

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. These include the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and the Regulated Qualification Framework (RQF).

3. Responsibility

The Quality Manager 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.

Terms in this section

A range of terms and processes are frequently confused with RPL. Explanations of these are shown below-

- Exemptions
- Equivalent Units

- Credit Accumulation and Transfer & Credit Transfer
- Qualification Legacy
- Predecessor Qualification
- Shared Units

8.1 Exemptions

The Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) describes an exemption as:

‘The facility for a learner to claim exemption from some of the achievement requirements of a QCF qualification using evidence of certificated, non QCF achievement deemed to be of equivalent value’

This means that certificated qualifications that were obtained outside of the QCF can be used as evidence for part or all of a qualification

The assessor must make sure that the components of the certificated qualification are sufficient to cover the requirements of all the learning outcomes, unit or units that it is being examined against.

Exemptions allow the recognition of qualifications (i.e. formally recognised achievements) obtained outside of the QCF; however unlike RPL, they do not attract credits.

Note that in certain circumstances, exemption from unit assessment may also apply where a candidate can show evidence of having achieved a unit forming part of an earlier QCF version of the same qualification.

Since individual units may or may not be substantially changed after a qualification review, exemptions may or may not be granted depending on the degree of change to the unit. The fact that a unit title may have stayed the same in a new version of a qualification does not mean that the learning outcomes in that qualification have stayed the same.

Exemptions do not attract credit, as the skills knowledge and / or competences described in the unit will have already have been recognised in the credit system.

8.2 Equivalent Units

Equivalent units are different units which, when compared, are judged to be equal to or greater than the content of another. An equivalent unit needs to be of the same credit value or higher and the same level or higher.

Equivalent units will look different but in short the content will be deemed to be identical or beyond and above the content required.

If a learner has achieved a QCF unit (either singly or as part of a wider qualification) and this unit is judged to be equal to or greater than the content of a unit in a qualification they want to progress. The unit that they want to progress can be claimed on the basis of having an equivalent unit.

Use of an equivalent unit will not attract additional credit, as the skills knowledge and/or competences described in the unit will have already have been recognised in the credit system.

8.3 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.

8.4 Qualification Legacy

Legacy is the term used to describe qualifications on the QCF which were then superseded by newer equivalent qualifications on the RQF.

During the migration from the QCF to the RQF units needed to take on a structure appropriate to the RQF. There are a variety of structural differences between the two frameworks including different level descriptors. A level 4 qualification in the QCF is not therefore automatically equivalent to a level 4 qualification in the RQF. A tariff of legacy qualifications is often used to show the (equivalence of old qualifications in the new framework).

8.5 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.

8.6 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.

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

10. Transitional Arrangements

Transitional arrangements are provisions which have been made for dealing with the move from the Qualifications Credit Framework (QCF) to the RQF. These may be for example, interim funding arrangements, or time allowances for learners registered on NVQs to complete their NVQ even though new registrations may not be permitted. There are different completion times for different qualifications as these are set in relation to the specific needs of the industry and the currency and typical duration over which a qualification is achieved.

11. Clarification on funding

Funding for RPL

In terms of funding the Education and Skills Funding Agency states:

'The current policy is that a reduction in funding is expected only where 50% or more of the assessment is carried out through RPL, and there is a 50% reduction in funding for those parts of the qualification achieved through RPL'

For publicly funded programmes of training, this means that where RPL accounts for half or over half of the evidence generated for a unit, the specific unit or units concerned, will see a 50% reduction in funding.

It should be noted that the reduction would not apply to the whole qualification in general, but is applied in relation to the proportion of the qualification for which RPL has been used. MIS must be informed of any RPL decisions.

12. Monitoring

This procedure will be monitored via- Internal Verification Reports and External verification reports