



PART OF **nocn** GROUP

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy and Procedure

Version 5.0

February 2021

Contents

1. Scope	1
2. Purpose	1
3. Principles of RPL	1
I. Appropriateness of RPL	2
4. Procedure for Implementation	3
I. Providing Information, Advice and Guidance to Learners	3
II. Collation of Evidence	4
III. RPL Assessment	4
IV. Claiming and Record Keeping	5
5. Exemptions from Assessment	5
I. Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning	5
II. Approved Exemptions	6
6. Appeals	6
7. Document Control	6

1. Scope

- 1.01 This policy and procedure outlines the requirements for the implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in their delivery and assessment of NOCN units.
- 1.02 This policy and procedure also confirms NOCN's acceptance of Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL), or a Credit Transfer for qualification within the QCF, to recognise learner's prior attainment.
- 1.03 If a Centre is managed by a NOCN subsidiary or Delivery Partner, then the organisation will follow this policy and procedure on behalf of NOCN. Centres and learners who are affected by this should replace references to NOCN with the relevant subsidiary or Delivery Partner throughout this document.
- 1.04 This policy applies to all NOCN units and qualifications except those assessed solely by external assessment, or where NOCN explicitly states that RPL is not permitted. NOCN reserves the right to exclude the use of RPL from any of its units at any point. Where this is the case, the exclusion of RPL as an assessment method will be stated in the relevant Qualification Specification, available on the NOCN website.
- 1.05 The intended audience for this document is:
 - a) NOCN Directors and Board of Trustees.
 - b) NOCN core, sub-contracted and associate staff, including External Quality Assurers (EQAs).
 - c) All staff of NOCN Delivery Partners associated with NOCN provision.
 - d) All staff in NOCN recognised and partner centres.
 - e) Learners.
 - f) Qualification Regulators¹.
 - g) Industry Regulators.

2. Purpose

- 2.01 The purpose of this document is to:
 - a) Inform centres of NOCN's policy regarding RPL.
 - b) Provide guidance and support to approved centres on the principles of RPL.
 - c) Provide information to centres on the implementation for RPL, including how they must claim and audit assessment which makes use of RPL.
 - d) Outline and provide information and guidance on related terms, including but not limited to, Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), exemptions and credit transfers.
 - e) Satisfy the Conditions of Recognition regarding the use of RPL by the various Qualification Regulators.

3. Principles of RPL

- 3.01 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is an assessment method that considers whether a learner is able to demonstrate that they meet the assessment requirements for a unit through knowledge, understanding or skills that they already possess (and can evidence), which do not require further development through a course of learning. The purpose of RPL is to recognise

¹ Ofqual in England; Qualification Wales; CCEA Regulation in Northern Ireland or successor bodies.

a learner's previous learning or experience rather than allowing exceptional entry to, or exemption from, a programme of study.

- 3.02 RPL is a recognised and valid assessment method and therefore there is no difference between a learner's achievement of the required standards (i.e. learning outcomes and assessment criteria), being met through RPL or through a formal programme of study. Therefore, the use of RPL is actively encouraged where it is of value to centres and learners in facilitating the assessment of previously uncertificated learning.
- 3.03 The use of RPL does not exclude or negate the need for learners to sit prescribed summative assessments for a unit or qualification, such as a mandatory examination or a practical assignment. Rather, RPL allows for a learner to avoid undertaking unnecessary learning, meaning that they can be put forward for the summative assessment with a tailored schedule of training, rather than the standard full course of learning where RPL is not used.
- 3.04 RPL must be treated in the same way as any another assessment methodology and therefore it will be subject to, and must comply with, all regulatory requirements for assessment. The assessment practices and decisions associated with RPL must be transparent, rigorous, reliable, sufficient, fair and accessible to all individuals to ensure that all parties can be confident of the reliability of the assessment decisions and outcomes.
- 3.05 All evidence must be evaluated using the stipulated learning outcomes in the unit or units 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 outcomes. Centres therefore must have personnel with the appropriate expertise and knowledge to undertake this, in line with the relevant NOCN qualification specification.
- 3.06 Centre use of RPL will be subject to the same standard of scrutiny by NOCN as other assessment methods in its application of Centre monitoring activities and must be included within the Centre's own internal quality assurance strategy and sampling activities. For this reason, the use of RPL should be clearly documented within the relevant learner's assessment documentation.
- 3.07 It is important to note that the use of RPL may affect a Centre's funding access or levels and therefore NOCN encourages centres to ensure they consult with their funding guidance prior to the use of RPL.
- 3.08 RPL is not the same as an exemption from assessment or Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning. Please refer to section 5.

