



Oakswood College

Empowering Through Education



Recognition of Prior Learning

Policy

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Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy

Document Control & Version History

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1. Introduction

Oakwood College is committed to widening participation, promoting inclusive access, and recognising that valuable learning can take place in formal, informal, and professional settings. This Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy sets out how the College will identify, assess, and recognise prior certificated and experiential learning in a fair, transparent, and academically robust manner. The policy supports learners who may already have achieved relevant knowledge, skills, and understanding before joining an Oakwood College programme.

This policy applies to applicants and registered students seeking admission with advanced standing, credit transfer, exemption from specified units or modules, or a modified assessment approach where prior learning can be evidenced and mapped against programme learning outcomes and assessment requirements.

2. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) means the identification, assessment, and formal recognition of relevant prior learning and achievement gained before a student undertakes the programme for which recognition is sought. Such prior learning must be relevant to the knowledge, skills, and understanding that would otherwise be assessed as part of the programme.

RPL may include:

- **Recognition of Prior Accredited Learning (RPAL):** previously assessed and formally certificated learning, such as qualifications, modules, or units awarded by a recognised awarding body or education provider.
- RPAL applies where a student has already achieved certificated learning that is equivalent in level, content, credit value, and learning outcomes to part of the Oakwood College programme. This may support admission with advanced standing, exemption from specific units or modules, or transfer of academic credit where permitted.
- Examples of RPAL evidence may include qualification certificates, academic transcripts, unit transcripts, or credit statements issued by recognised institutions or awarding bodies.

Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL): learning derived from employment, professional practice, voluntary work, training, independent study, or wider life experience that has not been formally certificated but can be evidenced and assessed.

- RPEL applies where a student seeks recognition for learning acquired through professional practice, employment, volunteering, training, or other relevant experience outside formal certificated education. Recognition will only be granted where the student can demonstrate, through assessed evidence, that the prior experiential learning matches the intended learning outcomes and level of the programme or unit concerned.
- Examples of RPEL evidence may include portfolios, project documentation, reports, professional records, witness testimonies, reflective accounts, interviews, demonstrations, audio-visual evidence, and records of continuing professional development.

3. Purpose and Scope

- The purpose of this policy is to provide a clear and equitable process for recognising prior learning towards admission, credit, exemption, or a reduced volume of learning where appropriate. The policy is intended to ensure that students are not required to unnecessarily repeat learning they have already successfully achieved, whilst maintaining the integrity, standard, and reliability of Oakwood College awards.
- This policy applies to all relevant programmes offered by Oakwood College, including face-to-face, blended, online, and distance learning provision, unless programme-specific regulations state otherwise. It should be read by applicants, students, academic staff, assessors, admissions staff, and quality assurance staff involved in admissions, delivery, assessment, and academic decision-making.

4. Data Protection Considerations

All personal data collected in relation to an RPL application will be processed confidentially and used only for the purposes of assessing the claim, making fair and consistent academic decisions, maintaining accurate records, and complying with quality assurance obligations. Personal data will be handled in accordance with applicable data protection legislation and the College's data protection requirements.

5. Responsibility and Authority

Overall responsibility for this policy rests with Oakwood College's Academic Board. Operational responsibility for implementing this policy sits with the Head of Governance, Quality, Compliance & Information Systems, Admissions Manager, Programme Leads, assessors, and quality assurance staff designated by the College.

Those involved in RPL decisions must ensure that decisions are evidence-based, academically sound, consistent across the College, and properly documented for internal and external review.

6. Principles

Oakwood College will apply the following principles to all RPL activity:

- **Equity:** all applicants and students will be considered fairly and without discrimination.
- **Transparency:** requirements, criteria, timescales, and possible outcomes will be clearly communicated.
- **Academic integrity:** RPL decisions will preserve the academic standards and learning outcomes of the qualification.
- **Student-centredness:** the process will support flexible progression routes and lifelong learning.
- **Evidence-based decision-making:** recognition will only be granted where sufficient, valid, authentic, current, and reliable evidence is provided.

8. Eligibility and Limitations

To be eligible for RPL (whether RPAL or RPEL), prior learning must be relevant to the target programme, at an appropriate academic level, and sufficiently current to demonstrate present competence. As a general principle, evidence should normally be recent enough to remain valid in light of professional, regulatory, technological, and curriculum developments, though exceptions may be considered where the applicant can clearly demonstrate currency.

