



# Recognition of Prior Learning (Coursework Programs) Procedure

## Purpose

This procedure specifies the processes for recognising prior learning (RPL) for admission to a program, and/or for credit or an exemption toward a program of study. The procedure can be used as the basis for Faculty RPL procedures.

## Scope

The procedure applies to all undergraduate and postgraduate coursework programs. It does not cover Higher Degree by Research (HDR) programs.

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## Principles and objectives

### 1. Types of prior learning which can be recognized

UNSW recognises prior learning for admission to a program, and/or for credit or an exemption toward a program of study, where this learning is deemed by the University to be aligned with the program’s entry requirements, educational objectives and learning outcomes.

The types of prior learning for RPL which can be recognised are:

- Formal learning
- Non-formal learning
- Informal / workplace-based learning.

#### 1.1. Recognising formal learning

Formal learning in this context applies to education undertaken after the completion of compulsory, high school or equivalent education.

A student may have their prior formal learning recognised if they have:

- Successfully completed or partially completed a program at UNSW or at another higher education provider
- Qualified for an award that is part of an articulated program sequence
- Completed, or partially completed, a program at another higher education provider where a credit transfer agreement exists as part of an articulation arrangement.

The following principles for granting RPL for formal learning apply:

- RPL can only be granted for completed entire courses not part courses
- RPL may be granted for courses completed whilst on approved leave or deferral where prior approval to undertake this study has been granted
- A student taking courses whilst on suspension or exclusion from a program will breach the conditions of their suspension or exclusion and will not be granted credit for those courses
- Grades for courses for which RPL has been granted, completed by students at another higher education provider, will not be included in the final weighted average mark (WAM)
- Applications for RPL must be lodged and approved prior to the commencement of the course for which credit or an exemption is being sought. Once a student has commenced a course, applications for credit for or exemption from that course are not permitted. Under no circumstances will retrospective RPL be allowed.

A postgraduate coursework student enrolled in an articulated sequence of programs will receive full credit for courses completed in earlier programs in the sequence whether the award has been conferred or not. This principle will also apply to students who have a qualification from another higher education provider if the courses/programs are determined to be comparable to the UNSW qualification, and they meet the program requirements regarding minimum number of units of credit (UoC) undertaken at UNSW.

Where an articulation arrangement is in place with another higher education provider, a student may have study completed in one program recognised for the requirements of a subsequent program. Where articulation arrangements are established, the agreed credit outcomes and the defined pathway between the linked qualifications will be documented and made publicly available.

## 1.2. Recognising non-formal and informal / workplace learning

Students may be eligible for RPL towards a UNSW qualification on the basis of non-formal and informal / workplace learning.

Where faculties recognise non-formal and informal / workplace learning they must:

- Develop, and make publicly available, procedures for recognising non-formal and informal / workplace learning
- Specify the arrangements for recognising non-formal and informal / workplace learning in the program rules when a program is proposed or formally revised
- Assess prior non-formal and informal / workplace learning for equivalence to the learning outcomes of the qualification specified as a requirement for admission to the program or the course or courses in the program for which credit or an exemption is being sought.

## 2. Recognising prior learning for admission or credit/exemptions

### 2.1. RPL for admission to a program

Prior learning may be recognised for the purpose of admission to a program by demonstrating that the program entry requirements have been met. This involves assessment of the student's prior learning for equivalence to the learning outcomes of the qualification specified as a requirement for admission to that program. (Refer to the [Admissions Policy](#) and [Admission to Coursework Programs Procedure](#) for the general rules and principles regarding admission.)

Typically, program entry requirements are met through formal learning leading to qualifications (such as the HSC for bachelor degree programs or a bachelor degree for postgraduate degree programs). In the case of non-formal or informal / workplace learning, an applicant is required to demonstrate how the program entry requirements have been met.

