

Recognition of Prior Learning – Higher Education Sector

Policy

Recognition of Prior Learning – Higher Education Sector

Purpose

The purpose of this policy and associated procedures is to provide for the assessment and credit of various types of non-credentialed learning undertaken outside of universities or TAFE institutes, whilst ensuring that academic rigour is appropriately maintained.

Swinburne University of Technology is committed to the principles of Recognition of Prior Learning as stated in the Credit Transfer Principles: Guidelines on Recognition of Prior Learning published by the Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee (AVCC) in December 1993. One of the objects of the University under the Swinburne University of Technology Act 1992 is to provide a multi-level system of post-secondary programs with provision for recognition of prior learning and flexibility of transition between programs.

The underlying principle of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is that no student should be required to undertake a subject/unit/module in a course for which they are already able to demonstrate satisfactory achievement of the performance outcomes stated in the published student information.

The policy therefore aims to maximise the recognition of a student's prior skills and knowledge whilst at all times maintaining the integrity and standards of the defined learning outcomes of the specific course of study.

The major benefit of taking into account a range of prior learning experiences is that it ensures students build on their prior learning and avoid repetition of subjects or stages of courses that they may have already completed elsewhere.

This policy also recognises that learning takes place not only through formal studies at accredited institutions, but also through activities such as employer-based training and development, and relevant life experience.

Scope

The above guidelines apply to all applications for credit which are not able to be processed under credit transfer and/or exemption criteria, or for which advanced standing is not available.

This policy applies to:

- individual students seeking advanced standing or exemption from specified subjects/units/modules within a particular program
- providers of employer-based programs, professional bodies, employers and private institutions seeking to work with Swinburne University of Technology in the recognition of their programs and identification of pathways for future study for those students completing their programs
- Faculty/Divisional RPL Committee members
- Faculty/Divisional Administrative staff

Applicable To

Higher Education Division

Procedure

Applies to: Higher Education Division

Approved by: Academic Board

Definitions

In this policy and procedures the following definitions apply:

Academic Unit Approving Body or equivalent

As work practices vary between Faculties and Centres, wherever the term Academic Unit Approving Body or equivalent appears it will be understood to include the Faculty Dean/School Director/Departmental Manager, as appropriate, and/or the School Academic Committee or the Course Convenor and /or the Deputy Director of a Centre

Advanced Standing

Credit may be given in one course on the basis of prior formal studies in another course without the direct correlation of learning outcomes. For example, advanced standing into the second year of a degree course may be granted on the basis of studies in a TAFE Diploma without the one to one correlation of learning outcomes

Assessment

Assessment is the process of collecting evidence and making judgements on the nature and extent of progress towards the performance requirements set out in a competency standard or a learning outcome, and making the judgement as to whether competency, learning outcome or the equivalent has been achieved

Assessor

Responsible for the management and assessment of RPL/RCC (Recognition of Current Competency) applications, including: organisation and conduct of interviews, practical demonstrations, written tests, projects and obtaining additional documentation, if required

Awarding Academic Unit

The Awarding Academic Unit is the Division (eg. Swinburne University of Technology, Lilydale), School (eg. School of Design) or Institute/Centre (eg. Industrial Research Institute Swinburne) that will approve a student's award on completion of a course of study

Block mode

A term used to describe an intensive teaching period that is shorter than the conventional semester

Census Date (Higher Education Sector)

The census date will be 31 March for Semester 1, 31 August for Semester 2 and 15 December for Semester 0 (Summer School). These dates do not apply to courses of study taught in block mode

Co-ordinator

A generic term used for anyone with co-ordination responsibilities within a course, as designated by the Department Manager/Faculty Dean

Credentialed Learning

Relevant skills, knowledge or competencies that have been acquired from a provider other than a university or TAFE institute, including education or training provided through employer-based programs, professional bodies, private providers etc

Credit Transfer

Credit transfer (or 'transfer' as it is sometimes known) means a student is granted credit for studies / module / competency taken at another educational institution or in another sector or in another course, which effectively means that they will be exempt from equivalent subjects in the course for which they are enrolling

ESOS Act

Education Services for Overseas Students 2000 (Clth)

Exemption (for similar studies)

An exemption means a student is not required to take a certain unit within a course on the basis of work experience or studies already completed at another educational institution or in another sector or in another course. There are five types of exemption:

