



Guidance note: Credit and recognition of prior learning

Version 2.0 (7 July 2023)

Providers should note that Guidance Notes are intended to provide guidance only. The definitive instruments for regulatory purposes remain the TEQSA Act and the Higher Education Standards Framework as amended from time to time.

1. What does Credit and Recognition of Prior Learning encompass?

The [Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2021 \(Threshold Standards\)](#) and the [Australian Qualification Framework \(AQF\)](#) set out requirements for recognition of prior learning (RPL) and granting credit in the higher education sector.

The primary obligations are found in section 1.2 of the Threshold Standards.

Credit is a recognition of equivalence in content and learning outcomes between different types of learning and/or qualifications. Credit can reduce the amount of learning required to achieve a qualification.

Credit may be granted through credit transfer, articulation, RPL or advanced standing.

For the purposes of this Guidance Note, credit is interpreted broadly to include:

- specified and unspecified credit
- exemptions
- advanced standing
- credit transfers
- opportunities for substitute learning

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is an assessment of an individual's prior learning to determine whether credit will be granted. RPL includes formal, informal, and non-formal learning. The [Australian Qualification Framework \(AQF\) Glossary of Terminology](#) provides definitions on these forms of learning.

- Formal learning – learning that takes place through a structured program of learning that leads to full or partial achievement of an officially accredited course.
- Informal learning – learning gained through work, social, family, hobby or leisure activities and experiences. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support.
- Non-formal learning – learning that takes place through a structured program of learning but does not lead to an officially accredited qualification.

A provider may grant credit arising from RPL in different ways, including:

- as part of a standing arrangement between providers to allow for credit to be transferred when a student completes particular units or courses



- on a case-by-case basis.

A provider's RPL policies and processes should be used to inform decisions about granting credit. These policies and processes should include considerations about:

- whether granting credit may disadvantage the student in achieving expected learning outcomes for the course of study or qualification
- maintaining the integrity of the qualification
- impact on variants of double awards (see Guidance Note on Joint and Dual Awards (in development)).

Further, any process for approving an RPL request should be grounded in evidence and academic judgement about equivalence of learning.

2. What TEQSA will look for

The Threshold Standards places requirements on a provider's processes and practices in granting credit and recognising prior learning. These include the following standards and criteria from the Threshold Standards:

Part A: Standards for HE Providers	Key considerations
1.1 Admission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prior to enrolment, providers must inform students of policies, arrangements, and potential eligibility for credit for prior learning.
1.2: Credit and Recognition of Prior Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • any granting of credit through RPL should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – not potentially disadvantage students including in the student's transition into and through their course – maintain integrity of the course and qualification • providers should grant credit and qualifications in accordance with its organisational policies and the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) • where credit is granted it must be identified on a student's record of results and in a Australian Higher Education Graduation Statement (AHEGS) if one is issued.
1.3.6 Orientation and Progression	
1.5.7b, and 1.5.8 Qualifications and Certification	
6.2.1(h) Standards for Corporate Monitoring and Accountability	
1.4 Learning Outcomes and Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on completion of a course, students must demonstrate they have achieved the specified learning outcomes for that course. • learning outcomes for a qualification must be consistent with the AQF Specification for the qualification level.
1.5.3 Qualifications and Certification	
2.4 Student grievances and complaints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providers must have mechanisms for resolving grievances about any aspect of a student's experience with a higher education provider
3.1 Course design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providers must ensure grants of credit will still result in the student having: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – engaged in advanced learning consistent with the study involved – achieved required learning outcomes.
5.3 Monitoring, Review and Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providers must monitor cohort data on student progress (and attrition) to continuously improve and address risk.
6.2.1(f) Corporate Monitoring and Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providers must ensure competent academic governance and leadership of higher education provision to maintain the quality of higher education offered.



6.3 Academic governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a provider's academic governance ensures the integrity and quality of the higher education activities of teaching, learning, research, and scholarship.
7.1.3 Representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> when offering units separate to a course of study that may entitle a student to credits toward a course or qualification the provider must explain: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – which course/qualification it will contribute to – the terms on which credit will be granted or recognised.
7.2.2(a),(d) Information for Prospective and Current Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> providers must provide public access to their policies and arrangements for RPL and granting credit, including standing credit transfer arrangements.
7.3.2 Information management	

The AQF Qualifications Pathway Policy

TEQSA will consider whether a grant of credit is consistent with the AQF's [Qualifications Pathway Policy \(QPP\)](#).

