EQUALITY SCREENING PRO - FORMA

Policy Title: Recognition of Prior Learning Policy

Decision: Screen out (with mitigation)

Contact: Dr Kieran Higgins

Date of Completion: 17 September 2026

Part 1: Policy Scoping

Information about the policy

Name of the Policy
Recognition of Prior Learning Policy

Is this an existing, revised, or new policy?
This is a significant revision of the previous Accreditation of Prior Learning Policy.

What is it trying to achieve?
The Policy aims to create a fair, transparent, inclusive and accessible admissions and access route to the University for those with qualifications not normally recognised by the University or significant personal and professional experience equivalent to study (or both).

Are there any Section 75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the policy? If so, explain how below.

Note: The Section 75 categories are:

- religious belief
- political opinion
- racial group
- age
- marital status
- sexual orientation
- sex (men and women generally)
- disability
- dependants

Racial Group, Age, Men and Women generally, Disability, Dependants. The new policy is not intended to have a differential impact on members of any protected characteristic group. The new policy is intended to apply consistently to all claimants, but it may support wider access to higher education by providing a formal route for recognising prior certificated or experiential learning among individuals across Section 75 categories whose previous educational, personal or professional circumstances have limited access through standard admissions routes.

Who initiated or wrote the policy?
Statute II of the University Statutes makes provision for Senate to determine the extent, if any, to which periods and courses of study or research and examinations passed at other universities, places of learning and other institutions or elsewhere may be recognised for the purposes of the University. The policy was updated by the

Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) Task and Finish Group in line with the previous policy's ambition to be reviewed every five years (last reviewed in 2020).

Who owns and implements the policy?
The policy is owned by the PVC Academic Quality and Student Experience (AQSE), who is supported in oversight of the policy by the Centre for Curriculum Enhancement and Approval and the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee. Academic staff in Schools are responsible for day-to-day implementation.

Implementation factors

Are there any factors which could contribute to or weaken the intended aim or outcome of the policy?

No

Main stakeholders affected

Who are the internal and external stakeholders (actual or potential) that the policy will impact upon?

- Staff
- Prospective students

Other policies with a bearing on this policy

Policy: Admissions Policy
Policy owner: Chief People Officer

Policy: Consumer Protection (Curriculum) Policy
Policy owner: PVC AQSE

Policy: Taught Programme Regulations
Policy owner: PVC AQSE

Available evidence

What evidence or information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Please specify details for each of the Section 75 categories below.

Religious Belief

The University's EO data were reviewed. On 6 February 2026, our staff profile was 53.9% Catholic and 46.1% Protestant. Compared with 6 February 2021, this indicates a 3.9% increase in Catholic staff.

In the Academic Year (AY) 2025 to 2026, 70.1% of our students identified as Christian and 12.9% identified as having 'No Religion'. Compared with AY 2020 to 2021, this indicates an 3.7% increase in students who identified as Christian and a 2.4% increase in students who identified as having 'No Religion'.

Political Opinion

The University does not collect information on Political Opinion or make assumptions regarding Political Opinion based on Community Background.

Racial Group

The University's EO data were reviewed. On 6 February 2026, our staff profile was 92.0% White and 8.0% Black and Minority Ethnic (BME). This indicates a 2% increase in BME staff compared with 2021.

In AY 2025 - 2026, 11.6% of students identified as BME. This indicates a 5.8% increase in BME students compared with AY 2020 to 2021.

Our BME profile suggests that we are twice as diverse as the local population, as the Northern Ireland Census 2021 suggests that 3.4% of the NI population is BME.

Age

The University's EO data were reviewed. On 6 February 2026, 29.7% of our staff were in the 46-55 age band and 26.0% of staff were in the 36-45 age band. 25.2% of staff were aged '56 and above', which represents a 0.8% increase in staff aged '56 and above' compared to 2021.

In AY 2025 to 2026, the majority of students (57.2%) were aged '21 and under 40'. This indicates a 7.6% decrease in students in this category since AY 2020 to 2021. The proportion of students within the '18 and under 21' category has increased by 9% compared to 2021, sitting now at 33.7%.

Marital Status

The University's EO data were reviewed. In February 2026, 55.1% of staff were 'Married or in a Civil Partnership', a decrease of 4.8% compared to 2021.

In AY 2025 to 2026, 77.8% of students were 'Single', a 9.3% increase compared with AY 2020 to 2021.

Sexual Orientation

The University's EO data were reviewed. In 2026, 75.5% of staff were 'Heterosexual'; 5.0% were 'Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB)' and 19.5% were 'Not Known'. This indicates a 2.3% increase in LGB staff compared with 2021.

