

PRIOR LEARNING POLICY

Responsible officer	Registrar
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Approved by	Academic Board
Last Approval date	8 March 2024
Effective date	29 July 2016
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Superseded documents	<i>Credit transfer and recognised prior learning policy</i>
Related documents	<i>Credit Transfer Rules</i>

1. PURPOSE

To recognise the value of prior learning and experience for coursework awards by providing a system for awarding credit.

2. DEFINITIONS

The **ACT** is the *Australian College of Theology Limited*.

An **ACT award** is a qualification conferred by the **ACT** which is certified by a *testamur*.

The **ACT Office** is the office of the *Australian College of Theology Limited*.

Advanced standing is the formal recognition of prior learning.

AEG stands for *ad eundem gradum*, meaning in the same degree. It refers to the recognition of learning from an equivalent award or institution.

An **affiliated College** is an institution approved to offer an accredited higher education award of the **ACT**.

AQF is the *Australian Qualifications Framework*. Every accredited course in the Australian higher education sector must comply with the requirements of the AQF.

Block Credit is the granting of advanced standing for a large volume of learning in a bulk credit arrangement rather than granting RPL or credit transfer for specific units of study.

Course/Course of Study is a course of **units** that lead to an award given by the **ACT**.

Coursework Masters degree is an accredited course type which conforms to the requirements of the category of "Coursework Masters" under the Australian Qualifications Framework. [ACT's current Coursework Masters awards include Master of Arts (Christian Studies), Master of Christian Leadership, Master of Intercultural Studies, Master of Missional Leadership, Master of Theological Studies]

Credit is awarded points for successfully completed **units** of study.

Credit point is a point awarded for study. Each **unit** comprises a set amount of credit points, and a **course of study** will require a set number of credit points for completion.

Credit transfer is the recognition for **credit** of prior study.

eCoE is the electronic confirmation of enrolment document issued by the **ACT** to each student accepted for enrolment.

Exemption is where a student is not required to take a certain **unit(s)** on the basis of work already completed but is required to undertake an alternative unit of equivalent **credit points**.

Home College is the **affiliated college** with which a student has their primary enrolment.

Merit grade is a grade awarded based on student performance in the assessment of a **unit**.

PLP stands for **Prior Learning Portfolio**.

A **Prior Learning Portfolio** is a detailed record of prior learning and experiences necessary for application for **credit transfer** or **RPL**.

PRISMS is the Provider Registration and International Student Management System, provided by the Department of Education and the Department of Home Affairs for the administration of overseas students.

Recognised Prior Learning is an alternative pathway to an **AQF** qualification that is different to **credit transfer**. RPL is related to learning achieved outside the formal education and training system.

Registrar is the officer of the **ACT** who manages academic administration, performance assessment and quality assurance.

RPL stands for **Recognised Prior Learning**.

Senescence in course credit refers to the reduction over time of the relevance of previous study or prior learning as a basis for **credit**.

Specified Credit is credit granted in the form of specific **unit(s)** from which a student is exempted.

Student is a student of the ACT. They may be a prospective, enrolled or former student.

Unit is a block of study in a particular field.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to all coursework awards of the ACT.

4. POLICY STATEMENT

The ACT recognises the value of prior learning and experience by awarding credit for courses of similar content to the learning and experience. The relevance of prior learning and experience is also acknowledged to reduce over time as knowledge becomes less current. This is due to changes and developments in the field of study, and loss of knowledge and skills due to disuse.

The ACT will grant credit transfer for students who have completed academic study deemed equivalent in content and academic standing. In accordance with the *AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy* the ACT also gives credit for learning that has occurred outside the formal education and training system. This is called Recognised Prior Learning (RPL). The key difference between credit transfer and RPL is that in RPL it is the student who is assessed, while for credit transfer the previous course or unit(s) is assessed.

Consistent with Standard 1.2.2 of the *Higher Education Standards (Threshold Standards) 2021*, **advanced standing** through recognition of prior learning or credit transfer is granted only if:

- a. students granted such credit are not disadvantaged in achieving the expected learning outcomes for the course of study or qualification, and
- b. the integrity of the course of study and the qualification are maintained.

Advanced standing through recognition of prior learning or credit transfer is only granted towards a course if the units requested contribute towards the completion of the requirements of a course.

