Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy

1. Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this policy and procedure document is to outline GA's approach to, and process for, the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and for the transfer of credits within GA regulated qualifications.

This policy should be read and understood by GA staff and centre staff (including staff at satellite centres and examination venues) who are involved in the delivery, assessment, quality assurance and management of GA qualifications. Candidates should also be provided with information about these arrangements. This includes candidates who are undertaking online or distance learning programmes.

2. Data Protection Considerations

All personal data gathered on candidates in respect of any claims for RPL or transfers of credit requested and/or granted will be held in the strictest confidence and only be used for the purposes of ensuring all assessment is carried out in a fair and consistent manner and that all results issued are valid and reliable. All data will be held in accordance with the current data protection legislation including, but not limited to, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations.

3. Responsibility and Authority

The overall responsibility for this policy and procedure is held by the Director. The authority to design and implement this procedure is delegated to the Assessment Manager and the relevant External Quality Assurance personnel, as designated to qualifications and/or centres.

4. Definition of RPL

GA's Regulator Ofqual defines RPL as:

"The (a) Identification by an Awarding Organisation (AO) of any learning undertaken and/or attainment, by a Learner:
(i) Prior to that Learner taking a qualification which the AO makes available or proposes to make available, and
(ii) Which is relevant to the knowledge, skills and understanding which will be assessed as part of that qualification,
and
(b) Recognition by an AO of that learning and/or attainment through amendment to the requirements which a Learner must have satisfied before the Learner will be assessed or that qualification will be awarded."

'Recognition of Prior Learning' or 'RPL' therefore refers to demonstrable knowledge, skills and/or understanding acquired by the learner before the learner takes the GA qualification in question.

The main principle behind RPL is that an individual's prior achievements can be recognised and that a learner is not disadvantaged by unnecessarily having to repeat a course of learning.

RPL focuses on assessment and awarding of credit for prior learning which may count as evidence towards:

- A unit of a full GA qualification.
- A full GA qualification.

Through the approach to the Recognition of Prior Learning, GA ensures that any qualification awarded to a learner who has made a successful application for RPL provides a valid and reliable indication of that learner's knowledge, skills and understanding.

5. Types of Recognition of Prior Learning (PRL)

RPL typically takes two forms, *RPAL: Recognition of Prior Accredited Learning* and *RPEL: Recognition of Experiential Learning.*

- Evidence of prior achievement of a qualification, units (or components) that has been formally recognised (in the form of a qualification or unit certificate) that also appear in the qualification they are now working towards – *this is referred to as RPAL: Recognition of Prior Accredited Learning (RPAL).*

- Documentary evidence of prior knowledge, skills and/or experience through work, voluntary or life experience that is uncertified, which may also include unregulated training or Continuous Professional Development (CPD) courses – *this is referred to as RPEL: Recognition of Experiential Learning (RPEL).*

The above instances could, if deemed current, consequently validate a reduction in Guided Learning Hours (GLH) and/or change to the assessment strategy for the learner for the particular qualification they wish to undertake.

An assessor reviews whether the evidence is enough to show that a learner has met the assessment requirements for a current qualification or is enough to reduce the GLH or amend the assessment requirements.

The learner needs to show that through the knowledge, understanding or skills they already have, that they do not need to repeat learning or complete extra assessment activities.

6. Recognition of Prior Accredited Learning (RPAL)

RPAL can occur where the qualification contains the exact same unit that has been previously certified for a different regulated qualification or from a different Awarding Organisation. The certificate can be used as evidence that the learner does not have to unnecessarily repeat previous learning and assessment.

Where a learner has already achieved a unit where credits are awarded, GA will recognise that prior learning and will allow the credit to be transferred onto the new qualification, provided that the units have the same Ofqual reference number. GA refers to this as a *Transfer of Credits*. It is also sometimes referred to as a Credit Accumulation Transfer ('CAT').

