



BLACKBURN GOULD  
& ASSOCIATES

# **RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING POLICY AND PROCEDURE**



## RPL Policy

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a method of assessing and validating learning, achievement or credit which considers whether a learner can demonstrate that they can meet the assessment requirements for a unit through knowledge, understanding or skills they already possess, and therefore do not need to develop these through a course of learning.

RPL enables recognition of achievement from a range of activities using any valid assessment methodology. Provided that the assessment requirements of a given unit or qualification have been met, the use of RPL is acceptable for recognising the achievement a unit, units, or a whole qualification. Evidence of learning must be valid, reliable, safe and fair.

RPL enables Blackburn Gould and Associates to recognise learner achievement from a range of activities that use any appropriate assessment methodology. It allows for learners that have undertaken formal learning and for those without learning experiences to progress.

The use and application of RPL is of significant 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 may be claimed against one or more units or, more rarely, against an entire qualification. 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 requirement.

Blackburn Gould and Associates offers RPL to learners with the appropriate level of resources to implement and maintain it in line with the accrediting body's requirements. The process considers whether a learner possesses, through existing experience and skills, the evidence of knowledge and understanding necessary to achieve stated assessment criteria and/or learning outcomes and to support a claim for RPL.

### Principle 1

RPL is a valid method of enabling individuals to claim achievement for units and qualifications, irrespective of how the learning took place and the assessments undertaken. There is no difference between the required standards through prior learning and through fresh learning and assessment.

### Principle 2

RPL must comply with all regulatory requirements for assessment. RPL policies and procedures 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.



### **Principle 3**

RPL is a learner-centred, voluntary process. The individual is offered advice on the nature and range of evidence considered appropriate to support a claim for assessing RPL and be given guidance and support to make his or her claim.

### **Principle 4**

The process of RPL is subject to the same standard of quality assurance and monitoring processes as any other form of learning, and assessment.

### **Principle 5**

Assessment methods for RPL must be of equal rigour as other assessment methods, be fit for purpose and relate to the evidence of learning. An individual can claim RPL against any achievement unless the assessment criteria of the unit states otherwise. For example, if an external assessment sets the standard of the learning outcome that the learner must achieve, then the learner must pass the external assessment to achieve the unit and gain the credit.

## **THE 5 STAGES OF RPL**

### **Stage 1: Application**

A centre will make a quest on behalf of a learner through the Learning Record Service and review the request to ensure it meets any stated and acceptable opportunities agreed within the qualification specification and will give feedback on the outcome of the review to the centre (e.g., accepted or not) with a clear rationale for the decision. The decision will be given to the centre within 10 working days of receiving the request.

Requests for, and assessment of, RPL should be made as soon as possible through the Learning Record Service once the learner is registered on a qualification. They should not be left until delivery and assessment activities have come to an end, as this could seriously disadvantage the learner if their request is rejected.

When a learner expresses an interest in registering for a qualification, the possibility that they may be able to claim unit(s) for some of their previous learning and/or experience should be raised with them. If the offer of RPL interests the individual at this initial stage, they will need to know about:

- The process of claiming achievement through RPL
- The sources of professional support and guidance available to them
- The administrative processes for RPL applications
- Timelines, appeals processes, and any fees and/or subsidies available to support the process.



## Stage 2: Assembling an RPL claim

The starting point for any learner wishing to claim for RPL is to reflect on their experience to identify relevant achievement. They should think about evidence of knowledge and experience gained:

- At work
- In any relevant voluntary work and leisure activities
- In formal or formal education and training – for example, adult education courses or in-company training
- From independent study
- From home-based activities, such as care of the young, the elderly or the sick, or involvement in the family business.

RPL learners will need to understand the relevant assessment requirements associated with the units they are claiming. Then they will be able to work towards assembling evidence to support these claims.

RPL learner activity. The learner will:	RPL Tutor/Assessor activity. The tutor/assessor will:
Reflect on relevant prior learning and achievement to identify evidence	Provide guidance to the learner
Establish an action and assessment plan	Identify and agree an action assessment plan with the RPL learner
Agree timescale and submission date with tutor/assessor	Provide guidance of timescale and submission date
Identify gaps in achievement	Map achievement and identify gaps
Provide evidence of achievement in a portfolio; for example, this may be paper-based, electronic, video/audio recorded evidence etc	Determine and set the standard

This stage should be undertaken at the earliest opportunity once a learner is registered on a qualification, in order that they will not be disadvantaged if their RPL claim is not awarded.

## Stage 3: Assessing an RPL claim

Assessment as part of RPL is a structured process for gathering and reviewing evidence and making judgments about an individual's prior learning and experience in relation to unit standards. Assessment must be valid and reliable to ensure the integrity of the award of unit(s), and the evidence gathered must meet the standards of the unit(s) that the evidence is being used for. The assessment process for RPL must be subject to the same quality-assurance procedures of the awarding organisation as any other assessment process.



