Skills4Stem Recognition of Prior Learning

Skills4Stem define 'Recognition of Prior Learning' (RPL) as a method of assessment (leading to the award of credit) that considers whether a learner can demonstrate that they can meet the assessment requirements through knowledge, understanding or skills they already possess and so do not need to develop through a course of learning.

The following terms are also recognised for the purpose of recognition of prior learning
• Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)
• Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)
• Accreditation of Prior Achievement (APA)
• Accreditation of Prior Learning and Achievement (APLA)

RPL enables recognition of achievement from a range of activities using any appropriate assessment methodology. Provided that the assessment requirements of a given unit or qualification have been met, the use of RPL is acceptable for accrediting a unit, units or a whole qualification. Evidence of learning must meet the VACS rule:
• Valid
• Authentic
• Current
• Sufficient

RPL is a valid method of enabling individuals to claim credit for units or qualifications, irrespective of how their learning took place. There is no difference between the achievement of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria through prior learning or through a formal programme of study RPL policies, processes, procedures, practices and decisions 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.

RPL is a learner-centered, voluntary process. The individual should be offered advice on the nature and range of evidence considered appropriate, to support a claim for credit through RPL, and be given guidance and support to make a claim.
The process of assessment for RPL is subject to the same quality assurance and monitoring standards as any other form of assessment. The award of success through RPL will not be distinguished from any other successes.

Assessment methods for RPL must be of equal rigor to other assessment methods, be fit for purpose and relate to the evidence of learning. Credit may be claimed for any unit

through RPL unless the assessment requirements of the unit do not allow this, based on a rationale consistent with the aims and regulations of the framework.

RPL is also of value to learners transferring across various learning programmes who have relevant learning but do not hold relevant credits or certificates. This may include learners transferring from NQF to QCF specifications.

The use and application of RPL is of particular 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 can be used where a learner has not had their prior learning formally recognised.

If a learner has certificated learning, then they should apply for exemption, not RPL. Exemption is the facility for a learner to claim exemption from some of the achievement requirements of a qualification, using evidence of certificated achievement deemed to be of equivalent value. Checks will need to be made with relevant Awarding Organisations to ensure compliance with their RPL policy and regulations.

RPL focuses on assessment and awarding of credit for prior learning which may count as evidence towards units or full qualifications.

Where units are assessed against assessment criteria or grading criteria, then all evidence must be evaluated using the stipulated criteria. In assessing a unit using RPL the assessor must be satisfied that the evidence produced by the learner meets the assessment standard established by the learning outcome and its related assessment criteria.

Most often RPL will be used for units or parts of a qualification. It is acceptable to claim for an entire qualification through RPL although this is not the norm. However, it would be unusual for a learner to be able to offer prior achievement that completely matches every aspect of a qualification's assessment requirements.

The prior achievement that would provide evidence of current knowledge, understanding and skills will vary from sector to sector. It will depend on the extent of the experience, technological changes and the nature of the outcome claimed. If the currency of any evidence is in doubt, the assessor may use questions or professional discussion to check understanding, and for competence. Note also that the assessment strategy for each qualification must be adhered to.

The RPL process is not concerned with allowing for exceptional entry to, or exemption from, a programme of study.

To carry out RPL, Skills4Stem must ensure that:
- Learners are registered as soon as they formally start to gather evidence.
- Records of assessment are maintained, as for any other unit/qualification
- Certification and claims are made according to normal procedures
- All relevant evidence is assessed before assessment decisions are confirmed
- There are designated personnel with the appropriate expertise to support and assure the RPL process.

The Skills4Stem RPL Process
The following stages apply to Skills4Stem learners:

Stage 1 – Awareness, information and guidance
Ahead of enrolling a potential learner, the possibility that they may be able to Claim credit for some of their previous learning should be raised with them. If the learner is interested in this, they will need to know the:
- Process of claiming achievement by using RPL
- Sources of support and guidance available to them
- Timelines, appeals processes and any fees involved Skills4Stem will provide this information direct to the learner.

Stage 2 – Pre-assessment; gathering evidence and giving information.
At this stage the learner will carry out the process of collecting evidence against the requirements of the relevant unit(s). In some cases the development of an assessment plan and tracking document or similar may be required, to support the learner through the process. The evidence gathered will need to meet the standards of the unit, or part of unit, that the evidence is being used for.

Stage 3 – Assessment/documentation of evidence
Assessment as part of RPL is a structured process for gathering and reviewing evidence and making judgments about a learners' prior learning and experience in relation to unit standards. The assessor may be looking at work experience records, validated by managers; previous portfolios of evidence put together by the learner or essays and reports validated as being the learner's own unaided work.

Assessment must be valid and reliable to ensure the integrity of the award of credit and, as above, the evidence gathered needs to meet the standards of the unit, or part of unit,

that the evidence is being used for. The assessment process will be subject to the usual quality assurance procedures of Skills4Stem for example, internal standardisation and internal verification as well.

Evidence gathered through RPL should be clearly referenced and sign posted to aid internal assessment and internal and external verification.

Stage 4 – Claiming certification

Once the internal and external quality assurance procedures have been successfully completed, certification claims can be made by Skills4Stem to the relevant Awarding Body.

Assessment and internal verification records, along with any additional RPL records completed, should be retained for the standard three year period following certification. The assessor must ensure that all learning outcomes and assessment criteria being claimed for each unit are achieved and that the records of assessment are maintained in the usual way.

Stage 5 – Appeal

As with any assessment decision, if a learner wishes to appeal against a decision made about their assessment they need to follow the Skills4Stem Appeals and Results Policy.

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Date:	5th February 2019
Approved by:	Sarah Davis
Date:	5th February 2019
Date to be reviewed:	February 2020