Recognition of Prior Learning

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Purpose

1. This procedure should be read in conjunction with Quality Assurance Agency's Recognised Prior Learning National Framework for Scottish Higher Education and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework guidelines. Reference should also be made to the University regulations when considering students' applications for RPL. Regulations A5 B3.19 and C3.11 make explicit that students should not be awarded Edinburgh Napier awards at the same level as they entered the programme. In addition, Regulation C3.11f) makes explicit that students are ineligible for a distinction unless they study 120 credits at the University (see also paragraphs 13-15 of this process).

2. The University's Recognised Prior Learning (RPL) processes are an important way of supporting University Strategy, in terms of widening access and offering flexible ways in which to enter higher education. They enable Schools to recognise, and award credit to prospective or current students for skills and knowledge acquired via a range of formal and informal learning experiences. The application of RPL enables students to gain credit for module(s) within a degree, or for entire level(s) of a degree enabling students to enter the programme with advanced standing. The process require students to demonstrate that they have already achieved specific module and/or programme learning outcomes.

3. The University recognises that knowledge and skills can be acquired from a wide range of learning experiences, both formal and informal. Students should enter a programme at a level appropriate to their prior learning and qualifications.

4. SCQF guidelines make a distinction between two forms of recognition:

    - Where learning is certificated or accredited, for example by examination certificates or by accredited modules studied at another institution, it is known as certificated recognition of prior learning;

- Where the learning is not certificated, and based on earlier informal learning or work experience, it is known as uncertificated recognition of prior learning.

5. RPL for personal/career development, or formative recognition, is a process of recognising learning achieved outside formal education or training systems within the context of further learning and development. This form of RPL may take place as part of a guidance process. This process can be linked to confidence-building; identifying individual learning pathways; a notional mapping of learning within the context of the SCQF; supporting the transition between formal, non-formal and formal learning; and preparation for the process of RPL for credit.

6. RPL for credit or summative recognition is a process of assessing learning achieved outside of formal education or training systems which is recognised, if appropriate, for academic purposes. RPL can enable a learner to gain entry to a programme if the outcomes of their prior informal learning are judged as comparable to the entry requirements of the programme; and to gain credit within a programme if the outcomes of his/her prior informal learning are judged as comparable to the outcomes of the programme to which he/she is seeking credit.

7. RPL should not be conflated with the admissions process and does not apply to students covered by articulation agreements or who articulate directly into advanced stages of the programme by means of a straightforward admissions decision based on their certificated learning. The admissions process decides whether students are eligible to enter a University programme. RPL determines the advanced stage at which a student might enter the programme and which individual modules might be credited. However, consideration of RPL may often happen at the same point as the admissions decision.

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Ownership and management of this Process

8. The Quality Framework is owned by Learning, Teaching, Assessment and Student Experience Committee, a sub-committee of Academic Board. Quality & Standards Committee is responsible to Learning, Teaching, Assessment and Student Experience Committee for ensuring that the Quality Framework is aligned to and takes full account of external expectations. This section of the Framework is managed and led by the Head of Quality & Enhancement. Responsibility for overseeing its implementation and the quality assurance and monitoring of the process in each school resides with the Convenor of the School's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee.

9. It is recognised that local arrangements exist in the management and operation of RPL and it is a devolved University process. Therefore, this process should be read as guidance, with schools continuing to make their own local arrangements within these parameters. The term RPL coordinator is used throughout this procedure. It is recognised that the member of staff involved in RPL coordination within a school may not necessarily have that job title. However, contacts for RPL within each School must be clearly identified.

Responsibilities

10. While this is a devolved matter, schools should ensure staff involved in the RPL process are adequately trained and supported to carry out the process. In addition, they should be aware of the following responsibilities and should consider how these will be met within their school either by identified individuals or collectively:

    a) advising students or applicants who wish to make a claim for certificated or uncertificated RPL

    b) assisting students in compiling relevant evidence for RPL claims, for example certificates, portfolios, etc

c) consulting with module leaders about an individual's RPL claim, and with programme leaders where appropriate

d) submitting completed paperwork to appropriate school support staff to ensure that students or applicants are notified of the RPL decision and that the student record is amended accordingly

e) monitoring claims and decisions for the recognition of prior learning from individual students and to identify policy issues arising from these

f) maintaining oversight of the assessment methods used to assess claims for uncertificated RPL

g) notifying students or applicants of the RPL decision within 4 weeks of the application being made (or advising student of progress if a decision cannot be made in that timescale) and amending student records accordingly.

h) ensuring that the School Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee is provided with sufficient data to be able to monitor claims and decisions and discuss as appropriate at meetings of the Committee

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Procedure outline

11. Edinburgh Napier University programmes have programme and module learning outcomes at each level. Students claiming RPL are asked to provide evidence that they have achieved the learning outcomes either at programme level, or for specific modules for which they wish to claim credit and the procedures to be followed vary according to whether the student is applying for certificated or uncertificated RPL.

