



University
Centre
Somerset

Part of Bridgwater & Taunton College

Higher Education Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy

Author: Head of HE
Approved by: SMT
Date: Jan 2023
Review Date: May 2025

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. SCOPE	3
3. POLICY STATEMENT	3
4. PUBLICITY	3
5. TERMINOLOGY	4
6. CRITERIA, CONDITIONS AND RESTRICTIONS FOR RPL.....	5
7. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS.....	8
8. TIMESCALES	9
9. APPROVAL PROCESS, QUALITY ASSURANCE AND CONFIRMATION OF DECISION	10
10. CHARGES	10
11. FEEDBACK TO RPL APPLICANTS	10
12. APPEALS.....	10
13. COMPLAINTS.....	11
14. REVIEW OF POLICY.....	11
APPENDIX 1: VOLUME OF RPL IN AWARDS	11
APPENDIX 2: GENERIC PORTFOLIO CRITERIA FOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING	13
APPENDIX 3: PROCESS DIAGRAMS.....	15

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. University Centre Somerset (UCS) recognises the value of learning wherever it occurs, either to meet programme entry requirements or to achieve credit towards a named award. However, recognition of prior learning (RPL) will only be possible where learning, appropriate to the outcomes of the relevant entry requirements, module(s) or award level, can be assured to be academically valid. RPL applications are subject to the same quality assurance processes as learning derived from taught programmes.

2. SCOPE

2.1. This policy covers Open University-validated Higher Education provision within UCS and those HE courses where the Awarding Organisation refers students to the provider's RPL policy. The written rules/guidance of these other Awarding Organisations should always be checked before proceeding with this RPL policy.

2.2. Reference should always be made to the relevant Academic Regulations, such as the OU/UCS Academic Regulations. The Academic Regulations take precedence over this policy.

2.3. This policy does NOT relate to courses validated by University of Plymouth or University of the West of England, Bristol. Reference should be made directly to the websites of those universities for their RPL policies.

3. POLICY STATEMENT

3.1. This Policy defines the procedures and guidance for submitting and considering requests for exemption from individual modules or direct entry to the second or subsequent year of a programme based on prior certified and/or experiential learning. Where the learning is deemed equivalent, i.e. 'recognised' the level and volume of credit shall be agreed and accredited to the intended programme.

3.2. 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 UCS Admissions for advice in the first instance.

3.3. UCS shall always seek to operate its RPL procedures in ways that are fair and are in accordance with the relevant Academic Regulations and the Equality and Diversity Policy. This includes a commitment through its Access & Participation Plan that UCS fosters recruitment from groups currently under-represented in higher education, by working to raise aspirations and break down barriers to participation such as those created by culture, geography, social and economic factors.

4. PUBLICITY

4.1. Details about RPL, including information as to where prospective students can obtain advice and guidance about submitting an application, any fees payable, and time limits shall be publicised to applicants via UCS's website. Unless

precluded by the requirements of a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB), all programmes shall consider a request for RPL.

5. TERMINOLOGY

5.1. **Recognition**

Refers to the process whereby applicants of all ages and backgrounds are eligible to receive recognition and/or formal credit for learning acquired in the past through formal study and through work and other life experiences.

RPL was previously known as AP(E)L: Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning, which also included Accreditation of Certified Learning.

5.2. **RPL - Recognition of Prior Learning**

Is the formal recognition of prior learning gained outside UCS through:

- A. formally assessed and certified programmes;
- B. other experience, which is uncertified and not previously assessed. For example, learning from unpaid work or paid work, community activities, leisure pursuits and other informal learning experiences.

5.3. **Recognition of Prior Learning (including credit transfer)**

It is the responsibility of UCS to decide how much specific credit to award an individual student via RPL, based on the level, extent and perceived relevance of the learning (both knowledge and skills based) when compared with their intended programme of study at UCS.

Where 'recognised' learning meets the criteria above and has been allocated credit, UCS is responsible for determining whether the credit awarded by the body which validated the programme/qualification is equivalent to the credit system used by UCS or the validating University partner/Awarding Organisation. If the credit systems are equivalent, the credit will be 'transferred' at the same level and volume.

Where the credit systems differ, UCS shall determine the equivalent level and volume of credit to be accredited.

Where 'recognised' certified learning meets the criteria above but has not been allocated credit, UCS shall follow the procedures detailed in this Policy to gauge the equivalent credit level and volume to be accredited.

