

HiQual UK

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING POLICY

HQUK-POL-RPL-001

Document Control Item	Details
Organisation	HiQual UK
Policy Title	Recognition of Prior Learning Policy
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Policy Owner	Sarah Williams, Head of Quality Assurance
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Classification	Public Policy
Applies To	Learners, Approved Centres, assessors, internal quality assurers, tutors, qualification teams, quality assurance personnel and relevant governance committees

Recognising demonstrable prior learning without compromising qualification standards, assessment validity or learner fairness

1. Purpose

HiQual UK recognises that learners may acquire relevant knowledge, skills and understanding through previous education, training, employment, professional practice, community or voluntary activity, and other forms of learning. This policy establishes a transparent process through which relevant prior learning may be assessed and, where appropriate, recognised toward a HiQual UK qualification.

The policy is designed to ensure that recognition is based on evidence rather than assumption and that any qualification awarded remains a valid and reliable indication of the learner's required knowledge, skills and understanding.

2. Scope of Policy

This policy applies to HiQual UK qualifications where Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is permitted by the qualification specification, assessment strategy, regulatory requirements or other approved arrangements.

It applies to learners, Approved Centres, assessors, internal quality assurers, tutors, qualification and quality teams, and any other person involved in making, reviewing or quality assuring an RPL decision.

3. Regulatory and Quality Framework

For regulated qualifications in England, Ofqual General Condition E10 requires an awarding organisation to establish, maintain, publish and comply with a policy stating whether it recognises prior learning. Where RPL is permitted, the arrangements must enable qualifications to be awarded in compliance with the Conditions of Recognition. Ofqual's guidance identifies transparency, evidence requirements, decision criteria, process stages, possible outcomes, complaints, Centre roles and any applicable limits as important features of an RPL policy. [\[cite?turn0search2?turn0search4?\]](#)

HiQual UK will also ensure that RPL decisions support the wider assessment and qualification integrity requirements applicable to the qualification concerned.

4. Definition of Recognition of Prior Learning

Recognition of Prior Learning is the process of identifying learning or attainment achieved by a learner before undertaking the relevant HiQual UK qualification, determining whether that prior learning is relevant to the knowledge, skills and understanding to be assessed, and recognising it where the evidence demonstrates the required outcomes.

RPL is therefore an assessment process. It is not an automatic exemption based solely on a learner's experience, job title, length of employment or possession of an unrelated certificate.

5. Related Forms of Prior Learning

Prior learning may arise from:

- formal education and training;
- workplace or professional learning;
- non-formal learning;
- community or voluntary activity;
- independent or experiential learning;

- previous assessment or achievement; and
- prior certificated learning where the relevant requirements can be demonstrated.

HiQual UK may use terminology such as Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), Accreditation of Prior Achievement (APA), or Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning (RPCL) where appropriate, but the underlying requirement remains that the learner must demonstrate equivalence to the relevant qualification requirements.

6. Principles of RPL

RPL decisions will be:

- valid – evidence must demonstrate the required learning outcomes and assessment criteria;
- authentic – evidence must be attributable to the learner;
- sufficient – enough evidence must exist to support a secure decision;
- reliable – an appropriately competent assessor should be able to reach a consistent decision;
- current – evidence must remain relevant to the competence being assessed;
- fair and accessible – learners must have a reasonable opportunity to present relevant evidence;
- transparent – criteria, responsibilities and outcomes must be clear; and
- quality assured – RPL must be subject to appropriate assessment and internal/external quality assurance.

These principles reflect the evidence expectations set out in the supplied OTHM v2.0 reference policy and the current Ofqual approach to RPL. [?cite?turn1view0?turn0search2?](#)

7. When RPL May Be Appropriate

RPL may be appropriate where a learner can demonstrate that they already possess learning relevant to a unit or qualification requirement and can provide sufficient evidence to meet the approved assessment criteria.

