

College Procedure

The Procedure for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Exemptions / Equivalency (FE and Pearson - Higher Nationals) 2025-26

25th July 2025



Senior Leadership Responsibility	Deputy Chief Executive - Curriculum and Quality- Adam Fahey
Policy Author	Executive Director Quality, Teaching and Learning) – Matthew Twitchett
Roles Responsible for Reviewing	Executive Director Quality, Teaching & Learning
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Significant changes following review of procedure – 25 July 2025

Page Number or Heading Name	Details of significant change	Changes made by
n/a	None	n/a

POLICY AVAILABILITY NOTICE

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Equality Impact Assessment

The aim of an equality impact assessment (EIA) is to consider the equality implications of any new or amended policy, procedure, practice, project, function on different groups of staff, students and visitors to the college. This EIA tool provides a simple framework that helps evaluate whether the change may inadvertently disadvantage protected characteristics and identify ways to proactively advance and promote equality.

You will need to consider each of the equations and provide information as to consideration and any changes made in relation to Equality, diversity and inclusion.

Date EIA completed.	25-7-25
Name of person responsible for completing the EIA	Matthew Twitchett
Role of person responsible for completing the EIA	Executive Director of Quality, Teaching and Learning
Who is affected by the policy / decision / change	Students and Staff employed
What's the reason for the new policy / change in policy, practice, process etc.	This is a yearly review and update required by awarding organisations

You will need to consider whether it's possible that the proposed new policy / change in policy /procedure/practice etc could discriminate or unfairly discriminate or disadvantage people. You should consider:

Who gets to participate	Who does not, or who now does not due to the changes proposed / made.
Who is at an advantage	Who is at a disadvantage, and again has this changed?
Who will benefit	Who will not benefit (or who did and now doesn't due to the changes proposed in policy
Who can access the policy	Who cannot, or now cannot.

Protected Characteristic	What degree of impact does the change have (score 1-5 with one being lowest impact and 5 being the highest)	What is a potential positive, neutral or negative impact? Include what you have considered. Are there any barriers?	What action will be taken to address any negative impact or remove any potential barriers identified? Note if we are not able to resolve anything identified.	Date by when and whom will this action be taken.
Age	1	None identified		
Disability	1	Some students may need support in understanding the policy and help in completing RPL. This will be provided by the student support teams in the College.	Students with an identified disability can seek support from a Carer/Parent or Guardian and the College in completing RPL. The College can also provide staff to support in this process.	As and when required
Gender (Sex)	1	None identified		
Gender Reassignment	1	None identified		
Marriage or Civil Partnership	1	None identified		
Pregnancy / Maternity	1	None identified		
Race	1	None identified		
Religion or Religious Belief	1	None identified		
Sexual Orientation	1	None identified		
Any other element that needs to be considered.	1	None identified		

Note:

1. The terms stated under protected characteristics are the terminology used in the Equality Act 2010.
2. As part of the policy approval process Executive Board will consider the EIA assessment and any potential barriers which we may not be able to overcome and whether the action proposed will mitigate sufficiently within legislation or whether we decide to not implement the new policy if the risk are significant. If the policy is approved the EIA is also approved.

South Essex College Group

Executive summary

The procedure for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and exemptions / equivalency

This procedure applies to all applicants, students and staff involved in the process of claiming credit through prior learning. It applies to all qualifications except for those assessed through national examinations and where the student is required to sit the examination. This policy does not apply to Higher Education students on degree programmes but does apply to students on Pearson Higher National programmes.

RPL has been defined as

“A method of assessment that considers whether a student 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.”

This procedure sets out the principles of, and procedures for, claiming credit at South Essex College Group. Each awarding organisation has specific guidelines.

The aim of the procedure is to:

- Establish the principles for the recognition of prior learning and claiming of credit.
- Provide common processes, applied with equity and fairness to all students seeking recognition of prior learning.
- Provide a system that meets the needs of the students and staff and supports students in preparing and presenting evidence of prior learning, achievement and/or experience for assessment.

The procedure for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) – exemptions / equivalency

1 Procedure

1.1 This procedure applies to all qualifications which contain elements of internally assessed work, including those on the National Qualification Framework (NQF), the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), Regulated Qualification Framework (RQF), Pearson (Higher Nationals) and other national frameworks in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and self-regulated qualifications.