5.4. **'Advanced Standing' or 'Direct Entry' via stage exemption**

This relates to exemption to a stage of a programme without award of credit from the relevant Awarding Organisation.

Advanced Standing, or Direct Entry refer to a student who has been granted sufficient RPL that they are permitted to enter a programme later than the normal start point (e.g. directly into the second term, second year of study and/or second or subsequent level of a programme). This may be expressed in stages. These terms would describe a student entering stage 2 or stage 3 of an

undergraduate qualification on the basis of completion of an appropriate certificated qualification from a recognised UK HE programme of study.

With stage exemption of this kind, it will be recorded on the student's transcript that stage exemption was awarded, but credit for the stage(s) from which the student was exempted would not be transferred to the Awarding Organisation's validated awards.

In these cases, the normal period of registration shall normally be shortened by the equivalent period and the student shall be required to complete their programme within this shortened period.

General Credit

General Credit is not programme-specific but is an objective measure of the credit weighting and Level of previous learning. Prior certificated learning undertaken in the UK Higher Education system will normally have appropriate credit weightings and levels attributed to it. As such it will attract general credit based on the academic value and level of the achievement: a student who has successfully completed a Diploma of Higher Education, for instance, will normally be entitled to claim 240 general credits, 120 at Level 4 and 120 at Level 5. General credit may be recorded on a transcript provided by another HE institution or confirmed by another institution.

Specific Credit

Specific Credit is credit awarded towards the attainment of a specific programme of study leading to an award. That is, it is general credit which is judged to be sufficiently relevant to count towards the award for which the student wishes to register. It is again defined in terms of credit weighting and Level but is identified against specific module(s) or Level(s) of a programme (that is a student is effectively given credit for those modules/Levels on the basis of having achieved the equivalent of the learning outcomes). Specific credit can only be confirmed by UCS. The amount of specific credit awarded to any students cannot exceed the amount of general credit which the student has, and will in many cases be significantly less.

6. CRITERIA, CONDITIONS AND RESTRICTIONS FOR RPL

6.1. Applicants for RPL shall provide the following evidence that learning has taken place to demonstrate equivalence. All evidence of learning shall be:

- A. *Written in English*
- B. **Sufficient** - Keep in mind that evidence presented (e.g. portfolio or syllabus) should be concise and contain sufficient evidence for the purpose intended.
- C. **Recent** - How recent the learning and/or experience is can determine its value, certain skills and knowledge, for example, can quickly become redundant.
- D. **Authentic** - For certain evidence to be accepted it may require endorsement or a reference from relevant sources e.g. employers or validating institutions.

- E. **Relevant** - The specifications of a job or the learning outcomes of a particular qualification will determine the relevance of the evidence.

The procedures for recognising prior learning shall ensure that the learning which has taken place and is presented as RPL is equivalent to the learning that would have otherwise occurred had the student studied all elements of the programme of study without RPL, i.e. that the learning outcomes of the modules accredited or programme specifications exempted have been met.

6.2. **Criteria**

When considering evidence for prior **certified** learning, the RPL Assessor (Course Leader) shall:

- A. confirm (against a transcript of credit or award certificate) that credit has been awarded by an agency, such as a university, recognised by UCS;
- B. confirm (against a transcript of credit or award certificate) that the learning activity has been given a credit rating (e.g. 20 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;
- C. assess the evidence submitted against the following:
 - i) the programme requirements and level learning outcomes; and
 - ii) the module learning outcomes for Core and Mandatory modules at level 5 and above, as appropriate. This requirement may be extended to include the learning outcomes for Optional modules where these are pre-requisites for modules that the applicant wishes to take on admission to the programme
- D. confirm that the learning has been in a subject area relevant to the programme of study.

When considering evidence for **experiential** learning, the RPL Assessor (Course Leader) shall:

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

The award of specific credit via RPL towards an intended programme at UCS is not guaranteed and may not necessarily directly reflect the value/level of the general credit assigned to the current/previous qualification by the validating body, i.e. it may be less.

RPL cannot be transferred in certain disciplines where professional, statutory or regulatory body requirements place additional restrictions on where and when learning shall take place (e.g. Department for Education, British Psychological Society, Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC)).

Exemptions may not be granted where a student has previously registered for and failed part of an award and wishes to seek readmission to the same or similar award.

6.3. ***'Shelf Life' of certified or experiential learning***

Recognition and accreditation shall normally be awarded for learning achieved within five years prior to the enrolment date for the intended programme at UCS.

