



Defence Awarding
Organisation



DAO Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy

Ver 6.2 Aug 26

Recognising Quality and Competence:

Supporting Defence with accreditation and specialist bespoke qualification opportunities

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Introduction

1. This policy sets out DAO's approach to the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for regulated qualifications. It provides guidance to DAO Approved Centres, learners, assessors, Internal Quality Assurers (IQAs) and External Quality Assurers (EQAs) on how RPL may be considered, assessed, quality assured and recorded.

Scope

2. This policy applies to all DAO regulated qualifications and units where RPL is permitted by the relevant qualification specification, assessment strategy and regulatory requirements. It applies to DAO Approved Centres and to all individuals involved in the consideration, assessment, quality assurance, oversight and certification of RPL claims.

3. RPL is not available where the assessment requirements of the qualification or unit expressly prevent it, or where prescribed assessment methods must be completed in the way set out in the published qualification specification. RPL **cannot be used for a whole qualification**, only parts of a qualification.

Regulatory Context

4. This policy should be read alongside the relevant qualification specification, assessment strategy, DAO Awarding Centre Handbook and related DAO policies. It supports the expectations placed on an Ofqual recognised Awarding Organisation (AO) to maintain sound assessment arrangements, valid certification decisions and auditable evidence records.

5. For the purposes of this policy, DAO complies with Ofqual General Condition of Recognition E10 (Recognition of Prior Learning)¹ by ensuring that RPL is only awarded where there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate achievement of the relevant assessment requirements, Recognition of Prior Learning, and the definitions of RPL used in the regulatory framework.

Definitions

6. Definitions in conjunction DAO Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy are as follows:

- a. **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** – A method of assessment that considers whether a learner can demonstrate that they 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.
- b. **Credit Transfer** – The process of using credit(s) previously awarded in a qualification towards the achievement requirements of another qualification, where this is permitted by the applicable rules.
- c. **Assessment Strategy** – The requirements that set out how assessment must be designed, delivered, quality assured and recorded for a qualification or group of qualifications.
- d. **Evidence** – Information or material used to support an RPL claim. Evidence must be valid, authentic, current, sufficient and relevant to the assessment requirements.

¹ This meets the requirement for [Ofqual GCoR Condition: E10](#)

RPL Guiding Principles

7. RPL is a valid assessment method where the learner can demonstrate achievement of the relevant Learning Outcomes (LOs) and Assessment Criteria (ACs) through prior learning or achievement. Decisions must be transparent, rigorous, reliable, fair, accessible, evidence-based and capable of audit. The Assessor is responsible for determining whether evidence submitted through RPL fully satisfies the relevant assessment requirements and for making the achievement decision.

8. RPL is learner centred and voluntary. Learners must be given clear information, advice and guidance on the evidence required and the basis on which decisions will be made. The assessment of RPL is subject to the same quality assurance and monitoring standards as any other form of assessment. Evidence must be assessed with equal rigour to other assessment methods and must be fit for purpose, mapped to the requirements of the unit or qualification, and supported by a clear assessment rationale.

9. RPL must not compromise assessment validity, reliability, comparability, authenticity, security or the integrity of qualification outcomes. Evidence must be:

- a. sufficiently current to demonstrate the learner continues to meet the assessment requirements.
- b. currency shall be determined by the assessor with reference to qualification requirements, industry practice and any occupational competence requirements.
- c. Centres must ensure that all RPL decisions are subject to enhanced IQA sampling until consistent assessment practice is established

10. All RPL activity is subject to DAO External Quality Assurance monitoring, and all associated records and evidence must be available for EQA scrutiny.

Credit Transfer

11. Credit or Unit transfer occurs when a learner has completed a unit with another provider or on a previous qualification. Any grades awarded on the learner's prior achievement will be retained (cannot be changed), as long as the unit is one which can be mapped wholly and accurately against a corresponding unit included in the rules of combination for the learner's new qualification.

Centre Requirements

12. DAO Approved Centres that permit RPL **must have** a Centre RPL policy, process and procedure aligned to this DAO policy. Centres **must ensure** that their RPL arrangements are implemented consistently and that staff involved in RPL are appropriately trained, occupationally competent and able to make defensible assessment decisions. Centres must maintain evidence that assessors and IQAs involved in RPL have received training and standardisation relating to RPL assessment practices. Also:

- a. confirm that RPL is permitted for the relevant qualification or unit before accepting an application;
- b. provide clear information to learners on the RPL process, evidence requirements, possible outcomes and right of appeal;
- c. register learners in accordance with DAO requirements and centre procedures;

- d. gather and assess evidence using the relevant DAO qualification specification and assessment criteria;
- e. ensure RPL evidence is assessed by a suitably qualified assessor and internally quality assured by a suitably qualified IQA;
- f. maintain a clear audit trail showing the evidence considered, mapping to learning outcomes and assessment criteria, assessor decisions, IQA decisions and any further assessment required;
- g. make all RPL records and evidence available to DAO and EQA when requested.

Eligibility for RPL

13. RPL may be considered where the learner can present evidence of prior certificated achievement or prior experiential learning acquired through formal, non-formal or informal routes, and where that evidence is capable of demonstrating that the relevant unit or qualification requirements have already been met. Also:

- a. Evidence **must** map directly and clearly to the relevant learning outcomes and assessment criteria.
- b. Evidence **must be** authentic, attributable to the learner and capable of verification.
- c. Evidence **must be** sufficiently current for the assessment requirements being claimed.
- d. Evidence **must be** at the same or a higher level than the level of the unit or qualification being claimed.
- e. Where evidence is incomplete, insufficient, outdated or otherwise unsuitable, the learner **must** complete additional assessment before achievement can be confirmed.

