University Students Consultative Forum

Consultation on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) - response

The RPL project was established in 2014 to take forward Strategy Office recommendations to:

- Increase visibility of RPL opportunities at the OU
- Map national vocational qualifications (such as HND and HNC) and foundation degrees against OU awards to create direct entry routes into OU stages 2 and 3
- Review and revise credit rating and transfer practice, processes and regulations to streamline the service
- Establish formal progression routes with awarding bodies of vocational and professional qualifications
- Explore options for assessment of informal learning.

Consultation with students took place between 26 August and 8 September 2014 to support and inform the thinking of the RPL project team.

Eight questions were asked. Analysis of the posts in response to those questions, and the project team response to the comments, are detailed below.

Summary and response

There were 223 posts with 23 forum members making at least one post and five making ten or more posts.

1. What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of RPL within HE qualifications?

Advantages:

- These were seen to include the reduced cost of a degree and the time taken to qualify and that such a process might boost self-esteem. It would encourage greater engagement and more responsibility for learning, make the OU more attractive to potential students, particularly those who might have dropped out of other HEIs and may release them from modules they don't need/want to study, enhancing the experience for others on the module

Disadvantages:

- Some concerns were expressed that pathways might be limited or the student’s journey may become more difficult due to lack of specific skills or knowledge. There was considerable discussion about open entry and fear expressed that RPL might be used as an alternative. The resource cost to the University and students’ unrealistic perceptions of the value of their prior learning were also cited as potential issues

Response:

- The project team agrees that these are significant advantages
- Guidance is currently, and will continue to be, given on what pathways a student could take and induction will be developed to encompass students starting at points other than access or the start of Stage 1. There is no possibility of RPL being used as an alternative for open entry – this is a unique and sacrosanct
element of the University’s identity. The introduction of direct entry routes may reduce the cost of RPL for the University and increase its capacity to allow more students to take this route

2. What kinds of prior learning should be allowed to be included in HE qualifications?
   Points made:
   - Different levels of stringency should be adopted for different types of prior learning
   - Greater flexibility would be welcome including school level qualifications being used to grant exemption
   - MOOCs could be used for orientation or induction but wariness about granting credit
   - Time limits for credit transfer could be re-considered
   - Testing could be used to assess need to study modules or to exempt people from studying elements of them
   - Support for work based learning and professional body qualifications to be recognised
   - A reduced fee for assessment only could help to show eligibility

Response:
   - It is not acceptable to have different levels of stringency for different types of RPL – it would be inequitable and would undermine standards
   - Qualifications below HE level cannot currently be used to grant exemption for OU qualifications
   - The feasibility of awarding credit for MOOC study is currently being investigated by the project team. The University agrees that orientation and induction are good uses and shares reservations about the award of credit
   - Time limits for credit transfer will be reviewed. Those currently used are enshrined in regulations which will also need to be reconsidered
   - The project team agrees that testing/assessment only models could be mechanisms for supporting RPL and will be reviewing this in the next stage of the project
   - The University agrees that work based learning and professional body qualifications can and should be recognised

3. What evidence should be required to show prior learning?
   Points made:
   - Certificates
   - Paid for assessment, portfolio, exam
   - Work related evidence
   - Short courses

Response:
   - The project team has agreed that certificated learning at HE level would be appropriate, all other forms of learning would need to be assessed by examination or test, by portfolio or other form of assessment
• Assessment of RPL has to be as rigorous as on-course assessment and therefore employer references or attendance at short courses would not be sufficient for award of credit or exemption from study

4. Before starting with your study with the OU were you aware of opportunities to use your prior learning towards your qualification? If yes, how did you find out about it?
Limited comment but points made:
• Most awareness gained from web site and Advisors
• One comment expressed disappointment that guidance did not meet expectation

Response:
• The project team is committed to ensuring that information, advice and guidance is clear, detailed and accurate
• The project team agrees that RPL could be a means of attracting more students to the OU

5. What impact would further recognition of prior learning opportunities have on your choice of qualification and institution?
Limited comment but points made:
• RPL could be a decisive factor in choice of institution and might encourage further CPD

Response:
• The project team agrees that RPL could be a means of attracting more students to the OU

6. What do you think would be the best ways to find out about opportunities to use your prior learning?
Points made:
• Information should be in one easily accessible place, should be included in qualification and module descriptions and in prospectuses
• It should be part of the registration process
• Include in module descriptions information about skills needed to start the module, list of topics and level of knowledge required, list of skills and level of understanding a student might expect to gain

Response:
• The project team agree that information should be accessible and clear and be shown on the web site and in qualification descriptions and are ensuring the policy makes this clear
• RPL is already part of the registration process
• Detailed information about skills and knowledge gained in modules is published under the Learning Outcomes section of the descriptions on the web site
7. If you used the University's credit transfer process in order to gain credit towards your qualification, what do you think of its effectiveness? Is there anything we can do to improve?
   Limited comment but points made:
   - The process should be used to allow students entry at Level 2 rather than 1

   **Response:**
   - It is fully intended that the RPL process should facilitate entry at Stages 2 and 3

8. Is there anything else you feel we should consider?
   **Points made**
   - Prior learning could be considered part-way through a qualification, for those wishing to transfer to a Q qualification or to study a new module without taking its pre-requisite
   - Objections to the rigidity of requiring 120 credits at Level 1

   **Response:**
   - The project team will review the possibility of considering RPL at points other than registration
   - The requirements for 120 credits at Level 1 is a regulatory one and outside the remit of this project. This is a normal requirement in HE and RPL can be used to reduce this or to be exempted from it but the requirement itself cannot be removed

The project team would like to thank the student consultative forum for their assistance in responding to these questions and are pleased to be able to address many of the proposals in the revised policy and guidance.