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:

- a. the Course Leader confirms that the learning is still relevant and meets the Learning Outcomes; and /or
- b. the applicant is able to demonstrate evidence of recent application of knowledge/skills, updating and relevance to their practice (in the case of professional programmes) and the award sought;

6.4. ***Limits on the volume of RPL***

Specific limits on the amount of RPL that may be transferred to a programme at UCS are defined in Appendix 1 of this Policy.

6.5. ***RPL for whole modules***

RPL shall only be considered for modules of study; not elements therein. If a student does not have full credit for a module, then the RPL Assessor may recommend that the student produce additional work at the appropriate level to be marked and moderated before a final decision is reached to approve/reject RPL for that module.

6.6. ***Credit Transfer***

Subject to relevance, certified learning will normally be transferred at the same or equivalent level as that awarded by the other institution.

Credit achieved at a higher level may exempt a student from modules at a lower level (i.e. downgraded credit). However, it is not normally permissible to offset credit achieved at a lower level from modules at a higher level (i.e. upgraded credit).

Students shall not normally receive more than one allocation of credit on the basis of a single learning activity.

6.7. ***Transfer of marks/grades***

RPL of prior certificated learning enables a learner to transfer credit gained within one programme to another programme at the same or a different institution. The credit may come from an incomplete or completed award and may be used as a foundation for a higher award. Credit for RPL may have been gained at an external institution. Credit which can be transferred into programmes at UCS must be at the same level of study or higher and subject to any Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB) restrictions or requirements.

6.8. Calculation of final awards and transcripts

Credits awarded through RPL shall be clearly identifiable on the student's transcript or Diploma Supplement.

A student's award and classification, where appropriate, shall only be calculated using the marks achieved as a result of their studies at UCS on an award validated by the same Awarding Organisation to which they wish to gain entry. Although general credit may be awarded, marks obtained from any other Awarding Organisation, will not be used.

Students who transfer specific credit and marks/grades within UCS shall normally have their final award calculated and, where appropriate classified, according to the relevant award rules set out in the Academic Regulations. (See also Appendix 1 'Volume of RPL Awards').

Students who are only permitted to transfer general credit without marks/grades and/or experiential learning may be unable to meet the appropriate Award calculation rule. In these cases, the RPL approval process shall include confirmation of how the calculation method shall be amended to calculate their final award in a consistent and fair manner.

Unless stated otherwise, the method approved will normally be an overall weighted average of all marks achieved by the student while studying at UCS.

6.9. Falsification or misrepresentation of evidence

UCS reserves the right to terminate an application for or registration on a programme, if the applicant/student is found to have omitted relevant facts or information in connection with their RPL application or to have falsified or misrepresented any part of their application.

7. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Applications for RPL shall consist of a written request, stating the UCS award for which the student seeks RPL, details of which modules or part of the programme for which they wish their application to be considered and submit:

7.1. For certified learning:

- a) a certified copy of a transcript and award certificate;
- b) a Programme Specification, curriculum or syllabus with module descriptions (including Learning Outcomes), where appropriate;

7.2. For experiential learning:

Applicants are required to submit a Portfolio, the content of which shall vary in accordance with the nature of the experiences and of the learning that has resulted from that experience but shall normally include the following elements:

- a) the statement of the claim;
- b) a brief CV to provide a context for the claim;
- c) reflection on the relevance of the learning to the programme against which the claim is being made;
- d) outcome cross-referenced to the full evidence;
- e) full evidence.

Please refer to Appendix 2 for information about the types of evidence required and a general methodology of the process.

The procedure for considering requests for the accreditation of prior experiential learning shall include the following stages:

- a) agreement of assessment work to be submitted (e.g. portfolio, presentation, submission of artefacts, or assignment);
- b) agreement of submission date;
- c) agreement of any RPL tutorial arrangements (including monitoring progress towards submission, reviewing drafts etc.);
- d) clarification of arrangements for assessment (including assessment criteria, internal and external moderation);

8. TIMESCALES

8.1. *For submission*

Applicants wishing to be awarded credit for RPL will be advised, in the first instance, to discuss the matter with UCS Admissions who will ensure that the applicant is informed of UCS's RPL policy and procedure.

Students who apply after the start of their programme may be disadvantaged, e.g. they may not be reimbursed for tuition fees already paid for modules from which they are subsequently exempted.

