**Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)**



**Scope**

This RPL document covers undergraduate and postgraduate programs.

***Definitions:***

**Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** is defined under the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) as follows:

*Recognition of prior learning is an assessment process that involves assessment of an individual’s relevant prior learning (including formal, informal and non-formal learning) to determine the credit outcomes of an individual application for credit.*

This is underpinned by the AQF definition of credit as follows:

*Credit is the value assigned for the recognition of equivalence in content and learning outcomes between different types of learning and/or qualifications. Credit reduces the amount of learning required to achieve a qualification and may be through credit transfer, articulation, recognition of prior learning or advanced standing.*

Recognition of Prior Learning under the current University of Newcastle policy is consistent with the AQF definition and is expressed as “an assessment process that assesses the individual's formal and informal learning to determine the extent to which that individual has achieved the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes, or standards for entry to, and/or partial or total completion of, an AQF standard qualification”[[1]](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policy/000282.html#_edn1);

**Cognate Discipline** means the same discipline, where discipline is defined as the ABS Australian Standard of Classification of Education, as follows

01 Natural and Physical Sciences

02 Information Technology

03 Engineering and Related Technologies

04 Architecture and Building

05 Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies

06 Health

07 Education

08 Management and Commerce

09 Society and Culture

10 Creative Arts

11 Food, Hospitality and Personal Services

12 Mixed Field Programs

**Non-cognate Discipline** means different discipline, where discipline is defined as the ABS Australian Standard of Classification of Education as above.

**Aligned Discipline** recognises that for some postgraduate programs study may build upon competencies developed through prior learning in a non-cognate discipline, and means for the purpose of recognition of prior learning a discipline that has been recognised through a formal approval process as being likely to prepare students in part for the program of study.

***Process for Using Recognition of Prior Learning in Admissions:***

**Prior Learning** assessed by the University may be used to satisfy, or partially satisfy, course admission criteria, and/or gain exemption in some programs at any AQF Level.

In assessing Prior Learning the University will take account of

1. Courses successfully completed which are provided by professional bodies, enterprises and other education providers;
2. Current professional accreditations or industry certifications;
3. Learning from work and/or other forms of practical experience, including the hours and years involved ; and
4. Learning from life experience

It is the student’s responsibility to provide the necessary documentation for RPL to be assessed. This should be provided in portfolio form. In the case of (a) and (b) this will require official documentary evidence. In the case of (c) and (d) the student must provide a written statement to reflect their experience, in terms of what they have learnt and how that learning prepares them for the degree program in which they are seeking admission. The Faculty will provide full details of the format in which the information is required.

Assessment of RPL must be undertaken by academic or teaching staff (usually the Program Convenor) with appropriate expertise in the program and course content, as well as knowledge of and expertise in RPL assessment. The assessment must be undertaken with the same rigor as for other assessment used for the qualification.

Documentary evidence of the decision to award credit or otherwise must be maintained, together with the basis for that decision. Records of decisions about RPL must be captured within the student’s record in NUSTAR and stored on a student file that has been established within a TRIM (or similar record that can be accessed for auditing and compliance monitoring).

In some cases the Faculty may use assessment from a short course or other assessment which students can undertake (with or without fee as appropriate) to demonstrate they have the necessary prior learning. Such a short course or assessment must be approved by PCAC and the necessary credit it will cover should be clearly stipulated.

Each program that uses RPL as a basis for admission must provide a written detailed submission outlining the justification to the Program and Course Approval Committee (PCAC) for consideration and approval, prior to the award of RPL for that program.

**Equivalence of Work Experience**

Where work experience is being used as a basis for RPL, notionally a minimum of two years of work experience in a relevant area may be used to demonstrate equivalence of up to 80 units of formal learning, subject to the applicant providing documentary evidence of their work experience and evidence of reflective practice and outcomes at an appropriate level.

***Admission to Level 9 (80 Unit) Programs:***

Admission into a Level 9 (80 unit) coursework masters degree can take the following form where a student has a *Level 8 qualification*:

1. Where the admission criteria are no less than a 4 year Bachelor (Honours) (320 units) program in a cognate area – no RPL is needed;
2. Where the admission criteria are no less than a 1 year Graduate Diploma (80 units) in a cognate area – no RPL needed;
3. Where admission criteria are no less than an Honours degree (80 units) in a cognate area – no RPL needed;
4. Where the admission criteria are no less than a 40 unit Graduate Certificate in a cognate area **-** RPL to the minimum value of 40 units must also be demonstrated.