5. PRINCIPLES

Application for credit transfer or RPL

- 5.1 Applications for the granting of credit or RPL will be completed by a student requesting credit or RPL on the appropriate form and are to be approved by the ACT Registrar.
- 5.2 Students are strongly encouraged to apply prior to the commencement of a course to assist with accurate course advice and appropriate candidature periods.
- 5.3 No fees associated with RPL or credit transfer applications are to be imposed by the affiliated colleges or the ACT office.
- 5.4 An application for the granting of credit or RPL requires the preparation of a Prior Learning Portfolio (PLP), which details the student's previous work experience, education and training details, and other interests and skills. Supporting documentation, such as references, course details about previous study, reports, should be included with the application. Applicants must identify ACT units against which the credit may be granted.
- 5.5 In the case where credit is sought based on RPL, the application should outline the link between the student's learning experiences and the learning outcomes of the unit(s) in which the student is seeking credit.

- 5.6 Students may be required to undertake some form of assessment to demonstrate that they have achieved the learning outcomes stated.
- 5.7 Overseas applicants who wish to be considered for credit transfer/RPL, should lodge their PLP when they lodge their application for admission for a course.

Prior Learning Portfolios (PLP)

- 5.8 In the case of accredited study with a recognised provider, the PLP should contain:
- a. Certified copies of statement(s) of satisfactory completion of non-ACT courses or units offered by a recognised provider;
 - b. For each non-ACT unit successfully completed, documentation from the provider which states:
 - i) the objectives, learning outcomes and content of the unit;
 - ii) details of any formal assessment of learning undertaken; and
 - iii) details of the contact hours of the unit.

Usually detailed unit outlines will be regarded as sufficient documentation.

- 5.9 In the case of any learning that isn't accredited study with a recognised provider, applications should include:
- a. details of prior learning experience(s) to support the claim for credit in the proposed ACT units, including the applicant showing how the prior learning experience(s) leads the applicant to the completion of the learning outcomes of the units being sought for credit;
 - b. a detailed curriculum vitae;
 - c. letters of support from appropriate persons/bodies who can verify these details.

Senescence Rule

- 5.10 Applications for course credit are subject to the senescence rule. The senescence rule takes precedence over all other credit regulations.
- 5.11 According to the senescence rule, credit will only be considered for a unit of an ACT award if the study on which the application is based occurred no more than ten (10) years before the commencement of the ACT award.
- 5.12 The exception to clause 5.11 is within **coursework masters** degrees where the course has been designed to have a reduced volume of learning for graduates holding a theological qualification. The granting of this reduction in volume of learning (through credit transfer from a prior theological qualification) is exempted from clause 5.10.
- 5.13 The senescence rule does not negate the possibility of students applying for

RPL. If it can be shown that the knowledge obtained in study from more than ten (10) years ago has been kept current, then consideration may be given to granting RPL.

Credit transfer

- 5.14 In ACT coursework courses, prior learning is recognised and/or credit is granted from previous study for particular units. Block credit is not applied except in the case of the Bachelor of Christian Studies (BChrStuds) where block credit forms part of the requirements for the awarding of the degree. Credit is awarded based on the rules in clauses 5.16-5.23.
- 5.15 No more than 33% of an ACT award can be granted in credit from prior non-ACT study or learning – either in Credit Transfer or RPL.
- 5.15.1 One exception to this is on admission to a **Coursework Masters degree** where course structures intentionally specify possibilities for reduced volume of learning based on the completion of prior theological studies. If the block credit granted on admission to a Coursework Masters degree exceeds 33% of the course, to maintain the integrity of the course, no further credit transfer or RPL will be permitted.
- 5.15.2 Another exception is within the Master of Professional Ministry, where up to 50% of the course may be granted as credit transfer.
- 5.15.3 The ACT Dean or the ACT Registrar have authority to waive the 33% limit in individual special cases, where the student is not disadvantaged by receiving the credit, and where the integrity of the award is maintained. One example might be where a provider closes down and students need to find another similar provider to continue in a related course, and ACT would review appropriateness of adjusting the 33% limit in that scenario. Another example is where a college has a market need for admission to a program which relies on completion of another program for entry, such as completion of a related CertIV for admission into a Diploma course, where up to 50% of the Diploma course may be appropriate, without compromising the course integrity. In line with the TEQSA Guidance Note on Admissions (Coursework) and Guidance Note on Credit and Recognition of Prior Learning, in all instances of the ACT Dean or ACT Registrar granting a higher volume of credit than the 33% limit, a record of the decision will be kept.
- 5.15.4 For clarity, since the Bachelor of Christian Studies course structure requires the completion of one third of the course in a discipline other than Religious Studies and credited to the course through

block credit, students remain eligible for credit transfer or RPL for up to 33% of the remaining component of the degree course.