### 2.2. RPL for credit or exemptions

Prior learning may be recognised for the purpose of granting credit or exemptions by demonstrating that part of the academic requirements of a program have been met. This involves assessment of the student's prior learning for equivalence to a course or courses in a program to which a student has been

admitted, and results in the awarding of credit or an exemption.

The granting of credit advances a student's standing in a program to which they have been admitted and so expedites their progression through the program. Credit may be granted in the form of specified or unspecified credit. Block credit significantly advances a student's standing as credit is granted for whole stages or components of a program.

Exemptions do not expedite a student's progression through a program. Students are exempted from a specified course, but they are not granted credit and are required to complete a course of the same credit value.

Substitution is a type of exemption where students are exempted from a specified core course, yet are still required to complete a specified equivalent course to the same unit of credit value. When determining the specified equivalent course the Faculty must ensure that the integrity of the program level learning outcomes are maintained.

Any credit or exemptions granted must be consistent with the rules governing progression within the program, and the maximum credit transfer permitted, which are operative at the time the application is determined.

General credit arrangements (including any limits on credit granted set by Program Authority) must be specified in the program rules when a program is proposed or formally revised, and maintained on the program record.

- Specified credit and unspecified credit

Specified credit is granted when an exact or near exact equivalence to one or more courses studied either at UNSW or at another higher education provider, or through non-formal or informal / workplace learning, can be demonstrated. Once agreed, this recognition becomes a precedent, subject to periodic review as needed.

Unspecified credit is granted when an exact or near exact course equivalence cannot be demonstrated. Unspecified credit most often relates to prior learning deemed to be equivalent in unit of credit value and outcomes to one or more of the courses comprising the elective requirement of a program.

The integrity of the program learning outcomes must not be compromised in the granting of specified and unspecified credit.

Specified and unspecified credit must be determined with reference to Learning outcomes and volume of learning. Academic judgment will be used to assess equivalence of the prior learning to the learning outcomes and volume of learning. This may involve assessment of:

- Course requirements
  - Content
  - Assessment
  - Contact hours
  - Professional placements hours
  - Units of credit.
- Block credit

Block credit is awarded as a specified unit of credit value and it may be granted on the basis of studies judged to be comparable to a stage or component of a given program.

Block credit is most often granted under an approved articulation agreement with an external partner; as part of an articulated UNSW program suite, or as part of admission rules for masters coursework programs.

Block credit can be specified or un-specified.

### 3. Limitations on RPL

The following limitations on the recognition of prior learning apply. Faculties can specify stricter limits. This may be applicable in the case of rapidly changing disciplines or to comply with professional accreditation requirements. These limits must be included in the approved program rules and information regarding the limits made available to students.

#### 3.1. Time limitations for recognition of prior learning

Prior learning will not be considered for credit or exemption from a course when more than 10 years has elapsed from the successful completion of the course (or other learning) and the student's commencement in the program at UNSW.

#### 3.2. Undergraduate single award programs

Students admitted to a single award undergraduate program, diploma or undergraduate embedded Honours program must complete a program of study deemed to be no less than that required of students in full-time attendance in the final year of the program concerned (48 units of credit). The limitations do not apply to credit or exemptions for internal transfer or incomplete UNSW program of study.

A student admitted to a single undergraduate degree program following completion of a first degree at UNSW, or equivalent completed elsewhere, will be required to complete the disciplinary core of the program. Students may also apply to receive additional credit for specific courses completed in the first degree. Credit for non-formal and informal / workplace learning towards an undergraduate single award requires the approval of the Program Authority. Program Authorities must have clear, documented processes for assessing (for credit recognition) the equivalence of a student's non-formal and/or informal / workplace learning with the learning outcomes of the program.

No credit will be given for prior learning towards a separate (end-on) one year Honours program, Diploma or Certificate. The limitations do not apply to credit or exemptions for internal transfer or incomplete UNSW program of study.

#### 3.3. Postgraduate coursework single award programs

Prior learning cannot be counted for credit towards more than 50% of a UNSW postgraduate coursework single award program to which the student is admitted.

