



# Exemptions Policy

Maintained by:	Quality and Standards
Owned by:	Quality Assurance Committee
Last Updated:	November 2015
Next review date:	November 2016
Current Version:	V1.0
Location of Master Document:	<a href="https://intra.brunel.ac.uk/s/QSO/Team/StudentPolicies/ExemptionsPolicy">https://intra.brunel.ac.uk/s/QSO/Team/StudentPolicies/Exemptions Policy</a>

## Quality Assurance Committee

### EXEMPTIONS POLICY

October 2015

## 1 Introduction

Where a student (or applicant) can demonstrate that they have already met, to the appropriate standard, the intended learning outcomes of part of a programme at Brunel, they may be granted exemption from that part, as permitted in Senate Regulation 2 and Senate Regulation 3. Such exemptions may be granted on the basis of Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning, Prior Certificated Learning or of credits/awards already achieved in a Higher Education institution.

This policy defines the requirements for the granting of exemptions, which vary depending on the type of exemption, the basis of the exemption, and the context for the exemption. The policy is informed by, and is consistent with, the UK Quality Code for Higher Education Chapter B6 expectation that, 'Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.' Chapter B6, *Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning*. This policy is also informed by Chapter B2, *Recruitment, selection and admission to higher education*, and Chapter B9, *Academic Appeals and Student Complaints*. In addition, the policy is compliant with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

## 2 Exemptions based on Recognition of Prior Learning or Higher Education Credit

### 2.1 Definitions

The University policy, in line with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education Chapter B6 2015 definitions pertaining to exemption processes, distinguishes between Recognition of Prior Learning and Recognition of HE credit. Prior Learning is thus defined as learning (whether experiential or organised) that has not been assessed and certificated by a Higher Education institution. The recognition process for prior learning involves an assessment process at Brunel whilst recognition of HE credit involves an evaluation of equivalency:

- Recognition of Prior Experiential or Certificated Learning (RPEL/RPCL);

- Recognition of HE Credit, i.e. learning and achievement gained in a HE institution.

## 2.2 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPEL/RPCL)

The recognition of prior experiential learning (RPEL) involves an assessment process by Brunel academic staff that leads to recognition of achievement of learning outcomes. The essential feature of this process is that it is the learning gained through experience that is assessed, not the experience itself.<sup>1</sup>

Prior certificated learning relates to formally certificated prior learning (such as professional development awards or employment-based or vocational awards) that is at an appropriate level but has not led to the gaining of credits or qualifications in a HE institution. A process of assessment or, in some cases, evaluation of equivalency enables a decision to be made on whether the certificated learning is suitable for recognition.<sup>1</sup> An evaluation of equivalency, rather than an assessment, may be used only where the standards of the award and of the awarding body are known and appropriate, as designated by the Academic Registrar.

## 2.3 Recognition of HE Credit

The recognition of HE credit involves an evaluation of equivalency of achieved learning outcomes and Level together with a mapping of grade/classification scales. Recognition of HE Credit does not involve an assessment of the student's work as such assessment has already been carried out by the HE institution.

### 2.3.1 Categories of HE Credit

It is necessary to distinguish several categories of HE credit in order to optimise the degree of scrutiny required:

**Brunel Prior Credit:** The applicant/student has already completed the Brunel module/block in a previous registration and thus, the only recognition criterion is currency of the learning.

**Brunel Compatible Credit:** The applicant/student has completed a similar Brunel module/block in a previous registration; thus the recognition criteria are currency, level and learning outcome compatibility.

**UK HE Credit:** The applicant/student has completed a similar module/block at a UK HE institution; thus the recognition criteria are currency, level and learning outcome compatibility, with mapping of grade/mark threshold or scale undertaken where grading scales differ.

**EHEA HE Credit:** The applicant/student has completed a similar module/block at a European Higher Education Area HE institution; thus the recognition criteria are currency, level and learning outcome compatibility, with mapping of grade threshold or scale undertaken where grading scales differ.

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter B6, *Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning*.

**Overseas HE Credit:** The applicant/student has completed a similar module/block at an overseas (i.e. non-EHEA) HE institution; thus the recognition criteria are currency, level and learning outcome compatibility, with mapping of grade threshold or scale undertaken, taking into account institutional standards.

### 2.3.2 Volume

Where a student is requesting exemption from one or more Brunel modules/blocks, it may be the case that the learning outcomes have been demonstrated elsewhere in a block or blocks of a different volume of credit compared with the block or blocks to be exempted at Brunel. In this case, the normal expectation for recognition is that:

***the equivalent credit weighting of the assessed learning outcomes should be no less than two-thirds of the credit rating of the Brunel block to be exempted.***

Thus for example, a student could be exempted from a 20-credit block on the basis of achievement in a 15 credit block taken elsewhere, but not on the basis of a 10-credit block.

