

Recognition of Prior Learning

Assessment Policy and Guidance Document

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide support, clarification and guidance to City & Guilds stakeholders on implementing its policies regarding the recognition of a learners' previous achievements and / or qualifications. In terms of contents the document explains City & Guilds' Assessment Policy on RPL and provides clarification on related terms and funding.

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.

Scope

This document applies to all qualifications on credit-based frameworks. These include the National Qualification Framework (NQF), the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)¹.

¹ Also known as, ***Fframwaith Credydau a Chymwysterau Cymru (FfCChC***

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.

A similar definition is given by The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework which provides the following explanation:

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the process for recognising learning that has its source in experience and/or previous formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts. This includes knowledge and skills gained within school, college and university and outside formal learning situations such as through life and work experiences.

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.²

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

Centres 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 and might, for example, include:

- examination of documents,
- expert 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.

² Frequently Asked Questions on the General Conditions of Recognition, 11th January 2012, <http://www.readonpublications.co.uk/pdf/Course%20Resources/Ofqual%20FAQs,%20January%202012.pdf>

Clarification of related terms and funding reductions

Terms in this section

A range of terms and processes are frequently confused with RPL. Explanations of those that have been found to occur most frequently are shown below.

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

City & Guilds encourages the use of these processes where they are of value to learners and /or centres.

Recognition of Prior Learning

Before looking at the terms that Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) tends to be confused with, it may be helpful to recap on the RPL definition. 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 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.

As long as all the composite learning outcomes have been met, an individual can claim credit for units where RPL has been used to generate all or some of the evidence required.

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.

Credit Accumulation and Transfer & Credit Transfer

Credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) is the system by which learners can accumulate and transfer credits over a period of time, in differing locations and contexts, in order to gain qualifications.

Credit transfer is the process of using credit(s) awarded in the context of one qualification or awarded by a different awarding organisation towards the achievement requirements of another qualification

CAT is therefore 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

Clarification of related terms and funding reductions

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.

Qualification Legacy

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

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

Predecessor Qualification

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

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Shared Units

Most units in the QCF are 'shared' units. This means that the unit title and reference number is available on the QCF framework for use by another Awarding Organisation. Shared units encourage progression and promote 'credit transfer' discussed previously. It should be noted that the assessment requirements for the same shared unit may be different in different qualifications (this incidentally applies to imported units too). This is because within the QCF, the detailed assessment requirements for a qualification are set by individual Awarding Organisations who take into account any overarching Assessment Strategy for qualification types provided by Sector Skills Councils.

Units in the QCF can also be 'restricted' units, which mean that they cannot be offered 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.

Transitional Arrangements

Transitional arrangements are provisions which have been made for dealing with the move from the National Qualification Framework (NQF) to the QCF i.e. moving from N/SVQs to QCF qualifications. These may be for example, interim funding arrangements, or time allowances for learners registered on N/SVQs to complete their N/SVQ 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.

Funding

The Skills Funding Agency is clear that funding must not be claimed for any part of a learner's learning aim or programme that duplicates provision they have received from any other source. They state:

You must make sure that a learner does not repeat learning that they have already carried out to achieve a qualification, unless they need to do so within an Apprenticeship framework.

For any learning aim outside of an Apprenticeship framework, If a learner achieves more than 50% of assessment through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), you must discount by 50% the funding for the percentage of the qualification assessed as being delivered through RPL

If RPL is used for a qualification within an Apprenticeship framework, funding for the qualification must be discounted by the percentage which is assessed through RPL. In the case of a Loan, the fee charged to the learner must be reduced by the same percentage.³

It should be noted that where 50% or less of the assessment is achieved through RPL, funding does not need to be reduced.

Similar efforts to avoid double funding must be made with regards to equivalent units and credit accumulation and transfer. This is denoted by the following in the Skills Funding Agency 2013/14 guidance:

If previously certificated achievement is used to exempt the learner for some or all of the assessment of a qualification, the amount of funding for the qualification must be discounted by the percentage achieved through previously certificated achievement. In the case of a learner funded through a Loan, the fee charged to the learner must be reduced by the same percentage.⁴

Clarification of related terms and funding reductions

Centres operating in other UK nations, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland will need to consult with their respective funding bodies as to their current RPL funding guidelines which may differ from the above. Clarification via City & Guilds will be provided as soon as it is obtained.

³ Skills Funding Agency Funding Rules 2013/2014
<http://readingroom.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/sfa/FRprintfinalv2.pdf>

⁴ ibid