Exceptions to the 50% credit limit are permitted where:

- Formal articulation arrangements are established; or
- Standardised block credit arrangements have been approved as part of formal admission requirements for the program, in which case the maximum credit that can be granted is 50% of the remaining program; or
- A student is completing an articulated sequence of programs as outlined in section 1.1.

Where a Masters program includes preliminary courses similar in content to undergraduate courses, students may be granted credit or an exemption on the basis of a completed undergraduate degree but must complete a program of study equivalent to one year of full-time study or 48 units of credit.

Non-formal and/or informal / workplace learning recognised for admission to a postgraduate program cannot also be used to obtain additional credit or exemptions. Non-formal and/or informal/workplace learning over and above the requirements for admission can be used for credit. When recognising this learning, the Program Authority must document how the learning has been assessed, what learning has been counted for admission and what learning is remaining which is being assessed for credit or exemptions.

#### 3.4. Double degree award programs

Double degree award programs are combinations of single award programs. The limitations on credit

will be the same as for each individual award component of the double degree award program on a pro rata basis. For example, for a four-year double degree award program, students must complete a program of study that is no less than 66 Units of Credit across the double degree program

## 4. Application and assessment process

### 4.1. Applying for RPL

Students must formally apply for recognition of prior learning for credit or exemptions to be granted unless formal articulation arrangements have been established, or where standardised block credit arrangements have been approved as part of the admission requirements for Master Coursework programs. This recognises that students may choose not to seek credit for equivalent courses (or other equivalent learning) completed previously as they may wish to complete the same content again to refresh their learning or ensure that the length of their program of study meets visa or professional requirements. Students transferring internally between UNSW programs do not need to apply separately for recognition of prior learning as this is processed as part of the admission process.

Students applying directly to UNSW should indicate in their application that they wish to be considered for RPL. Alternatively, students can apply for RPL at any point prior to completing their studies.

Where possible, students should include which components of the program they are applying for recognition of prior learning. A student is required to present a transcript for RPL to be assessed and may also be required to provide full course outlines.

See Appendix 2 for the flowchart of the RPL assessment and approval process.

### 4.2. Assessing RPL

Assessment of RPL requires judgement about:

- Whether the prior learning meets the admission criteria specified for the program
- How accurately the prior learning demonstrated in the application matches the learning outcomes of the UNSW program or courses
- The units of credit to be conceded in the form of one or more courses
- The type of credit (for example, specified credit for a block of courses in a program).

Assessment will be based on:

- Precedence: approved, administered and recorded by Faculties subject to relevant University policies and procedures
- Individual assessment of record of prior study or portfolio of evidence.

RPL assessment methods should:

- Address the specific evidence required to demonstrate prior achievement of the learning outcomes and assessment requirements of the particular qualification for which credit is sought
- Provide a range of ways for individuals to demonstrate that they have met the required outcomes
- Be in accordance with the framework set by existing UNSW policies and procedures.

Typically, Faculties should endeavour to assess applications within ten working days.

### 4.3. Articulation arrangements

Articulation arrangements between UNSW and other higher education providers can be used to provide automatic admission into one qualification from another.

Where articulation arrangements are established, the agreed credit outcomes and the defined pathway between the linked qualifications will be documented and made publicly available.

Credit transfer between UNSW programs that are part of an articulation arrangement may be processed by Student Records as part of the process to upgrade a student to a higher award program in an articulated suite of programs.

For credit transfer from other universities, where a formal articulation agreement is in place which sets out pre-assessed and approved program credit, students do not need to formally apply for credit transfer. The credit approved by UNSW will be applied automatically to any student upon admission if they have successfully completed or partially completed the previous qualification and met other admission requirements (such as English language proficiency or visa requirements). Details of the credit transfer agreement between Australia's Group of Eight (Go8) universities can be found at <http://www.go8.edu.au>.

#### 4.4. Appeals

A successful applicant or enrolled UNSW student may appeal the decision of the Program Authority by forwarding a written notice of appeal to the relevant Dean or nominee, normally within ten working days of receiving the decision. The notice of appeal must state the grounds on which the applicant or student is seeking the appeal.