Although we collect student data on sexual orientation, this is not considered to be reliable.

Men and Women generally

The University's EO data were reviewed. In 2026, 58.0% of staff were 'Female'. This indicates a 2% increase in female staff compared with 2021.

In AY 2025 to 2026, 58.8% of students were 'Female', a 0.4% decrease compared with AY 2020 to 2021.

Disability

The University's EO data were reviewed. In 2026, 7.2% of staff declared a disability, an increase of 2.3% compared with 2021.

In AY 2025 to 2026, 8.3% of students declared a disability, a decrease of 3.8% compared with AY 2020 to 2021.

Our disability declaration rate is lower than expected, compared with the local population. The NI Census (2021) found that 24% of the NI population stated that their day-to-day activities were limited because of a long-standing health problem or disability.

Dependants

The University's EO data were reviewed. In 2026, 43.4% of staff had dependants. This indicates an increase of 5% compared with 2021.

In AY 2025 to 2026, 11.2% of students declared they had dependants, a decrease of 1.4% compared to AY 2020 to 2021.

Needs, experience and priorities

Taking into account the information referred to above, what are the different needs, experiences and priorities of each of the following categories, in relation to the particular policy or decision?

Religious Belief
Some claimants may have prior experiential learning from faith-based contexts, and the process should assess the learning demonstrated without bias.

Political Opinion
Some claimants may have prior experiential learning from political contexts, and the process should assess the learning demonstrated without bias.

Racial Group
Applicants from international, minority ethnic, migrant, refugee backgrounds may have unfamiliar overseas qualifications, documentation challenges, interrupted education, or significant informal learning. The process should assess the learning demonstrated without bias.

Age
The policy may particularly support mature learners, career changers and returners to education whose learning has been gained through work or life experience. Currency requirements for prior learning should be applied carefully, as older applicants may be more likely to rely on learning gained over a longer period.

Marital Status
None identified.

Sexual Orientation
Some claimants may have prior experiential learning from certain contexts, and the process should assess the learning demonstrated without bias.

Men and Women generally
The policy may support claimants whose educational or career pathways have been shaped by gendered labour patterns, and the process should assess the learning demonstrated without bias.

Disability
Disabled claimants may require accessible information, reasonable adjustments for interviews, flexibility in evidence format, and support to demonstrate prior learning without being disadvantaged by the mode of assessment.

Dependants
The policy may support claimants whose educational or career pathways have been shaped by caring responsibilities, and the process should assess the learning demonstrated without bias. People with dependents may also need flexibility in the assessment process.

Consultation

Consultation with relevant groups, organisations or individuals about the policy can provide useful information about issues or opportunities which are specifically related to them (that is evidence to inform the policy).

Please indicate whether you carried out or intend to carry out any consultation exercises prior to equality screening?

Yes

A questionnaire was distributed to all staff in the University with roles related to RPL, such as RPL Advisor and RPL Assessor which gave valuable feedback. A focus group with students who had come through the RPL route had been planned, but no students responded to the invitation. Further groups were consulted:

- The RPL Task and Finish Group
- Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee
- Senate

Part 2: Screening questions

Introduction

The answers to the following screening questions will assist the University in making a decision whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment on the policy. The following information is provided to help you to identify and comment on the level of likely impact of the policy in question 1 to 4.

Select 'major' impact if:

a) The policy is significant in terms of its strategic importance;

b) Potential equality impacts are unknown, because, for example, there are insufficient data upon which to make an assessment or because they are complex, and it would be appropriate to conduct an equality impact assessment in order to better assess them;

c) Potential equality and/or good relations impacts are likely to be adverse or are likely to be experienced disproportionately by groups of people including those who are marginalised or disadvantaged;

d) Further assessment offers a valuable way to examine the evidence and develop recommendations in respect of a policy about which there are concerns amongst affected individuals and representative groups, for example in respect of multiple identities;

e) The policy is likely to be challenged by way of judicial review;

f) The policy is significant in terms of expenditure.

Select 'minor' impact if:

a) The policy is not unlawfully discriminatory and any residual potential impacts on people are judged to be negligible;

b) The policy, or certain proposals within it, are potentially unlawfully discriminatory, but this possibility can readily and easily be eliminated by making appropriate changes to the policy or by adopting appropriate mitigating measures;

c) Any asymmetrical equality impacts caused by the policy are intentional because they are specifically designed to promote equality of opportunities for particular groups of disadvantaged people;

d) By amending the policy there are better opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations;

e) Differential impact observed and opportunities exist to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

Select 'none' if:

a) The policy has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations;

b) The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity or good relations.

