



Recognition of Prior Learning Policy

Scope

This policy applies to all ABE qualifications on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF). The use of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is not mandatory. However, if centres choose to implement it, they must have an internal policy on RPL and the appropriate resources to do so.

Centre's responsibility

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a method of assessment [leading to the award of unit/s or qualification] that considers whether learners can demonstrate that they can meet all 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.

Note: RPL should not be confused with exemption, unit equivalency or credit accumulation and transfer.

RPL enables recognition of achievement from a range of activities using any appropriate assessment methodology. Provided that all the assessment requirements (e.g. learning outcomes and assessment criteria) of a given unit or qualification have been met, the use of RPL is acceptable for claiming a unit, units or a whole qualification. Partial unit completion is not acceptable. Evidence of learning must be:

- Valid
- Reliable.

ABE encourages the use of RPL where it is of value to centres and learners in facilitating assessment. Centres which use RPL must follow these principles and keep appropriate records.

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).

Context

The use and application of RPL is of particular value to learners without formal qualifications, who are either in employment, preparing to enter, or returning to employment. It enables them to gain all or part of a qualification without having to undertake a formal learning programme.

RPL can be used where a learner has not had their prior learning formally recognised.

RPL focuses on assessment and awarding for prior learning which may count as evidence towards:

- a unit accumulated towards a full ABE qualification
- a unit or units recognised by a ABE Certificate of Achievement of a full ABE qualification.

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 and make decisions about RPL. Evidence used for RPL must be submitted to ABE for external verification.

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.

Where Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning evidence is being assessed against graded units, only pass criteria can be awarded.

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

Centres wishing to carry out RPL must ensure that:

- Identification of any achievement through RPL is prior to learners taking a qualification
- Relevant to the learner's knowledge, skills and understanding which will be assessed as part of a qualification
- Learners are registered as soon as they formally start to gather evidence
- Records of assessment against prior learning are maintained
- Certification takes place 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

An example RPL process is outlined below, with common steps and actions outlined.

Stage 1 – Centre guidance

Ahead of enrolling a potential learner, the possibility that they may be able to claim unit/s for some of their previous learning and/or experience 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 – Evidence gathering

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 unit(s) 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.

If the collated evidence of RPL for a learner is judged by the centre not to be sufficient to meet all the requirements of the relevant unit(s), then the learner will have to complete the normal assessment for those unit(s) if they wish to be awarded the qualification.

The assessment process will be subject to the usual quality assurance procedures of the centre, for example internal standardisation and internal verification. Evidence gathered through RPL should be clearly referenced and sign posted to aid internal assessment and internal and external verification.

Stage 4 – Certification

RPL processes and evidence used by centres will be subject to a quality assurance process by ABE. ABE will check RPL via its external verification processes, and if we identify that not all requirements for a unit have been met via the RPL evidence, then more evidence will be needed in most cases the learner will have to undergo the normal assessment requirements.

Once the internal and external quality assurance procedures have been successfully completed, certification takes place as normal. 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 - Appeals

As with any assessment decision on procedural grounds; if a learner wishes to appeal against a decision made about their assessment they need to follow the standard centre policy and procedures and then ABE Enquiries and Appeals procedures.

Regulatory References

UK regulators require all awarding organisations to establish and maintain their compliance with regulatory conditions and criteria. As part of this process, policies that relate to ABE’s status as an awarding organisation will reference any particular conditions and criteria that they address. This policy addresses the following regulatory criteria and conditions:

Ofqual General Conditions of Recognition
Condition E10: Recognition of Prior Learning
Condition H5: Results for a qualification must be based on sufficient evidence