An appeal will normally be based on the following grounds:

- Procedural irregularity; and/or
- New evidence.

The Dean (or nominee) will consider the appeal and may consult with any relevant academic staff. The appellant may also be consulted.

The normal timeframe for assessing an appeal will be within ten working days of the receipt of the appeal.

## 5. Responsibilities for RPL

Faculties are responsible for RPL, including:

- Defining admission requirements for programs and setting the criteria for determining the amount of credit or exemptions that may be granted toward a program when a program is proposed or formally revised (within the framework and limits specified in the relevant UNSW policies and procedures).
- Establishing and documenting Faculty procedures for RPL in accordance with the [Academic Progression and Enrolment Policy](#) and this procedure. Faculty procedures will be made publicly available (for example on an appropriate faculty or School website with links to the University Handbook).
- Approving and administering the recognition of prior learning within the framework set by the [Academic Progression and Enrolment Policy](#) and RPL Procedure.
- Ensuring that applications for RPL are judged against the learning outcomes attained, content and volume of learning, using the assessment standards for the specific qualification.
- Ensuring that processes are evidence-based, transparent and accountable, and RPL decisions are subject to appeal.

The Admissions Office (at time of admission) and Student Lifecycle (following admission) are responsible for recording and applying RPL decisions by Program Authorities.

Faculty Program Authorities are responsible for providing the Admissions Office with any particular requirements and for providing applicants with specific guidelines, where these are additional to those stated in the [Admissions Policy](#), [Admission to Coursework Programs Procedure](#), the [Academic Progression and Enrolment Policy](#) and this procedure.

Where a precedent, rule or an articulation or credit transfer agreement has been approved, faculties may delegate the assessment and processing of RPL for formal learning for credit to the Admissions Office (at admission) or to Student Lifecycle (post-admission). Under such an arrangement, cases requiring individual academic judgment will be referred to the Program Authority.

Students will receive written advice of an RPL decision to accept. The decision will be maintained on the student record for two years after the student ceases to be enrolled, or in the event that the student does not enrol, two years after the offer of admission.

For international students, being granted RPL may result in reduced program duration. The Admissions Office (at admission) or International Student Compliance team (post-admission) are required to report the reduced program duration in PRISMS and reflect this on the student's Confirmation of Enrolment (CoE).

## **6. Support and advice**

The Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education & Student Experience) can provide guidance and support on good practices related to RPL.

**Effective:** 26 May 2025

**Responsible:** Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education & Student Experience)

**Lead:** Registrar & Director, Student Services



## Appendix 1: Related Documents

- [Academic Progression Procedure](#)
- [Enrolment and Withdrawal Procedure](#)
- [Admissions Policy](#)
- [Admission to Coursework Programs Procedure](#)
- [Program Design and Delivery Policy](#)
- [Program Design Procedure](#)
- [Program Delivery Procedure](#)
- [Microcredentials and Short Courses Procedure](#)