I. Appropriateness of RPL

- 3.09 The RPL process is relevant to individuals who can evidence that they have previously gained knowledge, understanding or achieved a skill or competence relevant to their current programme of study. Evidence could be drawn from various aspects of a learner's prior learning including, but not limited to:
 - a) Education and training.
 - b) Work activities.
 - c) Community or voluntary activities.

- 3.10 As a requirement of NOCN Centre Approval, all centres must have their own RPL policy and procedure which explains how the Centre will explore and implement RPL as an assessment method. The Centre's policy and procedure must be in line with NOCN's own policy and procedure regarding RPL.
- 3.11 Provided that the assessment requirements of a unit have been met, the use of RPL is acceptable for use towards the accreditation of a single unit, or units, but is restricted for the achievement of a whole qualification. The latter will be untypical of the use of the process as it would be unusual for a learner to be able to offer prior achievement that fully matches every aspect of a qualification's assessment requirement. For this reason, NOCN will only allow up to 50% of an individual learner's qualification to be awarded through RPL. It is the responsibility of the Internal Quality Assurer within the Centre to monitor the correct use of RPL by their team of Assessors. Where RPL evidence is being assessed against graded units, only pass criteria may be awarded.
- 3.12 NOCN does not offer partial accreditation of units and therefore RPL will need to be combined with other assessment methods to meet all requirements of a unit or units where RPL does not cover all of the required learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

4. Procedure for Implementation

- 4.01 NOCN will expect the following elements to be present in any Recognition of Prior Learning policy operated by a centre. Formal records of each RPL process must be maintained for scrutiny by both internal and external quality assurance staff, in line with NOCN requirements.

I. Providing Information, Advice and Guidance to Learners

- 4.02 Centres must ensure that all learners are aware of the RPL assessment method and that they are fully made aware of the RPL process where this is being considered by the learner or Centre. This includes ensuring that a learner has sufficient evidence to make a viable claim and to support evidence collection and presentation for assessment. The learner must be aware that evidence provided for consideration of RPL must have been achieved before the start of their programme/course.
- 4.03 The learner must be aware that not all evidence of prior learning or experience will be applicable for RPL use. Learners must ensure that evidence is current (as detailed in 4.11) and that the required skills and knowledge have been applied regularly to maintain levels of application and understanding in relation to the relevant learning outcomes and assessment criteria.
- 4.04 Whilst the learner is responsible for producing evidence to support the use of RPL, the learner must be aware that it remains the role of the Assessor and Quality Assurance staff within the Centre to make assessment decisions regarding the currency of the learner's existing achievements, experience, skills and competence. Centres may wish to signpost learners to support materials to assist them in their understanding of relevant pieces of evidence.
- 4.05 Centres must inform learners of the timescales for the submission of evidence for it to be considered for RPL. Where specific requirements and/or time limits regarding the currency of evidence apply to the unit where RPL is being considered, these should be made clear and transparent to the learner at the beginning of the RPL process.

II. Collation of Evidence

- 4.06 The evidence required for the achievement through RPL will depend on the purpose, learning outcomes and assessment criteria of the unit(s) in question, but these could include:
- The submission of written documents.
 - An expert witness testimony.
 - A professional discussion.
 - A reflective account written by the learner.
- 4.07 It is important that the Assessor supports the learner throughout the evidence gathering stage. An assessment plan must be created in conjunction with the learner to ensure that both parties are clear on requirements.
- 4.08 All evidence submitted for RPL must be referenced and signposted clearly in order to facilitate internal assessment, internal quality assurance and external quality assurance.

III. RPL Assessment

- 4.09 The assessment of evidence through RPL must be a structured process which allows the Assessor to make judgements about a learner's prior learning and experience in relation to unit standards. Assessment methods for RPL must be of equal rigour as other assessment methods, must be fit for purpose and relate to the evidence of learning. Any evidence submitted for RPL must be:
- Valid – the evidence must demonstrate achievement of the relevant learning outcomes/assessment criteria.
 - Authentic – the evidence must be the sole work of the learner, unless the learning outcome or assessment criteria of the unit(s) being assessed states that work must be produced in groups or in teams.
 - Current – the evidence must meet up-to-date standards of the unit/vocational area of the unit.
 - Reliable – the evidence must demonstrate sound competence which would allow confidence in the ability of the learner re-producing the evidence in the future.
 - Sufficient – the evidence must be substantial enough to fully meet the requirements of the assessment criteria/learning outcomes.
- 4.10 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 may ask for the demonstration of skills to check competence. This must be documented on the assessment record. It is essential that the assessment strategy for each unit, units or qualification is adhered to.
- 4.11 There are no standard timeframes or limits on when evidence can or is no longer acceptable to be used for RPL, however, evidence must meet the principles in 4.09 to allow for the Assessor to make a professional judgement regarding whether the evidence is appropriate and demonstrates the successful meeting of the relevant assessment criteria.
- 4.12 It is unlikely that when considering RPL, that a learner will successfully meet all of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of the unit(s) being assessed. Where evidence is assessed and found to be only sufficient to cover one or more learning outcomes, or to partially meet the

