

Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL) guidance notes

What is RPEL?

Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL), is the process through which we provide formal academic recognition of learning you have undertaken through experience, either through:

- Work / professional experiences
- Life experiences
- Hobbies and Interests

You may be able to gain exemption from certain stages of our undergraduate degree programmes by submitting an RPEL application. This application should evidence how you have met the various unit learning outcomes of your chosen degree programme. If your application is successful, then RPEL will be awarded as credit which will exempt you from studying one or more units from your chosen degree programme.

The maximum amount of RPEL that can be awarded as credit on our undergraduate programmes is as follows:

- Up to 120 credits at Level/Stage 1
- Up to 60 credits at Level/Stage 2

Please note:

- Exemption at Level/Stage 2 (HE5) is dependent upon gaining full exemption (120 credits) from Level/Stage 1 study.
- You cannot gain exemption from additional credits at Level/Stage 2 study, or any credits at Level/Stage 3 study.

Depending on the degree programme you wish to study and gain exemption from, you may need to apply for exemption from core units and select relevant elective units, or apply for exemption from a specific set of units. Please check the Programme Specification for your intended degree programme to find out which units you need to research in order to inform your application.

How do I apply for RPEL?

To apply for RPEL you will need to complete an RPL application form on the OCA website which will initiate the process to seek exemption from one of our degree programmes by evidencing prior experiential learning.

See the *Credit Exemptions* page of the OCA website here:

<https://www.oca.ac.uk/credit-exemptions/>

What are the charges for RPEL applications?

There is a standard £250 fee for application. This fee is charged regardless of whether your application is successful or not.

When can I submit my RPEL application?

The Open College of the Arts (OCA) holds three undergraduate exam boards each academic year. These typically occur in the months of November, March and July. The deadline for receipt of RPEL applications is as follows:

- 31 January for the March OCA Undergraduate Exam Board
- 31 May for the July OCA Undergraduate Exam Board
- 30 September for the November OCA Undergraduate Exam Board

How do I submit my application for RPEL?

After you have applied for RPEL, we will make arrangements to collect the relevant payment for the process (details of which are outlined in the application form). Upon receipt of payment, we will then provide you with a google drive folder into which you can upload your required documentation.

What happens after I have applied?

Once you have submitted a full RPEL application, we will acknowledge receipt and then process your application. Your application will be presented to a member of OCA's Academic Staff, who will review your application and make a recommendation of what exemption you should be awarded. Their course exemption recommendation will be submitted to the Exam Board for approval.

Following approval of the recommendation at the Exam Board, we will send you a detailed breakdown letter advising you which unit(s) you have been given exemption from and which unit(s) you must then study to obtain your chosen

degree. The credit exemption you are awarded will be registered with our accrediting university.

When will I receive notification of the outcome of my RPEL application?

Following the meeting of the given OCA Undergraduate Exam Board (as detailed in the *When can I submit...* section) and successful sign off of the results and outcomes, we would aim to notify you within one week of the board.

What if I do not agree with the outcome of my RPEL application?

Please note that you cannot appeal the outcome of your RPEL application if it questions the academic judgement of the member of OCA Academic Staff.

Please also note by submitting an RPEL application, OCA reserves the right to use any or all of your application as an example for future potential applicants.

What is required in my RPEL application?

Each applicant would need to supply the following for their RPEL application to be considered:

[A complete RPEL application form](#)

See the *How do I apply for RPEL* section of these guidance notes for details of how to complete an RPEL application form.

[Statement of Intent](#)

This can be a simple written document (no more than 750 words), or a recorded presentation (audio and/or visual, lasting no longer than 6 minutes). In this statement of intent, you can:

- Introduce yourself to the college/academics reviewing your application
- Contextualise your application (why you may not have studied at higher education level previously, why you were unable to complete prior studies, why you are applying for exemption now etc.)
- Outline your intentions for study should you be granted the exemption that you're seeking

- Outline any future study intentions (are you considering studying beyond undergraduate level, training to be a educator or researcher)
- Discuss any professional reasons or targets (does your employer require you to have certain qualifications, or do you want to evidence qualified status to clients)

Consider your particular circumstances and how best to convey them to the reviewer, bearing in mind that every student has their own motivations for study.