For most UK HE Credit recognition and for EHEA HE Credit recognition, where the learning outcomes have been demonstrated in a single module or block, the credit equivalence with Brunel credit should be clear under the relevant UK Credit Framework or the European Credit Transfer System (please note that 1 ECTS credit is deemed to be equal to 2 credits under UK HE Credit Framework and, therefore, to 2 Brunel credits).

For Overseas HE Credit and for UK HE institutions that do not implement a Credit system, and in all cases where achievement of the learning outcomes has been demonstrated over more than one module or block, a judgement may need to be made regarding the equivalent credit rating of the assessed learning outcomes.

## 3 Requirements for Graded and Ungraded Exemptions

### 3.1 Types of Exemption

As defined in Senate Regulation 2 and Senate Regulation 3, exemptions may be graded or ungraded. Ungraded exemptions are excluded from any award classification calculation whilst graded exemptions are included as part of the normal grade profile. The essential recognition criteria for the consideration of an exemption request are outlined in Table 1 for both graded and ungraded exemptions, and for each basis. Whether an agreed exemption is graded or ungraded depends on both the basis for the exemption and the context for the exemption (see Table 2).

Table 1- Recognition criteria for each type of exemption and basis

		Type of Exemption	
		Ungraded Exemption	Graded Exemption
Basis for exemption	Prior Experiential Learning	Assessment against Level and LOs, currency	
	Prior Certificated Learning	Assessment against Level and LOs, currency	
	Overseas HE Credit	Level, Standards LO Coverage Currency	Level, Standards, Nominal grading map plus moderation, LO Coverage, Currency
	EHEA HE Credit	Level LO Coverage Currency	Level, Grade Scales LO Coverage Currency
	UK HE Credit	Level LO Coverage Currency	Level, Grade Scales LO Coverage Currency
	Brunel Compatible Credit	Level LO Coverage Currency	Level LO Coverage Currency
	Brunel Prior Credit	Currency	Currency

### 3.2 Contexts for Exemptions

There are several contexts in which exemptions may be requested and Table 2 below defines, for each context, the type of exemptions that are permitted for each basis for exemption. It should be noted that, for articulation/recognition agreements, exemptions are systematic and pre-agreed, and are stated as part of the agreement. For exchange programmes, part of the exemption process is again systematic and pre-agreed, although some aspects are individually considered. For exemptions that are part of the admissions process, each request is considered individually.

Table 2 – Permitted Types of Exemption for each Context and Basis

		Context				
		On Admission (including internal transfer(new programme) and resumption of study (same programme))		On Programme		Articulation / Recognition Agreements
		Advanced Standing Individual Request	Block Exemption Individual Request	Block Exemption Individual Request	Exchange Programme	
Basis for exemption	Prior Experiential Learning	Ungraded Exemption from Level	Ungraded Block Exemption	Ungraded Block Exemption		
	Prior Certificated Learning	Ungraded Exemption from Level	Ungraded Block Exemption	Ungraded Block Exemption		
	Overseas HE Credit	Ungraded Exemption from Level	Ungraded Block Exemption	Ungraded Block Exemption	Graded Exemption from Block/Level	Ungraded Exemption from Block/Level
	EHEA HE Credit	Ungraded Exemption from Level	Graded Block Exemption	Graded Block Exemption	Graded Exemption from Block/Level	Ungraded Exemption from Level/Graded Exemption from Block
	UK HE Credit	Ungraded Exemption from Level	Graded Block Exemption	Graded Block Exemption	Graded Exemption from Block/Level	Ungraded Exemption from Level/Graded Exemption from Block
	Brunel Compatible Credit	Ungraded Exemption from Level	Graded Block Exemption	Graded Block Exemption		
	Brunel Prior Credit	Graded Exemption from Level	Graded Block Exemption	Graded Block Exemption		

### 3.3 Limits to exemptions

Requests for recognition of prior learning or HE credit will not normally be accepted if more than five years have elapsed since the said learning has taken place.

In addition to the limits on the type of exemption (graded or ungraded) permitted in each context and for each basis as defined in Table 2, Senate Regulations (SRs) impose further limits on the volume of exemption allowed, as follows.

As per SR2.26 and SR3.26 exemptions shall normally only be approved for whole assessment/modular blocks and not for individual elements of assessment within an assessment/modular block.

As per SR2.31 and SR3.31, exemptions (other than those based on Brunel credit) may not be applied to the following parts of programmes, which students must therefore normally attempt:

- (i) any Level 3 or Masters Level assessments in an ordinary bachelors, honours bachelors or integrated Masters degree programme;
- (ii) more than 50% of the assessed credit of non-degree undergraduate awards;
- (iii) more than 50% of the taught part assessed credit of any Masters level degree or other postgraduate award offered under Senate Regulation 3.

