

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy and Procedure

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1. Scope and Purpose of the Policy

Scope

Introduction and background

This policy applies to all students undertaking a further education course with Blackpool Skills Academy.

This document applies to all qualifications on credit-based frameworks. These include the National Qualification Framework (NQF), the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW).

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide support, clarification and guidance to all stakeholders on implementing the Blackpool Skills Academy's policies regarding the recognition of a students' previous work-related achievements and /or qualifications thereby nullifying the need to acquire knowledge and skills through a course of learning.

2. RPL Definition

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a form of assessment which makes use of evidence of a learner's **previous non - certificated achievements** to demonstrate competence or achievement within a unit or qualification.

Through the RPL process, evidence of a candidate's previous achievement (learning) is assessed against the learning outcomes of a unit.

The Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCFW) gives the following definition of RPL, and this definition is fully supported by the QCFW:

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a method of assessment (leading to the award of credit) that considers whether students can demonstrate that they can meet the assessment requirements for a unit through knowledge, understanding or skills they already possess and so not need to develop through a course of learning.

3. RPL application

The RPL process is relevant where an individual has evidence of having previously learnt something but has never received formal recognition for it through a qualification or other form of certification.

Evidence can draw on any aspect of a candidate's prior experience including:

- Domestic and family life
- Education and training
- Work activities
- Community or voluntary activities.

4. Pre-requisites of RPL assessment

RPL is one of many assessment methods appropriate to assessing work-based learning. Evidence obtained through RPL must therefore meet the same rigorous quality criteria that other assessment methods must conform to. It remains the role of assessors and quality assurance staff to ensure that evidence is:

Valid and Current:

Does the evidence genuinely demonstrate that the demands of the learning outcome have been met? For RPL, currency of evidence will be of particular concern. Does, for example, the evidence meet up-to-date demands or is it representative of practice that has significantly changed?

Authentic:

This involves consideration of whether the evidence being examined is genuinely the work of the learner. For example, the evidence may have been produced by somebody else, or may be the result of the work of a team. In the latter case, this would be acceptable if the learning outcome was related to team / joint working, but not if it was being used as evidence of an activity which should have been carried out individually.

Sufficient:

There must be enough evidence to fully meet the requirements of the learning outcome, or learning outcomes being considered. If there is insufficient evidence to fully meet requirements, then evidence obtained through RPL must be complemented by evidence gained through other suitable assessment method(s) before requirements can be said to have been met.

Reliable:

The evidence obtained through RPL should be such that an assessor would arrive at the same assessment decision, were the assessment to be repeated.

5. RPL practice

If individuals can produce relevant evidence that meets learning outcome requirements, then, recognition can be given for their existing knowledge, understanding or skills.

If an individual can meet all the learning outcomes and assessment criteria in a unit, then they can claim credit for that unit solely based on their RPL achievement.

If however, evidence from RPL is 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 employed to generate the sufficient evidence required to make a safe assessment decision.

This is recognised as good practice by all the concerned regulators and Ofqual has recently issued a statement reinforcing this:

Students are unlikely to have all the evidence they need to achieve a full unit and may need to produce additional evidence. Evidence used for RPL is not time-limited, but assessors must determine whether it is valid and authentic. RPL may be used in conjunction with other assessment methods such as examination of recent products, professional discussion or observation to assess current performance.

Since evidence from RPL is similar to that derived via any other acceptable assessment method, where the standard of a unit is met by evidence obtained from, or partly from RPL, credit can be claimed.

6. RPL procedure

To undertake RPL the following applies:

Student Responsibilities

- The student must supply evidence of prior learning for RPL assessment to be undertaken.
- The student must provide evidence to show that requirements of the unit, module or part of a unit, or module have been covered.
- The student must consult with the agreed subject specialist in the preparation of his or her evidence.
- Students applying for credit must agree to an action plan to enable him/her to obtain the award they are aiming for.
- Students must agree to attend any further oral assessments or appropriate assessments if initial evidence is deemed to be unsatisfactory for the RPL assessor.