Taking into account the evidence presented in Part 1, please complete the screening questions (Question 1 to 4).

Screening questions

1. What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the Section 75 categories?

   Details of the likely policy impacts on **Religious Belief**
   The Policy is unlikely to impact on equality of opportunity for this group as it largely technical in nature.

   What is the level of impact?
   None

   Details of the likely policy impacts on **Political Opinion**
   The Policy is unlikely to impact on equality of opportunity for this group as it largely technical in nature.

   What is the level of impact?
   None

   Details of the likely policy impacts on **Racial Group**
   The policy is likely to impact on equality of opportunity for this group. Claimants from international minority ethnic, migrant, or refugee backgrounds may face additional complexity in evidencing prior learning. This risk can be mitigated through training for RPL Advisors and appropriate case-by-case flexibility.

   Level of impact
   Minor

   Details of the likely policy impacts on **Age**
   The policy is likely to impact on equality of opportunity for this group. Mature learners, career changers and returners to education may be more likely to rely on learning gained over a longer period, and currency requirements may make some older evidence more difficult to use. This risk can be mitigated through training for RPL Advisors and appropriate case-by-case flexibility.

   Level of impact
   Minor

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Marital Status**
The Policy is unlikely to impact on equality of opportunity for this group as it largely technical in nature.

What is the level of impact?
None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Sexual Orientation**
The Policy is unlikely to impact on equality of opportunity for this group as it largely technical in nature.

What is the level of impact?
None

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Men and Women generally**
The policy is likely to impact on equality of opportunity for this group. Claimants may have educational or career pathways shaped by gendered labour patterns making evidencing prior learning difficult. This risk can be mitigated through training for RPL Advisors and appropriate case-by-case flexibility.

Level of impact
Minor

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Disability**
The policy is likely to impact on equality of opportunity for this group. Some disabled claimants may experience barriers in preparing and submitting their claims. This risk can be mitigated through training for RPL Advisors, provision of anticipatory and reasonable adjustments, and appropriate case-by-case flexibility.

Level of impact
Minor

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Dependants**
The policy is likely to impact on equality of opportunity for this group. Some claimants with dependents may experience barriers in preparing and submitting their claims. This risk can be mitigated through training for RPL Advisors, provision of anticipatory and reasonable adjustments, and appropriate case-by-case flexibility.

Level of impact
Minor

2. Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 categories?

Religious Belief
No, the policy sets out to provide access to higher education through a formal route for recognising prior certificated and experiential learning, including learning gained in faith-based contexts.

Political Opinion
No, the policy sets out to provide access to higher education through a formal route for recognising prior certificated and experiential learning, including learning gained in political contexts.

Racial Group
No, the policy sets out to provide access to higher education through a formal route for recognising prior certificated and experiential learning, including for claimants with overseas qualifications, migrant or refugee backgrounds, interrupted education or professional experience gained outside Northern Ireland.

Age
No, the policy sets out to provide access to higher education through a formal route for recognising prior certificated and experiential learning, including for mature learners, career changers and returners to education.

Marital Status
No, the policy sets out to provide access to higher education through a formal route for recognising prior certificated and experiential learning.

Sexual Orientation
No, the policy sets out to provide access to higher education through a formal route for recognising prior certificated and experiential learning.

Men and Women generally
No, the policy sets out to provide access to higher education through a formal route for recognising prior certificated and experiential learning, including those whose educational journeys have been shaped by gendered expectations or social patterns.

Disability
No, the policy sets out to provide access to higher education through a formal route for recognising prior certificated and experiential learning, supported by reasonable adjustments, accessible documentation and flexible evidence formats where appropriate.

Dependants
No, the policy sets out to provide access to higher education through a formal route for recognising prior certificated and experiential learning, including for claimants whose educational or employment pathways have been shaped by caring responsibilities.

3. To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

Religious Belief
The policy is unlikely to impact on good relations for this group; it has no relevance to good relations.

Level of impact
None

Political Opinion
The policy is unlikely to impact on good relations for this group; it has no relevance to good relations.

Level of impact
None

Racial Group
The policy is unlikely to impact on good relations for this group; it has no relevance to good relations.

Level of impact
None

4. Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

Religious Belief
No, the policy has no relevance to good relations.

Political Opinion
No, the policy has no relevance to good relations.