- 5.16 No credit can be granted from units completed at AQF Levels 5-7 to units at Levels 8-9 in a postgraduate course.
- 5.17 No unit already passed or for which credit has been granted in an ACT award can be repeated for a merit grade.
- 5.18 Units for which credit is granted from non-ACT awards are designated AEG and have no impact on the GPA of a student.
- 5.19 Where credit is granted from a non-ACT source towards one or more assessment pieces within a unit, those units are not eligible for a merit grade.
- 5.20 Where students are granted advanced standing, their candidature period will be shortened by the proportion of the course granted as credit.
- 5.21 The detailed rules for credit transfer from specific non-ACT courses and between specific ACT courses is set out in the *Credit Transfer Rules*.

Exemptions

- 5.22 Exemptions to specific course regulations (such as the requirement for a particular number of credit points of units in a particular unit field, or the requirement for a particular compulsory unit) may be granted in cases where there is no direct correlation between units studied and those for which the student is seeking credit, but where it is felt that the student would not benefit from repeating material similar in nature to that already completed elsewhere. Exemptions may also be granted in cases where there is a direct correlation between units studied and specific ACT units of study, but that these are not eligible for credit for any reason, such as clauses **5.11**, **5.15**, or **5.16**. The granting of exemptions does not reduce a student's remaining total study load for an award.

Recognised Prior Learning

- 5.23 In order to recognise prior learning it is necessary to compare the learning the individual has achieved against the learning outcomes of the proposed units to determine if the prior learning fulfils any of them.
- 5.24 The processes used to assess RPL applications may take several forms, such as:
 - a. participation in the same or modified versions of the assessment the student would be required to complete;
 - b. assessment based on a portfolio of evidence;
 - c. direct observation of demonstration of skill or competence;
 - d. written reflections or portfolios that relate past learning to the learning or competency outcomes of the current unit(s)/course;

- e. provision of examples of the student’s work drawn from the work, social, community or other setting in which the student applied their learning, skill or competence;
 - f. testimonials of learning, skill or competence;
 - g. combinations of any of the above.
- 5.25 The assessment of RPL should consider prior learning regardless of how, when and where it was acquired, provided that the learning is current and relevant to the learning or competency outcomes in a unit(s)/course.

Assessment and Approval of credit

- 5.26 Upon granting credit to a student, the ACT will inform the student’s home college in writing of the approval. The student’s home college will inform the student of the outcome and will work with the student on a course progress plan for the remainder of the student’s course.
- 5.27 With regard to overseas students, if credit granted shortens a student’s course, this must be reflected in the offer letter and will be indicated either on the eCoE issued for that student to commence the course, or reported on PRISMS. The eCoE will be shortened by the proportion of the award granted advanced standing.

6. RELATED LEGISLATION

*Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), including the Pathways Policy
Higher Education Standards (Threshold Standards) 2021*

7. REFERENCES

TEQSA Guidance Note: Admissions (Coursework)

GUIDANCE NOTE: CREDIT AND RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING
VERSION HISTORY

Version	Approved by	Approval Date	Effective Date	Changes made
1	Academic Board	29 July 2016	29 July 2016	Whole policy revised in light of new template, GSF now granted as RPL, removed rule, clauses on surrender of qualifications removed
2	Academic Board	9 Sept 2016	9 Sept 2016	Minor changes of terminology
3	Academic Board	8 March 2019	8 March 2019	Reference Higher Education Standards (Threshold Standards) 2015, further outline exemptions to course regulations when advanced standing is not granted, grant exemption to senescence policy for coursework masters

				designed on a reduced VOL for theological graduates
4	Coursework Committee	26 July 2019	26 July 2019	Create exception to 33% prior learning limit in coursework masters degrees (section 5.15).
5	Coursework Committee	8 October 2021	8 October 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update references from HESF 2015 to HESF 2021 • Amend section 5.2. • Add policy statement: Advanced standing through recognition of prior learning or credit transfer is only granted towards a course if the units requested contribute towards the completion of the requirements of a course. • Add: If the block credit granted on admission to a Coursework Masters degree exceeds 33% of the course, to maintain the integrity of the course, no further credit transfer or RPL will be permitted.
6	Coursework Committee	24 June 2022	24 June 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy review; add clarity to limit of credit transfer / RPL in the BChrStuds; add authority for the ACT Dean or ACT Registrar to modify the limit of credit transfer / RPL in special cases
7	Academic Board	8 March 2024	8 March 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy review; add exemption to the normal limit of credit transfer for the Master of Professional Ministry.

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