Applications received more than 4 weeks after enrolment on a programme shall not normally be considered unless the intention is to join and undertake modules that start at a later stage/semester in the academic year. If an applicant has a problem obtaining appropriate evidence in time to meet the 4-week deadline above, they shall inform UCS and request an extension at the earliest opportunity.

Applications for RPL shall normally be considered and a decision communicated to the applicant/student within 10 working days of receipt.

If, after considering the application, the RPL Assessor (Course Leader) requires further evidence, the RPL Assessor/UCS Admissions shall liaise with the applicant to establish an appropriate deadline for submission taking into account the modules for which the applicant is applying for exemption/accreditation and any other relevant factors.

Applicants must not assume RPL credits have been granted until they have received an official statement to that effect.

Applicants should also note that any reduction in the number of credits being studied may prevent them from having the status of full-time students in one or more years of study.

The Course Leader/Curriculum Manager will liaise with the MIS Team to set up an appropriate part time course code with associated fee.

9. APPROVAL PROCESS, QUALITY ASSURANCE AND CONFIRMATION OF DECISION

All applications shall be considered by an RPL Assessor (Course Leader) according to the criteria listed in Section 7 above. The RPL Assessor/ UCS HE Admissions may request additional information from the applicant or consult with colleagues, if required, before making a recommendation.

Their recommendation shall then be internally verified by another academic member of staff and then forwarded, for final approval, to the relevant Head of Department. The approved form should then be sent to UCS HE Admissions and the HE Team. The Course Leader should include the RPL evidence for any claim with the assessments made available to the External Examiner, as it counts as a formal form of assessment and is therefore subject to External Examiner scrutiny.

A decision shall normally be made and communicated to the applicant/student within ten working days of receipt of the application. If the Assessor requires further information, the applicant shall be advised within 10 working day of the submission and a deadline agreed for the new information to be submitted, in accordance with section on Timescales above.

The RPL applicant shall be notified of the decision, by email, by UCS HE Admissions.

10. CHARGES

A charge of £150 will be levied for assisting students preparing a portfolio of evidence for experiential (non-certified) learning for all programmes. This fee is subject to review annually by the Senior Management Team when they approve the UCS HE Fees Policy.

There shall be no charge for assessing RPL for certified learning.

11. FEEDBACK TO RPL APPLICANTS

Where the RPL application is partially or fully rejected, the email confirming the decision shall include details of any shortcomings.

12. APPEALS

Applicants may not appeal against the academic or professional judgement of those making the decision on an application.

However, UCS shall consider a request from an appellant that the decision to reject their application be reviewed on the grounds that:

- a) There is evidence of a material or administrative error in arriving at the decision
- b) The HE Admissions Policy was not followed, in a manner that could have resulted in a different decision if it had been properly followed
- c) The HE Admissions decision failed to take into account all qualifications held by the applicant, for which certificated evidence was supplied or has subsequently been provided
- d) The RPL Policy was not followed, in a manner that could have resulted in a different decision if it had been properly followed.

Academic Appeals must be made in writing within ten working days of the date of the letter from UCS notifying the applicant of the decision. Further details may be found in UCS's Academic Appeals policy on the UCS website [UCS \(somerset.ac.uk\)](http://www.somerset.ac.uk).

The appeal will be considered by an appropriate member of staff such as a Head of Department or Curriculum Manager that has not been involved with the initial RPL decision as set out in the Academic Appeals Policy.

13. COMPLAINTS

UCS is committed to delivering to its applicants a high quality, efficient and fair admissions service and encourages its applicants to tell it where there is cause for concern and a case for improvement.

Complaints may be made regarding the services or facilities offered by UCS or the actions or behaviour of a member of staff during the process. The outcome of a complaint that is upheld could include an apology or an undertaking to revise procedures. It will not usually result in reconsideration of the applicant's application.

Students who wish to complain may do so in accordance with the Complaints Policy by emailing complaints@btc.ac.uk.

14. POLICY REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years unless circumstances require it to be reviewed more frequently. It will be reviewed by the Head of HE.

APPENDIX 1: VOLUME OF RPL IN AWARDS

The maximum volume of RPL outlined below applies to RPL achieved by certificated learning and is provided for the guidance of applicants and staff but does not constitute an entitlement.

