Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) 2026-2027

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Definition

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.

The Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework give 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 no need to develop through a course of learning.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) can be used when a learner has evidence of previously learning something but has not received any formal recognition through either a qualification or other form of certification. An example of this may be from any aspect of the learner's prior experience, including:

- Work experience
- Voluntary activities
- Prior education, training or associated qualification(s) in a related sector subject area
- Any previous apprenticeship undertaken

Recognition of existing knowledge, understanding or skills should be obtained on completion of the learner's diagnostic assessment, within their Individual Learning Plan (ILP).

Assessment of RPL Evidence

Any evidence of RPL must be assessed to the same quality as evidence obtained through any other assessment process.

RPL cannot and must not replace any qualification requirement such as summative assessments, mandatory exams, practical/theory tests or assignments.

RPL is there to prevent a learner from having to repeat existing learning, allowing them to present for summative assessment at an earlier stage, where they can show that they can meet the learning outcome(s).

It remains the role and responsibility of the assessor and quality assurance staff to ensure that learning outcomes are:

Valid:

Does the evidence genuinely demonstrate that the demands of the learning outcome have been met? For RPL, attention must be paid to ensure that the evidence meets up-to-date demands as opposed to being representative of practice that has significantly changed.

Authentic:

Consideration must be given to 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 methods(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.

If individuals can produce relevant evidence that meets learning outcome requirements, then recognition can be given for their existing knowledge, understanding or skills. If evidence from RPL is only sufficient to cover one or more learning outcomes, or to partly meet the need of a learning outcome, additional assessment methods should be used to meet the remaining evidence criteria. Additional assessment may include witness statements, certificates, CVs and validated work experience or voluntary work records.

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.

Submitting an RPL request

To apply for RPL for a learner or group of learners, an RPL Application Form must be completed and submitted to the awarding body for approval. Only once this RPL has been approved can this be used. For further information on how to access this application form, please refer to the Recognition of Prior Learning Policy of the related awarding body.

Funding and RPL

In the approval of RPL, funding bodies should be consulted, as recognition of prior learning may have an impact on funding claims.

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