



Recognition of Prior Learning, Exemptions and Equivalent Units

Guidance to Centres and Assessors

June 2011

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Aim of the Document

This document has been designed to provide Centres with the necessary information to develop procedures for offering Recognition of Prior Learning, Exemptions and Equivalent Units as a means to claim credits/recognition for learning which has already taken place.

Whilst the QCF offers the technical features to support these functions, individuals invariably rely on the support and resources provided by WAMITAB and WAMITAB Centres to put these into practice.

The individual is central to the process, and it will ultimately be their choice and responsibility to decide whether to apply for recognition of their prior learning and achievements - be it via RPL, exemption or equivalent units.

What is RPL?

The process of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is defined within the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) as follows:

A method of assessment that 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 do not need to develop through a course of learning.

The RPL process is relevant where an individual has previously learnt something but has never received formal recognition for this learning through a qualification or other form of certification. Within the QCF an individual is able to 'claim' that he or she knows or can do something already and does not need to attend a course to learn it again. If the candidate can prove this claim (through assessment of relevant evidence) then credit can be awarded for that achievement. In short, RPL refers particularly to previously uncertificated learning, and achievements through RPL always lead to the award of credit within the QCF.

In the context of the QCF, the definition of RPL is quite specific and related to assessment leading to award of credit. Assessment for RPL is conducted against the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of a unit and is subject to the same quality assurance requirements as any other kind of assessment in the QCF. If an individual can demonstrate that they can meet the standard of the unit, defined by the learning outcomes and assessment criteria, then they can claim credit for that unit, irrespective of whether they prepared for assessment through a formally taught course or through previous experience.

It should be noted that there is no concept of 'partial achievement of a unit' in the QCF. All learning outcomes of a unit must be achieved for credit to be awarded, and the number of credits will always be defined by the credit value of the unit. There is no facility to claim or be awarded some of the credits in a unit. Therefore, where the RPL processes only evidence partial achievement of learning outcomes, some other form of assessment must be employed to confirm achievement of all outcomes. If necessary, a learning programme could be developed to cover only those outcomes which were not achieved in the RPL evidence.

Assessment of RPL Evidence

- WAMITAB Centres must have in place procedures to allow for recognition of prior learning, where it is appropriate. This does not mean that all individuals must be offered RPL in all cases.

There is no difference between the approaches to RPL candidates than for any other candidate where evidence is presented which may be taken into account during an assessment process. It remains the role of the Assessor, supported by the verification team, to accept or reject RPL evidence using the usual Valid, Authentic, Sufficient and Reliable audit check.

That the evidence is:

- Valid
- Authentic
- Sufficient
- Reliable (and therefore 'current')

Example: A Candidate may present evidence of internal company Health and Safety induction which covers manual handling, accident and reporting and PPE. The Assessor should then map this against HSS3 and the manual handling unit, where appropriate.

There are certain principles which relate to RPL and which, when followed, allow for a streamlined RPL process that retains the rigour and quality assurance of any other type of assessment.

1. RPL is a valid method of enabling individuals to claim credit for units in the QCF, irrespective of how their learning took place. There is no difference between achievement of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of a unit through prior learning and through a formal study programme.
2. RPL policies, processes, procedures, practices and decisions should be transparent, rigorous, reliable, fair and accessible to individuals.
3. RPL is a learner-centred, voluntary process. The individual must be offered advice on the nature and range of evidence considered appropriate to support a claim through RPL.
4. The process of assessment for RPL is subject to the same quality assurance and monitoring standards as any other form of assessment.
5. Assessment methods for RPL must be of equal rigour as any other assessment methods.

The RPL Process

The RPL process involves individuals from the moment they consider making a claim and supports them through to the result of the assessment. WAMITAB Centres should follow a stage by stage process when offering and completing RPL applications:

Stage 1. - General Awareness, Information Advice and Guidance.

When an individual indicates an interest in registering for a QCF qualification, the possibility that they may be able to claim credit for some of their previous learning will need to be raised with them. If the candidate is interested in this, they will need to know:

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

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

During this stage the candidate will carry out the process of collecting evidence against the requirements of the unit or units for which credit is being claimed. In some cases this may entail the development of an assessment plan or similar tool to support the individual through the process. The evidence gathered will need to meet the standard of the unit (as expressed in the learning outcomes and assessment criteria). For example, a candidate could produce the DASH induction handbook as proof of learning for the outcomes within a health and safety unit.

