you apply to transfer for up to five years from the time you left your studies

How do I apply?

If you are thinking of leaving your current programme please contact your personal tutor/programme leader for support and advice in the first instance.

If you are currently studying, or have previously studied, at participating university, send an email to the MCC university you are interested in going to. The email should contain the following information:

- 'Midlands Credit Compass' in the subject line
- A photo or digital version of your university transcript or third-party access to your Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR).
- The name of the programme you wish to study
- Your name, address and telephone number

Please note that there is no guarantee that you'll be able to switch to another programme at a different provider. Each university reserves the right to make a decision based on its individual regulations and admissions procedure.

Section 5: For reference

Regulations regarding the use of credit

There are limits to the volume of RPL credit which can be awarded to students, as the university has specific requirements about the proportion of credits which must be studied at DMU in order to receive a DMU award. These are specified in the RPL section of the academic regulations. The limits outlined in the regulations don't apply to previous DMU students who may have left the university with an exit award and wish to return to their previous programme to achieve a higher award. In such cases a student will only be required to study for the credits they need to achieve the award.

Credits achieved via the RPL process are excluded from the calculation of awards, for example honours degree classification, distinction, merit, except in the case of previous DMU students returning to the same programme.

Prior learning as covered by this guide refers to learning at the same academic level as the programme a student is applying for, or undertaking. Where a student has relevant prior learning which is at a level lower than the programme, the learning will be considered in terms of its suitability to meet or contribute to meeting the entry requirements for the programme. Recognition in this circumstance is outside the remit of this guidance document and forms part of the admissions process, and staff should refer to the university's Student Admissions Policy. However, the principles in this guide may be useful to staff in advising applicants preparing a portfolio as part of the admissions process where they do not meet the standard entry requirements.

Advice on the re-use of credit

At DMU relevant credit achieved can be re-used towards an award at a higher level of study, subject to the RPL limits outlined within the regulations (see above). It is important that the re-use of credit is accepted in relation to staged or complementary awards, for example where credits achieved from a foundation degree can count towards the achievement of an honours degree.

What happens to the RPL credits? – student record system and the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)

Student record system (SAP) and Assessment Board Report (ABR)

The decision to award RPL will be reflected in the student's record on SAP, the university's student record system. The volume and level of RPL credits will be included on the Assessment Board Report (ABR) so that assessment board members can clearly see the credits awarded by DMU and the credits awarded by a previous institution.

Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)

Students achieving a DMU award or interim (exit) award will receive a Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR). The HEAR will include details of the credits awarded to the student, clearly identifying where RPL credits have been awarded.

Section 6: Further information

The following documents/ links may be of interest:

De Montfort University Academic Regulations for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Programmes

QAA Quality Code for Higher Education: Advice and guidance on assessment

The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (2024)

The Higher Education Credit Framework for England (2021) and accompanying guidance

Department for Education Apprenticeship Funding rules

Department for Education Recognition Prior Learning guidance

DMU Apprenticeship Skills Scan