Recognition of Prior Learning Guidelines

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide support, clarification and guidance on implementing the recognition of a learners' previous work related achievements and/or qualifications.

2. Scope

This document applies to all qualifications on credit-based frameworks which align to the RQF.

3. Responsibility

The Director of Quality will be responsible for its management and implementation, supported by Curriculum Managers.

4. RPL Defined

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a form of assessment which makes use of evidence of a learner's previous non-certificated achievements to demonstrate competence or achievement within a unit or qualification.

Through the RPL process, evidence of a candidate's previous achievement (learning) is assessed against the learning outcomes of a unit.

The Regulatory Arrangements for the Regulated Qualifications Framework gives the following definition of RPL:

> ***'Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a method of assessment (leading to the award of credit) that considers whether learners can demonstrate that they can meet the assessment requirements for a unit through knowledge, understanding or skills they already possess and so do not need to develop through a course of learning'***

5. When to use RPL

The RPL process is relevant where an individual has evidence of having previously learnt something but has never received formal recognition for it through a qualification or other form of certification.

Evidence can draw on any aspect of a candidate's prior experience including:

- Domestic / family life
- Education and training
- Work activities
- Community or voluntary activities.

6. Assessment of RPL Evidence

RPL is one of many assessment methods appropriate to assessing work based learning. Evidence obtained through RPL must therefore meet the same rigorous quality criteria that other assessment methods must conform to. It remains the role of assessors and quality assurance staff to ensure that evidence is:

Valid:
Does the evidence genuinely demonstrate that the demands of the learning outcome have been met? For RPL, currency of evidence will be of particular concern. Does, for example, the evidence meet up-to-date demands or is it representative of practice that has significantly changed?

Authentic:
This involves consideration of whether the evidence being examined is genuinely the work of the learner. For example, the evidence may have been produced by somebody else, or may be the result of the work of a team. In the latter case, this would be acceptable if the learning outcome was related to team / joint working, but not if it was being used as evidence of an activity which should have been carried out individually.

Sufficient:
There must be enough evidence to fully meet the requirements of the learning outcome, or learning outcomes being considered. If there is insufficient evidence to fully meet requirements, then evidence obtained through RPL must be complemented by evidence gained through other suitable assessment method(s) before requirements can be said to have been met.

Reliable:
The evidence obtained through RPL should be such that an assessor would arrive at the same assessment decision, were the assessment to be repeated.

7. Outcomes of RPL

If individuals can produce relevant evidence, that meets learning outcome requirements then, recognition can be given for their existing knowledge, understanding or skills.

If an individual can meet all the learning outcomes and assessment criteria in a unit, then they can claim credit for that unit solely on the basis of their RPL achievement. If, however, evidence from RPL is only sufficient to cover one or more learning outcomes, or to partly meet the need of a learning outcome, then additional assessment methods should be employed to generate the sufficient evidence required to make a safe assessment decision.

This is recognised as good practice by all the concerned regulators and Ofqual has issued a statement reinforcing this:

'Learners are unlikely to have all the evidence they need to achieve a full unit and may need to produce additional evidence. Evidence used for RPL is not time-limited but assessors must determine whether it is valid and

authentic. RPL may be used in conjunction with other assessment methods such as examination of recent products, professional discussion or observation to assess current performance'

Since evidence from RPL is similar to that derived via any other acceptable assessment method, where the standard of a unit is met by evidence obtained from, or partly from RPL, credit can be claimed.

8. RPL Process

Staff wishing to undertake RPL must ensure that:

- It is carried out by designated staff with relevant levels of expertise to meet the requirements of the assessment strategy/guidance for the qualification concerned.

The methods of assessment used will be determined by the assessment strategy for the qualification being assessed but might, for example, include:

- Examination of documents,
- Witness testimony
- Reflective accounts
- Professional discussion.

The RPL assessment should be carried out as an entire process. This means that the assessor should:

- Plan with the learner
- Make a formal assessment decision
- Feedback assessment decisions to the learner, confirming decision and giving guidance on the available options (particularly in situations where the decision has been not to award credit)
- Maintain appropriate records
- Ensure that learners are aware of their right to access the appeals process should they feel the assessment decision was unfair

The assessor must ensure that all learning outcomes and assessment criteria being claimed are covered and that records of assessment are maintained in the usual way. The process must be subject to the same quality assurance requirements as any other assessment method.

