

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING POLICY

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide support, clarification and guidance to PrATiQ™ stakeholders on implementing the institute's policies regarding the recognition of learners' previous achievements and / or qualifications.

Audience

Although the information is for all stakeholders it is of particular relevance to those responsible for supporting learners in their choice of qualification and to those responsible for planning, carrying out and quality assuring assessment. The information will also have relevance for those involved in teaching and learning

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

RPL Defined

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is an assessment process 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 Qualifications and Credit Framework gives the following definition of RPL and this definition is fully supported by the CQFW:

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 not need to develop through a course of learning.

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.

Assessment of RPL Evidence

Evidence obtained through the RPL process must be assessed, to the same rigorous quality as evidence obtained through any other process.

In no circumstance does the RPL process mean that any required qualification summative assessments can be avoided e.g. mandatory exams, practical/theory tests or assignments. This is because the prescribed summative assessment is the process through which evidence (produced via any prior assessment method or through the RPL process) is evaluated.

RPL allows an individual to avoid unnecessary learning, meaning that they can present for summative assessment without repeating learning in areas where they will be able to show that they can meet the learning outcome(s).

It remains the role of assessors and quality assurance staff to ensure that learning outcomes are only deemed to have been met where 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 additional evidence gained through other suitable assessment method(s) before requirements/outcomes 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.

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 demonstrate that they 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 sufficient evidence on which to base a safe assessment decision.

This is recognised as good practice by all the concerned regulators and Ofqual has recently issued a statement¹ 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.

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

RPL Process will be aligned with the awarding body's RPL policy and procedures.

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.

Recognition of Prior Learning

RPL is a process that considers whether an individual can demonstrate that they can meet the assessment requirements for a unit through knowledge, skills and / or competence that they already possess and do not need to develop through a course of learning. RPL is appropriate for use where an individual's learning has not been formally recognised.

The knowledge, understanding and/or or skills in question may have been acquired in any area of life, for example, domestic / family life, education and training, work related activities, community or voluntary activities.

Evidence from RPL processes is similar to that which is generated by any other assessment method permitted by a qualification. Learners can therefore use RPL to generate evidence for one or more learning outcomes. In many instances however, RPL alone will be insufficient to cover all the learning outcomes in a unit.

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 of or all of a unit /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.

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

Equivalent Units

Equivalent units are different QCF 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.