- A matched exemption, where a student is exempted from a particular subject
- A partial exemption, where a student is exempted from a part or percentage of a particular subject (for RPL/RCC or exemption for similar studies)
- an unmatched exemption, where a student is given an exemption/s which is not linked to any particular subject/s (it is often given in the form of credit points or exemption from elective requirements of a course)
- a “block” exemption, where a student is exempted from a significant period of a course, such as a semester, a year or a specified number of credit points, rather than from specified subjects
- an exemption based on recognition of prior learning

Lodgement Officer

Person in the TAFE department responsible for accepting, recording receipt, and tracking of RPL and Exemption applications

Lodgement Register

Method used by departments (in TAFE) to register the lodgement and progress of RPL and exemption applications in the department

National Code

National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007

Prior Learning Portfolio (where applicable)

A series of documents which provide evidence of learning experiences and links them to learning outcomes

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) means a student is granted credit or partial credit towards a qualification in recognition of skills and knowledge gained through work experience, life experience and/or formal training which effectively means that they

- will be exempt from completing certain units within a course; or
- in the case of recognition of uncredentialed prior learning:
 - may be exempted from completing units; or
 - allowed to substitute more advanced units within the course irrespective of prerequisite requirements.

In the TAFE Division, an exemption based on RPL can be granted to a student if it is deemed that they have had sufficient experience in life and work relating to the module/subject for which they apply. RPL is assessed against the learning outcomes contained in the relevant course and module curriculum documents.

Within the Higher Education sector, the recognition for credit of prior 'informal' learning, that is the knowledge, skills, attitudes and/or attributes which have been acquired other than from an Australian university or TAFE institute. Recognition of Prior Learning, or 'RPL', involves the systematic assessment and acknowledgment of relevant and verifiable skills, knowledge and competencies acquired formally or experientially over the five (5) years prior to application to undertake a course of study. (Consideration may be given to learning undertaken more than five years prior to application on the basis of ongoing learning.) Claims are assessed and given recognition by granting of credit

towards an education program. For the purposes of this policy, the term Recognition of Prior Learning includes credentialled and uncredentialled learning

Recognition of Current Competency (RCC)

In the TAFE Division, an exemption based on Recognition of Current Competency (RCC) can be granted to a student if it is deemed that they have had sufficient experience in life and work relating to the unit of competency for which they apply. The assessment of RCC is made against the elements and units of competency described in the relevant endorsed training package

Registered Training Organisation (RTO)

Registered Training Organisation (RTO means a training organisation registered in accordance with the Australian Recognition Framework, within a defined scope of registration)

Sources of Prior Learning

Swinburne University of Technology recognises the following educational experiences of prospective and enrolled students

i) University or TAFE Institute

Prior learning undertaken at an Australian University or TAFE Institute is recognised by the Higher Education and TAFE Sectors through Credit Transfer. The procedures for obtaining Credit Transfer are set out in the 'Credit Transfer' Policies & Procedures for each of Higher Education and TAFE.

The [Swinburne Pathways Credit Transfer Guide](#) sets out the details of the University's credit transfer agreements.

ii) Other than University or TAFE

Prior learning other than that undertaken at an Australian University or TAFE Institute is recognised by Swinburne through Recognition of Prior Learning. Such learning includes credentialled and uncredentialled learning.

Specified Credit

See 'Types of Credit Available'

Student

For the purposes of these procedures, student may be divided into three categories:

i) Prospective or Potential Students

Persons seeking entry into a Swinburne course or entry into a specific level of a Swinburne course who may or may not meet the minimum admission requirements.

ii) Current Students

students who are already enrolled in a Swinburne course and who seek credit for their prior learning.

iii) Student

A person who is applying for enrolment at the University "who has met the minimum admission requirements either through RPL or academic study"

TAFE

Training and Further Education

Types of credit available

In recognition of their prior learning, students may be granted three types of credit:

i) Block Credit:

Credit granted in the form of whole stages or semesters of a course

ii) Specified Credit:

Credit granted in the form of specific subject(s) from which a student is exempted. In the case

of recognition of uncredentialed prior learning, credit may be granted as:

- exemption from completing one or more units within a course; or
- permission to substitute one or more advanced level subjects in place of introductory level subjects within the course, irrespective of prerequisite requirements.

iii) Unspecified Credit:

Credit which is not matched to a particular subject in the student's new course. It is often given in the form of credit points or exemption from a course's elective requirements.