Definitions and Acronyms	
<b>Advanced standing</b>	<p>A status that reflects that a student's progression through their program has been advanced as a result of the granting of credit for prior learning.</p> <p>The granting of credit results in the reduction of the amount of learning required to achieve a qualification.</p> <p>The prior learning for which credit is granted may be formal, non-formal or informal / workplace learning. The credit granted may be specified or unspecified.</p>
<b>Articulated programs</b>	<p>A defined sequence of programs in which the courses and requirements for completion of earlier programs in the sequence are a subset of subsequent programs in the sequence, and full credit is granted for courses completed in earlier programs in the sequence.</p>
<b>Articulation arrangement</b>	<p>An approved agreement or structure which enables students to progress in a defined pathway from one qualification to another with credit.</p> <p>An articulation arrangement can be internal, through an articulated sequence of programs, or external.</p>
<b>Block credit</b>	<p>Block credit is awarded as a unit of credit value on the basis of studies judged to be comparable to stage or component of a given program.</p> <p>Block credit is most often granted under articulation arrangements where an approved agreement exists, or where standardised block credit arrangements have been approved as part of the admission requirements for Master Coursework programs.</p> <p>Block credit can be specified or unspecified.</p>
<b>Course learning outcomes (CLOs)</b>	<p>The knowledge, attitudes, skills and their applications, behaviours and practices that students need to demonstrate to complete a course within a program. CLOs articulate with PLOs and SLOs (where relevant).</p>
<b>Credit</b>	<p>The value assigned for the recognition of equivalence in content, volume of learning, and learning outcomes between different types of learning and/ or qualifications.</p> <p>This value may be expressed in terms of units of credit or prescribed courses.</p>
<b>Credit outcomes</b>	<p>The results of a process of determining a student's application for credit.</p>
<b>Credit transfer</b>	<p>A process whereby a student who transfers from a program at another higher education provider, or from another program at UNSW, is granted credit for courses completed at that higher education provider or program.</p>

<b>Double degree</b>	The concurrent or sequential study of two award programs as one integrated and coherent program leading to two awards and two testamurs (one for each program). Double degree programs can be within a career. (e.g. double degree masters programs) or cross-career (e.g. combined bachelors and masters programs).
<b>Exemption</b>	The waiver of a requirement to complete a specified course. Students are not granted credit and are required to complete an alternative course of the same credit value.
<b>External articulation</b>	The process by which one higher education provider matches its courses or requirements to course work completed at another higher education provider for the purpose of granting students credit or exemptions.
<b>Formal learning</b>	Learning that takes place through a structured program of study that is delivered by education or training providers, and which leads to the full or partial achievement of an officially accredited qualification.
<b>Informal / workplace learning</b>	Learning that takes place through life and work experience. Unlike formal or non-formal learning, it is not organised or externally structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support.
<b>Learning outcomes</b>	Refer to Program Learning Outcomes, Specialisation Learning Outcomes and Course Learning Outcomes.
<b>Non-formal learning</b>	Learning that takes place through a structured program of learning but does not lead to an officially accredited qualification.
<b>Program learning outcomes (PLOs)</b>	The specific knowledge, skills and their applications, behaviors and practices, including graduate capabilities, that students need to demonstrate in completing a program.
<b>Program rules</b>	The academic requirements a student must satisfy to be awarded the qualification. Program rules include: core, electives, and general education course rules; unit of credit requirements; specialisation requirements; and limit rules.
<b>Recognition of prior learning (RPL)</b>	The process of assessing an individual's relevant prior learning (including formal, non-formal learning and informal / workplace learning) for equivalence to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the learning outcomes of the qualification specified as a requirement for admission to the program, or</li> <li>courses in the program to which a student has been admitted to determine the credit value to be granted as advanced standing or exemptions.</li> </ul>
<b>Specified credit</b>	Credit granted when an exact or near exact equivalence to one or more courses studied either at UNSW or at another higher education provider, or through non-formal or informal / workplace prior learning, can be demonstrated. Once agreed, this recognition becomes a precedent for other students.
<b>Specialisation learning outcomes (SLO)</b>	The knowledge, skills and their applications, behaviours and practices that students need to demonstrate to complete a specialisation within a program. SLOs articulate with PLOs.
<b>Substitution</b>	A type of exemption from a core course or other requirement. Students are still required to complete an equivalent, or near equivalent, course to the same unit of credit value.
<b>Unit of credit (UOC)</b>	The value assigned to programs and courses indicating duration and workload. For a course, UOC indicates the student workload expectations and the contribution of the course to meeting program requirements.
<b>Unspecified credit</b>	Credit granted when an exact or near exact course equivalence cannot be demonstrated.
<b>Volume of learning</b>	The notional duration of all activities required for the achievement of the learning outcomes specified for a program, expressed in units of credit.

## Appendix 2: Flowchart of the RPL process