12. Prior learning for specific credit against university programmes through the RPL procedure must be:

- At higher education level (i.e. SCQF levels 7 to 12);
- Directly relevant to the award sought; and

- Supported by evidence.

13. The number of credits students can claim through the University's RPL process is only limited by the minimum number of credits required to be studied for a University award, as is stated in University Regulation B3.19 and C3.11.

14. RPL claims for credit may be based on learning which has already been through prior certificated learning, for example, learning resulting from work-based experience whilst undertaking a formal programme of study such as a Higher National Diploma.

15. Double counting of credit must be avoided as per the University regulations**.** The risk of double counting of credit can occur where RPL for a particular set of learning outcomes is used to gain entry to a degree programme, and where an attempt may then be made to utilise the same learning as the basis of a claim for credit against modules within the same degree programme.

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Procedure for Certificated Recognised Prior Learning

There are three stages to the process:

i. Initial advice and guidance
ii. Support in the gathering of evidence
iii. Recognition (assessment)

Certificated RPL may be considered for applicants to the University if an individual:

- is applying to join an advanced stage of the programme

and

- their qualification is not covered by an articulation agreement or does not readily articulate onto an advanced stage under the admissions process

or

- is applying to entry level of the programme and believes they qualify for exemption from specific modules.

16. Assuming that a decision has been taken to offer the applicant a place on the programme, the application should be referred to the School RPL coordinator to enable an RPL judgement on the point at which the applicant may enter the programme and/or from which individual modules they may be exempt.

17. Existing students may also apply for certified RPL against individual modules within their programme.

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Procedure for Uncertificated Recognised Prior Learning

18. Uncertificated RPL may be considered for applicants to the University. The candidate must be able to demonstrate that their learning experiences have resulted in relevant learning which is broadly equivalent (in terms of content, volume and level) to the learning outcomes of the programmes at the appropriate level.

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Procedure for applicants to the University

UCAS applicants during the year

19. Some individuals applying to the University through UCAS may be doing so on the basis of prior learning experience. While they do so according to the admissions process, assessment of their prior learning is still necessary. These students will often be required to attend an interview, normally with the Admissions Tutor and/or Programme Leader, and the School RPL co-ordinator who will make an assessment of the RPL claim. Pro-forma D/PM/5 will provide a record of the assessment and decision for School records.

20. If an interview is not possible then the Admissions Tutor and/or Programme Leader, and the School RPL co-ordinator will complete D/PM/5 and confirm the decision by interview during induction.

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UCAS applicants at Clearing

21. Students who apply to the University during Clearing may require a decision on their application prior to interview. The RPL process described in Flowchart 3.2 still applies to these students except that typically their interview with the School RPL co-ordinator or Programme Leader will take place after their arrival at the University.

22. The University's Clearing admissions process will deal with these students which involves decisions made by the staff from the Schools on duty at Clearing. Typically, a decision will be made based on the applicant's justification of their prior learning experience. A written offer will be made subject to the student's prior learning experience being checked at interviews with the School RPL co-ordinator or Programme Leader during induction.

23. In accordance with University's Clearing admissions process, decisions are recorded on the student's application form and in their offer letter. The student's RPL assessment interview during induction will be recorded using the D/PM/5 form in the same manner as applicants during the year.

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Procedure for existing students at the University

24. Students wishing to consider uncertificated RPL should meet with the School RPL coordinator to discuss the proposed claim for credit. The student should be assisted in identifying the main subject areas or topics into which their prior learning naturally falls. The School RPL coordinator may seek the expertise of appropriate module/programme leaders to help the student to identify the modules against which they may wish to make a claim for credit. Once the student has identified the modules that seem most appropriate they need to consider the learning outcomes required for achievement of each module. In addition, the student will need to consider the kind of experience, knowledge

and understanding required to be evidenced in order to process the RPL claim. Students should complete a D/PM/5 form and submit it to the School RPL coordinator.

