Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy

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1   Introduction and Policy Statement

EduQual performs and maintains comprehensive quality assurance processes and procedures which are designed to:

- Safeguard EduQual's integrity as a business and as an Awarding Body

- Ensure the validity and integrity of EduQual-approved qualifications and relevant assessment methodology

EduQual also maintains up-to-date policies for staff and centres in order to meet any requirements stipulated by the regulatory authorities.[1]

This Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy is a guidance document for use by EduQual staff (including its External Quality Assurers) and by the staff of EduQual-approved centres.

2   About Recognition of Prior Learning[2]

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a process of assessment that can lead to the award of credit to a learner without the learner necessarily completing a complete, formal learning programme for one or more units of a qualification. The process considers whether a learner possesses (through existing experience and skills) the evidence of knowledge and understanding necessary indicating achievement of stated learning outcomes of the unit for which RPL is sought. **RPL can only be granted for complete units, not parts of units**. This could be a transfer of credit from formal learning programmes (for example, credit transfer using the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework) or, for appropriate programmes, the recognition of relevant and applicable experience gained from employment (normally this would be for units up to and including RQF Level 3; SCQF Level 6).

Although the use of RPL can be acceptable for accrediting any number of EduQual unit(s), **entire qualifications may not be awarded by EduQual unless a minimum of one EduQual set assessment is taken and achieved by the learner(s) concerned**.

RPL is an appropriate and alternative approach for learners with relevant skills, knowledge and understanding (sometimes arising through prior experience). This can be beneficial in the marketing of qualifications through brochures and prospectuses, and ultimately to the recruitment of potential learners. RPL enables learners to be properly placed on accredited qualifications/units to which they are best suited.

RPL also enables EduQual and EduQual-approved centres to recognise learner achievement from a range of activities that use any appropriate assessment methodology. On the condition that the assessment requirements of a given unit or qualification have been met, the use of RPL is acceptable for accrediting a single unit, or multiple units.

EduQual's RPL policy applies to all EduQual qualifications and EduQual-approved qualifications as recognised by the regulatory authorities.

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[1] This term, 'regulatory authorities', includes national regulators such as SQA Accreditation

[2] RPL is sometimes referred to as 'APL' (Accreditation of Prior Learning) APCL refers to accreditation of prior certificated learning, whilst APEL refers to experiential (e.g. through relevant work experience) prior learning. EduQual uses the former abbreviation and 'RPL' (Recognition of Prior Learning) is the term used throughout this document and elsewhere in EduQual policies and related materials.

2.1   RPL and the Non-Formal Learning Process

While many RPL learners will have a background in formal learning, the process also allows for learners with non-formal experience to progress through academic programmes (especially vocational programmes). Their own life and work experiences can inform and enhance their learning just as effectively as if they had undertaken formal learning.

The following graphic illustrates this process, and is taken from the SCQF RPL toolkit:[3]
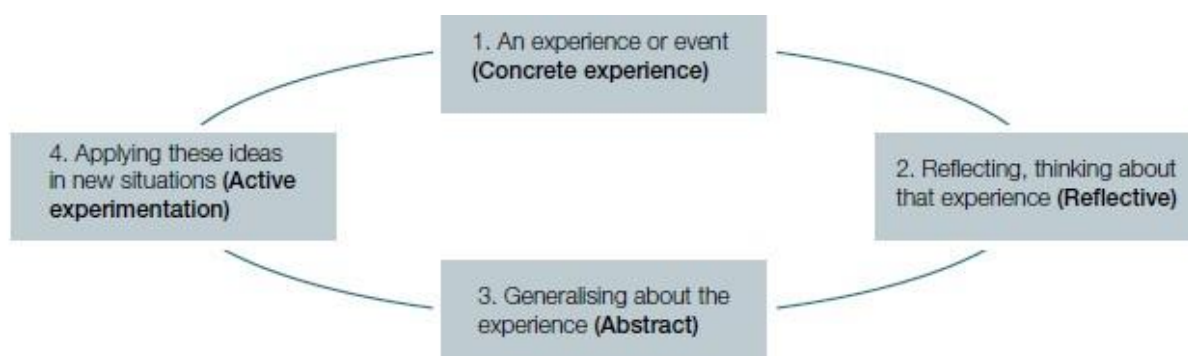
2.2   Supporting RPL at EduQual-approved Centres

EduQual-approved centres that wish to offer RPL to their learners must possess their own internal policy on RPL as well as the appropriate level of resources to implement and maintain it.

The implementation and use of RPL is not obligatory and centres may choose whether they wish to employ it. Formal recognition of achievement for a unit or (units) may only be signed off /endorsed for award by EduQual given robust and internal verification of RPL evidence by the centre.

3   Evidence of RPL

Evidence submitted to prove RPL must fulfil the following criteria:

- **Authentic:** Evidence must prove conclusively that RPL is based upon the learner's own work

- **Valid/Current:** Evidence must meet the requirements of the current assessment criteria. EduQual operates a 5-year limit on the validity of qualifications. Older qualifications may be considered where they are supported by recent i.e. within 5 years, work experience in the subject areas for which RPL is sought.