Learners will need to provide evidence to show that they have covered the requirements of the units or modules. This will take the form of a portfolio, prepared by the learner, which sets out the qualification assessment requirements claimed, together with any supporting evidence. The learner should divide their portfolio into sections according to units or modules. The unit or module tracker (which also serves as the evidence tracking sheet) must be at the front of each section. The portfolio MUST be page numbered and cross-referenced to the unit or module descriptor, to make for straightforward assessment and quality assurance of portfolios.

Professional discussions or oral assessment can be used to contribute towards portfolio evidence. They must be documented and can be supported by audio/video recordings. Separate evidence is not required for each assessment criterion. Where possible, learners should be encouraged to present a small number of complex pieces of evidence that demonstrate the achievement of several unit or module assessment requirements.

Evidence submitted must fulfil the following criteria:

- Evidence must be authentic and prove conclusively that RPL is based on the learner's own work
- The evidence must meet the requirements of the current assessment criteria and must be appropriate to the content of the unit/qualification being considered for RPL.
- The evidence must be sufficient to conclusively prove consistency of learner performance in meeting the assessment criteria.

RPL learner activity. The learner will:	RPL Tutor/Assessor activity. The tutor/assessor will:
Review action and assessment plan	Assess the evidence and check its authenticity
Provide additional evidence if required	Provide the learner with timely feedback
Make a final submission	Arrange Internal Quality Assurance

This stage should be completed within 10 working days of the agreed date for submission of the RPL claim.

#### **Stage 4: Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) of an RPL claim**

Once the portfolios are complete and have been assessed by the RPL assessor, they must be passed on to the relevant Internal Quality Assurer (IQA) for the qualification at the centre. The role of the IQA is to ensure that the evidence provided meets the requirements and standards of the units or modules being claimed and is comparable with other claims for the qualification. If the IQA judges that the evidence is valid, and that the assessment decisions are accurate the IQA records their process using an IQA report and notifies the EQA. If the evidence or assessment decisions are not valid, the IQA will advise the tutor/assessor of what is missing or invalid and discuss what opportunities there may be for



the learner to collect and submit additional evidence to meet the requirements. It is the IQA's responsibility to contact the EQA (or Blackburn Gould and Associates if an EQA has not been allocated to the qualification at the centre) when the portfolio(s) are ready to be Externally Quality Assured and claimed.

RPL learner activity. The learner will:	Internal Quality Assurer Activity. The IQA will:
Receive feedback on the portfolio submitted	Ensure that the evidence is valid and has been correctly assessed
	Provide feedback to tutor/assessor in the form of an IQA report
	Arrange external quality assurance (EQA) of the RPL claim

This stage should be completed within 10 working days of receipt of the assessed portfolio by the IQA.

### Stage 5: External Quality Assurance (EQA) of an RPL claim

The IQA will notify the External Quality Assurer (EQA) of the RPL claim and make arrangements with them for monitoring and review of the process outlined above.

The EQA will request relevant evidence, including feedback to the learner and IQA report, and will judge if the claim meets the assessment requirements and conditions set out in the qualification specification.

The EQA will either release or withhold the claim in accordance with their judgement and will report to the IQA accordingly. They will do this within 10 working days of receiving all required evidence.

This process will apply even where a qualification is otherwise given direct claims status. A claim for certification that includes an element of RPL must always be referred to the EQA before the claim is made, or it risks being invalidated.

### Staff Guidance and Support

RPL learners will probably require considerable tutor/assessor encouragement and guidance in compiling their RPL evidence. Guiding RPL learners is a staff-intensive activity. While one-to-one contact is essential, there are advantages in holding workshops – both in economy of staff time and in helping to overcome any sense of isolation felt by the learners. Additional support with the RPL process may be provided by the centre or by Blackburn Gould and Associates.

Most learners will be unfamiliar with the process of putting together an RPL claim. It is important that learners receive adequate advice and guidance on how to proceed. This will involve:

- Encouraging reflection and self-evaluation
- Helping to identify possible sources of evidence
- Helping to identify possible evidence of achievement
- Advising on the structure and presentation of evidence



- Explaining assessment requirements

### **External Quality Assurance carried out by a Blackburn Gould and Associates Ltd appointed EQA**

A Blackburn Gould and Associates appointed EQA will fulfil the external quality assurance process appropriately for each qualification. There will be no distinction between RPL evidence and other forms of evidence submitted to meet the requirements of a qualification.

The evidence the learner provides is judged against the following key criteria:

**Validity:** Does the evidence match the competences that should be evident on successful achievement of the qualification? Are the skills, knowledge, understanding and expertise being demonstrated by the learner at the appropriate level?

**Sufficiency:** Is the amount of evidence sufficient? Does it cover all the aspects required?

**Authenticity:** This refers to the ownership of the evidence. Assessors need to be confident that the work submitted is directly attributable to the learner.

**Reliability:** Does the evidence accurately reflect a level of knowledge, understanding and/or performance that can be consistently demonstrated or produced?

**Currency:** Assessors must be sure that the evidence submitted by a learner is recent enough to be considered a measure of their current levels of knowledge, understanding and competence.

The learner will either be recommended for award of credit and certification or the portfolio with feedback will be returned to the RPL tutor/assessor and student with a request for further evidence and assessment.