An example of RPAL is where a learner has completed and achieved a certificate for a qualification that is made up of a series of units, where one of these units forms part of a further qualification they wish to undertake. The previously certificated qualification required units 1 and 2 to be completed. A higher level or larger size qualification requires units 1, 2 and 3 to be completed. The centre and learner may agree that the previously achieved units 1 and 2 could be used and only unit 3 needs to be undertaken.

Note: an RPAL application may also be made for a unit or units within a GA qualification which is assessed via an externally set and externally assessed examination, for example a GA International ESOL qualification, where the learner wishes to re-sit the assessment for the qualification after failing a component unit examination. The learner's Result Notification will be used to confirm achievement of component units and a 're-sit' examination for the previously failed units can be booked separately. Where originally awarded by GA, no form is required; the GA-issued Results Notification form can be used. Where the original award was awarded by another Awarding Organisation, the RPAL form should be used.

7. Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)

RPEL is a process that acknowledges and values the knowledge and skills that individuals have acquired through various life experiences, work, or training outside of formal educational settings. It recognises that learning can occur in different contexts, and that individuals may possess valuable competencies that are relevant to their academic or professional goals, even if they do not have formal qualifications or certifications.

The RPEL process typically involves an assessment or evaluation of the individual's prior learning experiences. This assessment may involve various methods, such as examining product evidence, an interview or demonstrations. The purpose of the assessment is to determine the extent to which the individual's prior learning aligns with the learning outcomes or competencies required for a particular qualification.

If the assessment confirms that the individual has acquired relevant knowledge and skills through their prior experiences, they may be granted credit, an exemption from certain course

or assessment requirements. This recognition can save time and money for the learner, as they may not need to repeat learning experiences they have already gained elsewhere.

An example of RPEL is where a learner has worked in a salon for 10 years without a formal qualification and wishes to enrol on a beauty therapy qualification that requires case studies and practical assessments. Through the RPEL process, the learner can submit evidence of her prior work experience as a beauty therapist, such as client testimonials, photos/videos of her work, and CPD certificates. If the assessor determines that the learner's prior experiential learning from her work demonstrates the required competencies, they may be granted recognition and exempted from completing new case studies or be asked to complete a reduced number of practical assessments for areas where they have already acquired the necessary skills.

As a result, the learner does not need to repeat the learning they have already acquired through work experience. This recognition of prior learning through experience allows the learner to complete the qualification more quickly and focus on acquiring new knowledge and skills they still need for their academic and professional goals.

The RPEL process recognises and values the knowledge and competencies that learners have gained outside of traditional educational settings, promoting accessibility, flexibility, and lifelong learning opportunities.

8. Limitations on the Use of RPL

It is essential to strike a balance between recognising prior learning and ensuring that the learner still undertakes a substantial portion of the new qualification. Clearly defined limits support GA to maintain the integrity and quality of the qualification while providing flexibility for learners.

There are therefore limits on the amount of content within a qualification that can be subject to an application.

For centre-assessed qualifications, GA permits up to a maximum of 50% of the total qualification content that can be subject to RPL. This ensures that the learner still undertakes a significant portion of the learning for the new qualification and ensures that the learner still completes a substantial portion of the assessments for the new qualification, demonstrating their competence in the required areas.

Depending on the nature and structure of certain qualifications, GA may set different RPL limits. For example:

i. Qualifications with a significant practical component may have a lower RPL limit for the practical assessments. In these instances, qualification-specific guidance will be provided.

ii.   Qualifications which are assessed via a series of externally-set and externally assessed controlled examinations may permit any number of component examinations to be used as RPL.

9.   Evidence Requirements

The key aspect within RPL is that qualification requirements can all still be evidenced. Evidence obtained through the RPL process must be assessed to the same rigorous standards as evidence obtained through any other process.