1.2 It should be read in conjunction with the code of practice, procedure and guidance provided by the awarding or examining organisation which validates the qualification.

1.3 The purpose of this procedure is to provide a framework of generic procedures which reflect the requirements of all awarding organisations; it emphasises procedures relating to the recognition of prior learning.

1.4 In all cases where RPL is being considered due reference must be made to the relevant awarding organisation's RPL procedure and procedures.

1.5 All queries about this procedure should be addressed to the Executive Director of Quality, Teaching and Learning.

1.6 RPL is about using a student's evidence of earlier learning and achievement towards part of a qualification. An assessor reviews whether the evidence is enough to show that a learner has met the assessment requirements for a current qualification. The student needs to show that through knowledge, understanding or skills they already have, they do not need to repeat the course or complete extra assessment activity.

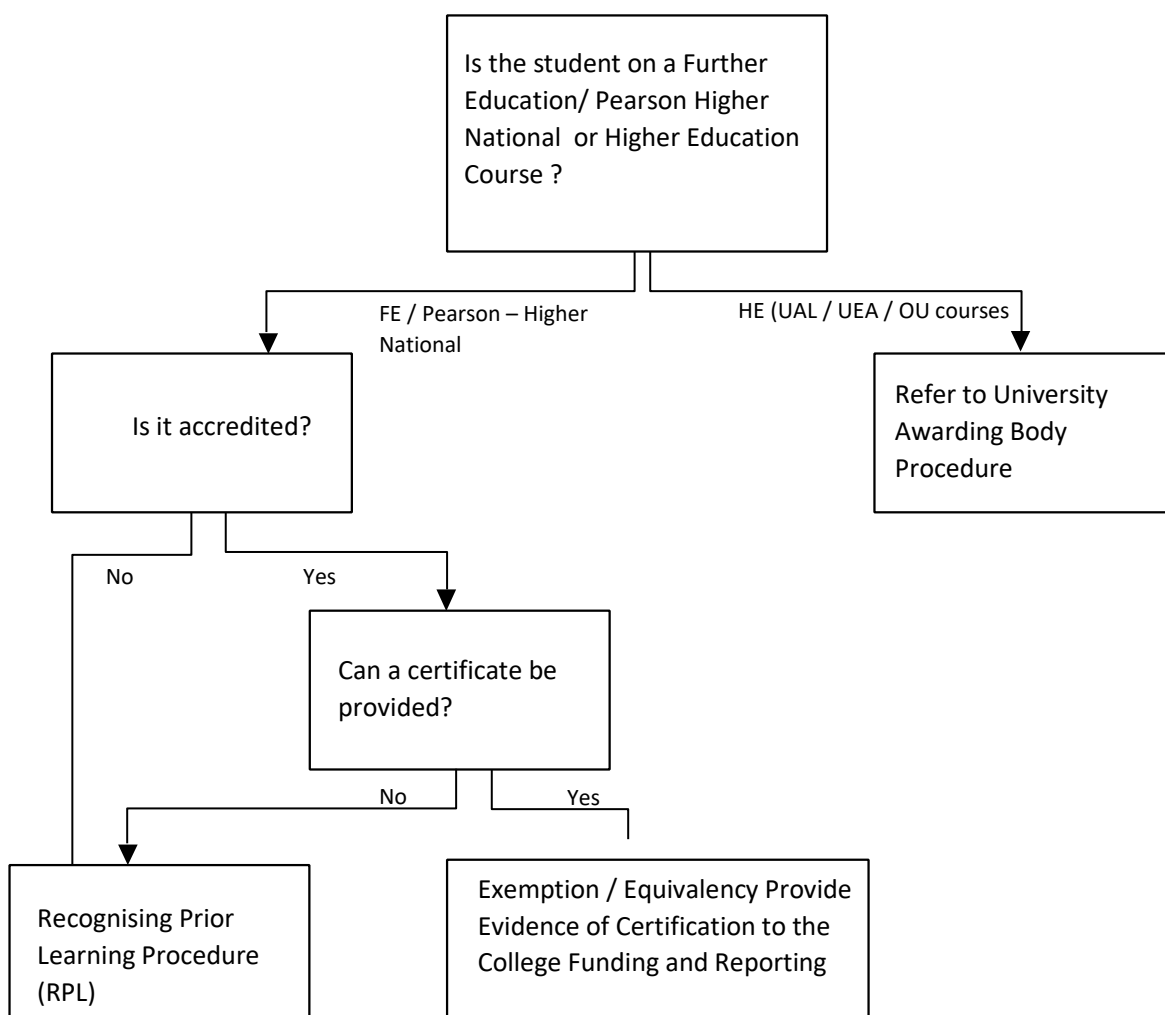
2. Recognising Prior Learning (RPL) , experience and achievement purpose