The possibility of RPL should, where practical, be identified during initial assessment or learner onboarding. Learners should receive clear information about the potential benefits, limitations, evidence requirements and implications of making an RPL claim.

A learner must not assume that a unit or assessment can be skipped merely because an RPL claim has been submitted. Normal teaching and assessment arrangements should continue unless the RPL decision has been formally approved.

8. RPL and Assessment Requirements

RPL does not automatically remove any assessment requirement. Evidence must be assessed against the same approved learning outcomes and assessment criteria that would apply to the relevant unit.

Where the qualification requires a particular practical demonstration, examination, performance, controlled assessment or other essential assessment activity, HiQual UK will only permit RPL to replace that activity where the approved assessment strategy and regulatory requirements allow it and the required competence can be validly established.

9. Evidence for RPL

Evidence may include, where relevant:

- portfolios of work;
- previous assignments or projects;
- workplace records and authenticated work products;
- professional reports;
- certificates and transcripts;
- reflective accounts;
- witness or expert testimony;
- professional discussion;
- structured interviews;
- observation of current performance;
- examination or testing;
- evidence of completed training;
- employer or professional records; and
- other appropriate evidence identified in the qualification assessment strategy.

The type and amount of evidence required will depend on the learning outcomes, assessment criteria and nature of the claim.

10. Validity and Currency

Assessors must consider whether the evidence actually demonstrates the requirements being claimed. Currency is particularly important where knowledge, technology, legislation, professional practice or occupational standards may have changed.

Evidence does not become invalid merely because it is old; however, age may be relevant to whether the evidence continues to demonstrate current competence. Where currency cannot be established from existing evidence, HiQual UK or the Centre may require additional assessment such as observation, professional discussion or testing.

11. Authenticity

Evidence must genuinely belong to the learner. Where evidence arises from teamwork, the assessor must distinguish the learner's individual contribution from the team's collective output unless the assessment criterion specifically concerns collaborative performance.

HiQual UK may require authentication declarations, questioning, professional discussion, witness confirmation, document verification, system records or other appropriate checks.

12. Sufficiency

Evidence must be sufficient to cover all relevant learning outcomes and assessment criteria being claimed. Partial evidence may demonstrate some requirements but does not justify recognition of requirements that remain unproven.

Where evidence is incomplete, the learner may be asked to provide additional evidence or complete an appropriate assessment activity.

13. Reliability and Consistency

RPL decisions must be based on clear criteria and competent assessment. HiQual UK will use appropriate standardisation, moderation, sampling and quality assurance to promote consistent decisions across Centres, assessors and qualifications.

RPL must not become a lower standard of assessment than the normal assessment route.

14. Possible Outcomes

Following assessment, an RPL application may result in:

1. full recognition of the relevant unit or approved component where all requirements are demonstrated;
2. partial recognition where the qualification rules permit it and remaining requirements are completed through additional assessment;
3. no recognition where evidence does not demonstrate the required standard; or
4. a request for further evidence or assessment before a final decision is made.

Where RPL is successful, the learner's achievement must be recorded in accordance with HiQual UK's assessment and certification arrangements.

15. Limits on RPL

HiQual UK will specify any qualification-specific limits on RPL. RPL will not be used to bypass mandatory assessment, practical competence, statutory or regulatory requirements, or other conditions necessary to protect qualification validity.

Where a qualification has a prescribed minimum period, mandatory component, external assessment or other non-substitutable requirement, that requirement will continue to apply unless an approved rule expressly permits otherwise.

16. Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning (RPCL)

Where a learner has previously achieved a qualification, unit, credit or other formally assessed award, HiQual UK may consider whether that achievement is equivalent to the relevant HiQual UK requirements.

The Centre or HiQual UK must map the prior achievement against the current qualification's learning outcomes, level, content, credit or other relevant requirements and verify the authenticity of the original achievement. A copy of the certificate, transcript or other authoritative evidence should be retained as required.