For OU-validated Awards:

For an OU-validated Award, a student may be awarded recognition for prior learning (certified, experiential or uncertified), towards the requirements of a named award up two-

thirds¹ of the total credit requirements for that award. Apart from the full Bachelor's Degree covered by footnote 1, usual practice is for RPL to be awarded up to 50% of an Award.

Recognition for prior learning (certified, experiential or uncertified) is **not** permitted at level 6 of a Bachelor's Degree or for the thesis/dissertation module, where students are expected to complete 120 credits in order to gain the award².

Limits for Accredited Learning on Awards

Award	Maximum credits which may be accredited via RPL	Minimum credits to be passed on OU Awards at UCS	Total credits required for award
Bachelor's degree with Honours	240 <i>(at levels 4 & 5)</i>	120 <i>(All 120 at level 6)</i>	360
Top-up Degree with Honours	none	120	120
OU Ordinary Degree (ie without Honours)	150 <i>(at levels 4 & 5)</i>	150 <i>(including all 60 credits at level 6)</i>	300 ³
Foundation Degree	120 <i>(at levels 4 & 5)</i>	120 <i>(including at least 60 at level 5)</i>	240
Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE)	120	120 <i>(at level 5 or above)</i>	240
Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE)	60	60 <i>(at level 4 or above)</i>	120

¹ two-thirds of RPL is only permitted for full, three-year bachelor's degrees (360 credits) and not sub-awards, where the usual maximum is 50%.

² The maximum credit may be waived in the case of a student who has successfully passed an Ordinary Degree and wishes to convert it to a Bachelor's degree with honours, in which case the student may be awarded up to 300 RPL certified credits towards the Bachelor's degree with Honours subject to studying 60 Level 6 credits in full.

³ NB. Other universities often have a different total number of credits required for an Ordinary Degree. The number of credits required for an Ordinary Degree should therefore be checked in the Academic Regulations of the relevant Awarding Organisation rather than assuming that they are the same as the OU Ordinary Degree stated above. The other Awards noted above have a nationally set number of credits and are therefore the same across all HE Providers in the UK.

APPENDIX 2: GENERIC PORTFOLIO CRITERIA FOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

14.1. Guidance for Applicants

What is a Portfolio?

A portfolio is an organised folder of information compiled by an applicant with support from University Centre Somerset staff. It will contain details of past experiences and accomplishments. It may also contain evidence that the individual has reliably demonstrated the skills, knowledge and understanding to be given recognition to gain exemption, or to gain qualifications or credit towards qualifications.

A Portfolio can be used to gain accreditation and/or exemption or to decide what continuing education is appropriate. It needs to be, concise, well presented and relevant.

Key Features of a Portfolio

The folder should contain details of:

- Skills
- Knowledge
- Understanding
- Achievement

These features can come from:

- Paid employment
- Voluntary work
- Domestic work
- Hobbies and interests
- Education and training

What should be included in the Portfolio

- A Curriculum Vitae
- Voluntary work - unpaid
- Domestic work - unpaid
- Hobbies and interests
- Education and training: formal and informal
- List of competencies
- Supporting evidence

Type of Evidence Required:

Direct Evidence (your own work)

For example:

- written reports
- essays/Poems
- articles
- computer programmes
- a set of accounts
- photographs of objects that you have produced, for example, furniture, painting.
- practice-based documents;
- reports based on reflection on practice;
- video/audio tapes and analysis relating to the learning outcomes;
- analysis of issues arising in preparing for practice;
- analysis and description of practice activities;
- analysis of training activities in relation to the practice;
- statements from line-managers in relation to practice.

Indirect Evidence (What someone else says about you)

For example:

- Testimonials from one or more of the following: employers, colleagues, business partners, voluntary organisations, teachers /lecturers etc
- Articles written about you
- Prizes
- Certificates