2.1 The RPL procedure is in place to enable learners to avoid duplication of learning and assessment for the purposes of awarding credit. There are three ways that this can be managed;

1. Exemption
2. Equivalency
3. Recognition of prior learning

2.2 College students will be able to claim exemptions/equivalency by providing evidence of certification to the funding and reporting unit or by following the College RPL procedure.

The flow chart below will inform staff whether the student's claim is exemption/ equivalency or RPL:



3. Definition of Recognition Prior Learning (RPL)

- 3.1 Recognition of prior learning is a method of assessment leading to the award of credit that considers whether students can demonstrate that they can meet the assessment requirements for a unit through knowledge, understanding or skills they already possess and so not need to develop through a course of learning.
- 3.2 If there is evidence that the student has previously shown the knowledge, skills or understanding required by a qualification, this may be used towards achieving that qualification. The evidence must be, valid, current, reliable, authentic and sufficient.
- 3.3 RPL is not normally used to provide evidence against achievement for an entire qualification. This would be called an exemption and is usually used where a learner must gain a specified qualification for a particular purpose (for example, as an entry requirement for further study, employment or registration). If a student thinks that they are entitled to an exemption, the student must refer to the organisation which has specified the original qualification requirement.
- 3.4 Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework
Ofqual/08/3726) 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 be valid and reliable.
- 3.5 The College Group will use RPL where agreed between the learner and the College Group that this process will help learners in facilitating their assessment. RPL is also of value to students transferring across various learning programmes that have relevant learning but do not hold relevant credits or certificates. This may include students transferring from NQF to QCF or RQF specifications.

4 Principles of recognised prior learning

4.1 RPL is a valid method of enabling students to claim credits for units or modules, irrespective of how the learning occurred. There is no difference between the achievement of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of the unit or module through prior learning or through a formal programme of study.

4.2 The process of assessment for RPL is subject to the same quality assurance and monitoring of standards as any other form of assessment. The award of credit through RPL will not be distinguished from any other credits awarded.

4.3 Assessment methods for RPL must be of equal rigour and validity to other assessment methods, be fit for purpose and relate to the evidence of learning and/or skills development. Credit may be claimed for any unit or module through RPL unless assessment requirements of the unit or module do not allow this.

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

- A unit or module which forms part of the full qualification
- Unit or units recognised by a certificate of achievement
- A full qualification

4.5 Applications for RPL must be carried out by centre staff who are competent to consider and make decisions about RPL.

5 Recognising RPL

5.1 These are three ways of recognising RPL:

1. Submit a portfolio of evidence based on previous relevant knowledge, skills and competencies which must be assessed against the assessment criteria of the

unit(s) or module(s) for which RPL is being sought to ensure that all learning outcomes have been achieved.

2. Undertake the same assessments as learners following a formal course of learning and assessment that lead to the award of the unit, module or qualification. The assessments may be undertaken without attending teaching sessions.
3. Assessment through summative assessment against a unit, module or full qualification

6 Responsibilities for accepting an RPL claim

6.1 All requests for claims must be referred to the department Curriculum Leader for the subject area who needs to be aware of the relevant awarding organisation's policy and or procedures for claiming credit through RPL.

6.2 Requests from students must be made at the start of the programme of study to allow time for the process of RPL. Ideally these requests should be made during enrolment but must not be completed any later than the induction period.

6.3 The Curriculum Leader will:

- check that staff have the expertise to support and assure the RPL process
- examine the documentation or other material which has been presented and will interview the learner; any requirement for the interview would be determined in accordance with the specific regulations of the programme.
- establish whether learning as a result of the applicant's experience matches the learning outcomes of the unit(s) or module(s) for which credit is being claimed and is current.