Uncredentialed Learning

Learning acquired in an uncredentialed context, such as through work experience, life experience and/or informal training

Unspecified Credit

See 'Types of Credit Available'

PROCEDURE

1 General

Obtaining an RPL assessment will not automatically guarantee students a place in a course. They must obtain a place in the relevant course through normal selection procedures. Information regarding selection procedures may be obtained from the relevant Faculty Office. Swinburne's Higher Education sector does not charge for assessment of RPL applications from its current students. There are external agencies which assist students in applying for RPL. These agencies charge for their services.

The implementation of an "assessment" within the Higher Education sector is left to the discretion of each department and may differ from case to case or course to course, depending upon many variables including the:

- nature and amount of evidence provided by the applicant;
- scope of subject matter covered by the application;
- specific needs of the applicant (language, special needs, etc)
- number of equivalent student contact hours involved.

It is expected that prospective or potential Australian (domestic) higher education students and, TAFE students, where appropriate, make their applications for recognition of prior learning before they apply for a place in a course, to ensure that the most appropriate course of study is undertaken. Current students are expected to apply for recognition of prior learning prior to the commencement of study. Higher Education students interested in obtaining RPL must first contact the relevant Faculty Office to determine whether credit in relation to any types of informal learning is available without the need for the preparation of a portfolio or a formal RPL assessment.

If credit without a portfolio or formal RPL assessment is available, the student must complete an Application for Exemption/RPL form and lodge it at the Faculty Office. There is no charge for current students or students applying for enrolment when making this application. Attached to the application should be appropriate supporting documentation such as course records, references and transcripts.

International students who wish to apply for RPL should do so at, or immediately after, enrolment.

Applications will be considered by the relevant Faculty (see clause 4).

2 Obtaining an RPL Assessment

A RPL assessment will normally be obtained prior to the commencement of the program of study. In circumstances in which credit is not already available for a specific type of informal

learning, prospective or current higher education students will be advised to either:

- a) prepare a portfolio of their prior learning for assessment by Swinburne. Students may wish to prepare this portfolio themselves or prepare it with the assistance of a program such as RePLay; or
- b) contact an external agency about obtaining a RPL assessment. Such an assessment will also involve the preparation of a folio of information about a student's prior learning and may also involve the use of a portfolio preparation assistance program such as RePLay

3 Portfolio

The portfolio should contain:

- a) Evidence of the student's prior learning experiences.

In the case of credentialled learning, applications should contain:

- a certified copy of a statement of satisfactory completion of a course offered by a professional body, enterprise, private educational institution, or by any other provider recognised by a university;
- documentation stating the objectives, learning outcomes and content of the course;
- details of the contact hours of the course (timetable or other supporting documentation required);
- details of the presenter.

In the case of uncredentialled learning, applications should include:

- details of uncredentialled learning, a detailed curriculum vitae and a letter of support from an appropriate person/organisation who can verify these details.

- b) A document which outlines the link between those learning experiences and the learning outcomes of the course in which the student is seeking credit. (Students may be required to undertake some form of test or assessment to demonstrate that they have achieved the learning outcomes stated.)

Claims made after initial enrolment in a course may be considered on a case-by-case basis by the RPL Committee

4 Applying for Credit

Students are normally expected to obtain a RPL assessment prior to the commencement of their program of study, *except in the case of international students*.

Students who have prepared a portfolio or obtained an external RPL assessment must lodge an Application for Exemption/RPL form with their Faculty Office, listing the subject(s) for which recognition of prior learning is sought. Their application must also include their portfolio prepared in accordance with clause 3.2

5 RPL Committee/Assessor

All applications for recognition of prior learning will be assessed by either the relevant Faculty RPL Committee, membership of which is representative of the range of programs offered by that Faculty, or by the nominated Faculty RPL Assessor. The Faculty RPL Committee or Assessor may consult subject conveners in arriving at conclusions. In considering applications for prior learning, the RPL Committee or Assessor will determine the extent to which the student's prior learning experiences, and resultant learning outcomes, match the learning outcomes of the course in which they seek credit.

6 Outcome of Applications for Credit Supported by a Prior Learning Portfolio

The relevant Faculty RPL Committee or Assessor, after considering the application, may:

- a) grant the level of credit sought by the student;

- b) grant credit in excess of the level sought by the student;
- c) grant credit at a level lower than that sought by the student;
- d) grant such credit as is appropriate in the circumstances;
- e) refuse to grant credit; or
- f) request that additional information be provided either in written form or via an interview.

In recognition of their prior learning, students may be granted Block Credit, Specified Credit, or Unspecified Credit.

