



Recognition of Prior Learning Procedure

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 do not need to develop through a course of learning.

Terminology

RPL policies and procedures have been developed over time, which has led to the use of a number of terms to describe the process. Among the most common are:

- Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)
- Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)
- Accreditation of Prior Achievement (APA)
- Accreditation of Prior Learning and Achievement (APLA).

These terms broadly describe the same process.

All evidence must be evaluated using the stipulated learning outcomes and assessment criteria from the qualification or unit being claimed. In assessing a unit using RPL the assessor must be satisfied that the evidence produced by the learner meets the assessment standard established by the learning outcome and its related assessment criteria. Centres must have personnel with appropriate expertise and knowledge to facilitate this. Most often RPL will be used for units. It is acceptable to claim for an entire qualification through RPL although this is not the normal practice because it would be unusual for a learner to be able to offer prior achievement that completely matches every aspect of a qualification's assessment requirements.

The prior achievement that would provide evidence of current knowledge, understanding and skills will vary from sector to sector. It will depend on the extent of the experience, technological changes and the nature of the outcome claimed. If the currency of any evidence is in doubt, the assessor may use questions to check understanding, and ask for the demonstration of skills to check competence. Note that the assessment strategy for each qualification must be adhered to. Where evidence is assessed to be 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 used to generate sufficient evidence to be able to award the learning outcome(s) for the whole unit. The RPL process is not concerned with allowing for exceptional entry to, or exemption from, a programme of study. The RPL process does not allow the recognition of any unit or qualification assessed by



external assessment only. This is because such units are subject to specific evidence requirements.

Centres wishing to carry out RPL must ensure that:

- Learners are registered as soon as they formally start to gather evidence
- Records of assessment against prior learning are maintained
- Certification claims are made according to normal procedures
- All relevant evidence is assessed before assessment decisions are confirmed
- There are designated personnel with the appropriate expertise to support and assure the RPL process

The RPL Process

Stage 1 – Awareness, information and guidance

Ahead of enrolling a potential learner, the possibility that they may be able to claim credit for some of their previous learning should be raised with them. If the learner is interested in this, they will need to know the:

- Process of claiming achievement by using RPL
- Sources of support and guidance available to them
- Timelines, appeals processes and any fees involved

Stage 2 – Pre-assessment; gathering evidence and giving information.

At this stage the learner will carry out the process of collecting evidence against the requirements of the relevant unit(s). In some cases, the development of an assessment plan and tracking document or similar may be required, to support the learner through the process. The evidence gathered will need to meet the standards of the unit, or part of unit, that the evidence is being used for.

Stage 3 – Assessment/documentation of evidence

Assessment as part of RPL is a structured process for gathering and reviewing evidence and making judgments about a learners' prior learning and experience in relation to unit standards. The assessor may be looking at work experience records, validated by managers; previous portfolios of evidence put together by the learner



or essays and reports validated as being the learner's own unaided work. Assessment must be valid and reliable to ensure the integrity of the award of credit and, as above, the evidence gathered needs to meet the standards of the unit, or part of unit, that the evidence is being used for. The assessment process will be subject to the usual quality assurance procedures of the centre, for example internal standardisation and internal verification as well as exam board's quality assurance procedures. Evidence gathered through RPL should be clearly referenced and sign posted to aid internal assessment and internal and external verification.

Stage 4 – Claiming certification

Once the internal and external quality assurance procedures have been successfully completed, certification claims can be made by the centre. Assessment and internal verification records, along with any additional RPL records completed, should be retained for the standard three-year period following certification. The assessor must ensure that all learning outcomes and assessment criteria being claimed for each unit are achieved and that the records of assessment are maintained in the usual way.

Stage 5 – Appeal

As with any assessment decision, if a learner wishes to appeal against a decision made about their assessment, they need to follow the standard centre and then the exam board's Appeals procedures.