

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for QQI (CAS) Awards

An Introduction

NOTE: under the current provider quality assurance agreement with QQI, the provider will have a policy on access, transfer and progression. Registered providers are required to facilitate, in as much as they can, a learner's entry to and successful participation on a programme.

Registered providers are required to offer RPL for entry to programmes and for exemptions within programmes. Providers must document these procedures in their quality assurance agreement - policy area: access, transfer and progression; procedural area: recognition of prior learning.

Registered providers who have the capacity and resources to enable learners to achieve awards through RPL may also document an additional policy and associated procedures for RPL. Prior approval from QQI is required before a provider can implement this policy.

What is the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)?

The recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a method of assessment which may allow learners to gain formal recognition (certification) for knowledge, skills and competence that they already have, however acquired. RPL requires the learner to demonstrate or prove their learning through interview and/or through compiling a portfolio.

RPL may allow the learner:

- To gain **entry** to a programme: that is, a learner may gain a **place** on a programme, without having the certificate required for entry onto that programme (where such an entry requirement exists).
- To gain **exemptions** within a programme: for example, a learner may be granted **exemptions** from elements of programme requirements on the basis of learning that they already have achieved.
- To attain an **award**: that is, a learner may be awarded a major or minor award on the basis of previously acquired learning for which they do not have a formal certificate.

What is prior learning?

Learning is the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competence. Prior learning is the knowledge, skills and competence that an individual learner already has. This may have been acquired in any of the following ways:

- **Formal learning:** takes place through programmes of study or training that are delivered by education or training providers, for example in schools, colleges or adult education centres.

This learning is usually **accredited**, i.e. it is recognised through formal certification, for example leaving certificate or ECDL.

- **Non-formal learning:** takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training, for example in work-based training, in voluntary sector activities or in community-based learning.

Where this learning is assessed and leads to formal certification, it is **accredited**.

Where it is not assessed and does not lead to formal certification, it is **non-accredited**.

- **Informal learning:** takes place through life experience and work experience. This learning is often unintentional and the learner may not recognise at the time that it has contributed to his or her knowledge, skills and competence; for example the learning acquired through running a family business or through caring for an elderly relative.

Informal learning does not lead to formal certification, so it is **non-accredited**.

How can the provider implement RPL?

The provider may implement RPL within programmes in the following ways:

- **Credit towards an award – based on prior learning**

NOTE: This is only applicable where the learner is being entered for a major award/special purpose award. Credits cannot be claimed in isolation.

QQI recognises a range of specific prior **accredited** learning. Details are listed at the link below:

<http://qsearch.qqi.ie/WebPart/Search?searchtype=exemptions>

The provider should inform learners of this initiative. The learner must provide proof of prior learning to the provider, by supplying the original certificate.

The provider decision to offer a place on a programme or to grant exemptions from elements of programme requirements is made on the basis of this original certificate and on the appropriateness of the certificate to the QQI award.

For the learner to achieve the component credit, the provider enters the learner for assessment of the programme module in the normal way. The evidence that the learner presents for assessment will be the **original** of the other certificate.

For example, QQI grants the module credit mathematics [3N0929] for junior certificate mathematics. The provider enters the learner for mathematics [3N0929]. The learner's portfolio of assessment will contain his/ her original junior certificate.

Please note: implementation should be in accordance with the recognition of prior learning procedure documented in the provider's quality assurance agreement

- **Entry to a programme**

The provider may offer a learner a place on a programme on the basis of prior learning. For each programme, the provider should make available a list of the competences needed to succeed on the programme.

Where there are entry requirements to a programme, these should be stated in such a way that learners who possess the competences, even if not formally certified, may achieve entry.

The provider's selection process should be documented in quality assurance procedure for the recognition of prior learning. Evidence must be maintained and monitored to ensure consistency of implementation.

Learners must demonstrate to the provider that they have the capacity to participate successfully on the programme. Evidence of this capacity may include a CV, references, and records of courses attended or samples of work.

The provider decision to offer the learner a place on a programme is usually made on the basis of information obtained through interview, meeting, questionnaire, application form, checklist or other.

Having gained a place on the programme, the learner will complete the programme and the assessment in the normal way.

Please note: implementation should be in accordance with the procedure documented in the relevant section of the provider's quality assurance agreement.

- **Exemptions within programmes**

The provider may grant a learner exemptions from specific requirements of a programme, on the basis of prior learning. For each programme, the provider should make available a statement of entry requirements where applicable, and a list of the competences needed to succeed on the programme.

The learner should demonstrate to the provider that they have the capacity to achieve the programme learning outcomes without attending or participating in the programme or part of the programme. Evidence of this capacity may include a CV, references, and records of courses attended or samples of work. The provider may grant the exemption(s) from attendance and/ or participation in the programme on the basis of information obtained from the learner through, for example, an application form, an initial interview or meeting, or a completed questionnaire or checklist.

The provider should enter the learner for assessment of the module in the normal way. Learners must provide proof that they have achieved the programme learning outcomes, either by:

Option 1	OR	Option 2
completing the assessment as per programme/ module requirements	OR	submitting a portfolio of valid and reliable * evidence of relevant prior learning, for example, CV, references, records of courses attended or samples of work. NOTE: Providers who choose to offer this option must document their procedures separately in the relevant section of the quality assurance agreement and must have prior approval from QQI

***NOTE:** for evidence to be **valid**, it must match the learning outcomes for the programme and must demonstrate the standard required. For evidence to be **reliable**, the learner must attest that it is their OWN.

Whether the assessment is to be completed as per programme requirements or through submitting a portfolio of prior learning, the learner should be provided with a full, written assessment brief, to include marking and grading criteria.

Please note: implementation should be in accordance with the relevant procedures documented in the provider's quality assurance agreement **AND** the provider **MUST** have received prior approval from QQI, where appropriate.

Can providers offer RPL independent of programmes?

Providers who have the capacity and resources to enable learners to achieve **awards** through RPL may choose the additional option of offering RPL independent of programmes.

Procedures for the implementation of this option must be documented by the provider as an additional section of their quality assurance agreement. Provider applications for approval must specify the named awards to be offered on the basis of RPL.

Prior approval by QQI of the provider's policy and procedures for RPL for awards is required before any learners can be facilitated. Providers approved by QQI will implement the procedures as agreed in their quality assurance agreement.

RPL for an award: This is where a learner may achieve a major or minor award on the basis of prior learning.

Providers facilitate learners in achieving an award on the basis of RPL by assessing learner evidence and submitting learner results for certification to QQI using standard procedures.

The role of the provider is to:

- assist the learner in identifying the award they wish to apply for
- determine the learner's eligibility for the named award
- analyse the learner's knowledge, skill and competence in relation to the standards of knowledge, skill and competence required for the award
- support the learner in identifying and gathering the appropriate evidence
- assess the evidence provided by the learner against the assessment criteria for the award
- quality assure the assessment process
- submit learner results to QQI for certification

The role of the learner is to gather and present the evidence required for assessment according to the guidance given by the provider. The volume and range of evidence required will depend on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) level of the award sought.

Evidence may include CV, references, certificates or testimonials, products or samples, job descriptions and/ or evaluations, evidence of attendance at training courses or workplace assessments. Evidence for assessment may be presented in a portfolio of evidence.

Please note: implementation should be in accordance with the procedures documented in the provider's quality assurance agreement