

# Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy and Procedures

## 1. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance, support and clarification to NOCN approved centres on implementing and claiming credit against RPL assessment.

The intended audience for this document is:

- NOCN Directors and Board of Trustees
- NOCN Core and Associate staff
- All staff of NOCN Delivery Partners associated with NOCN provision
- All staff in NOCN recognised and partner Centres
- Qualification Regulators<sup>1</sup>
- Industry Regulators
- Learners

## 2. Scope

This policy applies to all NOCN units and qualifications approved by the regulatory authorities in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland except those assessed solely by external assessment or otherwise where RPL is not permitted. Where the latter applies it will be stated as such in the relevant Qualification Specification. NOCN reserves the right to exclude RPL in cases such as Licence to Practice, Health and Safety Requirements, regulated professions and work placement.

The use of Recognition of Prior Learning is not a mandatory requirement in terms of the learner. However, if a learner or the initial assessment, presents the possibility of RPL and the qualification allows the use of RPL, the centre must implement the assessment of the RPL. Centres that wish to use RPL must have an internal policy on RPL and the appropriate resources to undertake it.

## 3. Statement of Policy

Recognition of Prior Learning is a process of assessment leading to the award of credit that considers whether a learner can demonstrate that they meet the assessment requirements for a unit/qualification through knowledge, understanding or skills they can evidence that they already possess and which do not require further development, at the identified level, through a course of learning.

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<sup>1</sup> Ofqual in England; Qualifications Wales; CCEA Regulation in Northern Ireland

The RPL process is relevant to individuals who can evidence that they have previously gained knowledge or 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 exclusively:

- education and training
- work activities
- community or voluntary activities
- Previous accreditations of qualifications

Any appropriate assessment methodology may be used in the Recognition of Prior Learning Process. Provided that the assessment requirements of a specific unit or qualification 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 very unusual for a learner to be able to offer prior achievement that totally matches every aspect of a qualification's assessment requirements. Partial accreditation of NOCN units through RPL is not permitted.

Any evidence submitted for the Recognition of Prior Learning must be;

- Valid
- Reliable
- Current
- Authentic
- Sufficient

The use of the Recognition of Prior Learning is encouraged where it is of value to centres and learners in facilitating the assessment of previously uncertificated learning. Centres which use the processes associated with the Recognition of Prior Learning and must follow the procedures described below and keep auditable records.

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.

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 may ask for the demonstration of skills to check competence. It is essential that the assessment strategy for each unit, units or qualification is adhered to. 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.

Where RPL evidence is being assessed against graded units only pass criteria may be awarded.

The RPL process is not concerned with allowing for exceptional entry to, or exemption from, a programme of study.

#### 4. Principles of RPL:

The Recognition of Prior Learning is a valid method of enabling individuals to claim credit for units and qualifications irrespective of how the learning took place and the assessments were undertaken. There is no difference between the achievement of the required standards, i.e. learning outcomes and assessment criteria being met at the required level, gained through prior learning, or via experience, or through a formal programme of study.

The Recognition of Prior Learning must comply with all regulatory requirements for assessment, Recognition of Prior Learning policies, processes, procedures. Practices and decisions should be transparent, rigorous, reliable, sufficient, fair and accessible to individuals and stakeholders to ensure that users can be confident of the fidelity of the assessment decisions and outcomes of the Recognition of Prior Learning. In effect, RPL is just another assessment methodology and therefore subject to all the usual requirements relating to assessment.

The Recognition of Prior Learning is a learner-centred voluntary process. The individual should be offered advice on the nature and range of evidence considered appropriate to support a claim for assessing the Recognition of Prior Learning, and be given guidance and support to make his or her claim. It remains the role of the assessor and quality staff to ensure that assessment criteria are only deemed to have been met where assessment is valid; reliable and fit for purpose and where evidence is adequate, sufficient and authentic.

The process of the Recognition of Prior Learning is subject to the same standard of scrutiny through the application of existing quality assurance and monitoring processes as any other form of learning and assessment and should be included within the centre's Internal Quality Assurance strategy, policies and evidenced within the IQA sample.

Assessment methods for the Recognition of Prior Learning must be of equal rigour as other assessment methods, must be fit for purpose and relate to the evidence of learning.