Student Entitlement

- All students shall be entitled to apply for RPL providing they meet the specific requirements of the validating or awarding body governing the qualification for which they are studying.
- A student who makes an initial enquiry about RPL should be given timely and appropriate guidance and support on the rules, regulations and processes involved in accreditation.
- A student may appeal against the credit points awarded but only on the grounds of non-observance of agreed procedures and/or improper application of those procedures.

Staff responsibilities

- Ensure that the student claiming credit is enrolled with the BSA for a specific award/qualification.
- Ensure that RPL is carried out by designated staff with relevant levels of expertise to meet the requirements of the assessment strategy/guidance for the qualification concerned.

The methods of assessment used will be determined by the assessment strategy for the qualification being assessed but might, for example, include:

- Examination of documents
- Witness testimony
- Reflective accounts
- Professional discussion
- Observation

The RPL assessment should be carried out as an entire process. This means that the assessor should:

- Plan with the student
- Make a formal assessment decision
- Feedback assessment decisions to the student, confirming decisions and giving guidance on the available options (particularly in situations where the decision has been not to award credit.)
- Maintain appropriate records
- Ensure that student is aware of their right to access the appeals process should they feel the assessment decision was unfair
- Notify the Achievements Officer of any student claiming credits by RPL or using units gained from one qualification towards the next level of achievement.

The assessor must ensure that all learning outcomes and assessment criteria being

claimed are covered and that records of assessment are maintained in the usual way. The process must be subject to the same quality assurance requirements as any other assessment method.

Management responsibilities

BSA management should ensure that:

- All BSA staff are fully conversant with this policy and the demands it places on them
- All appropriate staff are competent to undertake their roles and responsibilities in the procedures for verification and recognition of prior learning.
- Staff development is made available to those staff not conversant with or competent to undertake the procedures for RPL.

7. RPL exemptions

The Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) describes an exemption as:

The facility for a student to claim exemption from some of the achievement requirements of a QCF qualification using evidence of certificated, non QCF achievement deemed to be of equivalent value.

This means that certificated qualifications that were obtained outside of the QCF can be used as evidence for part or all a qualification.

The assessor must make sure that the components of the certificated qualification are sufficient to cover the requirements of all the learning outcomes, unit or units that it is being examined against.

Exemptions allow the recognition of qualifications (i.e. formally recognised achievements) obtained outside of the QCF; however, unlike RPL, they do not attract credits.

Note that in certain circumstances, exemption from unit assessment may also apply where a student can provide evidence of having achieved a unit forming part of an earlier QCF version of the same qualification. As the QCF is still relatively new, these types of exemptions are likely to have been infrequent; however, the frequency of their occurrence will probably increase over time.

Since individual QCF units may or may not be substantially changed after a qualification review, exemptions may or may not be granted depending on the degree of change to the unit. The fact that a unit title may have stayed the same in a new version of a qualification does not mean that the learning outcomes in that qualification have stayed the same.

Exemptions do not attract credit, as the skills knowledge and / or competences

described in the unit will have already been recognised in the credit system.

8. RPL terms

Equivalent Units

Equivalent units are different QCF units which, when compared, are judged to be equal to or greater than the content of another. An equivalent unit needs to be of the same credit value or higher and the same level or higher.

Equivalent units will look different but in short, the content will be deemed to be identical or beyond and above the content required.

If a learner has achieved a QCF unit (either singly or as part of a wider qualification) and this unit is judged to be equal to or greater than the content of a unit in a qualification they want to progress. The unit that they want to progress can be claimed based on having an equivalent unit.

Use of an equivalent unit will not attract additional credit, as the skills knowledge and / or competences described in the unit will have already been recognised in the credit system.