25. There are different RPL assessment methods for claims for credit and students are required to discuss the assessment methods available in their school with the School RPL coordinator. The assessment methods for assessing RPL claims for credit include:

- direct mapping of learning outcomes
- project work
- interview or oral assessment
- assessment on demand
- simulation or observation of practice
- portfolio

26. **Mapping of learning outcomes:** written statements of learning achieved within the workplace context can be defined by the student and mapped onto the outcomes of a module or programme, as a means of demonstrating their achievement. This approach is intended to enable the student to reflect on their experiences and make clear connections between past experiences and the learning that has resulted. This can be a more streamlined approach and is useful when a student is claiming a substantial amount of credit within a programme, against particular levels.

- **Project work:** this can demonstrate a student's prior learning if they have undertaken a particular work-related or community-based activity. This might include:
- the solution of a work-related problem
- the development of a strategy to meet a perceived need
- the management of a project

- the implementation of change to existing systems.

27. **Structured interview or oral assessment:** interviews can be used as a valid process when making an RPL claim against module learning outcomes. Typically, an interview schedule or proforma will be used by the RPL assessor (ref para 29) to ensure consistency. The interviewer will record the key outcomes of the interview, so that the process is transparent. Interviewing can provide a good opportunity for the student to provide further clarification on the nature and outcomes of their prior learning and to discuss their goals in terms of further learning and development.

28. **Assessment on demand:** students can undertake traditional forms of assessment where appropriate. A student can undertake the existing assessment for a particular module, or they can undertake one that has been specially devised.

29. **Observation of practice or simulation:** direct observation of a student's skills, knowledge and understanding can take place in an appropriate context, such as the workplace. If the student does not have the opportunity through his or her workplace to demonstrate particular skills and knowledge, a simulation or role-play could be used.

30. **Portfolio:** this refers to a collection of materials that have been compiled by a student to demonstrate what they have learnt. The portfolio method of claiming RPL enables the student to decide which learning experiences to draw upon and the particular pieces of evidence they will compile to demonstrate the learning outcomes or competences. Evidence can include direct evidence, which is material the student produced at the time of the experience; reflective evidence, such as reflective accounts; and 'third party' evidence, such as references or testimonials from employers, tutors, colleagues and/or peers. While the process of compiling a portfolio can be highly rewarding, it is usually resource intensive. The student requires guidance on how to put together a portfolio, and, in particular, on the nature, range and volume of evidence required to demonstrate the learning.

31. Once the student has discussed their proposed RPL claim with their module leader or programme leader and agreed an appropriate assessment method, the student will decide whether to proceed with the claim, given study and other commitments. A principle of the RPL process is that it is always up to the claimant to complete the claim - or not. The responsibility for completing the agreed RPL assessment method (for example, presenting evidence, writing a reflective account, attending an interview) lies with the student.

32. The module leader or programme leader should support the student in putting together the claim. Once the student is ready to make a claim, an RPL assessor who is a subject specialist should be identified. This assessor should not have been involved in the preparation of the claim and should be a member of teaching staff who is familiar with the programme or module learning outcomes relating to the claim. The RPL assessor should have a good understanding of the level of knowledge and understanding that is required in the subject area by students on degree modules who are being assessed in the conventional manner to ensure maintenance of academic standards. Normally there will be just one RPL assessor but if the student's claim addresses more than one subject area, more assessors may be required.

33. Depending on the purpose of the claim, the RPL Assessor then determines equivalence of this learning in terms against:

    - the requirements for entry to a programme in terms of knowledge, skills and understanding (for RPL for entry)

    or in terms of credit and levels against:

    - existing modules (awarding RPL credit for modules)
    - the outcomes for entire levels or parts of levels on a particular degree programme (awarding RPL credit for advanced entry).

34. The following widely applied RPL assessment criteria should be used by school staff to assist in determining whether the learning evidenced is satisfactory and appropriate:

- **Acceptability**: is there an appropriate match between the evidence presented and the learning outcomes being demonstrated, that is, is the evidence reliable and valid?
- **Sufficiency:** is there a sufficient breadth and depth of evidence, including evidence of reflection, to demonstrate the achievement of the learning outcomes claimed?
- **Authenticity**: is the evidence clearly the outcome of the student's own effort?
- **Currency:** is what is being assessed current learning? If the learning experience occurred some time ago, does the student provide evidence of having kept the learning up-to-date?