Oakwood College will normally permit RPL for up to 50% of the total credit or content of a qualification unless programme regulations, professional body requirements, awarding body rules and regulations, and/or validation conditions specify a different limit. Some programmes with substantial practical,

professional, or regulated components may impose lower limits, and certain externally assessed components may be excluded from RPL where required. In all circumstances where RPL is applicable, the specified maximum permitted allowance for RPL pertaining to admission to any individual programme of study with Oakwood College cannot be exceeded in any circumstances, in order to ensure that the academic standards and integrity of programmes and awards is preserved.

9. Evidence Requirements

All evidence submitted in support of an RPL claim must enable the College to determine whether the student has already met the relevant learning outcomes, assessment criteria, and academic standards. Evidence submitted through the RPL process will be assessed with the same degree of rigour as evidence generated through standard teaching and assessment arrangements.

Oakwood College will apply the CRAVES principles when evaluating RPL evidence. Evidence must be current, reliable, authentic, valid, evaluated, and sufficient. Evidence must also be submitted within timeframes specified by the College in order to be considered within the respective admissions cycle; failure to adhere to the specified timeframes will normally result either in the College declining the RPL application or an offer of a place being deferred to the next admissions cycle.

10. Application Process

Students or applicants seeking RPL must submit a formal application together with all required supporting evidence before the start of the relevant programme or, where permitted, before the commencement of the unit or module for which recognition is sought.

- The College will normally require a completed RPL application form, copies of certificates or transcripts, a portfolio of evidence, references, and a reflective statement where experiential learning is being claimed.

The College will review the application, map the evidence against relevant learning outcomes and assessment criteria, and determine whether the prior learning justifies admission with advanced standing, credit transfer, exemption, a reduction in guided learning, or a modified assessment approach.

11. Assessment of RPL Claims

RPL claims will be assessed by suitably qualified and competent staff with relevant subject expertise. Assessors must verify the authenticity of evidence and determine whether prior learning is equivalent in level, breadth, depth, and standard to the learning for which recognition is sought.

Where necessary, the College may use supplementary methods such as professional discussion, interview, viva, challenge assessment, practical demonstration, or additional questioning to confirm the applicant's current knowledge, understanding, and competence.

11a. Reasonable adjustments

Where an Equality Impact Assessment identifies a potential barrier, as part of fulfilling the anticipatory duty under the Equality Act (2010), the College will proactively consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place. For students, this may include alternative assessment formats, adapted learning materials, Learning Support Plans, or flexibility in attendance and submission arrangements. For staff, this may include modifications to duties, working arrangements, equipment, or workplace processes.

In addition to the College's proactive approach to EIAs and reasonable adjustments, students and staff are actively encouraged to disclose any additional needs, disabilities, conditions or other requirements so that reasonable adjustments can be made by the College in line with our legal, statutory and regulatory obligations.

All requests for reasonable adjustments will be considered individually and documented. Students should contact Student Services or their Personal Tutor; staff should contact the Head of Operations and HR.

As a small institution, requests can be raised relatively informally in the first instance and will subsequently be referred into relevant processes to ensure requests are properly considered and documented, and decisions regarding reasonable adjustments are clear for all parties. For students, reasonable adjustments put in place by the College will normally be recorded, managed and monitored under our informal or formal Support Through Studies procedures. For staff, agreed reasonable adjustments will be recorded on their HR file and line managers (and other staff as necessary and relevant) will be appropriately informed of any adjustments in place.



12. Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Admissions Team	Provides guidance to applicants, receives applications, checks documentation, and coordinates the process.
Programme Lead / Academic Lead	Reviews academic suitability of claims and confirms alignment with programme outcomes.
Assessor	Evaluates evidence, maps learning outcomes, tests authenticity and sufficiency, and makes a recommendation.
Quality Assurance Team	Monitors consistency, compliance, record-keeping, and adherence to academic standards.
Academic Board or delegated committee	Oversees implementation, approves policy, and reviews effectiveness and regulatory alignment.

