

# Recognition of Prior Learning Policy and Process

For internal and external use

September 2014

Version 2.1

Quality, Standards and Research

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### **Recognition of Prior Learning Policy and Process**

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The key role of Pearson Education Ltd (Pearson) is to secure standards for those qualifications we certificate. As part of our commitment to quality assuring standards and therefore protecting learners, Pearson provides guidance and support to help centres and their learners achieve their learning and development goals. Pearson also ensures that any regulatory requirements our regulators impose on us are met, and that we support centres to meet those requirements.

Pearson regulatory policies are integral to our approach and articulate in a consistent way how we meet our regulatory requirements. They are reviewed annually to ensure that they remain fit for purpose. These regulatory policies apply to Pearson business units where UK regulated qualifications are developed, implemented or delivered.

This policy provides guidance on Recognition of Prior Learning. This document replaces the previous *Recognition of Prior Learning policy and process*.

### **Scope of policy**

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This policy applies to all Pearson qualifications, including those on the National Qualification Framework (NQF), the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), Self Regulated Framework (SRF) and other national frameworks in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and self-regulated qualifications.

The use of Recognition of Prior Learning is not mandatory and centres can choose if they wish to implement it. Centres which wish to support it must have an internal policy on RPL and the appropriate resources to do so.

### **Policy statement**

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Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a *method of assessment* [leading to the award of credit] *that considers whether learners can demonstrate that they can meet 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*.<sup>1</sup>

Note: RPL should not be confused with exemption, unit equivalency or credit accumulation and transfer.<sup>2</sup> For further information about credit accumulation please see the Credit Accumulation and Transfer Policy available on our website.

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

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<sup>1</sup> Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (Ofqual/08/3726)

<sup>2</sup> Exemption - the facility for a learner to claim exemption from some of the achievement requirements of a qualification, using evidence of certificated achievement deemed to be of equivalent value.

Equivalent unit(s) - a unit/units from a different qualification or submitted by another recognised organisation that is/are deemed to be of equivalent value and so can count towards a qualification in place of designated mandatory or optional units from it.

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- valid<sup>3</sup>
- reliable.

Pearson 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**

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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).

These terms broadly describe the same process. Pearson uses the term Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

## **Amplification**

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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 Pearson qualification
- a unit or units recognised by a Pearson Certificate of Achievement of a full Pearson 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.

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.

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<sup>3</sup> This includes 'current'

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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 RPL 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.

The RPL process does **not** allow the recognition of any unit or qualification assessed by external assessment only. This is because such units are subject to specific evidence requirements.

Centres wishing to carry out RPL must ensure that:

- Learners are registered as soon as they formally start to gather evidence
- 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 confirmed
- There are designated personnel with the appropriate expertise to support and assure the RPL process.

## **The RPL process**

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

### **Stage 1 – Awareness, information and guidance**

Ahead of enrolling a potential learner, the possibility that they may be able to claim credit for some of their previous learning 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

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- Timelines, appeals processes and any fees involved

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

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

## **Stage 4 – Claiming certification**

Once the internal and external quality assurance procedures have been successfully completed, 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.

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 – Appeal***

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 Pearson Enquiries and Appeals procedures.

## **Regulatory references**

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Ofqual and SQA require all awarding organisations to establish and maintain their compliance with regulatory conditions and criteria. As part of this process, policies that relate to Pearson's status as an awarding organisation will reference the particular conditions and criteria that they address.

This policy addresses the following regulatory criteria and conditions:

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Ofqual General Conditions of Recognition
Condition H5.1: Results for a qualification must be based on sufficient evidence
SQA Accreditation Regulatory Principles (2014)
<p>Principle 10</p> <p>The awarding body shall ensure that it has the necessary arrangements and resources for the effective delivery, assessment and quality assurance of SQA accredited qualifications</p>
Regulatory Arrangements for Qualifications and Credit Framework
<p>Section 5. Requirements for awarding organisations:</p> <p>Delivery of Assessment</p> <p>5.6h – the awarding organisation must have in place the necessary systems and procedures and resources to ensure achievement is recognised through the recognition of prior learning (RPL) where this is appropriate.</p> <p>Centre recognition</p> <p>5.11g – the awarding organisation must have procedures in place to recognise, and monitor on an ongoing basis, centres to offer assessment leading to awards within the QCF. These procedures must ensure that each centre, where appropriate, has in place arrangements that allow for recognition of prior learning (RPL).</p>

## Policy review date

September 2015

## Useful contacts

For more information on Pearson qualifications and services please visit the website: [qualifications.pearson.com](http://qualifications.pearson.com)

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