Whilst many requirements under the QPP are similar to those under the Threshold Standards, the QPP adds additional expectations on providers in areas such as:

2.1.3 - The process for deciding whether to give credit into or credit towards AQF qualifications

2.1.5 – Requirement for credit to be granted based on individual negotiation between a student and provider, or as part of a formal negotiation between providers

2.1.9-2.1.10 – Considerations for negotiating credit agreements between providers.

Obligations applying to providers of education to overseas students in Australia

Where it applies to a provider, TEQSA considers the [National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018](#) (National Code) and the [Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000](#) (ESOS Act).

Sections of the National Code relevant to recognition of prior learning are:

2.1.1 – prior to acceptance of an overseas student's enrolment in a course, a provider must make the student aware of any course credit applicable

2.3 – a provider must have a documented policy and process for RPL and granting credit. Further, a provider's decisions to assess prior learning or grant credit must preserve the integrity of the award to which it applies

2.4 – if a provider grants credit to or recognises prior learning of an overseas student, the provider must give the student a written record of it to the student to accept and retain. The provider must also retain its own record of it for at least two years after the student ceases to be an accepted student

2.5 – if course credit or RPL result in the reduction of an overseas student's course length, the provider must inform the student and ensure the confirmation of enrolment is issued for the reduced duration of the course. If the reduction of the course length occurs after the overseas student's visa is granted, the change duration needs to be reported in the Provider Registration and International Student Management System (PRISMS)



8 – requirements on a provider in monitoring, reviewing, and improving student and course outcomes.

Additionally, sections 21(2B), 21(2C) and 21(3) of the ESOS Act, requires providers to retain most student records for two years after the overseas student ceases to be an accepted student.

3. Identified issues

TEQSA has identified a range of issues which can indicate potential problems in a provider's approach to granting RPL and credit. These include:

- either poor or no information being provided to students about how to apply for credit, or their eligibility for credit with a provider, which can impact on a student's decision making when comparing providers
- a lack of timeliness in notifying students about whether credit will be granted, as well as a providers reasoning if it is not granted, can lead to a poor student experience
- poor quality record keeping of the reasons for refusing to grant credit to students, or granting credit, particularly when doing so departs from the provider's policies. e.g., recording that credit was granted to a student only because they completed a unit with the same title at another institution
- poor quality records, about courses of study or individual units of study, may make it difficult for students to have their studies recognised through RPL at other providers. This also makes it difficult for providers to review and improve their own RPL policies and procedures
- evidence-based approaches are not used in granting credit because the policies are poorly written or applied. An example of this is granting credit in the interest of improving the recruitment of students, without consideration of whether doing so will disadvantage the students
- policies lacking clarity about who has appropriate expertise to make informed decisions about granting credit, or delegating decisions on granting credit to employees lacking the specialist knowledge may disadvantage students
- granting credit for short-form credentials, where the available information suggests learning outcomes are not achieved or sufficient. Providers should have consideration of factors such as length of course and intensity of the learning when determining the amount of credit to award
- when making changes to course design, not appropriately planning for and managing potential impacts on students who have been granted credit through RPL
- not adequately monitoring and reviewing RPL procedures and policies in granting credit. For example:
 - not monitoring cohorts of students granted credit to identify if they are succeeding in their courses of study
 - not recognising and addressing problems with current credit or RPL procedures resulting in high attrition or failure rates.

Related resources

- [AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy](#)



- [AQF Glossary](#)
- [Guidance note: Admissions \(coursework\)](#)
- Guidance note: Monitoring, Review, and Improvement (in development)
- Guidance note: Learning Outcomes and Assessment (in development)

Version #	Date	Key changes
1.0	23 October 2017	Made available as beta version for consultation.
1.1	15 March 2019	Amended in response to consultation feedback.
2.0	7 July 2023	Major revision. Amended to incorporate updates to the Threshold Standards.