Evidence of experiential learning

For each unit you seek exemption, we require the following evidence:

- **A selection of creative work** - Depending on the unit/degree programme you are seeking exemption from, your selection of creative work will differ. For example, if you are seeking exemption against a photography unit, you may submit three photographic series, containing up to 10 images each (up to 30 single images overall), or if it's a creative writing unit, you may select samples of writing up to no more than 6000 words overall, or perhaps three pieces of music composition. Be discerning in your selection of creative work, show the reviewer that you have carefully considered the learning outcomes¹ of the given unit and have selected appropriate work to evidence your meeting these learning outcomes.
- **A reflective evaluation/presentation** - Similar to the statement of intent in terms of word count/length (750 words/six minutes), this reflective account needs to reference the selection of creative work for the unit and discuss how it evidences how you have met the learning outcomes in your life/work experiences. Consider this a balance of academic writing and personal reflection, use the principles of essay writing/formal presentation to guide you, and

¹ At present, it is possible to find the learning outcomes of a degree programme by referring to the specific Programme Specification. To find out about the learning outcomes of a specific unit, you will need to contact the Registry Team - registry@oca.ac.uk - to request the relevant information.

make use of the Harvard academic referencing system where appropriate.

- **An example of academic writing in the form of an essay/extended written piece/report** - You need only submit an example of academic writing in the event you apply for exemption from all of Level/Stage 1 study (120 credits), or the maximum exemption available (all of Level/Stage 1 and part of Level/Stage 2 study [180 credits]). This example of academic writing must make use of an academic referencing system and follow the principles of formal academic writing (introduction, paragraphed content, conclusion, illustrations where appropriate, reference list and bibliography). No more than 2500 words maximum (if your writings exceed this maximum word count, you may need to consider providing an extract from a larger piece of writing).

Please note that there must be a certain amount of separation between the evidence for each of the units and an avoidance of duplication. For example, if you're applying for the maximum exemption available, we would expect to see four sets of creative work selections, four reflective evaluations and one sample of academic writing, not one selection of creative work for all four units you are seeking exemption from.

What should I write about in my statement of intent or my reflective evaluation/presentation?

Consider the following advice when looking to write your statement of intent or your reflection evaluation/presentation:

- Look to demonstrate an understanding of where your own creative work and the work of other creative practitioners sits within the wider artistic and cultural context.
- Refer to your selections of creative work as appropriate, provide a rationale for why you have included them in your application, why in your opinion they meet the learning outcomes of the given unit.
- Your writings/presentations need to demonstrate your ability to articulate opinions and perspectives, as well as meeting learning outcomes.
Remember that you're applying for exemption from degree level courses

and the reviewers must be shown evidence of your meeting higher education standards.

- Do your research, read the Programme Specification for the degree programme you are seeking exemption from. Read around your chosen subject to be certain that it's the right course for you, and that your previous experience is relatable to the chosen unit(s).

What should I select to evidence my creative work?

As previously stated, your selection of creative work should seek to evidence your having met the learning outcomes of the unit in your life/work experiences. Consider the wording of the learning outcomes, are you submitting work that demonstrates curiosity, observation, technical skill, original thinking, experimentation, an awareness of other practitioners work, that is reflective, self critical etc.

As for how many pieces of work to select, we would advise the following:

- Visual arts and design units - Eight to twelve pieces of imagery/designs/work
- Photography units - Up to three photographic series containing a maximum of 10 images each (no more than 30 single images overall)
- Creative writing units - Samples of writing (no more than 6000 words overall)
- Music composition units - Up to three music compositions

How should I present my RPEL application?

Consider the following advice when looking to put your application together for upload to the google drive folder:

- You could supply an index of the documents/files that you are submitting in support of your application. This could be a simple document that indexes all of the word documents, images, audio/visual files, PDFs etc. via email, and a short sentence alongside each image to contextualise it.
- You must be selective about the evidence you choose to submit. A random collection of works with little to no context or relation to the given unit may not gain credit exemption. Make use of the google drive folder's

functions to create sub folders, and organise documents with titles that make them easy to navigate.

What file formats can I use in my RPEL application?

It is important that you provide documents and other evidence for your RPEL application in digital formats that reviewers can easily access. This means using:

- PDFs - for large or lengthy documents such as portfolios
- JPEG, JPG - for images
- Google Doc or Word documents for written elements (.doc / .docx / .pdf)
- Videos / short film can be saved as .mp4 or .mov files
- Audio files can be saved as .mp3 files
- All score-based work (Music units only) should be saved using Sibelius or Dorico files only
- GoogleSlides or Powerpoint for presentations (.ppt / .pptx / .pdf)

Checklist for your RPEL application google drive folder

Your RPEL application google drive folder should contain the following:

- **A statement of intent** (no more than 750 words/no longer than six minutes)
- **Evidence of experiential learning***
 - **A selection of creative work** (limitations will depend upon the unit/subject)
 - **A reflective evaluation/presentation** (750 words/six minutes)
- **An example of academic writing in the form of an essay/extended written piece/report**** (no more than 2500 words)

**Only if you are seeking exemption from all of Level/Stage 1 study (120 credits) or the maximum exemption available (all of Level/Stage 1 and part of Level/Stage 2 study [180 credits])