Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy and Procedure

Purpose

This Policy and Procedure sets out Gateway Qualifications' approach to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) of its qualifications.

The purpose of this Policy is to provide support, clarification and guidance on the Gateway Qualifications approach to the recognition of prior learning.

Recognition of Prior Learning provides learners and Gateway Qualifications' Recognised Centres ("Centres") with an alternative assessment method by which a learner's previous achievements can contribute towards meeting the assessment requirements for a unit/qualification through the knowledge, understanding or skills that they already possess and so, do not need to develop these through a course of learning.

It enables the recognition of achievement from a range of activities using any valid assessment methodology. Providing that the assessment requirements of a given unit or qualification are met, the use of RPL is acceptable to contribute to a unit, units or a whole qualification where RPL is permitted.

This Policy provides all Gateway Qualifications' stakeholders information and guidance on implementing a fair and consistent approach to the Recognition of Prior Learning.

Scope

This Policy applies to all Centres offering Gateway Qualifications' qualifications, including those regulated by Ofqual and Qualifications Wales. This Policy does not apply to Access to HE Diplomas or apprenticeship assessment.

Not all qualifications permit Recognition of Prior Learning. Where the use of Recognition of Prior Learning is permitted, this will be stated within the published Qualification Specification.

This Policy does not apply to the bespoke accreditation services, including Quality Mark courses and Tailored Qualifications.

The use of Recognition of Prior Learning is not mandatory. However, if Centres choose to adopt RPL, they must have an internal policy on Recognition of Prior Learning.

Prior Learning includes both certificated learning attained through a Gateway Qualifications' regulated qualification and other experiential/certificated learning. The approach taken to Recognition of Prior Learning requires the same level of quality assurance as applied to any other approach to assessment.

Audience

This Policy is intended for the following audience:

- Recognised Centres ("Centres") in relation to the offer of qualifications with exception of Apprenticeship assessment – including all Centre staff, associates, freelance staff and contractors
- Gateway Qualifications' staff
- Gateway Qualifications' wider workforce – including consultants, qualification developers, assessment.

Definitions

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

According to Ofqual:

> (a) The identification by an awarding organisation of any learning undertaken, and/or attainment, by a learner –
>
> i. prior to that learner taking a qualification which the awarding organisation makes available or proposes to make available, and
> ii. which is relevant to the knowledge, skills and understanding which will be assessed as part of that qualification, and
>
> (b) The recognition by an awarding organisation of that learning and/or attainment through amendment to the requirements which a learner must have satisfied before the learner will be assessed or that qualification will be awarded.[1]

According to Qualification Wales

> "Describes a process where evidence of a learner's previous learning and/or achievement is assessed and can be used to exempt the learner from all or part of a qualification. The learner needs to show that through knowledge, understanding or skills they already have, they do not need to repeat the course or complete extra assessment activity. An assessor will review whether the evidence is enough to show that a learner has met the assessment requirements for a current qualification or part of a qualification[2].

Responsibilities

Centre/Provider Responsibilities

Gateway Qualifications' Centres are required to have a Recognition of Prior Learning Policy and procedure that is kept up to date. Centre's must ensure that when considering the use RPL, the centre will adhere to the principles set out in this Policy.

Centres should contact Gateway Qualifications before using RPL as an alternative assessment method.

[1] Definition source: Ofqual Handbook: General Conditions of Recognition - Section J
[2] Definition source: Recognition of Prior Learning | Qualifications Wales

Gateway Qualifications Responsibilities

Gateway Qualifications is responsible for periodically reviewing a qualification's eligibility and suitability in offering RPL.

Gateway Qualifications is further responsible for ensuring that evidence provided by the centres is appropriate and permissible prior to RPL being approved.

Related Policies and Documents

This Policy should be read alongside:

- Appeals Policy and Procedure
- Centre Agreement Terms and Conditions
- Centre Recognition Policy
- Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration – Centre Guidance

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Statement

Throughout the development of the policies and processes cited in this document, we have given due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity, and to foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic (as cited under the Equality Act 2010) and those who do not share it.

