

Recognition of Prior Learning

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This policy has been reviewed in line with the Equality Act 2010 which recognises the following categories of individual as Protected Characteristics: Age, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion and Belief, Sex (gender), Sexual orientation and Disability. We will continue to monitor this policy and to ensure that it has equal access and does not discriminate against anyone, especially any person/s listed under any protected characteristic.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 As part of our commitment to quality assurance, The Bedford College Group seeks to provide learners with guidance and support to help them achieve their learning and development goals while meeting any regulatory requirements. Our policies are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they remain fit for purpose.
- 1.2 This policy is about prior learning and recommends ways a learner can meet any requirements while avoiding repetition of learning and assessment.
- 1.3 Please note that this guidance does not substitute the Awarding Organisations own procedures and where conflict occurs the specific Awarding Organisational guidance must be followed.

2. Qualifications in scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to all provided qualifications, including those on the National Qualification Framework (NQF) and the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). However, where learning is evidenced only through a national examination, the learner is required to sit this examination, e.g. General Qualifications such as GCSEs or GCE are not within the scope of this policy.
- 2.2 This policy applies to Apprenticeship Frameworks and the qualifications within these. This policy also includes Apprenticeship Standards (of which some do not require a qualification) and are initially assessed via a 'skills scan' to identify an apprentice's prior knowledge, skills and work experience.

3. Policy Statement

- 3.1 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 so not need to develop through a course of learning.*

Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework (Ofqual /08/3726)

- 3.2 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. Evidence of learning must be:

- Valid¹
- Reliable

¹ This includes 'current'

- 3.1 Bedford College encourages the use of RPL where it is of value to Bedford College and its learners in facilitating assessment. If RPL is used it must follow these principles and keep appropriate records.
- 3.4 Where RPL is applied for an Apprenticeship Standard, this will take place during the sign up process and as a direct result of a skills scan being completed. This process will be used to inform any delivery adjustments required to the programme content (as per agreed with the employer and recorded in the training plan) and may reduce the overall cost of the apprenticeship.

4. Terminology

- 4.1 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)
- 4.2 These terms broadly describe the same process; Bedford College uses the term Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in connection with the QCF.

5. Principles of RPL²

5.1 Principle 1

RPL is a valid method of enabling individuals to claim credit for units, irrespective of how their learning took place. There is no difference between the achievement of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of a unit through prior learning or through a formal programme of study.

5.2 Principle 2

RPL policies, processes, procedures, practices and decisions should be transparent, rigorous, reliable, fair and accessible to individuals and stakeholders to ensure that users can be confident of the decisions and outcomes of RPL.

5.3 Principle 3

RPL is a learner-centred, voluntary³ process. The individual should be offered advice on the nature and range of evidence considered appropriate, to support a claim for credit through RPL, and be given guidance and support to make a claim.

² These principles have been developed specifically for the QCF, but are valid for dealing with prior learning for all qualifications

³ For the learner

5.4 **Principle 4**

The process of assessment for RPL is subject to the same quality assurance and monitoring standards as any other form of assessment. The award of credit through RPL will not be distinguished from any other credits awarded.

5.5 **Principle 5**

Assessment methods for RPL must be of equal rigour to other assessment methods, be fit for purpose and relate to the evidence of learning. Credit may be claimed for any unit through RPL unless the assessment requirements of the unit do not allow this, based on a rationale consistent with the aims and regulations of the framework.

5.6 RPL is also of value to learners transferring across various learning programmes who have relevant learning but do not hold relevant credits or certificates. This may include learners transferring from NQF to QCF specifications.

6. Amplification

6.1 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.

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

6.3 If a learner has certificated learning, then they should apply for exemption, not RPL.

6.4 Exemption is 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 (see Centre Management Handbook for more information).

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

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

6.6 Where units are assessed against assessment criteria or grading criteria, then all evidence must be evaluated using the stipulated criteria. 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.

- 6.7 Most often RPL will be used for units. It is acceptable to claim for an entire qualification through RPL although this is not the norm. However, 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.
- 6.8 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.
- 6.9 If the currency of any evidence is in doubt, the assessor may use questions to check understanding, and for competence. Note also that the assessment strategy for each qualification must be adhered to.
- 6.10 The RPL process is **not** concerned with allowing for exceptional entry to, or exemption from, a programme of study.
- 6.11 The RPL process does **not** allow the recognition of any unit assessed by external assessment only because such units are subject to specific evidence requirements.
- 6.12 Areas wishing to carry out RPL must ensure that:
- Learners are registered as soon as they formally start to gather evidence
 - Records of assessment are maintained, as for any other unit/qualification
 - Certification and 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.