Granted exemptions should be clearly identified on a student's transcript.

### 3.4 Appeals against Exemption decisions

Where a Request for Exemption is turned down, the applicant/student shall have the right to appeal against the decision under the following terms:

- **All exemption requests at the admission stage:**  
The applicant may appeal the exemption decision strictly in accordance with the University's Admissions Policy.
- **Exemption requests from current students based on recognition of HE Credit**  
Students may request a review of the exemption decision by the Academic Registrar, whose decision shall be final.
- **Exemption requests from current students based on assessment of Prior Learning**  
Students may appeal the exemption decision in accordance with Senate Regulation 12, Academic Appeals.

## 4 Processes for considering and granting individually-requested exemptions defined in the University's Exemptions Policy

*Please note that the following processes do not apply to exchange programmes or articulation agreements and thus apply only to individual requests for exemptions made on admission or on-programme (see Table 2). Exemption processes for articulation agreements and exchange programmes are specified in the University's "Managing Partnerships Code of Practice" and the "Exchange Programme Policy and Process" documents respectively.*

### Transparency of process

The granting of exemptions should be a process that is clear, transparent and equitable. Guidance for applicants/students concerning exemptions should be clear on:

- criteria used to assess requests;
- the nature and range of evidence considered appropriate to support an exemption request;
- the process for submission and consideration of exemption requests.

All RHEC or RPL requests from applicants or current students should be made using the University's Exemption Request Form (ERF). The applicant/student will complete Part A of the form which, along with attached supporting evidence, should be submitted either to Admissions (for applicants) or to the relevant College Education Manager (for current students).

**The scrutiny/approval process for Recognition of HE Credit** will involve consideration of the Exemption Request Form and supporting evidence by the Departmental/Divisional Admissions Tutor, in consultation with the Divisional Director or the Head of Department (in single Division Departments). For on-programme Recognition of HE Credit decisions, the Programme Director will take the role of the Admissions Tutor described above. The criteria to be addressed for the particular basis and context of the case are defined in the Exemptions Policy Section 2 and Table 1.

**The assessment process for Recognition of Prior Learning** involves consideration of the Exemption Request Form and assessment of the supporting evidence by two appropriate members of academic staff, who will initially conduct independent assessments of achievement of learning outcomes before agreeing a recommendation to the Chair of the Panel of Examiners responsible for the block(s) being considered for exemption. The Director of Learning and Teaching in the relevant Department will assign the academic staff members.

The decisions for the granting of exemptions from the above two processes are recorded on the Exemption Request Form in Part C and signed by the individuals named in the processes above, as appropriate. The completed form will then be passed to the College Education Manager for post-decision processing, including sign-off of document verification. The College Education Manager then passes the ERF to Admissions (for action re applicants and entering information on the exemptions database). Admissions will then pass relevant ARFs to the Student Centre (for action re current students).



## Process Flowchart

The full process for handling individual exemption requests is given on page 10.

## Responsibilities for Exemptions processes

Applicants/Students may apply for exemptions at several stages in their relationship with Brunel. This may be at the time they make an application to the University, or while already enrolled on a programme. In all instances, clear information needs to be given to students.

### Admissions

Requests for Exemption received by Admissions will be forwarded to the relevant College Education Manager after completion of Part B.

Admissions will also maintain a database of all agreed exemptions and established equivalences. Where precedence or an established equivalence exists for a particular request, Admissions will state this on the Exemption Request Form before forwarding the form to the relevant College. Where an exemptions request is made directly to the College by a current student, Admissions will be able to give advice to the College on possible precedent or established equivalence.

Admissions will action approved exemptions for applicants (notification of the applicant and entering on the student's record).

### Student Centre

The Student Centre will action approved exemptions for current students (notification of the student and entering the exemptions on the student's record).

### College Education Manager (CEM)

The CEM's role is to receive, progress and communicate outcomes for all exemption requests considered in the College. The CEM will complete Part B of the ERF for current students, will progress the decision-making of Part C and, after completing Part D, will return the Exemption Request Form (along with attached evidence) to Admissions (for applicants) or to the Student Centre (for current students).

### Exemptions Advisor

One Exemptions Advisor should be established per College, nominated by the Vice-Dean (Education). This person will provide academic advice and guidance to applicants regarding issues such as how best to evidence prior experiential or certificated learning and to colleagues regarding the assessment of such learning.

### Deadlines

For those applying to Brunel, requests for recognition are normally made at the time of the application. In all cases (both applicants and current students), requests for exemption must be made, at the latest, three weeks before the commencement of the relevant module(s)/Level. Decisions regarding granting

exemption requests must be made normally within 3 weeks of receipt of the Request for Exemption by the University; this will be subject to reasonable additional time if additional information is required in order to reach a decision.

# Individually-requested Exemption Process