Evidence of learning must meet the GA CRAVES requirements:

- **Current:** the work is relevant at the time of the assessment
- **Reliable:** the work is consistent with that produced by other learners
- **Authentic:** the work is the candidate's own work
- **Valid:** the work is relevant and appropriate to the subject being assessed and is at the required level
- **Evaluated:** where the learner has not been assessed as competent, any deficiencies have been clearly and accurately identified via feedback to the learner
- **Sufficient:** the work covers the expected learning outcomes and any range statements as specified in the criteria or requirements in the assessment strategy.

10.   Centre responsibilities and processes

Centres can apply RPL to internally assessed components of GA vocational qualifications (inclusive of those qualifications that have externally set assessment requirements which are internally assessed).

The use of RPL is optional; however all centres must have an RPL process in place which enables learners and centre staff to record the learner's knowledge, understanding and skills from both formal learning and from work experience and informal training.

This process must outline the steps through which:

- Learners can submit RPL evidence to the centre for consideration *(note that centres must be fully transparent about any fees which may be charged for this process)*.
- The evidence submitted will be assessed and mapped against the learning outcomes, assessment criteria and indicative content of the GA qualification for which the Learner has registered.
- Decisions will be made with respect to the reduction of GLH or a change to the assessment strategy.
- Learners will be informed of the outcome prior to course commencement.
- All evidence will be made available to GA for review and moderation.

GA provides centres and learners with forms for applying for RPL. Forms may be qualification-specific or apply to a suite of qualifications.

These forms are available in the Document Library on the Ark.

The centre must ensure that they retain evidence of the application for RPL, the considerations made as part of reviewing the application for PRL, and the decision to accept or reject the application for RPL within the individual learner's portfolio and is made available to GA upon request.

11. Requirements for Centre Assessors

The centre must use assessment staff who are fully qualified and competent to make the decision on recognising the learner's prior achievement and/or experience.

Where examining evidence towards an application for RPAL, staff members should take steps to ensure that the unit is of the same title, number, level, value and content and that it sits on the same framework.

Where examining evidence towards an application for RPEL, staff members should have the ability and competency to assess a portfolio of evidence against the delivery and assessment requirements of the qualification.

Staff members assessing evidence submitted for either type of RPL must also consider any changes that may have impacted on the learner's previous achievement such as sector, qualification or legal requirements and complete further assessment in the event that gaps are found in the learner's knowledge or competence.

12. General Guidance for Centres

Where there is potential for a candidate to use RPL for a qualification, the centre must undertake a RPL mapping exercise to identify and evaluate whether the learner's previous evidence of learning satisfies the current assessment criteria and a decision must be made on whether the evidence provided partly or fully maps against the qualification or unit.

Where units are assessed using RPL, then all evidence must be evaluated using the stipulated criteria from the qualification or unit being claimed. In assessing a unit using RPL, the centre's assessor must be satisfied that the evidence produced by the learners is CRAVES (as above) and meets the assessment standard established by the learning outcomes and its related assessment criteria.

The prior learning 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 to check understanding, knowledge and/or competence.

RPL processes, procedures, practices and decisions should be transparent, rigorous, reliable, fair and accessible:

- Achievement must be identified prior to taking a qualification.
- Learners are registered as soon as they formally start to gather evidence.
- All evidence of RPL is retained for the purpose of External Quality Assurance by GA
- Certification and claims are made according to normal procedures.
- All relevant evidence is assessed before assessment decisions are confirmed.
- Assessors must have the appropriate expertise in order to support the RPL process.
- The process does not replace the need to check and confirm any applicable entry requirements to a programme of study.
- The process of assessment for RPL is subject to the same quality assurance and monitoring standards as any other form of assessment.

13. Evidence Types

For RPAL applications, the learner must present their qualification certificate and/or unit transcript from their previously achieved regulated qualification (or Results Notification from GA, if applicable). The authenticity of the certificate must be confirmed by the centre.

For RPEL applications, a range of different evidence types may be included, according to the particular qualification content and assessment requirements.