- **Relevant:** Evidence must be appropriate to the content of the unit/qualification being considered for RPL

- **Sufficient:** There must be enough evidence to conclusively prove consistency of learner performance in meeting the assessment criteria.

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[3] The full SCQF RPL toolkit is available online here.

If the validity of any evidence is held in doubt (for example, it is deemed superficial or irrelevant), the assessor may formulate questions in order to test their reservations and the veracity of a learner's RPL claim.

4   Guidance for Centres

Note: RPL is not concerned with allowing for exceptional entry to, or exemption from, a programme of study. It focuses on assessment of prior learning which can count as evidence towards a complete unit or number of complete units that accumulate towards a full EduQual qualification.

In considering the previous knowledge, skills and understanding of a learner, centres are expected to match the Learning Outcomes of previously achieved programmes to the Learning Outcomes of the nominated EduQual qualifications. The comparison of Learning Outcomes must consider the levels of achievement for appropriate units and their Learning Outcomes. **When considering claims for RPL, EduQual reserves the right to request (normally through its External Quality Assurers, or EQAs) those samples of evidence scrutinised which underpin the claimed achievement through RPL.**

4.1   Establishing RPL System and Policy

A centre that wishes to establish its own RPL procedures **must adhere to the following key points** when doing so:

1) **Statement of Policy:** Centre RPL policy must be set out in a clear way for the benefit of both centre staff as well as a centre's learners. The policy should emphasise the centre's commitment to RPL, which will be more attractive to potential learners with existing skills, knowledge and expertise (see paragraph 2).

2) **Restrictions and Caveats:** Any restrictions on RPL must be made clear to centre staff as well as learners. Any limitations to RPL must be fully explained to the RPL learner in any introductory meetings held with centre staff. One such limitation, with especial regard to EduQual qualifications is that **there will always be a minimum of one EduQual set assessment that must be taken by the learner before any award may be made**.

4.2   Centre Checklist Guidance

Given the above principles, the following checklist might prove helpful to centres in implementing and maintaining the requirements for RPL. **For successful implementation of RPL policy, a centre requires:**

1) **A Centre Policy on RPL**

2) A **named member of staff with responsibility for RPL in the centre, or within a department.** Where RPL is organised by a department, the named individual must be responsible for coordinating RPL across the entire centre

3) A **staff development programme**, wherein clear procedures for administering RPL are established and understood

4) **Trained assessors/tutors** skilled in the assessment requirements of specialist vocational areas

5) **Trained support staff** or access to them (e.g. an outside agency)

6) **Access to learning resources which support additional learning**. RPL learners may be recruited at any time during the year, subject to assessment requirements for certain qualifications.

7) Appropriate **assessment recording documents**

8) An **appeals system** (see also EduQual's 'Appeals Policy')

4.3   Supporting RPL Procedures

In order to help learners progress using established RPL systems, centres should adhere to the following principles:

- All evidence for RPL must be evaluated using the stated learning outcomes and assessment criteria from the qualification or unit being claimed. When assessing a unit using RPL, the assessor **must be satisfied** that the evidence produced by the learner meets the assessment standard (as established by the desired learning outcomes and their related assessment criteria). Centres must have personnel with the appropriate level of expertise and knowledge to facilitate this. **Normally this means that the assessor must be qualified to at least one level higher than the level of the qualification being assessed through RPL.**

- If the validity/currency of any evidence is in doubt, the assessor may use questions to check understanding and/or ask for demonstration of skills in order to check learner aptitude. **In this case the assessment strategy/criteria must still be adhered to**

- Learners must be registered as soon as they begin to gather evidence for RPL

- Records of assessment against prior learning are maintained

- Certification claims are made according to normal procedures

- All relevant evidence is assessed **before** assessment decisions are made and confirmed. All evidence should be preserved for the attention of EduQual EQAs/quality assurance staff as requested

- There must be designated personnel with the correct level of expertise to support and assure the RPL process

5   Example of RPL Process

This example of an RPL process is designed to highlight the key areas involved in supporting a valid and clear RPL policy.

1) **Awareness, Information, and Guidance:** Before a centre formally enrols a potential learner, the possibility that they may be able to claim credit for some of their previous learning should be raised with them by centre staff. If the learner proves to be interested in this, they will need to know the process of claiming achievement through RPL **and** be made aware of the support and guidance available to them.

2) **Pre-Assessment:** Evidence must be gathered by the learner and information given to the centre staff member with responsibility for RPL. The learner will begin to collect evidence to hold against the requirements of the relevant unit(s) for which RPL is being claimed. **Staff should offer their support to the learner in this**, helping them to collate their evidence with the use of (for example) an assessment plan or tracking document. Those who assess RPL

should be qualified to one level higher than the level of the unit(s) for RPL is being sought. Evidence gathered must match the Learning Outcomes and their assessment criteria for the unit(s) being claimed and must be at the same or higher level and credit value as the EduQual unit.