35. Where possible, streamlined approaches to support and evidence-gathering will be used to ensure the process is accessible to learners and more resource-efficient for staff without undermining the integrity of the process or the outcome.

36. When the claim has been assessed, the RPL assessor notifies the School RPL coordinator who informs appropriate school support staff to notify the applicant of the outcome and update the student record.

37. **Appeals and complaints**

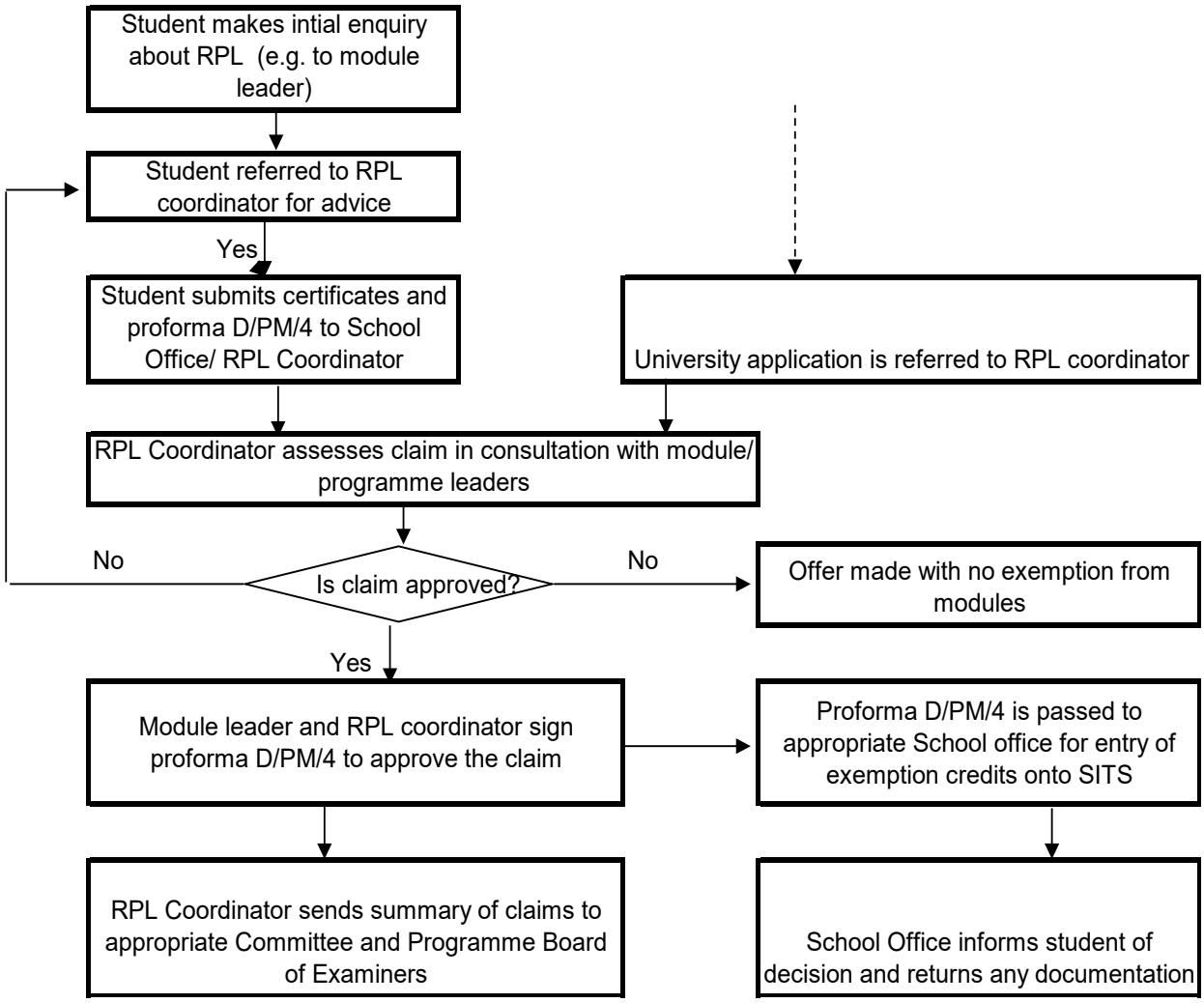
In line with the University's assessment regulations, appeals cannot be made against the assessment decision on RPL. Appeals can only be based on the grounds of material administrative error, regulatory irregularity or other material irregularity, for example, that the assessments were not conducted in accordance with current regulations for the programme.