Recognition of Prior Learning principles

1. The Regulators' definition of RPL is the adopted definition for Gateway Qualifications.

2. Gateway Qualifications does not permit RPL to be used for all qualifications. The following are examples where RPL is not permitted, the list is not exhaustive:

    - licence to practice qualifications
    - qualifications with specific health and safety requirements
    - qualifications with work experience requirements.

3. The applicability as to whether RPL can be applied is established as part of the qualification development process and may be revised as part of the qualification review process.

4. The RPL rules are set for individual qualifications and detailed in the associated published qualification specification.

5. RPL can be used to claim full (not partial) units within qualifications.

6. RPL as an assessment method should follow the assessment principles of:

    - Validity
    - Authenticity
    - Sufficiency

- Reliability
- Currency
- Fairness.

7. Evidence must be provided by learners to meet the assessment criteria of a unit/ qualification.

8. Evidence provided by the learner must be achieved within the last five years unless the qualification specification states a different timescale.

9. The process must be negotiated by the learner with the Centre. The Centre is responsible for assessment and claiming achievement. There is no difference between achievement of the required standards by Recognition of Prior Learning and achievement through a formal programme of study.

10. Centres must follow the Gateway Qualifications' RPL process.

11. RPL is subject to external quality assurance monitoring.

If further clarification is required about the units and qualifications that are eligible for Recognition of Prior Learning please contact Gateway Qualifications.

Recognising Prior Learning procedure

Centre preparation

Centre staff should check the published qualification specification to establish if RPL is permitted or not.

RPL not permitted

Where RPL is not permitted learners must satisfy the full qualification requirements through the course/programme they are undertaking.

RPL permitted

Where RPL is permitted the RPL process set out in this Policy must be followed.

Where qualifications have previously been achieved as part of a Gateway Qualifications' qualification suite, RPL will automatically be applied without a formal application process.

For qualifications with shared units within a nested suite, e.g. qualifications at the same level and subject available as Awards, Certificates, Extended Certificates and Diplomas, learners should be registered on the appropriate qualification. Where a learner progresses from the smaller qualification to a larger qualification previously achieved (shared) units can be used to meet the rules of combination of the larger qualification. Centres delivering qualifications in this way are advised to contact our Customer Excellence Team via email registrations@gatewayqualifications.org.uk who will ensure appropriate awarding takes place.

For all other situations, whether prior learning has been achieved through Gateway Qualifications, awarded by another awarding organisation or through experiential learning then the process below must be followed.

Stage 1: Awareness, information, advice and guidance

During enrolment, the Recognition of Prior Learning process should be discussed. In particular, learners will need to know:

- whether the qualification they are registered on permits RPL
- the process of claiming achievement through Recognition of Prior Learning
- the sources of professional support and guidance available to individuals and employers
- the administrative processes for Recognition of Prior Learning applications
- timelines, appeals processes and any fees and subsidies

Stage 2: Pre-assessment, gathering evidence and giving information

During this stage prior learning evidence is collated and the Centre will need to map it across to the relevant component/s(unit/s)/qualification content. An assessment plan or tracking document should be useful to aid this process.

Stage 3: Assessment

Assessment as part of Recognition of Prior Learning is a structured process for gathering and reviewing evidence and making judgments about a learner's prior learning and experience in relation to the component(unit) standards.

All assessment principles must be applied to ensure the integrity of units and qualifications. The evidence gathered needs to meet the standards of the component/s(units) and qualification assessment requirements being applied for RPL and show appropriate evidence of current knowledge, understanding and skills. Evidence may include:

- qualification certificates/unit/component transcripts
- work experience records, validated by managers
- past portfolios of evidence or essays made by the learner
- reports validated as being the learner's own unaided work
- witness testimonies/professional discussions
- new assignments or tasks that have been created to fill any gaps in the learner's work.

The tutor/assessor must be satisfied that the evidence from the learner meets the standard for all of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria. If any gaps are identified then the learner may be set alternative assessments or undertake the normal assessments in order to be awarded the qualification but may do so without attending teaching sessions.