requirements of any learning outcomes, then additional assessment methods should be used to generate sufficient evidence to be able to award the learning outcome(s) for the whole unit.

- 4.13 After the assessment, the Assessor must provide feedback to the learner. The feedback must include the outcome of the assessment. If the decision has been made to not award achievement(s), the learner must undertake the Centre's standard assessment for those unit(s) where RPL is being considered.

IV. Claiming and Record Keeping

- 4.14 If the decision is made to award the unit(s) through RPL, the Centre must follow their own assessment and internal quality assurance processes to allow for the claims of achievements to be submitted to NOCN. This includes ensuring that assessment decisions which have made use of RPL are selected and form part of the Centre's own internal quality assurance and standardisation activities.
- 4.15 Once claims are ready to be submitted to NOCN, the procedure for claiming achievements through RPL is the same as claiming for achievements through other forms of assessment. Once claimed by the Centre, NOCN will quality assure, award and certificate the claims in line with its standard certification procedure.
- 4.16 The Centre must ensure that assessment records clearly show how RPL was considered, reviewed and applied for external quality assurance purposes. The Centre's External Quality Assurer may request the Centre to identify or confirm claims which include the use of RPL so that this can form a part of the EQAs sampling of Centre marking of assessments. For further detail on how NOCN quality assures Centre marking of assessments, please refer to the NOCN Risk-Based Approach to Centre Quality Monitoring Policy and Procedure.

5. Exemptions from Assessment

I. Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning

- 5.01 Learners are able to apply for Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) (or a Credit Transfer for qualifications within the QCF) where they can evidence that they have certificated achievement of the exact content of the unit at the same or a higher level. The APCL process provides recognition that some units may be the same across Awarding Organisations and negates the need for learners to repeat unnecessary learning.
- 5.02 Where APCL is appropriate, learners will not need to undergo any further learning or assessment for the relevant units, although the Centre must ensure that appropriate checks are made before applying to NOCN to ensure that APCL is appropriate.
- 5.03 All requests for APCL must be approved by NOCN and cannot be claimed by the Centre. NOCN will review the evidence of certificated achievement to determine if APCL is appropriate and will approve or decline each request individually. If approved, NOCN will apply the APCL against the learner's record, which will contribute to the learner's achievement of the relevant qualification. Units achieved through APCL will be marked as such on the qualification certificate to ensure clarity that the learner has not re-taken an assessment to obtain achievement.
- 5.04 It is important to note that for NOCN to apply accreditation of prior learning, the certificated achievement must meet the current learning outcomes and assessment criteria of the unit being considered. It is therefore only in rare cases where APCL is appropriate. Where the certificated

achievement is no longer current, or only shows partial completion of a unit, APCL will not be applicable and RPL may be considered by the Centre.

II. Approved Exemptions

5.05 Only in rare cases will NOCN allow for a learner to be exempt from an assessment to contribute to the award of a qualification. This is due to NOCN's responsibility to ensure that only learners who demonstrate the required knowledge and competencies demanded by the qualification are certificated. Centres and learners may wish to discuss their case for an exemption with NOCN.

6. Appeals

6.01 Learners must be aware of their right to access the Centre's appeals and complaints procedures if they are not satisfied with the Centre's application of RPL. If a learner wishes to appeal a Centre's decision regarding the application of RPL, they will need to exhaust the Centre's own appeals procedure first before being able to raise their appeal to NOCN directly. For further information, refer to the NOCN Appeals Policy and Procedure.

7. Document Control

7.01 This policy is maintained by the Quality Assurance Team and will be reviewed and updated where necessary to reflect updated legislation, customer feedback, improvements of operation and changes to the regulatory environment. If you have any queries regarding the contents or the use of this policy, please contact the Quality Assurance Team directly on assurance@nocn.org.uk.

7.02 All NOCN policies and procedures are signed off by the NOCN Responsible Officer. The latest versions of which can be found on our website here: <https://www.nocn.org.uk/support/nocn-group-policies/>.