

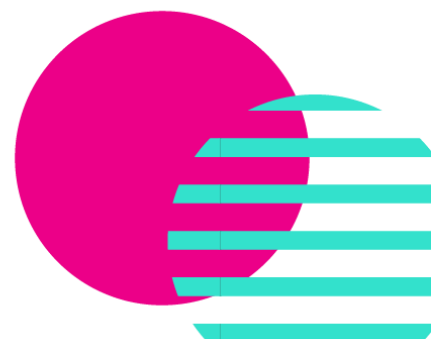


PART OF **nocn** GROUP



# **NOCN Recognition of Prior Learning Policy and Procedure**

**28<sup>th</sup> April 2023 (V5.1)**



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## 1. Scope

- 1.01 This policy and procedure outlines the requirements regarding the use of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in relation to NOCN assessments. This document also confirms NOCN's acceptance of Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) where a learner has partial achievement of a qualification from another Awarding Organisation, where the unit(s) are the same in content and design.
- 1.02 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.
- 1.03 This policy applies to all NOCN units and assessments, except those which are externally assessed, *including End Point Assessments*. Despite this, training providers may wish to use the principles of RPL during the on programme stage to tailor or reduce the level of training required to be delivered to the apprentice. Where this is the case, providers will need to consider if this has any funding implications.
- 1.04 NOCN reserves the right to exclude the use of RPL from any of its units or assessments at any time. Where this is the case, the exclusion of RPL as an assessment method will be stated in the relevant product specification document, 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) and End Point Assessors (EPAs).
  - c) All staff of NOCN Delivery Partners associated with NOCN provision.
  - d) All staff in NOCN recognised/partner centres and training providers.
  - e) Learners registered on NOCN products.
  - f) Apprentices completing End Point Assessments.
  - g) Qualification<sup>1</sup>, assessment and Industry Regulators.

## 2. Purpose

- 2.01 The purpose of this document is to:
- a) Outline NOCN's approach regarding the acceptance of RPL.
  - b) Provide guidance and support regarding the principles of RPL, including on the recording, implementation and claiming of achievement through RPL.
  - c) Outline and provide information and guidance on related terms, including Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) and exemptions.
  - d) Support adherence to the Conditions of Recognition by the qualification and assessment Regulators.

## 3. Policy

- 3.01 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is an assessment method that considers whether a learner has met the assessment requirements for a unit through their existing knowledge,

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<sup>1</sup> Ofqual in England; Qualification Wales; CCEA Regulation in Northern Ireland or successor bodies.

understanding or skills that do not require further development through a course of learning. For RPL to be considered, the possession of the required knowledge, understanding or skills must be able to be evidenced. The purpose of RPL is to recognise 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 should be 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. This also includes the use of RPL during the initial assessment process.

## **I. Principles of RPL**

- 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 through 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 any other assessment method 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.

## **II. 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 In line with the NOCN Centre Approval Policy and Procedure, 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 qualification to be awarded through RPL.
- 3.12 It is the responsibility of the Internal Quality Assurer within the Centre to monitor the correct use of RPL by their team of Assessors.
- 3.13 Where RPL evidence is being assessed against graded units, only pass criteria may be awarded.
- 3.14 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 is insufficient to satisfy all requirements of achievement of a unit.

## **4. Procedure for Implementation**

- 4.01 Centres must ensure that all learners are aware of the RPL assessment method and that they are made aware of the RPL process where this is being considered. 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.

### **I. Providing Information, Advice and Guidance to Learners**

- 4.02 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 meets the required principles (as detailed in 4.09) 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.
- 4.03 Although the learner is responsible for producing evidence to support the use of RPL, they must be made aware that it is the role of the Assessor to make the assessment decision regarding the currency of the learner's experience, skills and competence. Centres may wish to signpost learners to support materials to assist them in the collation of evidence.
- 4.04 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:
- a) The submission of written documents.
  - b) An expert witness testimony.
  - c) A professional discussion.
  - d) 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 auditable, 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. Assessment through RPL must be:
- a) Valid – the evidence must demonstrate achievement of the relevant learning outcomes/assessment criteria.
  - b) 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.
  - c) Current – the evidence must meet up-to-date standards of the unit/vocational area of the unit.
  - d) Reliable – the evidence must demonstrate sound competence which would allow confidence in the ability of the learner re-producing the evidence in the future.
  - e) 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 requirements and strategy for each unit, units or qualification, as outlined by NOCN, 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.
- 4.15 Once claims are ready to be submitted to NOCN, the procedure for claiming achievements where RPL has been used 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.
- 4.17 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 EQA's sampling of Centre marked 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) 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 and assessment.
- 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 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 any due 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 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 NOCN via email at [assurance@nocn.org.uk](mailto: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/>.