RPL Application Process

14. The RPL process can be found at [Annex A](#) and follows the following steps:

- a. **Awareness and initial enquiry:** The learner contacts the DAO Approved Centre. The centre provides information, advice and guidance on whether RPL may be available and what evidence will be required.
- b. **Initial review:** The centre confirms whether the relevant qualification or unit permits RPL and whether the available evidence is likely to support a valid assessment decision.
- c. **Evidence submission:** The learner submits the RPL application, supporting evidence and any declarations required by the centre or DAO.
- d. **Assessment:** A suitably competent assessor assesses the evidence against the relevant learning outcomes, assessment criteria, qualification specification and assessment strategy.
- e. **Internal Quality Assurance:** The IQA must review the learner's application, evidence mapping, assessor rationale and assessment decision to confirm that the evidence is valid, authentic, current, sufficient and meets the qualification requirements.
- f. **DAO approval and EQA scrutiny:** Approved RPL applications and associated evidence must be available for DAO oversight and external quality assurance scrutiny before certification is claimed.
- g. **Outcome:** The outcome may be full recognition, partial recognition requiring further assessment, or rejection of the claim where the requirements are not met.

Evidence and Assessment Requirements

15. All evidence submitted in support of an RPL claim must be assessed against the requirements of the relevant Unit or Qualification. Assessment decisions must:

- a. be based on whether the evidence is valid, authentic, current, sufficient, reliable and relevant.
- b. evidence must not be accepted solely on the basis of unsupported assertion or unverified claim.

16. Acceptable evidence may include:

- a. prior qualification certificates,
- b. unit transcripts, assessor records,
- c. authenticated workplace documents,
- d. records of professional discussion,
- e. reflective accounts,
- f. witness testimony,
- g. observation records,
- h. work products,
- i. assignment or project work,
- j. training records and other verified evidence relevant to the assessment requirements.

17. Where naturally occurring evidence is used, it **must** still be mapped clearly to the relevant learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Where evidence only partly meets the requirements, the learner **must** complete supplementary assessment before achievement can be confirmed. The basis for each decision **must be** recorded clearly and in sufficient detail to support audit, review, external scrutiny and appeal.

Assessor Responsibility for Achievement Decisions

18. RPL is a form of assessment and does not remove or diminish the assessor's responsibility for making valid assessment decisions. The assessor is accountable for determining whether the evidence presented demonstrates full achievement of the relevant LOs and ACs. Assessment decisions must be evidence-based, objectively justified, appropriately documented and capable of withstanding IQA, EQA, regulatory scrutiny and appeal.

Internal Quality Assurance Activity

19. All RPL decisions must be subject to Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) review before certification is claimed. The IQA must review the learner's application, evidence mapping, assessor rationale and assessment decision to confirm that the evidence is valid, authentic, current, sufficient and meets the qualification requirements. Any concerns identified through IQA must be resolved and documented before the RPL claim can be approved. Centres must maintain a clear audit trail of all IQA activities and decisions associated with RPL claims.

Conflicts of Interest

20. Where an RPL application identifies a connection between the learner, learner evidence and the assessor conducting the review, this **must** be managed as a Conflict of Interest. The Centre **must** apply additional moderation and ensure the evidence and decision are reviewed before certification is claimed. Where required, the matter **must be** referred for EQA scrutiny to protect the validity of the award.

Records

21. Centres **must** maintain appropriate records for all RPL claims. Records must include the completed RPL application, supporting evidence, mapping to assessment criteria, assessor decision, IQA decision, any EQA review, learner communications and certification outcome. Records **must be** stored as normal learner assessment records and retained in accordance with DAO and Centre records management requirements.

Appeals, Complaints and Malpractice

22. Learners **must have** access to the Centre's Appeals and Complaints procedures where they wish to challenge an RPL decision or raise a concern about the conduct of the process. Centres must inform learners of their right to appeal an RPL decision.

23. Suspected or actual maladministration or malpractice arising from an RPL claim, including false declaration, plagiarism, misrepresentation or fraudulent evidence, must be managed in accordance with the relevant DAO and Centre malpractice requirements. Where evidence is not reliable or cannot be authenticated, the claim **must be** rejected or additional assessment required.

Monitoring and Review

24. DAO will maintain oversight of RPL through External Quality Assurance and approval monitoring arrangements. RPL evidence, assessment decisions and quality assurance records **must be** made available to DAO and EQAs on request.

Review Arrangements

25. The DAO will review the policy and its associated procedures annually as part of the DAO self-evaluation arrangements, and revise it as and when necessary in response to customer, DAO Learner or Regulatory feedback (e.g. to align with any appeals and complaints process established by the Regulator(s)) and any trends that may emerge in the subject matter of complaints received.

Centre Support

26. The DAO will work with Awarding Centres to deliver a customer-focused and professional service to DAO Learners. DAO policies are reviewed annually. Any queries about the contents of the policy, please contact the DAO Compliance Team via:

DAO website

<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/defence-awarding-organisation>.

Post

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Annex A



Recognising Quality and Competence:

Supporting Defence with accreditation and specialist bespoke qualification opportunities