Stage 4: Applying for RPL

Centres should contact Gateway Qualifications before using RPL as an alternative assessment method.

Centres will be required to complete an online RPL form and provide the supporting evidence.

Stage 5: Awarding achievement

All work submitted for RPL must be referenced clearly for Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) and External Quality Assurance (EQA).

The assessment process for RPL will be subject to the same quality assurance processes as any other part of the assessment process. If it is identified that there is insufficient evidence, either more evidence will be requested or the learner must complete the normal assessment requirements.

Centres must inform the relevant EQA, before any monitoring activity starts, if RPL has been applied for any particular components(units) or learners as they will include these in their sample. Where the Centre does not give prior notification that RPL has been used as an alternative then this will be investigated by the EQA and recorded in the EQA monitoring/sampling report and may result in an investigation for maladministration.

The Centre's processes in respect of Recognition of Prior Learning will be reviewed during the quality monitoring visit by the Centre's EQA, to ensure that the processes have been applied consistently and fairly and that any decisions made regarding the application for RPL have been carried out by staff who are competent to consider and make decisions about RPL. The outcome of the review and agreed actions (where appropriate) will be recorded in the external quality assurance report.

On completion of the IQA and EQA procedures, the Centre can claim certificates following the usual process.

RPL and externally marked components(units)/qualifications

Where RPL is being sought for a component/s(unit/s) within a qualification that is externally marked and awarded by Gateway Qualifications and the learner has evidence of prior achievement then Stages 1 - 4 should be followed. Once the Centre is satisfied that sufficient documentary evidence has been provided then the Centre will need to register the learner on the qualification and submit the completed online RPL form to Gateway Qualifications.

The RPL form and supporting documentation will be reviewed by the Quality Assurance team and the outcome of the review will be communicated to the Centre within 5 working days from the receipt of a fully completed application.

Stage 6: Appeal

On the basis that the application of RPL is not granted as an alternative method of assessment for a qualification or units thereof, learners should appeal to the Centre first and then, if not satisfied, to Gateway Qualifications.

Record-keeping

Centres are required to keep records of Recognition of Prior Learning for three years after certification. This includes details of which learners, units, assessment evidence and evidence of the RPL process for the particular claim.

Review arrangements and monitoring

Gateway Qualifications will periodically review this Policy and the associated procedures and revise as necessary. As part of the review consideration will be given to feedback received and regulatory/legislative requirements.

If you would like to feedback on any views on this Policy, please contact us via the details provided at the end of this document.

Gateway Qualifications' Quality and Standards Committee is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the application of this Policy. An annual summary is provided to the Board of Trustees for monitoring and ratification.

Legal and 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 Gateway Qualifications' status as an awarding organisation will reference any conditions and criteria that they address.

This Policy addresses the following legislation and/or regulatory requirements:

Regulator or Relevant Governing Body	Reference Details	Legislation/Regulatory Reference
Ofqual	General Conditions of Recognition	Condition No: E10 Recognition of Prior Learning
Qualification Wales	Standard Conditions of Recognition	Condition No: E10 Recognition of Prior Learning

Contact us

If you have any queries about the contents of the policy, please contact:

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Document Controls

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Version	5.8
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Revision History

Revision Date	Version	Updated By	Summary of Changes
August 2026	5.8	Quality Improvement Administrator	Updated to latest policy template.
June 2026	5.7	Director of Awarding	Typographic error – version number corrected.

June 2026	5.6	Director of Awarding	Typographic error – version number corrected on footer first page.
May 2026	5.5	Director of Awarding	Update to remove references relating to End-point Assessment with Apprenticeship Assessment as applicable.
February 2026	5.4	Director of Awarding	Scope revised to include the position that Recognition of Prior Learning does not apply for bespoke accreditation services, i.e. Tailored Qualifications and Quality Mark.
June 2025	5.3	Quality Improvement Administrator	Document name font in Document Controls changed to correct size.
June 2025	5.2	Head of Product	Policy transferred to new policy document template. Clarification regarding responsibilities and process to be followed.

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