Where a student has a *Level 7 qualification* in an *aligned discipline*, admission may be via a Graduate Certificate which PCAC has approved as providing learning outcomes that build on recognised prior learning in a non-cognate discipline to the extent that the Graduate Certificate and the prior learning subsequently meet the requirement of for Level 8 admission to Level 9 (80 unit) programs as outlined above. Where work experience is used for RPL, the necessary volume of prior learning must be specified and would normally not be expected to be less than two years equivalent work experience in a relevant area. Where a short course is used to supplement RPL and provide a means for students to demonstrate the necessary learning outcomes for admission, such a short course would normally at a minimum be expected to cover material relating to academic learning skills as well as discipline specific material.

***Essential supporting documents:***

* AQF Level 9 Masters Points to Note particularly for admission– Attachment 1.

Information as at 5 September 2013

Developed by Professor Andrew Parfitt, Professor Val Robertson and Professor Bill Hogarth

Updated by Chair and Secretary, PCAC on 7 September 2013, following PCAC meeting on 5 September 2013

**DOC PCAC13:068A - Attachment 1**

**PROGRAM AND COURSE APPROVAL COMMITTEE**



**AQF LEVEL 9 – MASTERS: POINTS TO NOTE**

**Volume of Learning and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)**

A key issue in the AQF is the volume of learning completed by a student at the end of a degree. This also means the volume of learning the student has on entry is important. The Faculties therefore need to provide evidence of entry standards. Hence the following may be useful in determining the volume of learning for a Masters program (note: RRL is *Recognition of Prior Learning*):

At Entry Masters Structure

240 unit, level 7, award (non-cognate area) 160 units

240 unit, level 7, award (cognate area) 120 units

240 unit, level 7, award (cognate area) with RPL 80 units

240 unit, level 7, award (non-cognate area) with RPL 120 units

320 unit, level 8, award (non-cognate area) 120 units

320 unit, level 8, award (cognate area) 80 units

80 unit, level 8, honours award (non-cognate area) 120 units

80 unit, level 8, honours award (cognate area) 80 units

80 unit, level 8, Grad Diploma (non-cognate area) 120 units

80 unit, level 8, Grad Diploma (cognate area) 80 units

40 unit, level 8, Grad Certificate (cognate) with RPL 80 units

40 unit, level 8, Grad Certificate (non-cognate area) 120 units

Any entry arrangement which is not consistent with the above for Masters’ programs will need to be defensible, particularly where RPL is involved.

The Faculties should develop templates for their RPL. The Faculty must describe RPL for each program and this must be approved by the Program and Course Approval Committee. It is important that when work experience is acceptable as a basis of admission, students must provide a written statement to reflect on how that experience, in terms of what they have learnt, prepares them for the program they wish to do. Other RPL might be professional accreditation, industry certifications, professional training courses or programs etc. Official evidence must be provided to support any claims.

It is the responsibility of the Program Convenor to approve an individual student’s application for RPL and to ensure compliance with the RPL approved for the program by the Program and Course Approval Committee. This approval might be after a committee within the Faculty/School/Discipline has considered each individual case or where the templates allow administrative checking. Records of decisions about RPL must be captured within the student’s record in NUSTAR and stored on a student file that has been established within a TRIM (or similar record that can be accessed for auditing and compliance monitoring).

**New Programs and Program Reviews**

If the number of units for the program has increased as a result of AQF compliance, the Faculty must:

* complete an Abbreviated Business Plan (available on the [AQF Toolkit website](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/service/committees/senate/aqf-toolkit.html)) and receive Vice-Chancellor approval;
* receive approval for the new program from the Program and Course Approval Committee. This new program must have a new program code even if the name of the program is not changing;
* apply for and receive a new CRICOS code due to the increase in unit value.

*Information as at 5 September 2013 - Approved by Chair, Program and Course Approval Committee*

*Updated by Chair and Secretary, PCAC on 7 September 2013, following PCAC meeting on 5 September 2013*