

BIMM Institute Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy & Procedure

Section A: Introduction & Terminology

Introduction

BIMM Institute recognises the value of learning wherever it occurs, either to meet course entry requirements or to achieve credit towards named awards. 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 courses.

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 course on the basis of 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 course.

Procedures relating to the admission of students who do not meet the usual entry requirements specified for an undergraduate course of study are not included in this policy. Applicants for non-standard entry should contact BIMM Institute's Admissions team for advice in the first instance.

BIMM Institute shall seek to operate its RPL procedures in ways that are fair and in accordance with legal requirements and the Institute's regulations at all times. This includes specific compliance with the Equality Act and BIMM Institute's Equal Opportunities & Diversity Policy, as well as including a commitment that the Institute will foster stronger 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.

Publicity

Details about RPL, including information on where prospective students can obtain advice and guidance about submitting an application, any fees payable, and time limits shall be publicised to applicants via the Institute's prospectuses.

Terminology

- **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, through work and other life experiences.
- **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** - Refers to the formal recognition of prior learning gained outside the Institute through:
 - Formally assessed and certified courses;
 - Other experience, which is uncertified and not previously assessed. For example, learning from paid or unpaid work, community activities, leisure pursuits and other informal learning experiences.
- **Accreditation of prior learning (including credit transfer)** - It is the Institute's responsibility to decide how many specific credits to award an individual student via RPL, based on the level, extent, and perceived relevance of the learning (both knowledge and skills-based) compared to their intended course of study at BIMM Institute.

Where 'recognised' learning meets the criteria above and has been allocated credit, the Institute is responsible for determining whether the credit awarded by the body which approved the course/qualification is equivalent to the credit system used by the Institute. If the credit systems are equivalent, the credit will be 'transferred' at the same level and volume. Where the credit systems differ, the Institute 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, the Institute shall follow the procedures detailed in this policy to gauge the equivalent credit level and volume to be accredited.

- **'Advanced Standing' or 'Direct Entry'** – Refer to a student who has been granted sufficient RPL that they are permitted to enter a course later than the normal start point (i.e. directly into the second or subsequent year of study and/or second or subsequent level of a course). In these cases, the normal period of registration shall be shortened by the equivalent period, and the student shall be required to complete their course within this shortened period.

Outgoing Students

All students who exit the Institute, either upon completion of their intended award or part way through a course, are issued with an academic transcript which details the modules taken, their credit values, the marks achieved and the award attained (including exit awards).

Students who intend to transfer credit to another institution will require electronic copies of the course specification documents to support their application. These are available to current students on the VLE and can be requested by former students, along with Digital copies of academic transcripts, via email to registry@bimm.co.uk. The decision to accept credit achieved at BIMM Institute is at the discretion of the receiving institution.

Section B: Application Process

Criteria, Conditions & Restrictions for RPL

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

- **Written in English**
- **Sufficient** - Keep in mind that evidence presented (e.g. a portfolio or syllabus) should be concise and contain sufficient evidence for the purpose intended.
- **Recent** - How recent the learning and/or experience is can determine its value. Certain skills and knowledge, for example, can quickly become redundant.
- **Authentic** - For certain evidence to be accepted it may require endorsement or a reference from relevant sources, e.g. employers or validating institutions.
- **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 course without RPL, i.e. that the learning outcomes of the modules accredited, or course elements exempted, have been met.

Criteria

When considering evidence for prior certified learning, the RPL Assessor shall:

- Confirm (against a transcript of credit or award certificate) that credit has been awarded by an agency, such as a University, recognised by BIMM Institute;
- Confirm (against a transcript of credit or award certificate) that the learning activity has been given a credit rating (e.g. 15 CATS 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;
- Assess the evidence submitted against the requirements and learning outcomes of the relevant degree course and the constituent modules;
- Confirm that the learning has been in a subject area relevant to the course of study.

When considering evidence for experiential learning, the RPL Assessor shall:

- 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 course at the Institute 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. 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.

'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 course at the Institute.

Prior learning completed more than five years prior to the enrolment date for the intended course may be recognised and accredited subject to the following conditions:

- The Course Leader confirms that the learning is still relevant and meets the required Learning Outcomes; and/or
- The applicant can demonstrate evidence of continuous application, updating and relevance to their practice (in the case of professional courses) and the award sought.

Limits to the Volume of RPL

Specific limits on the amount of RPL that may be transferred to a course at the Institute are defined in Appendix 1 of this policy.

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 produces additional work at the appropriate level to be marked and moderated before a final decision is reached to approve or reject RPL for that module.

Credit Transfers

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.

Transfer of Marks/Grades

RPL of prior certificated learning enables a learner to transfer credit gained within one course to another course 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 which can be transferred into courses at BIMM Institute must be at the same level of study or higher.

Marks and/or grades attached to such credit shall only be recognised and transferred to the new course if the prior certified learning was undertaken at BIMM Institute.