Laying out the Information

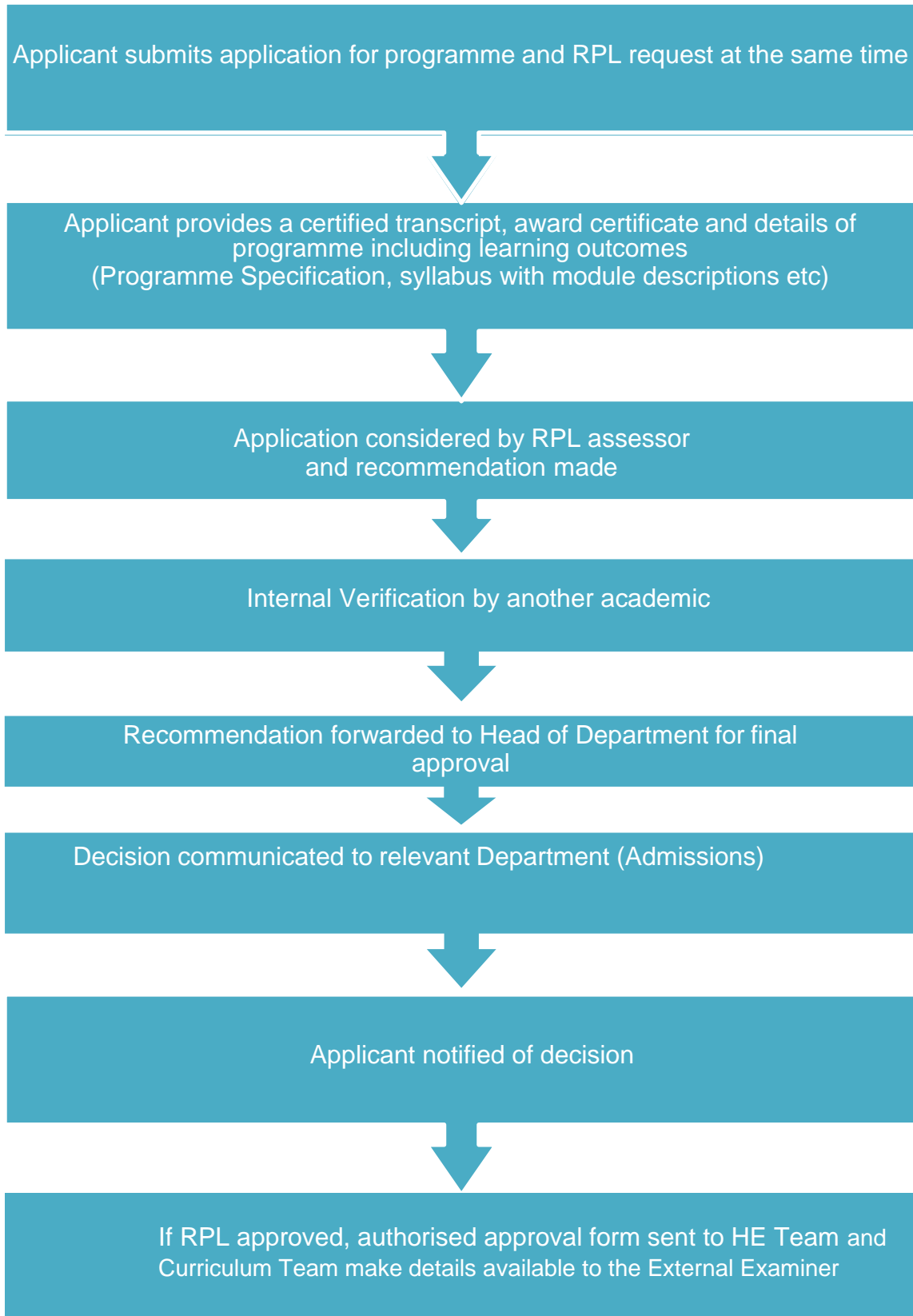
You do not have to use a prescribed format to present the material but you might find the following order useful.

- a) Cover page – RPL application for (your name)
- b) Curriculum Vitae (CV)
- c) Education and training – indicate the skills, knowledge and understanding which you have acquired through various aspects of your education
- d) Work experience and training – indicate the skills, knowledge and understanding you have acquired through employment
- e) Voluntary or community work – identify what skills, knowledge and understanding has been acquired
- f) Other formal or informal learning experiences for example, captain of a sports team, running a sports club, organising a school trip
- g) List of competencies – categorise your skills, knowledge and understanding. For example:
 - i) personal skills
 - ii) good communicator
 - iii) confident public speaker
 - iv) ability to assimilate a range of ideas
- h) Any areas that do not fall into the above categories (b - g) which you consider relevant for assessment.

Note: Supportive evidence, for example transcript of a training course showing learning outcomes, should be included in each section alongside the description given of the specific skill, knowledge and understanding you want assessed.

APPENDIX 3: PROCESS DIAGRAMS

A) Diagram for Recognition of Certified Learning from Applicants to University Centre Somerset programmes



B) Diagram for Recognition of Experiential Learning from applicants to University Centre Somerset programmes