In line with the University's Complaint Handling Procedure, section 2.1, a complaint is defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more individuals about the standard of service, action or lack of action by or on behalf of the Institution'. Complaints in relation to RPL decisions will, therefore, only be considered on the basis of the University's definition. An appeal about an academic decision on assessment or admission is not a complaint.

Version Management	
Last updated: September 2021	

Flowcharts

3.1 Procedure for Certificated Recognised Prior Learning



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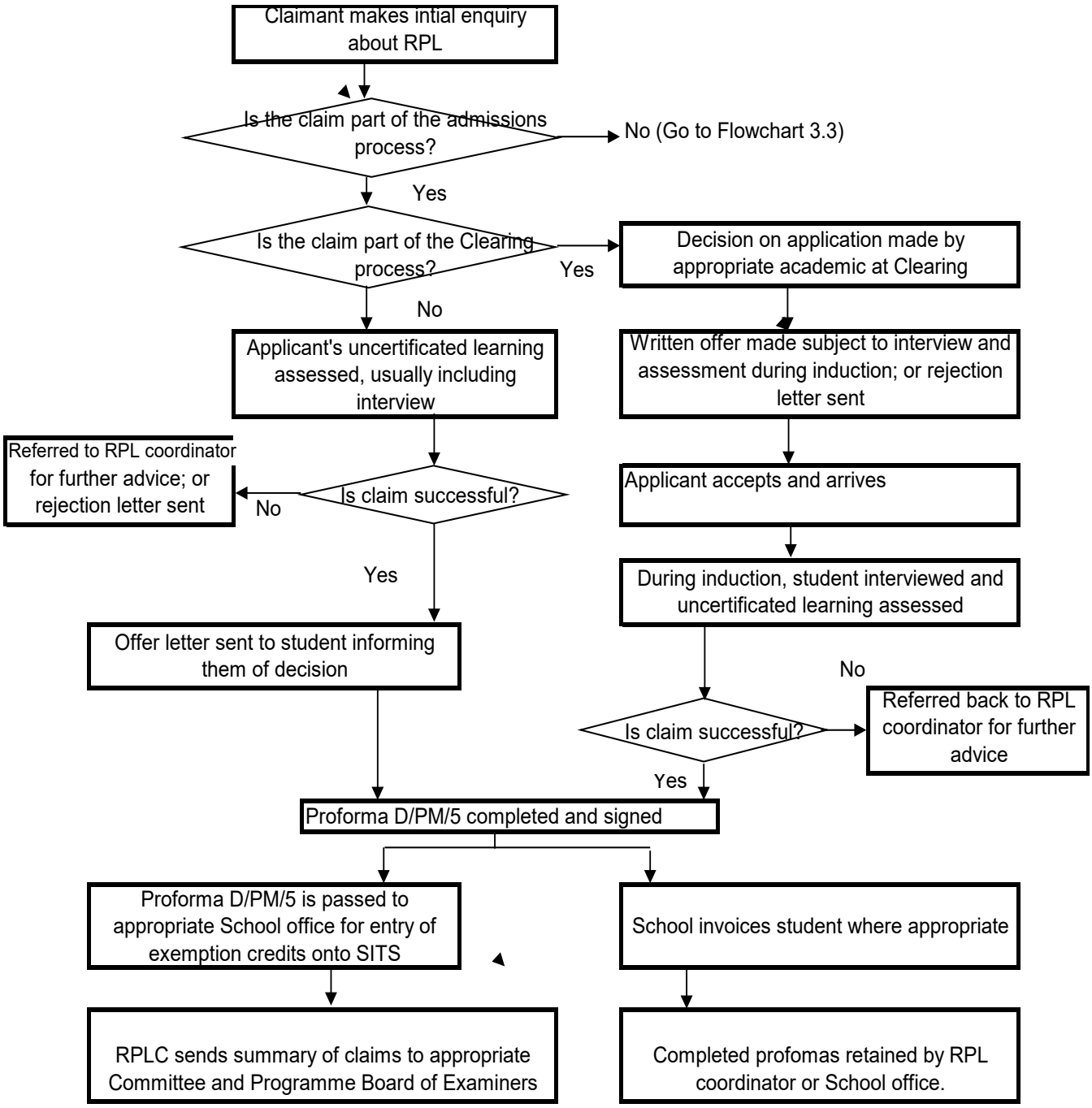
3.2 Procedure for Uncertificated Recognised Prior Learning (on application to the University)