Marks and/or grades from a course undertaken at another institution shall not be transferred unless approved via an Institutional Agreement or Exemption, the latter of which would require approval by Academic Board.

Calculation of Final Awards & Transcripts

The student's transcript or diploma supplement shall clearly show where credit has been awarded based on RPL, rather than study of the module(s), or where a student has been exempted from elements of the course.

Students who transfer credit and marks/grades within BIMM Institute or one of its partners shall normally have their final award calculated and, where appropriate, classified according to the relevant award rules (See Appendix 1 'Volume of RPL in BIMM Institute Awards').

Students who are only permitted to transfer credit without marks/grades and/or experiential learning may be unable to meet the appropriate requirements for award classification. 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 module marks achieved by the student while studying at the Institute.

Falsification or misrepresentation of evidence

The Institute reserves the right to terminate an application for or registration on a course 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.

Application Requirements

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

- For Certified Learning:
 - A certified copy of a transcript and award certificate;
 - A Course Specification, curriculum or syllabus with module descriptions (including Learning Outcomes), where appropriate.

- 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:

 - The statement of the claim;
 - A brief CV to provide a context for the claim;
 - Reflection on the relevance of the learning to the course against which the claim is being made;
 - Outcome cross-referenced to the full evidence;
 - Full evidence.

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

In preparing the Portfolio, an applicant shall be allocated a mentor by the Institute who may be subsequently involved in the assessment of the evidence but shall not be the sole assessor. The mentor shall advise the applicant of any additional course-specific criteria and what evidence shall be required for this.

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

- Agreement of work to be submitted (e.g. portfolio, presentation, submission of artefacts, examinations);
- Agreement of submission date;
- Agreement of any tutorial arrangements (including monitoring progress towards submission, reviewing drafts, etc.);

- Clarification of arrangements for assessment (including criteria, internal and external approval processes).

Timescale for Submission

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

Applications for RPL should normally be made no later than ten weeks in advance of enrolling on the intended course for which they are seeking to transfer prior certificated or experiential learning, unless specific course requirements have set an earlier deadline. Where earlier deadlines are required, this shall be published in the prospectus, as appropriate.

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

If the applicant has a problem obtaining appropriate evidence in time to meet the ten-week deadline above, they should inform BIMM Institute and request an extension at the earliest opportunity.

Applicants must not assume RPL credits to have been granted until they have received an official statement to that effect, as well as noting that any reduction in the number of credits being studied may prevent them from having the status of full-time student in one or more years of study.

Approval Process & Confirmation of Decision

The Admissions Team will advise RPL applicants on deadlines for submission of their application and work with College academic teams to arrange appropriate support, where applicable, to ensure the applicant understands what is required of them.

If the agreed submission deadline is missed by the applicant, the Admissions Team will advise on the next available date by which their application should be received to ensure it makes the next RPL Panel date. If the applicant has missed the final RPL Panel date for the relevant year of entry, Admissions will discuss the application with the RPL Panel Chair to see if other options are available or if the applicant needs to re-apply the following academic year.

All RPL applications accepted by the Admissions Team will be referred to a College RPL Academic Lead (normally the Head of Education, Head of Higher Education or Head of Learning & Teaching), who will assign an RPL Assessor (normally the relevant Course Leader).

The RPL Assessor will consider the application and, should they require additional information, the applicant will be advised within fifteen working days of the original submission, with an appropriate deadline agreed for the new information to be submitted, taking into account the modules for which the applicant is applying for exemption/accreditation and any other relevant factors. When the RPL Assessor is satisfied that they have all the necessary details to assess the application, they will make a recommendation to the RPL Panel via the College RPL Academic Lead.

It is the responsibility of the College RPL Academic Lead to ensure all RPL Assessors meet the marking deadline to ensure the RPL submissions are considered at the panel date as agreed with the applicant.

The College RPL Academic Lead will be responsible for submitting assessed RPL applications and accompanying recommendations to the RPL Panel, which will consider them for final approval. The RPL

Panel will be comprised of all College RPL Academic Leads and chaired by the Academic Registrar. All RPL applications for entry into levels contributing to an award (i.e. level 5) will also require External Examiner approval, which will be sought by the RPL Panel Chair. The decision of the RPL Panel will be communicated to the Admissions Team within ten working days of meeting (Panel dates are listed in Appendix 4).

The RPL applicant will be notified of the decision in writing by the Admissions Team, who will update the applicant's record as appropriate and store the documentation on file. Where the RPL application is partially or fully rejected, the letter confirming the decision shall include details of any shortcomings and how they might be rectified should the applicant wish to re-apply.

Appeals

Applicants may not appeal against the academic or professional judgement of those making the decision on an application. However, BIMM Institute shall consider a request from an appellant that the decision to reject their application be reviewed on the grounds that:

- There exists new evidence, which can be corroborated, and could not have been brought to the attention of BIMM Institute prior to the selection process;
- There is evidence of a procedural irregularity connected directly with the selection process undertaken by BIMM Institute;
- The decision of BIMM Institute is, on the basis of the information available, unreasonable;
- There is evidence of prejudice or bias on the part of those involved in the selection process.