3) **Assessment:** This stage also includes the documentation of evidence. This stage should be a structured process for gathering and analysing evidence, and for deciding whether or not a learner's prior experience matches current unit standards. During this stage the assessor may:

- o Review work experience records (as validated by managers, for example through detailed applicant references)

- o Review previous portfolios of evidence collated by the learner

- o Read essays and/or reports that have been validated as the user's own unaided work

Note: Evidence gathered should be referenced clearly on any tracking documentation and adequately signposted in order to facilitate internal assessment as well as internal/external verification.

4) **Claiming Certification:** Once internal and external quality assurance procedures have been completed, the learner must undertake the minimum number of additional assessments as set by EduQual. Certification claims can be made by the centre. Assessment and internal verification records, along with any additional RPL records completed, should be retained for the standard three-year period following certification. In addition, the assessor must ensure that all assessment criteria for each unit claimed under RPL have been fulfilled and should maintain the records of assessment in the usual way.

5) **Appeal:** If a learner wishes to appeal against a decision made about their assessment, they must follow the standard centre policy procedures, and then EduQual Appeals Policy procedures.

6   Learner Evidence Submission Requirements – the Portfolio

Generally, a learner intending to claim credit through RPL should aim to construct a **portfolio of evidence** which will be submitted to EduQual by the Centre. Typically, this may contain (not exhaustive):

- Authenticated copies of Qualification Certificates e.g. attested as authentic copies by a Senior Assessor at the centre

- The EduQual agreed and set assessments, as specific to the RPL learner(s)

- Assessor marking and feedback for the above

- A current CV or other document listing the learner's educational/vocational/employment records and achievements

- Signed statement of authenticity for all other relevant work/assessments (see the **Witness Testimony Form** at the end of this document)

- Mapping of the Learning Outcomes previously achieved by the student against the Learning Outcomes of the EduQual qualification

- Assessment and Internal Verification Records

While documentation may be presented in a portfolio, the production of physical evidence for products and objects that the learner has created may not always be practicable. In this case, authenticated photographic evidence which can be assembled within the portfolio will generally suffice provided that it also satisfies the assessor and assessment criteria for which RPL is being claimed. **Such work will be accompanied by a signed Statement of Authenticity**.

6.1   Additional Evidence

If the evidence presented in support of a claim for RPL is convincing, it may be deemed sufficient for the purposes of certification. However, if the evidence is less convincing (though still substantial), the assessor may decide to further prove the learner's RPL claim by:

- Setting an oral assessment for the learner

- Setting a written assessment for the learner

- Asking the learner to carry out a demonstration

- Any combination of the above

6.2   Additional Learning

If only part of a unit's assessment requirements have been met once evidence has been collated and analysed, centres should arrange for additional learning and assessment as appropriate to the learner in order to cover the outstanding (i.e. missing, incomplete, or invalid) evidence. This additional learning might be facilitated through individual tutorials and/or assignments, seminar instruction, open learning, or through a learning contract.

6.3   Internal Verification

EduQual's qualifications are internally assessed, and EduQual-approved centres are required to maintain processes for internal verification of all assessments including those delivered through RPL. This ensures that centre assessors' decisions are consistent in the   interpretation and application of assessment criteria. For some qualifications, the internal verification process is designed by the centre and is part of that centre's own quality assurance systems. **Centres must treat RPL evidence as they would any other kind of traditional evidence**, ensuring that RPL evidence is internally assessed and internally verified. Evidence that has not been subject to internal verification should not be presented to EduQual for consideration of an award.

6.4   External Verification and Accreditation of RPL

Awards may only be made when relevant and appropriate evidence has been made available for the scrutiny of EduQual Examiners and or Verifiers. External quality assurance of RPL evidence will be undertaken in the same way as would apply to evidence from learners who have been through more traditional methods of study. That is to say the evidence presented will be matched to and considered against the Learning Outcomes of the unit(s) concerned. There is

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therefore no distinction between RPL evidence and traditional evidence submitted to EduQual in terms of the scrutiny to which it is subjected.

7   Witness Testimony Statement for RPL Evidence

The Witness Testimony Statement Form (overleaf) allows a witness to corroborate a learner's claim for RPL and to write down, briefly, his or her observations of the learner's prior (relevant) experience in the context of the unit(s) being claimed for RPL. **Witnesses must be academically and/or professionally qualified to make acceptable and authoritative comment on the evidence provided**.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Witness Testimony Form

Learner name

Assessor name

Witness name

Qualification / Unit title(s) being assessed for RPL

Section 1 (to be completed by the Learner)

Achievements to be recognised through RPL

Learner signature

Date (DD/MM/YYYY)

Section 2 (to be completed by the Assessor)

Achievements to be mapped to the assessment requirement(s) of the unit being claimed for RPL

Assessor signature

Date (DD/MM/YYYY)

Section 3 (to be completed by the Witness)

Details of testimony

I hereby declare that the learner's evidence is accurate and authentic.

Witness signature

Date (DD/MM/YYYY)

Relationship of Witness to Learner   **If 'other', please specify**