6.4 If the Curriculum Leader feels that there is a valid case for claiming the credits applied for, they must submit a report to her/his Head of School/ who will be responsible for making the final decision with regard to the claim and following awarding organisation guidance.

6.5 If a claim is deemed to be valid by the Head of School, he/she will then submit the claim to the Funding and Reporting Department at the College.

7 Stage 1 - Awareness , information and Guidance

7.1 The student should be offered advice on:

- The nature and range of evidence required to support a claim for credit through RPL.
- The process for claiming credit.
- The support and guidance available to them.
- Timelines, appeals process and any costs which may be involved.

7.2 Students will be informed of RPL during the recruitment process and induction which may include open evenings, interviews or information sessions.

7.3 Before enrolling the student, discuss with them the option of using RPL to claim units for some of their past learning or experience. If the student is interested in this, you should explain to them:

- The process of claiming a unit using RPL.
- The support and guidance that is available.
- How long the process will take, how to appeal and any costs included.

7.4 Check that the evidence provided by the learner for RPL has been achieved before the start of their course of study

8 Stage 2 – Pre-Assessment/ gathering evidence

8.1 The student must be registered as soon as possible and an RPL application form completed (See Appendix Two) – This will take place during the learner's induction period.

8.2 The learner needs to collect the evidence required.

8.3 A plan for the completion of the RPL activity including any assessment must be agreed with the learner.

8.4 The evidence required will depend on the purpose, learning outcomes and assessment criteria for the relevant unit(s), module(s) or qualification.

8.5 The recognised prior learning that would provide evidence of current knowledge, understanding and skills will vary for different areas a qualifications. It must be current i.e. attained within the last five years. (This currency period may vary according to the awarding organisation).

8.6 If the currency is in doubt, the assessor may use questions to check understanding and for competence. The assessment strategy for each qualification must be adhered to.

8.7 The student should continue study the part of the programme which they have requested RPL until this has been accepted as RPL. This is to prevent the student being disadvantaged if the RPL is rejected.

9 Stage 3 – Assessing and documenting evidence

9.1 Assessment must be valid and reliable to ensure the integrity of the unit(s), module(s) or qualification and the RPL process.

9.2 Assessment as part of RPL is a structured process for gathering and reviewing evidence and making judgements about students' past learning and experience in relation to unit standards. The Assessor may look at:

- Work experience records, validated by managers.
- Past portfolios of evidence or essays made by the learner.
- Reports validated as being the learner's own unaided work.
- Expert witness testimonies.

- Professional discussions.
- New assignment briefs or tasks that have been created to fill any gaps in the learner's work.

9.3 Where unit(s), module(s) or qualifications are assessed against assessment or grading criteria, then all evidence must be evaluated against the stipulated criteria. 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.

9.4 The recording of assessment and assessment process for RPL must be subject to the same quality assurance processes as any other part of the assessment process.

9.5 Inform your Standards Verifier/External Examiner, before any monitoring activity starts, if you have applied RPL for any particular units or learners. Your Standards Verifier/External Examiner may include these in their sample.

9.6 If the assessor find gaps in the student's work through RPL, they will need to use more assessment methods to create enough evidence to be able to award the learning outcome for the whole unit.

10 Documenting evidence

10.1 Evidence collected through the RPL process must to be assessed and verified through the same quality assurance procedures that your centre uses for any other internal assessment methods.

10.2 Records of assessment against prior learning are kept and are available for verification if requested.

10.3 Awarding credit - The awarding organisation is responsible for awarding credit and issuing certificates The procedure is the same as for other forms of assessment

11 Stage 4 - Outcomes of RPL / Feedback to student

- 11.1 After the RPL process or assessment the assessor must give feedback to the student, discussing the results and providing support and guidance on options available which may include further learning and development.
- 11.2 The assessor must check that the student understands how they can appeal if they do not agree with the assessment decision.
- 11.3 If the student can show that they have met all the learning outcomes and assessment criteria using RPL they will be able to claim for the unit or qualification.
- 11.4 An awarding organisation may identify that all unit requirements have not been met, they may ask us to provide more evidence, or ask the student to complete the standard assessment requirements if they want to achieve the qualification.