13. Decision-Making and Communication

Following assessment, the College will communicate the outcome of the RPL application in writing. The decision will confirm whether the claim has been approved, partially approved, or rejected, and will identify any conditions, exemptions, transferred credit, altered assessment requirements, or remaining study obligations.

Students will be informed of the outcome within a reasonable timeframe and, wherever possible, before enrolment or before the start of the relevant learning period so that they can make informed decisions about commencing study.

14. Expected Timelines

Oakwood College will aim to complete RPL cases within the following indicative timescales, recognising that more complex cases may require additional time:

- Student submission of application and evidence: normally at least 4 to 6 weeks before the programme or module start date.
- Initial administrative and academic review: normally within 2 weeks of receiving a complete application.
- Full assessment by a qualified assessor: normally within 2 to 3 weeks after the initial review.
- Communication of outcome: normally within 10 working days of the assessment decision.



- Record retention and quality review: maintained throughout the student lifecycle and made available for audit or moderation where required.

Stage	Activity	Indicative timeline
1	Student submission of RPL application and supporting evidence	At least 6 weeks before the programme or module start date
2	Initial (administrative and academic) review of the application	Within 2 weeks of receiving a complete application
3	Full assessment by a qualified assessor	Within 2 weeks after the initial review
4	Communication of outcome to the applicant or student	Within 5 working days of the assessment decision
5	Record retention and quality review	Maintained throughout the student lifecycle and available for audit or moderation up to 6 years

15. Record-Keeping and Quality Assurance

The College will retain records of the application, evidence submitted, mapping and assessment activity, decisions taken, and communications issued to the student. These records will be stored on the student's file or equivalent institutional record system and made available for internal monitoring and any relevant external quality assurance or audit activity.

RPL decisions and processes will be subject to the same quality assurance expectations as all other academic assessment activity. The College, via Academic Board, will monitor RPL activity periodically to ensure fairness, consistency, and alignment with institutional and external requirements (monitoring may be delegated to a sub-Committee of Academic Board for in-depth scrutiny).

16. Appeals

An applicant or student who is dissatisfied with an RPL decision may request a review or appeal in accordance with the Admissions Appeals Process. Complaints about the conduct of the process will be addressed under the College's complaints procedure.

17. Associated Policies and External Reference Points

This policy should be read alongside relevant Oakwood College policies and procedures, which may include:

- Admissions Policy
- Admissions Appeals & Complaints Procedure
- Assessment Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

This Policy and its application falls within the scope of applicable Awarding Body academic regulations, and is wholly subject to the conventions and requirements set out in those regulations. In the event that this policy is not fully in alignment with the respective academic regulations pertaining to the programme of study in question, the Awarding Body academic regulations will take precedence.

This policy is informed by relevant sector expectations including the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, the Credit Framework for England, the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Equality Act (2010).

18. Monitoring and Review

Oakwood College, via its Academic Board, will review the effectiveness of this policy through periodic monitoring of RPL applications, outcomes/data, assessor practice, student feedback, and relevant regulatory or sector developments. The policy will be reviewed at least annually, or sooner where required by changes in law, regulation, awarding body requirements, or institutional need.

APPENDICES TO THIS POLICY

Appendix A: Recognition of Prior Learning Application Form (this can be found on the College website at <https://oakwoodcollege.co.uk/policies-and-procedures.php>)

Appendix B: Illustrative Evidence Types

Depending on the nature of the claim, evidence may include:

- Qualification certificates and academic transcripts.
- Work products such as reports, project plans, designs, or case records.
- Professional or employer references and witness testimonies.
- Reflective statements or learning narratives.
- Audio-visual evidence, including photographs or recordings.
- Interview, viva, or practical demonstration outcomes.

Appendix C: Good Practice Notes

- RPL does not remove the need to meet any stated entry requirements unless the College expressly determines that prior learning sufficiently satisfies them.
- Recognition should be confirmed before the start of the relevant programme or module wherever possible. Where recognition is retrospectively applied, this is still an admissions decision and any applicant/student appeal or complaint relating to the matter should be raised under the Admissions Appeals & Complaints Procedure.
- Evidence must be mapped explicitly to learning outcomes and assessment criteria.
- Programme-specific requirements may override general RPL arrangements where professional, statutory, regulatory, or validating body rules apply.