Racial Group
No, the policy has no relevance to good relations.

Additional considerations

Multiple identity

5. Generally speaking, people can fall into more than one Section 75 category. Taking this into consideration, are there any potential impacts of the policy or decision on people with multiple identities?

Yes

Please specify the relevant Section 75 categories concerned below.
Provide details of the policy impact and data which describes the policy impact.

Racial Group, Age, Men and Women generally, Disability, Dependants. Where a person's educational journey has been shaped by multiple identities, they may experience additional challenges in completing the RPL process or evidencing prior learning in the required format. The policy may also promote equality of opportunity where those intersecting identities have contributed to marginalised educational achievement, by providing access to higher education through a formal route for recognising prior certificated and experiential learning.

Disability Duties

6. Does the policy provide an opportunity to encourage disabled people to participate in University life?

   Yes, the policy may encourage disabled people to participate in University life by providing a formal route into higher education through recognition of prior certificated and experiential learning, with reasonable adjustments, accessible documentation and flexible evidence formats supporting claimants to engage with the process.

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7. Does the policy provide an opportunity to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people?

   Yes, the policy may promote positive attitudes towards disabled people by recognising the value of prior certificated and experiential learning, including learning gained through non-standard educational, professional or personal pathways, and by supporting disabled claimants to evidence this learning through reasonable adjustments and accessible processes.

Part 3: Screening decision

Based on the evidence considered and outlined in Part 1 and the responses to the screening questions (Part 2), please indicate the screening decision for this policy.

Note: The University should take particular care not to screen out policies that have a procurement aspect if there is potential to promote equality of opportunity through the procurement of services.

☐ **Screen in** the policy (that is, subject to an Equality Impact Assessment). The likely impact is **major** in respect of one, or more of the equality of opportunity or good relations categories.

☐ **Screen out** the policy without mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted (that is, **no** Equality Impact Assessment). The likely impact is **none** in respect of all of equality of opportunity or good relations categories.

☒ **Screen out** the policy and **mitigate the impacts on equality** by **amending or changing the policy**, or by **developing an alternative policy or action** (that is, **no** Equality Impact Assessment). The likely impact is **minor** in respect of one or more of the equality of opportunity or good relations categories.

If the decision is to subject the policy to an equality impact assessment (that is, 'screen in' the policy), please provide details of the reasons.

Not applicable

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment (that is, 'screen out' the policy), please provide details for the reasons.

Not applicable

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment (that is, 'screen out' the policy) and mitigate the impacts on equality of opportunity by amending or changing the policy, or by developing an alternative policy or action, please provide reasons to support your decision, together with the proposed changes, amendments or alternative policy.

The likely impact is **minor** in respect of one or more of the equality of opportunity or good relations categories.

The Policy aims to create a fair, transparent, inclusive and accessible admissions and access route to the University for those with qualifications not normally recognised by the University or significant personal and professional experience equivalent to study (or both).

Where particular categories experience barriers to the process, that is, where there is differential impact, this can be mitigated through training for RPL Advisors, provision of anticipatory and reasonable adjustments, and appropriate case-by-case flexibility.

In line with University policy, the final approved policy will be reviewed 2 years post-implementation, and if necessary, amended.

Timetabling and prioritising

If the policy had been **'screened in'** for an equality impact assessment, then please answer the following questions to determine its priority for timetabling the equality impact assessment.

On a scale of 1 to 3, with 1 being the lowest priority and 3 being the highest, assess the policy in terms of its priority for equality impact assessment.

Priority rating for timetabling the equality impact assessment in terms of effect on equality of opportunity and good relations:

Not applicable

Priority rating for timetabling the equality impact assessment in terms of social need

Not applicable

Priority rating for timetabling the equality impact assessment in terms of effect on people's daily lives

Not applicable

Priority rating for timetabling the equality impact assessment in terms of relevance to the University's functions

Not applicable

Note: The Total Rating Score will be used to prioritise the policy in rank order with other policies screened in for equality impact assessment. This list of priorities will assist the University in timetabling. Details of the University's Equality Impact Assessment Timetable will be included in its quarterly Screening Reports.

Is the policy affected by timetables established by other relevant public authorities?

Not applicable

Approval and authorisation



Screened by:
Position or Job Title: Pro-Vice Chancellor Academic Quality and Student Experience
Date screened: 16/09/26



Approved by:
Position or Job Title: Chief People Officer
Date approved: 17 September 2026

Review

This policy is due for review (in terms of its impact on equality of opportunity and good relations) by the policy owner on: 17 September 2028