12 Stage 5 - Claiming Certificates

- 12.1 Certificates will be claimed once the quality assurance processes have been successfully completed using the standard procedures.
- 12.2 The student has met all the requirements/outcomes set by the awarding organisation
- 12.3 Assessment and internal verification records, along with any extra RPL records will be kept for three years.

13 Stage 6 - Appeals

- 13.1 A student can appeal and should follow the College Appeals procedure.

Please refer to Appendix three for additional guidance regarding Pearson Qualifications page 15

14. The Procedure for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) (Exemptions and Equivalency) – Apprenticeships

14.1 Students completing apprenticeship programmes who have prior attainment either accredited (APL) or Non-accredited (RPL) must provide evidence to the Apprenticeship Team. Evidence should be gathered during recruitment activities and checked by the compliance officers and delivery teams to ascertain if a reduced price should be negotiated with the employer.

14.2 Confirmation of prior attainment should be checked with the relevant Tutor/Assessor and their line manager to confirm which elements of the programme the learner does not have to undertake. Where the learner is on an Apprenticeship Standard, considerations must be taken in to account regarding how well the learner is prepared for End Point Assessment (EPA) if related learning is not delivered. Suitable assessment and checks must be carried out to ensure that relevant skills and knowledge are at the correct level for EPA.

14.3 RPL is most likely to occur when a learner has progressed to a higher level, when they have completed an Alternative Education Programme at school or when they have had significant experience in the vocational area relevant to their apprenticeship programme. Where a level of prior experience has been discussed and documented but there is no direct duplication or reduced delivery requirements this should be clearly recorded and evidenced in the Commitment Statement.