#### 5. Guidance for implementation

NOCN will expect the following elements to be present in any Recognition of Prior Learning policy operated by a centre with formal records maintained for scrutiny by both internal and external quality assurance staff;

##### **Stage 1: Awareness raising regarding claiming of credit, information, advice and guidance**

Once learners have committed themselves to having their learning considered for the purposes of the Recognition of Prior Learning they will need information, guidance and support on:

- how to claim achievement via the Recognition of Prior Learning process
- sources of professional support and guidance available to individuals and employers
- the administrative processes for Recognition of Prior Learning applications
- timelines and appeals processes
- the currency of existing credits, qualification, experience, skills or competence, i.e. does the evidence relate to current learning? Have the skills and knowledge been applied regularly to maintain levels of application/practice and understanding in line with unit learning outcomes and assessment criteria and identified unit level?
- where centres and/or professional, statutory or regulatory bodies have specific requirements and/or time limits for the currency of evidence, certification, or demonstration of learning, these should be made clear and transparent.

Note that evidence provided by the learner for RPL must have been achieved before the start of their programme/course.

### **Stage 2: Pre-assessment – gathering evidence and giving information**

When an individual has decided to pursue a Recognition of Prior Learning route towards achievement, it is vital that the learner is fully informed of the Recognition of Prior Learning process and has sufficient support to make a viable claim and to make decisions about evidence collection and presentation for assessment.

During this stage, the learner will carry out the evidence collection and have an assessment plan developed with support from the assessor. The evidence required for the achievement will depend on the purpose, learning outcomes and assessment criteria for the relevant units.

### **Stage 3: Assessment / documentation of evidence**

Assessment as part of the Recognition of Prior Learning Framework is a structured process for gathering and reviewing evidence and making judgements about a learners' prior learning and experience in relation to unit standards.

Assessment must be valid, reliable with consideration given to issues of inclusion to ensure the integrity of units and qualifications and the Recognition of Prior Learning system as a whole.

All evidence submitted for RPL must be referenced and signposted clearly in order to facilitate internal assessment, internal quality assurance and external quality assurance.

The assessment process for the Recognition of Prior Learning must be subject to the same quality assurance processes of awarding organisations as any other part of the assessment process. Learners' work which contributes towards their claim for credit via the Recognition of Prior Learning process should be internally and externally quality assured and all achievement documented as for conventional learner achievement. All Recognition of Prior Learning related achievement should be identified as such in all documentation.

### **Stage 4: Feedback**

After the assessment, the assessor will need to give feedback to the learner, discussing the outcomes and giving support and guidance on the options available to the learner. If the decision has been not to award achievement(s) the learners will have to undertake the current standard assessment for those unit(s).

### Stage 5: Awarding achievement

NOCN as the awarding organisation is responsible for awarding achievement. The procedure is the same as for other forms of assessment. Any claims for achievement via the Recognition of Prior Learning should be identified as such to ensure that the appropriate amounts identified in rules of combination for qualifications are not exceeded or are met.

### Stage 6: Appeal and complaints

Learners should be made aware of their right to access the organisation’s appeals and complaints process and how to access it.

If claimants wish to appeal against a decision made about their claim for credit via the Recognition of Prior Learning process, they will need to follow the standard appeals processes that exist within the centre with the right of appeal to NOCN.

## 6. Collating information on the use of RPL

Centres must notify NOCN about any claims for achievement through RPL where the learner has completed different assessment requirements to the standard assessment of the cohort.

External quality assurers will be required to identify the provision where Recognition of Prior Learning has been applied. Centres will be required to inform the External Quality Assurer prior to a monitoring visit where this assessment method has been used so that the work may be included in a sample.

The Recognition of Prior Learning assessments must be included in standardisation and evaluation activities.

Evidence of assessment decisions must be retained for 7 years.

#### **PLEASE NOTE: The Recognition of Prior Learning is not the same as:**

- An exemption
- An equivalent
- A credit accumulation or transfer

#### **Version control**

Version	Date	Owned by	Approved by	Review Date
4.0	July 2018	NOCN Assurance	GHE	July 2019