Examples include:

- Documentation e.g., work products/artefacts, project plans, commissioning reports, design documents
- Audio-visual evidence e.g. photographs, videos
- Expert witness testimonies
- Reflective accounts
- Professional discussion
- Interviews
- Demonstrations

Specific evidence types and requirements for RPL are specified for some GA qualifications. Detailed instructions are provided to approved centres.

14. Summary of Expected Timelines

GA sets out the various stages to be followed in considering an application for RPL and the timelines to be followed at each stage below. Please note that the timelines suggested here are for guidance only and these can vary depending on the arrangements and resources available

at the centre, and the complexity, size and level of the qualification the learner is applying to RPL against. However, it is essential to ensure that the RPL process is completed before the learner starts the course or qualification to avoid any unnecessary repetition of learning.

i.   **Learner Submission of RPL Application -** the learner should submit their RPL application, along with relevant evidence, to the centre before they start the course or qualification.

Suggested Timeline: At least 4-6 weeks before the course/qualification start date.

ii.   **Initial Review by the Centre -** the centre should review the RPL application and evidence submitted by the learner and should map the evidence against the learning outcomes, assessment criteria, and indicative content of the GA qualification.

Suggested Timeline: Within 2 weeks of receiving the RPL application.

iii. **Assessment by Qualified Assessor -** a qualified and competent assessor at the centre should thoroughly evaluate the RPL evidence against the qualification requirements. The assessor should determine if the evidence meets the CRAVES criteria (Current, Reliable, Authentic, Valid, Evaluated, Sufficient). The assessor should identify any gaps in the learner's knowledge or competence and determine if further assessment is required.

Suggested Timeline: Within 2-3 weeks after the initial review.

iv.   **Decision Communicated to the Learner -** the centre should communicate the decision (approval or rejection) of the RPL application to the learner, along with any conditions or further requirements. If approved, the centre should inform the learner of any reduction in Guided Learning Hours (GLH) or changes to the assessment arrangements.

Suggested Timeline: Within 1 week after the assessor's evaluation.

v.   **Record Keeping and Submission to GA -** the centre should retain all evidence of the RPL application, review process, and decision-making in the learner's portfolio. The centre should submit the RPL evidence and records to GA for review and moderation.

Suggested Timeline: Before the learner starts the course/qualification, and as part of regular moderation processes.

vi.   **Appeals Process (if required)** - if the RPL application is rejected, the learner should be informed of their right to appeal the decision, as per the centre's internal Appeals Policy.

If a centre believes that their standard timelines will exceed the above, they should discuss this directly with their GA Centre Administrator.

15. Appeals

The GA Appeals Procedure applies to any assessment decision including RPL evidence. Please refer to GA's Appeals Policy for further details.

16. Monitoring the RPL Policy

GA will ensure that:

- reports are made to the Governance Committee and Quality Panel, as appropriate, as part of our monitoring and reviewing arrangements.

- guidance from the Regulators is reviewed and the policy is updated to comply with best practice, as required.

- feedback, industry requirements, and other applicable sector-specific or regulatory guidelines are reviewed and the policy updated as required.

- information from monitoring activities is made available to the Regulator(s) as part of the Awarding Organisation's self-evaluation procedure and on request.

- this policy is reviewed as required.

Document Specification:

The purpose of this document is to set out the policy and procedure to be followed by GA and GA approved centres on receipt of an application by a Learner for an amendment to the requirements for which a Learner must satisfy before the Learner will be assessed or that qualification will be awarded, based on learning they have already undertaken and achieved ('prior learning').

Accountability:	Gatehouse Awards Governance Committee
Responsibility:	Director
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Links to Ofqual GCR	E10
Other relevant documents:	Gatehouse Awards Application for RPL Form Gatehouse Awards Regulations for Conducting Controlled Examinations Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny (CASS) & Moderation Policy Record of Reasonable Adjustment/Special Consideration Form Request for Reasonable Adjustment and Exemption Form Qualification Specifications Gatehouse Awards Centre Handbook Gatehouse Awards Appeals Policy and Procedures