Credit Accumulation and Transfer & Credit Transfer

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSiS) provide the following definitions:

Credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) is the system by which students can accumulate and transfer credits over a period of time, in differing locations and contexts, in order to gain qualifications.

Credit transfer is the process of using credit(s) awarded in the context of one qualification or awarded by a different awarding organisation towards the achievement requirements of another qualification²

CAT is therefore the term used to describe the system which supports credit transfer. Credit transfer gives recognition to the fact that some units are the same, irrespective of the fact that they appear in different qualifications. This recognition promotes progression within and between industries and avoids unnecessary duplication of learning.

Credit transfer is relevant where a unit in a qualification is the same as a unit in another qualification.

A practical example of credit transfer would be a learner who achieves an award which consists of units 'A, B & C' transferring their credits to progress towards a certificate comprising 'A, B, C, D and E'. In this case the units in the award have been nested in the certificate enabling the recognition of the previously achieved units.

If on the other hand a learner registered for the Certificate containing units 'A, B, C, D and E' without having done the award, but then withdrew from their programme of learning after completing only 'A, B & C', they could transfer their credits and consequently obtain the Award.

Shared Units

Most units in the QCF are 'shared' units. This means that the unit title and reference number is available on the QCF framework for use by another Awarding Organisation.

Shared units encourage progression and promote 'credit transfer' discussed above. It should be noted that the assessment requirements for the same shared unit may be different in different qualifications. This is because within the QCF assessment requirements are set by the individual Awarding Organisations, in relation to the Assessment Strategy provided for individual qualifications.

Units in the QCF can also be 'restricted' units, which mean that they are not available for by other Awarding Organisations. Restricted units do not encourage credit transfer and are less common, but in some cases, they are required because of specific circumstances associated with their development.

9. Accountability, Monitoring & Evaluation

- The Senior Management Team will monitor the operation of the policy to ensure it reflects current strategic aims, every 2 years.
- The policy will be updated as required and monitored by the BSA management team
- Internal Quality Assurers (IQA) are responsible for ensuring that the relevant points of the IQA procedure are carried out effectively by appropriate team members.
- RPL procedures will be informed by student feedback, including questionnaire responses regarding advice and help received in preparing to claim RPL. Staff feedback on the quality of support provided by BSA to enhance skills and competence to undertake the procedures for RPL and External Quality Assurance (EQA) comments on the rigour and consistency applied to RPL procedures.

10. Student Involvement

There will be opportunities for students to feedback regarding the quality of the assessment processes. The student voice contributions will come through, Team Meetings, Quality Review Points and Student Focus Groups.

11. Linked Procedures

- Internal Quality Assurance Procedure
- Appeals Against Assessment Decisions Procedure

12. Equality Impact Assessment

Impact Assessment for the 4 strands of Equality, Safeguarding, Health and safety and Sustainability

Initial Form to be completed with Risk Assessments or as part of a proposal or change to a policy, plan or new way of working

Title of Activity: Author and Date: Dionne McCann Nov 2020	☐ New or ☒ Revision (Tick as appropriate) Expected Implementation Date: Nov 20 What is the Review Date: Every 2 Years
Equality and Diversity. Which of the characteristics may be impacted upon? And, if yes, how has this been considered? What are the risks? What are the benefits?	None, no impact
Safeguarding: Are there any aspects of this proposal which could cause a Student/member of staff/visitor to feel unsafe? If yes, how has this been considered? What are the risks? What are the benefits	☐ Yes ☒ No
Health and Safety: Have any risks been identified? If yes, how has this been considered? What are the risks? What are the benefits?	☐ Yes ☒ No
Sustainability: Are there expected benefits or impacts on sustainability issues? If yes, how have these been considered?	☐ Yes ☒ No
Evidence: What evidence do you have for your conclusions and expectations for these conclusions? How will this impact be monitored for all these considerations?	Quality is monitored through both internal and external reviews
Is this policy of a high/medium or low risk? :	☐ High ☐ Medium ☒ Low