Procedure End

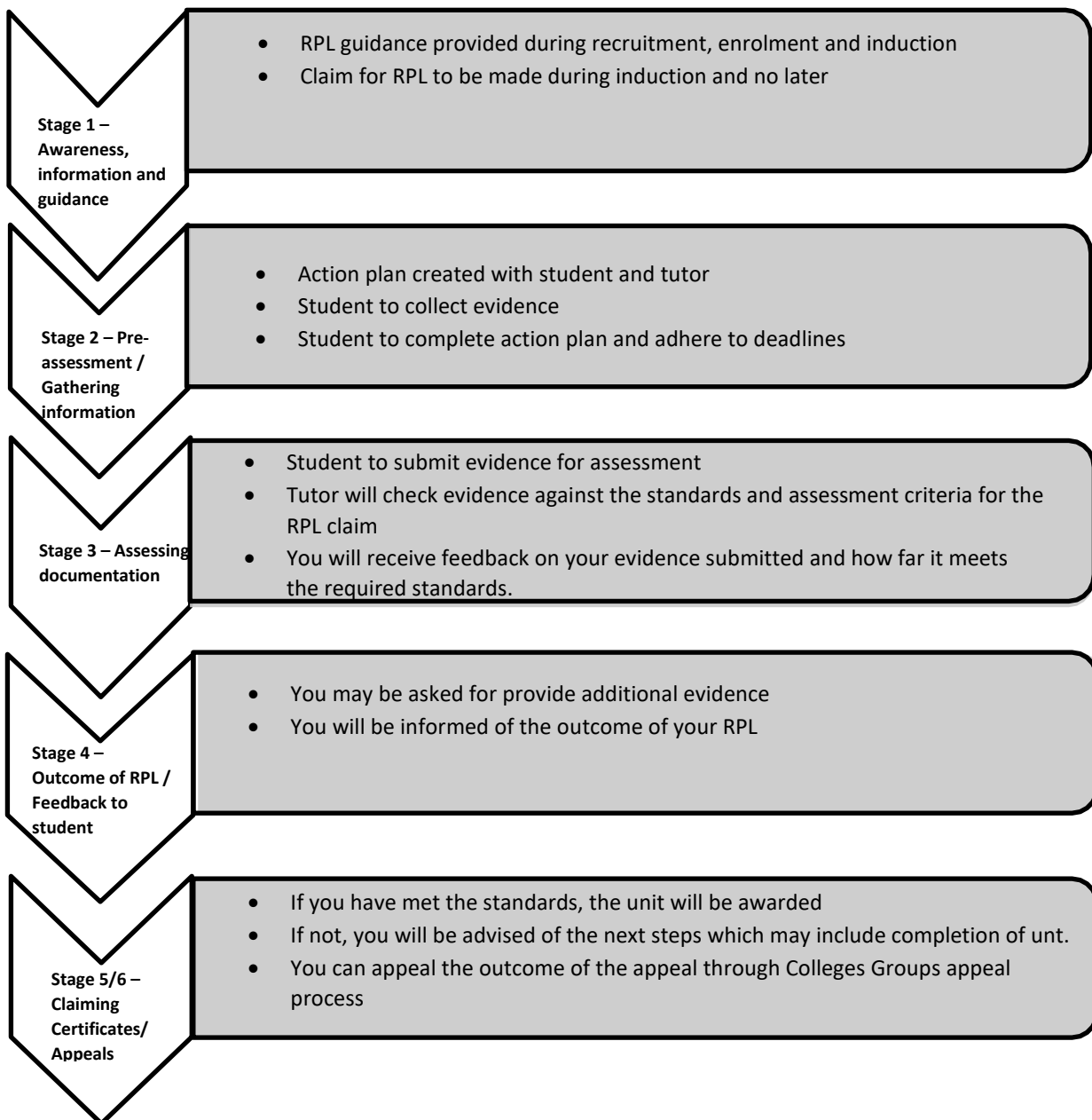


Appendix One

Information for applicants

The College Group is aware that many students have knowledge skills and understanding learnt for example through the workplace over time.

RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) is a process where individuals can demonstrate that they can meet the assessment requirements for a unit using the skills, knowledge and understanding they already have. If you wish to 'claim credit' for a unit, the chart below outlines the process.



Appendix Two - Form for registration of exemptions/ equivalents/ RPL

Learner Name				Student ID	
College				School	
Course Title		Course Code		Awarding Organisation	
SECTION A Exemptions/equivalents					
Title of unit / Module achieved	Year Achieved	Grade Achieved (If relevant)	Title of unit/ module Equivalent in Programme	Code of Unit/ Module Equivalent in Programme	Copy of certificate attached
SECTION B	RPL				

Unit/ Module Title	Unit Code	No. of credits	Outcome/ Grade (if relevant) Awarded	Signature of Academy Manager/ Date

Appendix 3 – Further Information - Recognition of Prior Learning for Pearson Higher Nationals

- When using RPL for Higher National awards, the underlying principle is that assessed evidence from certified learning should be at the same level of education for which RPL is being used. Pearson also acknowledges that RPL can be undertaken through assessment of previous experiential learning. However;
- A Higher Education award which has been certified by Pearson, cannot be used as prior learning to contribute to the achievement of another Pearson higher education award of an equivalent level. An award is defined as a completed qualification (Higher National Certificate or Higher National Diploma). Individual units are not defined as an award and can be used for RPL.
- Where higher education awards have been certified by another awarding body, under License from Pearson, this may not apply as centres must make case by case determinations as to whether RPL is applicable
- Where students wish to top-up from a Level 4 HN programme on the QCF specification to a Level 5 HN programme on the RQF specification, units can be used for RPL but the centre must ensure that additional tasks can be set to ensure that Learning Outcomes not achieved can meet assessment criteria.
- An exception to 1.2 will be for credit-bearing units contributing to HN Flex study, where a student has achieved a Pearson Level 4 Higher National Certificate, studies HN Flex units and then progresses onto the Pearson Level 5 Higher National Diploma.
- Where RPL is used to determine whether learning outcomes have been met on a Pearson Higher National award, the maximum grade that the student can achieve for that unit will be a Pass if the RPL has been undertaken through experiential learning. Where RPL is undertaken by assessing certified learning, then centres must demonstrate clearly where RPL is able to meet Merit or Distinction criteria across all learning outcomes.
- RPL processes should not be used for any more than 50% of the total credit value of a Higher National award.
- All RPL decisions will be ratified by the Assessment Board and minuted; records of the evidence for RPL decision will be kept and may be viewed by Pearson-appointed External Examiners.
- All RPL applications will be documented. All RPL documentation should record clearly where learning outcomes have been met by either certified or experiential learning.