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# Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL) guidance notes

## What is RPEL?

Recognition 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 programmes by submitting an RPEL application. This application should evidence how you have met the various course unit learning outcomes of your chosen programme. If your application is successful, then RPEL will be awarded as credit which will exempt you from studying one or more course units from your chosen programme.

The maximum amount of RPEL that can be awarded towards the full BA Hons degree as credit on our undergraduate programmes is as follows:

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

For sub-awards the maximum amount of permitted RPL is 50% ie

- CertHE – up to 60 credits at stage 1 (HE4)
- Dip HE – up to 120 credits at Stage 1 (HE5)

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 any Level/Stage 3 study.
- You would be enrolled onto a BA (Hons ) degree, and cannot be selectively enrolled onto a CertHE, DipHE or Ordinary degree unless this is the offered qualification.
- Your experiential learning must be mapped/matched across to the equivalent OCA course unit(s).

You must commence study on the qualification in the within 6 months of the outcome of the RPL application for a non-cohorted qualification and for the next available intake for a cohorted qualification. Depending on the programme you wish to study and gain exemption from, you may need to apply for exemption from core course units and select relevant elective units or apply for exemption from a specific set of units. Please check the Programme Specification for your intended programme to find out which course 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 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?**

Undergraduate

The Open College of the Arts (OCA) holds up to three assessment events each academic year. These typically occur in the Autumn, Spring and Summer. The deadline for receipt of RPEL undergraduate applications is as follows:

- 30 September for the Autumn review
- 31 January for the Spring Review
- 31 May for the Summer Review

CertHE

The deadline for receipt for RPEL applications towards a specified CertHE programme is 31 May.

Applications can only be accepted prior to study with OCA.

Postgraduate

These are reviewed on an ad-hoc basis and will be presented to the following Board of Examiners for ratification.

### **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 course unit(s) you have been given exemption from and which course unit(s) you must then study to complete the programme. 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 Exam Board (as detailed in the *When can I submit...* section) 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. However, if you feel that you have other grounds for appeal then please review [OCA's Academic Appeals Policy](#)

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. OCA advises that in order to comply with GDPR and Data Protection legislation that the application would be redacted and anonymised to ensure there was no identifying data available to other 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/postgraduate 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 course unit you seek exemption, we require the following evidence:

- **A selection of creative work** - Depending on the course unit/ programme you are seeking exemption from, your selection of creative work will differ. For example, if you are seeking exemption against a photography course 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 outcomes of the given course 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 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 undergraduate Level/Stage 1 study (120 credits), or
  - the maximum undergraduate exemption available (all of Level/Stage 1 and part of Level/Stage 2 study [180 credits]), or
  - Any post graduate credit exemption

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 course units and an avoidance of duplication. For example, if you're applying for the maximum undergraduate exemption available, we would expect to see the equivalent number of sets of creative work selections, reflective evaluations and one sample of academic writing, not one selection of creative work for all the course 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 course unit.
- Your writings/presentations need to demonstrate your ability to articulate opinions and perspectives, as well as meeting learning outcomes. Remember that you are 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 is the right course for you, and that your previous experience is relatable to the chosen course 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 course 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 course units - Eight to twelve pieces of imagery/designs/work
- Photography course units - Up to three photographic series containing a maximum of 10 images each (no more than 30 single images overall)
- Creative writing course units - Samples of writing (no more than 6000 words overall)
- Music composition course 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 course 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 courses 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\***
  - \*Evidence will be required for each course unit you seek exemption from)
    - **A selection of creative work** (limitations will depend upon the course 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]) or any exemption from postgraduate units.