Stage 3. - Assessment/documentation of evidence

Assessment as part of RPL is a structured process for gathering and reviewing evidence and making judgments about an individuals' prior learning and experience in relation to unit standards. Assessment must be valid and reliable to ensure the integrity of the award of credit and the RPL system as a whole. The assessment process will be subject to the usual quality assurance procedures which WAMITAB undertake.

Stage 4. - Feedback

After the assessment the Centre will, where possible, need to give feedback to the candidate, discuss the results and give support and guidance on the options available to the candidate. For example, further learning and development may be suggested.

Stage 5. - Awarding Credit

WAMITAB is responsible for awarding credit. All credits achieved through RPL are recorded by WAMITAB in the same way as all other credits.

Stage 6. - Appeal

If a candidate wishes to appeal against a decision made about their claim for credit they need to follow the standard Centre/WAMITAB Appeals Procedures.

What is an Exemption?

An exemption is defined within the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) as follows:

The facility for a learner to claim exemption from some of the achievement requirements of a QCF qualification using evidence of certificated, non QCF achievement deemed to be of equivalent value.

The definition includes the critical distinction between exemption and RPL in the QCF. The process of exemption is applied to certificated achievement whereas RPL is applied to previously uncertificated achievement. The other key difference is that where exemption is granted, based on certificated achievement outside the QCF, no credits are awarded to the individual. In both cases, individuals' achievements are recognised, but exemptions are deemed to be of equivalent value to credits in the QCF - whereas RPL leads directly to the award of credit.

WAMITAB have produced a listing which details previous NQF units which WAMITAB recognises as exemptions for QCF units appearing in WAMITAB qualifications - available on the WAMITAB website. However, this list is not exhaustive. If a Centre believes a unit which a candidate has previously achieved outside of the QCF to be an exemption for a unit appearing in a WAMITAB QCF qualification, the Centre must make a formal application to WAMITAB for this unit to be considered. WAMITAB will draw together necessary experts, in the form of a working group, to discuss and make decisions regarding the possibility of using the requested unit as an exemption.

The result of this decision will be communicated to the Centre, and will be included in the list of exempt units to allow any future candidates to use this unit, where appropriate, as an exemption.

Prior to the award of the exemption to the Candidate, WAMITAB will require the Centre to carry out usual quality assurance procedures to ensure the candidate achieved the unit in question. Unit achievement certificates will require to be presented to the Centre, by the candidate, as evidence of achievement. The Centre should document this appropriately to enable the evidence to be internally and/or externally verified, and for a complete audit trail to be available.

To access the most up-to-date list of exemptions recognised by WAMITAB, please use the following link <http://www.wamitab.org.uk/pg/funding/unit-exemptions>

What is an Equivalent Unit?

An equivalent unit is defined within the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) as follows:

Credits from equivalent units: This must set out any opportunities to count credits from a unit/s from other qualifications or from a unit/s submitted by other recognised organisations toward the qualification in place of mandatory or optional units specified in the rule of combination. In order to be accepted as an equivalent the units must have the same credit value or greater than the mandatory or optional units in question and must be of the same level or higher.

As the definition of ‘exemption’ makes clear, the process relates exclusively to certificated learning outside of the QCF. Equivalent Units also relate to certificated learning, though they only refer to learning which has been achieved within the QCF.

As with unit exemptions, Centre’s who believe the candidate has achieved a unit which is equivalent to a unit appearing in a WAMITAB qualification must make a formal application for this equivalent unit to be recognised by WAMITAB. WAMITAB will bring the necessary experts together and consider not only the title, level and credit value of the unit, but also the unit standards as set out in the learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

The result of this decision will be communicated to the Centre, and will be included in the list of equivalent units to allow any future candidates to use this unit, where appropriate, as an equivalent unit.

Prior to the recognition of the unit for the Candidates qualification, WAMITAB will require the Centre to carry out usual quality assurance procedures to ensure the candidate achieved the unit in question. Unit achievement certificates will require to be presented to the Centre, by the candidate, as evidence of achievement. The Centre should document this appropriately to enable the evidence to be internally and/or externally verified, and for a complete audit trail to be available.