Apprenticeships
When utilising recognition of prior learning for apprenticeships, staff should refer to the government guidelines to consider the starting points for apprentices.
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeships-recognition-of-prior-learning/apprenticeships-initial-assessment-to-recognise-prior-learning

Additional guidance for funding should also be considered*:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6875204b55c4bd0544dcae08/Apprenticeship_funding_rules_2025_to_2026_v2.pdf
***OTJT - Providers must now meet a published minimum OTJT volume per standard. If the published OTJT volume (or reduced figure for RPL) is not met, funds may be recovered**.

8.1 Credit Accumulation and Transfer and Credit Transfer (CAT)

CAT is the term used to describe the system which supports credit transfer. Credit transfer gives recognition to the fact that some units are the same, irrespective of the fact that they appear in different qualifications. This recognition promotes progression within and between industries and avoids unnecessary duplication of learning.

Credit transfer is relevant where a unit in a qualification is the same as a unit in another qualification.

A practical example of credit transfer would be a learner who achieves an award which is comprised of units 'A, B & C' transferring their credits to progress towards a certificate comprised of 'A, B, C, D and E'. In this case the units in the award have been nested in the certificate enabling the recognition of the previously achieved units.

If on the other hand a learner registered for the Certificate containing units 'A, B, C, D and E' without having done the award, but then withdrew from their programme of learning after completing only 'A, B & C', they could transfer their credits and consequently obtain the Award.

8.2 Predecessor Qualification

A predecessor qualification is the name given to the qualification, or unit before the current. The A1 and V1 for example are the predecessor qualifications to the TAQA qualifications.

8.3 Shared Units

Most units in the RQF are 'shared' units. This means that the unit title and reference number is available on the RQF framework for use by another Awarding Organisation. Shared units encourage progression and promote 'credit transfer' discussed above. It should be noted that the assessment requirements for the same shared unit may be different in different qualifications. This is because within the RQF assessment requirements are set by the individual Awarding Organisations, in relation to the Assessment Strategy provided for individual qualifications.

Units in the RQF can also be 'restricted' units, which mean that they are not available for by other Awarding Organisations. Restricted units do not encourage credit transfer and are less common, but in some cases they are required because of specific circumstances associated with their development.

Section E of Ofqual's General Conditions of Recognition focuses on qualification design and development. It includes rules about qualification titling, qualification specifications, credit, and qualification size and level. These rules ensure that qualifications are well-designed, appropriately structured, and provide the necessary credit and level of attainment. They also cover the provision of information on qualification fees and features, packaging qualifications with other products or services, and invoicing. Please refer to the link below for further information.

Ofqual Handbook: General Conditions of Recognition - Section E - Design and development of qualifications - Guidance - GOV.UK

9. Additional BTEC Guidelines

Individual learner needs and circumstances are always taken into consideration. Evidence needed by the centre and learner would include the following:

- The learner would need to produce assessed work from other qualification / awarding body which staff would then assess against the relevant criteria / unit. - Without the work RPL cannot be completed.
- The centre would be required to have a tracking document of BTEC criteria and map where evidence is present at the correct level and where evidence is missing.
- This work should also be Internally Verified by the centre.
- For missing evidence - at pass level only - a task needs to be written and completed by learner, assessed and IV'd.
- Core units must be carefully matched when being assessed.
- External units cannot be RPL'd.
- If the learner is chosen as part of SV sample share RPL mapping documents with the SV to explain why paperwork / units may look different.
- All mapping evidence needs to be retained for 3 years, including assessment and IV documentation

Note: Functional Skills Exemptions - GCSE English results cannot be used for exemption in Functional Skills due to differing assessment criteria. Students can carry forward component marks from previous attempts at the same level.

10. Awarding Organisation Guidelines

Before applying RPL for any individual, the teacher/assessor must refer to the awarding organisation guidelines for recognition of prior learning.

MIS must be notified of any RPL decisions to ensure funding is being considered.

11. Monitoring

This procedure will be monitored via- Internal Verification Reports and External verification reports. This RPL guideline will be reviewed annually and reflect current awarding body and government guidance.