Recognition will not be based solely on matching titles. The actual content, level, learning outcomes, assessment demands and currency must be considered.

17. Equivalence and Credit Transfer

RPL must be distinguished from other mechanisms such as credit transfer, equivalent units, exemptions, legacy arrangements or predecessor qualifications. Where another approved mechanism is more appropriate, HiQual UK will apply that mechanism rather than treating it as RPL.

The relevant qualification specification and approved rules will determine which mechanism is available.

18. RPL Application Process

The normal process will be:

1. learner is informed that RPL may be available;
2. learner discusses the potential claim with the Centre;
3. the Centre conducts an initial review of the proposed evidence;
4. the learner submits the RPL application and evidence;
5. a competent assessor maps and assesses the evidence against the relevant requirements;
6. additional evidence or assessment is requested where necessary;
7. the assessment decision is recorded;
8. internal quality assurance or moderation is completed where required;
9. HiQual UK approval is obtained where the qualification rules require central approval;
10. the learner is informed of the decision and next steps; and
11. achievement and supporting records are retained securely.

19. Responsibilities of the Learner

Learners are responsible for:

- providing accurate information and authentic evidence;
- identifying relevant prior learning;
- cooperating with verification and assessment activities;
- responding to requests for additional evidence;
- complying with assessment conditions; and
- using the appeals or complaints process where they believe an RPL decision was unfair.

20. Responsibilities of the Approved Centre

Approved Centres are responsible for:

- informing learners about RPL where applicable;
- maintaining an RPL procedure consistent with this policy;
- using competent assessors and quality assurance personnel;
- ensuring evidence is appropriately authenticated;
- conducting appropriate mapping and assessment;
- maintaining complete records;
- preventing inappropriate or unsupported RPL decisions;
- obtaining HiQual UK approval where required; and
- cooperating with monitoring, sampling and audit.

21. Responsibilities of Assessors

Assessors must:

- plan the RPL assessment with the learner;
- map evidence against the correct learning outcomes and assessment criteria;
- make objective assessment decisions;
- consider validity, authenticity, sufficiency, reliability and currency;
- identify gaps and request additional evidence where appropriate;
- provide clear feedback;

- maintain assessment records; and
- refer decisions for quality assurance or approval where required.

22. Responsibilities of Internal Quality Assurance

Internal quality assurance must ensure that RPL assessment is subject to the same appropriate quality controls as other assessment. This may include sampling, standardisation, review of assessment decisions, verification of evidence and checks on assessor competence.

23. HiQual UK Responsibilities

HiQual UK will:

- maintain and publish this policy;
- define qualification-specific RPL requirements;
- provide guidance to Centres and assessors;
- identify cases requiring central approval;
- monitor RPL activity and outcomes;
- review the consistency and integrity of RPL decisions;
- investigate concerns or suspected misuse;
- maintain appropriate regulatory evidence; and
- review this policy in response to regulatory or operational change.

24. Quality Assurance and Monitoring

RPL will be included within HiQual UK's quality assurance framework. Monitoring may include Centre sampling, assessment review, EQA activity, analysis of RPL volumes and outcomes, review of evidence quality, assessor standardisation and audit of records.

Where systematic weaknesses are identified, HiQual UK may require an action plan, additional sampling, assessor retraining, suspension of RPL activity or other proportionate controls.

25. Malpractice and Maladministration

False evidence, forged certificates, deliberate misrepresentation of prior learning, inappropriate coaching, fabricated witness testimony, unauthorised alteration of RPL records or deliberate circumvention of assessment requirements may constitute malpractice or maladministration.

Suspected concerns will be managed under the HiQual UK Malpractice and Maladministration Policy and may affect the learner's result, Centre approval or other relevant status.

26. Appeals and Complaints

Learners must have access to a fair route to challenge an RPL decision. Appeals will be considered under the HiQual UK Appeals Policy, while complaints about the service or process may be handled under the Complaints Policy.