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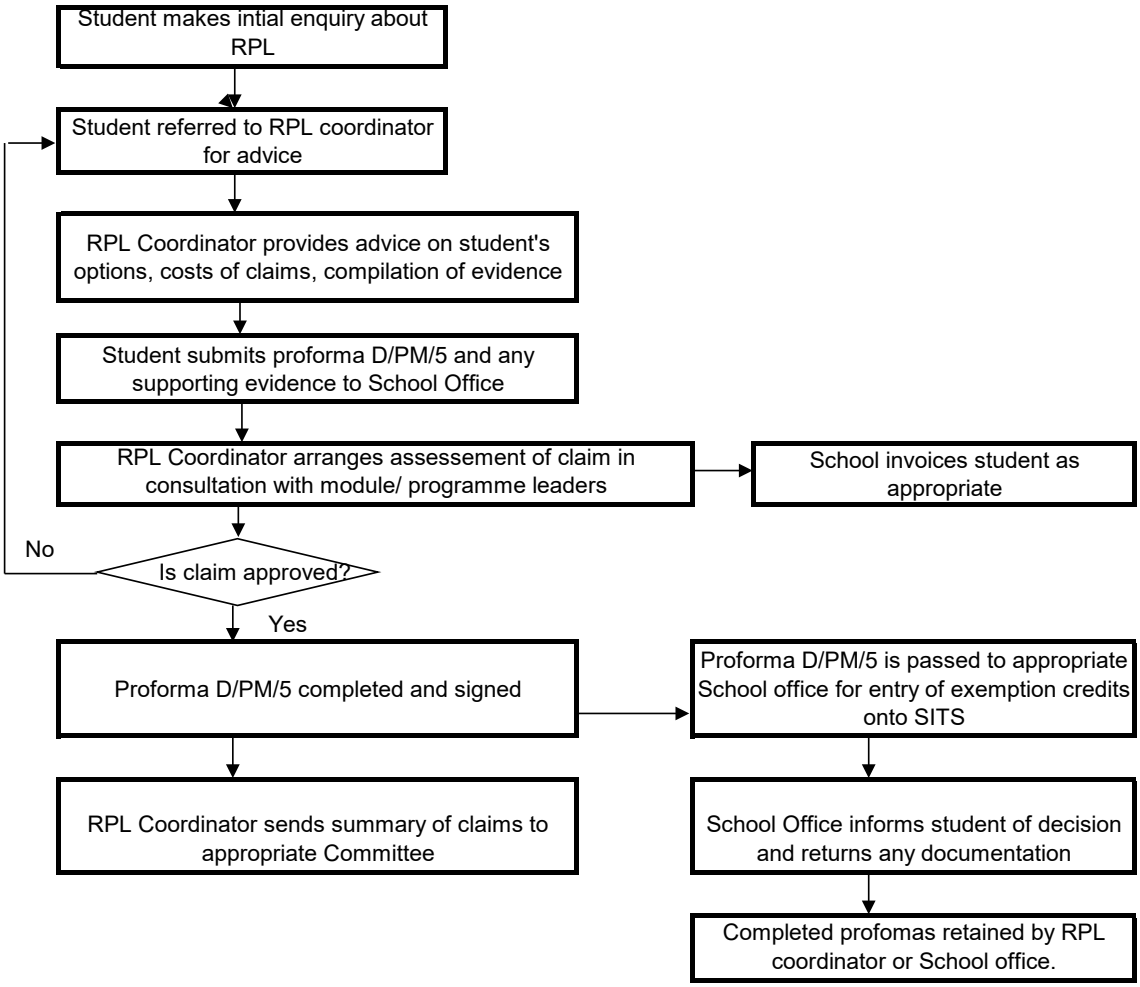
3.3 Procedure for Uncertificated Recognised Prior Learning (existing students)



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