7 Outcome of Applications for Credit Supported by an External RPL Assessment

The relevant Faculty RPL Committee or Assessor, after considering the application, may:

- a) grant the minimum credit recommended in the RPL assessment;
- b) grant credit in excess of the minimum credit recommended in the RPL assessment;
- c) in exceptional circumstances, refuse to grant credit or grant credit at a level lower than that sought in the RPL assessment; or
- d) request that the application be resubmitted with such additional information as is required to enable the Committee or Assessor to make a determination.

In most circumstances, the RPL assessment will constitute the minimum credit that the student should be granted. In exceptional circumstances, the RPL Committee or Assessor may choose to reject the recommendation contained in the RPL assessment.

8 Maximum Credit Granted through RPL

The Faculty will determine the maximum credit to be granted for the courses under their jurisdiction. The School/Division is responsible for publicising this annually in its course and student information.

Students will normally be required to undertake at least the final two academic semesters (equivalent to one academic year) of study at the University before being granted a University award.

9 Notification of Decision

Where a student lodges an application for credit under Section 3.3, 3.5 or 3.6 of these procedures, the Faculty concerned must, within five (5) working days of making a decision to grant or refuse an application for RPL credit, notify the student in writing of what credit (if any) is to be given for his/her prior learning.

In cases in which a prior learning portfolio or external RPL assessment is submitted in support of a RPL application, and that application is not granted, the Faculty shall furnish the student with written reasons for its decision.

10 International Students

- 10.1 Notwithstanding anything in this policy, any grant of RPL to international students on student or AusAID visas must be compliant with the ESOS Act and the National Code, or the requirements of AusAID respectively.
- 10.2 International students must sign or otherwise accept a record of the RPL granted, which must then be placed on the student's file.
- 10.3 If the RPL leads to a shortening of an international student's course duration, the faculty must advise Swinburne International with seven (7) days of the RPL being finalized in order that Swinburne International can report this to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship as required by the ESOS Act and National Code.

11. Appeals Procedure

- 11.1 A student who is dissatisfied with the decision of the Faculty in relation to their application for recognition of prior learning, may appeal this decision on one or more of

the following grounds:

- a) That a procedural irregularity has occurred
 - b) That the case was not heard on its academic merits
- 11.2 A student who wishes to appeal against the decision of the Faculty in relation to their application for recognition of prior learning may submit an appeal in writing to the relevant Faculty Dean.
- 11.3 Appeals must be lodged with the relevant Faculty Administration Manager no later than five (5) working days from notification of the outcome of the application.
- 11.4 The written appeal shall state the grounds on which the appeal is made, and shall contain:
- An outline of why the student believes the original decision is inappropriate; and
 - Any additional evidence in support of the student's case (copies of relevant documents should be attached to the written appeal)
- 11.5 The relevant Faculty Dean or nominee will consider the appeal by reviewing the initial decision and the student's written submission. The Faculty Dean or nominee is required to consult with the relevant Faculty Academic Committee (or equivalent) and may, if further information is required, discuss the matter directly with the student.
- 11.6 Students may be accompanied and assisted by a support person (who is not a legal practitioner) at any relevant meetings during the formal review process.
- 11.7 The student will be informed *in writing* of the outcome of the appeal within ten(10) working days of its lodgment as identified by the date of receipt by the relevant Faculty Administration Manager. The notification will contain the reasons for the outcome, and advise the student that they have the right of appeal to the Victorian Ombudsman if they are dissatisfied with the outcome.
- 11.8 There is no further appeal from the decision of the Faculty Dean or nominee to any other officer or body within the University.
- 11.9 Complaints about administrative actions and decisions of the University can be made to the Victorian Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is, generally, the office of last resort. If students have not followed the steps laid down in the relevant University procedures, the Ombudsman may ask them to do so before accepting their complaint.
- 11.10 The student's enrolment will be maintained throughout the internal or (if known) any external appeals process, provided the student fulfils all conditions for a valid enrolment, including payment of all fees, and compliance with all applicable standards of conduct, statutes, regulations, policies and procedures of the University.
- 11.11 If the internal or any external appeal process results in a decision that supports the student, Swinburne must immediately implement any decision and/or corrective and preventative action required.

Responsibilities

Managerial Responsibility:

Director, Academic Policy & Secretariat

Other Responsibilities:

Faculty Deans

Faculty Managers

Forms

- Application for RPL/Exemption form (Faculty Administration)

Related Materials

[Credit Transfer and Exemptions - Higher Education](#)

[Minimum Course Component for a VET/TAFE Award](#)

Status

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