Where an RPL decision is reviewed, the review should be undertaken by an appropriately independent and competent person who was not responsible for the original decision where practicable.

27. Conflicts of Interest

Any person involved in assessing or approving RPL must declare actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest. Where a conflict could affect impartiality, the matter must be reassigned or otherwise appropriately managed.

28. Equality, Accessibility and Learner Support

HiQual UK will operate RPL arrangements fairly and consistently and will consider reasonable adjustments where a learner has a disability or other qualifying need. Adjustments must support access to the RPL process without changing the competence or standard that must be demonstrated.

29. Data Protection and Confidentiality

RPL applications may contain personal, employment, educational and professional information. Such information must be handled in accordance with the HiQual UK Data Protection & UK GDPR Policy.

Only information necessary to assess, quality assure, approve, audit or regulate the RPL claim should be collected and shared. Records must be stored securely and retained for the applicable period.

30. Record Keeping

For each RPL claim, the Centre or HiQual UK must retain appropriate records, including the application, evidence, mapping, assessment decision, assessor identity, quality assurance records, approvals, learner notification and any appeal or review documentation.

Records must be sufficiently detailed to demonstrate how the decision was reached and to support audit or regulatory scrutiny.

31. Learner Information and Transparency

HiQual UK and its Approved Centres will provide learners with clear information about:

- whether RPL is available;
- which units or components may be considered;
- evidence requirements;
- assessment and decision stages;
- expected timelines;
- possible outcomes;
- any limits on RPL;
- applicable fees, where relevant;
- appeals and complaints; and
- the effect of an unsuccessful claim on the learner's normal study and assessment route.

32. RPL Timelines

Centres should acknowledge an RPL request promptly and provide the learner with an expected timetable. As an internal target, an initial review should normally be completed within 10 working days of receiving a

sufficiently complete application, with a final decision normally targeted within 20 working days after all required evidence is available.

Complex cases, requests for additional evidence, external verification or central approval may require longer. Learners should be informed of material delays.

33. Fees

Where HiQual UK or an Approved Centre charges an RPL assessment fee, the fee structure must be communicated clearly before the learner commits to the process. Fees should reflect the assessment and quality assurance activity involved and must not discourage eligible learners from accessing the process unfairly.

34. Review and Continuous Improvement

This policy will be reviewed at least annually and earlier where regulatory requirements, qualification rules, audit findings, learner feedback or operational experience indicate a need for change. Ofqual guidance states that an RPL policy should be regularly reviewed and amended where appropriate. [?cite?turn0search2?](#)

35. Related Policies and Procedures

This policy should be read alongside:

- Academic Governance Policy;
- Assessment and Assessment Integrity Policy;
- Quality Assurance Policy;
- Qualification Development, Approval & Review Policy;
- Malpractice and Maladministration Policy;
- Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration Policy;
- Appeals Policy;
- Complaints Policy;
- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy;
- Data Protection & UK GDPR Policy;
- Centre Recognition Policy;
- Centre Monitoring Policy; and
- Records Management and Retention Policy.

36. Document Control

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37. Version Control

Version	Date	Description of Change	Author	Approval
1.0	1 June 2026	Initial publication of HiQual UK Recognition of Prior Learning Policy, informed by the supplied OTHM Recognition of Prior Learning Policy v2.0 and current Ofqual RPL requirements.	Sarah Williams, Head of Quality Assurance	Academic and Standards Committee

38. Policy Statement

HiQual UK recognises that learners may have acquired relevant knowledge, skills and understanding before entering a qualification. Where RPL is permitted, HiQual UK will provide a transparent and rigorous assessment route through which such prior learning can be considered.

RPL will never be used simply to reduce assessment requirements. Recognition will only be granted where competent assessment demonstrates that the relevant requirements have been met and where the resulting qualification remains a valid and reliable indication of the learner's attainment.

END OF POLICY