Appeals must be made in writing within twenty-eight calendar days of the date of the letter from BIMM Institute notifying the applicant of the decision. Further details may be found in BIMM Institute's Appeals Procedure, available via the BIMM Institute website: www.bimm.co.uk/appeals-process/.

Complaints

BIMM Institute is committed to delivering a high quality, efficient and fair admissions service, and it is encouraged that applicants notify the institution of any causes for concern, and areas for improvement. Complaints may be made regarding the services or facilities offered by BIMM Institute 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. However, it will not usually result in reconsideration of the candidate's application. Students who wish to complain may do so in accordance with BIMM Institute's Appeals & Complaints Procedures.

Appendix 1: Volume of RPL in BIMM Institute Awards

It is important to note that the acceptance of RPL towards BIMM Institute awards is a decision based on each individual case.

Limits for Certificated Learning

To receive an undergraduate honours degree from BIMM Institute, a student will be required to undertake at least one full-time academic year of study, or part-time equivalent, on a BIMM Institute approved course and achieve 120 credits. 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.

Limits for Experiential Learning

To receive an undergraduate honours degree from BIMM Institute, a student will be required to undertake at least two full-time academic years of study, or part-time equivalent, on a BIMM Institute approved course and achieve 240 credits. The volume of RPL permitted via prior experiential learning shall normally equate to half the maximum volumes listed below.

Award	Maximum credits which may be accredited	Minimum credits to be passed on BIMM Institute courses	Total credits required for award
Master's Degree	100 (level 7)	80 (level 7)	180
Bachelor's Degree with Honours	240 (120 at level 4 and 120 at level 5)	120 (level 6)	360
Top-up Degree with Honours	none	120 (level 6)	120
Diploma of Higher Education	120 (level 4)	120 (level 5)	240
Certificate of Higher Education	none	120 (level 4)	120

Appendix 2: Generic Portfolio Criteria for Experiential Learning – Guidance for Applicants

A portfolio is an organised folder of information compiled by an applicant with support from BIMM Institute 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 (CV)
- Voluntary work – unpaid
- Domestic work – unpaid
- Hobbies and interests
- Education and training: formal and informal
- List of competencies
- Supporting evidence

Types of Evidence Required

Direct Evidence (your own work)

For example:

- Written reports
- Essays/Poems
- Articles
- Computer courses
- A set of accounts
- Photographs of objects that you have produced
- 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:

1. Cover page – RPL application for (your name)
2. Curriculum Vitae
3. Education and training – indicate the skills, knowledge and understanding which you have acquired through various aspects of your education
4. Work experience and training – indicate the skills, knowledge and understanding you have acquired through employment
5. Voluntary or community work – identify what skills, knowledge and understanding has been acquired
6. Other formal or informal learning experiences for example, captain of a sports team, running a sports club, organising a school trip
7. List of competencies – categorise your skills, knowledge and understanding. For example:
 - Personal skills
 - Good communicator
 - Confident public speaker
 - Ability to assimilate a range of ideas
8. Any areas that do not fall into the above categories (b - g) which you consider relevant for assessment.

Supporting 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.

BIMM Institute's Commitment to Applicants

BIMM Institute will help applicants to compile a portfolio of evidence by offering the relevant resources, information, advice and one-to-one guidance on how to collect evidence and lay out the portfolio. We will also offer a one-hour tutorial to check the completed portfolio and to make recommendations if further evidence or descriptions are needed. If any additional support is required, this should be requested by the applicant in advance of the tutorial.

Appendix 3: Supporting Staff Assessing RPL

College Principals will nominate a College RPL Academic Lead (normally the Head of Education, Head of Higher Education or Head of Learning & Teaching) to support academics dealing with RPL applications. This person shall be experienced in RPL processes and will be allocated time to fulfil their responsibilities. The College RPL Academic Lead will be responsible for ensuring consistency within their own college.

The RPL Panel is responsible for final approval of all RPL applications, and all paperwork should be available for internal or external scrutiny, as required. RPL claims must be available for scrutiny by external examiners in accordance with normal BIMM Institute procedures for assessed work contributing to an award.

Appendix 4: RPL Panel dates for Academic Year 2019/20

Applicant Deadline for RPL submission	RPL submission marking deadlines	RPL submission received by RPL panel	RPL panel date:	<i>Applicant informed of decision – guide dates below: (normally within ten working days of RPL panel date)</i>
3 rd February	7 th February	21 st February	26 th February	<i>4th March</i>
30 th March	3 rd April	17 th April	24 th April	<i>28th April</i>
1 st May	7 th May	21 st May	28 th May	<i>3rd June</i>
15 th June	19 th June	3 rd July	10 th July	<i>14th July</i>
25 th August	1 st September	15 th September	18 th September	<i>21st September</i>