

aat

# Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy

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## 1. Introduction

AAT is the UK's leading professional body offering skills-based accountancy and finance qualifications. Our accountancy qualifications teach practical skills for the workplace. We work across the globe with around 130,000 members in more than 100 countries. Our members are represented at every level of the finance and accounting world, including students, people already working in accountancy and self-employed business owners.

AAT qualifications are assessed primarily through externally set and marked assessments, which are administered by approved centres under controlled conditions. However, students may be eligible to submit evidence of prior learning instead, which is assessed by their centre and externally quality assured by AAT using the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process.

This policy sets out the principles and process for centres who are planning to use RPL for their students to achieve AAT qualifications. It explains the requirements for centres to have an RPL policy, how and when RPL can be used as a method of assessment, the type and suitability of evidence and processes that should be followed to achieve a successful RPL outcome. It applies to all assessable units, with the exception of the synoptic assessments and units that are only assessed as part of the synoptic assessments.

This document is not applicable to students who wish to claim exemption for an assessment based on their achievement of a comparable external qualification. For information about current exemptions and how to claim them, please refer to the [Qualifications Exemptions Policy](#).

## 2. Definition of RPL

RPL is a method of assessment that uses evidence of a student's previous work experience, learning or achievements to demonstrate competence in, or achievement against the learning outcomes within units of AAT qualifications, and which may lead to the award of those units. It is also known as the Recognition of Prior Achievement (RPA) and Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL).

The qualifications regulators in England, Wales and Northern Ireland define RPL as the:

- a) identification by an awarding organisation of any learning undertaken, and/or attainment, by a learner
  - I. prior to that learner taking a qualification which, the awarding organisation 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 awarding organisation 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.

### 3. Centre RPL Policy

All approved centres are required to have their own RPL policy and to ensure that relevant staff within the centre are familiar with the content.

The policy should clearly set out the centre's RPL process and should make it clear that its purpose is to enable students to record knowledge, understanding and skills they have acquired from work experience and training, and to have this assessed against the requirements of an AAT assessable unit. The policy should explain how students can do this by using a range of evidence showing prior learning undertaken, for example having completed a relevant qualification.

The centre's policy should align closely to the principles and processes set out in this document. It should unequivocally state that the evidence should be mapped 100% to the AAT unit assessment criteria, then assessed and internally quality assured by the relevant centre staff.

AAT will review the policy during the centre approval process and will then monitor the centre's use of the policy as part of on-going external quality assurance activity.

### 4. Fees for RPL assessments

Where RPL is used as the method of assessment for a unit, a fee equivalent to the published assessment fee for that unit will be charged.

### 5. RPL unit limitations and restrictions

Students may achieve up to a maximum of 50% of the units required to achieve an AAT qualification using RPL and must achieve at least one unit using the assessment method required by that unit.

A student may not be certificated for any level of the AAT's qualifications using RPL alone.

For the avoidance of doubt, the table below shows the maximum number of units that may be achieved using RPL, depending on the total number of units required to achieve a qualification.

Number of units required to achieve an AAT qualification	Number of units that can be achieved by RPL
1	None
2	1
3	1
4	2
5	2
6	3
7	3
8	4
9	4
10 or more	No more than 50%

It should be noted that under AQ2016 no RPL will be accepted for the synoptic assessments, or any units that are only assessed as part of the synoptic assessments. For the avoidance of doubt, this includes the following units/assessments:

- Foundation Synoptic Assessment
- Work Effectively in Finance
- Advanced Synoptic Assessment
- Ethics for Accountants
- Spreadsheets for Accounting
- Professional Synoptic Assessment
- Accounting Systems and Controls

If a student has failed an AAT assessment, AAT will not accept RPL applications for that unit for a period of two years from the date of the failed assessment.

## 6. Type and suitability of evidence

Examples of the types of evidence which may be submitted for RPL assessment include:

- workplace documents
- witness testimonies
- personal statements
- professional discussion
- assessor observation records
- record of voluntary activities
- certificates issued following an informal or formal course of learning\*.

\*For certificated achievement a detailed specification of the learning/qualification gained will be required in order to make the mapping process possible.

All evidence submitted for RPL assessment must be:

- **valid** – it should relate to the assessment criteria
- **authentic** – it must be the student's own work
- **current** – it should normally be no more than 24 months old, except for areas where:
  - change is rapid and the 24 months guideline would be too long
  - candidates can prove evidence is still valid
- **sufficient** – it must meet all of the assessment criteria.

## 7. The RPL process

Each centre will develop their own approach to supporting students through the RPL process. However, the process must be fair, neither advantage nor disadvantage any student, and cover all of the 10 stages detailed below.

### Stage 1: Initial Assessment

The possibility of RPL as an assessment method should be discussed with the student during initial assessment, at the start of the course.

## **Stage 2: Advice and guidance**

The assessor should encourage the student to identify any prior learning that could be used as evidence. It should then become clear whether the student will be able to present sufficient evidence for the unit(s).

## **Stage 3: Assessment planning**

The assessment planning process should formalise the approach to presenting evidence as well as help the student to become familiar with the standards.

## **Stage 4: Evidence collection**

Assessors should support students by helping them to identify appropriate evidence.

## **Stage 5: Evidence mapping**

The student should map the evidence to the assessment criteria, with support from the assessor, using the AAT mapping sheets available on the assessment platform. This task is made easier if completed on an on-going basis rather than being left until the end of the process.

## **Stage 6: Formative feedback**

The assessor should review the evidence and provide formative feedback to the student.

## **Stage 7: Assessment**

Centres are required to schedule students for RPL assessment on the assessment platform.

The student will have six months to submit all of their evidence for the assessment including mapping documents. Students are able to access the assessment as many times as they wish within the six-month period.

The assessor should check the evidence for validity, authenticity, currency and sufficiency and may ask questions to plug any gaps in the evidence or strengthen weak areas.

The assessor should check that the RPL limit of 50% for the overall qualification has not been exceeded.

## **Stage 8: Assessment decision**

The assessor should review the evidence submitted by the student and award the appropriate assessment outcome, within 10 working days of the assessment taking place.

## **Stage 9: Internal verification**

Once the assessment decision has been made the internal verification process can begin.

In regard to workplace evidence, it is usual for internal verifiers to contact a sample of employers to authenticate employer witness testimonies.

Internal verifiers should review the assessment decisions and add feedback for the assessor, ensuring that the full range of internal verifier activities have been covered, within 10 working days of the assessment decision.

## Stage 10: External quality assurance

Once the internal verifier has confirmed the assessment decision it will be available on the assessment platform for the External Quality Assurer (EQA) to carry out the required quality checks through a process of sampling, and before results are confirmed and issued.

External quality checks will normally be completed within 10 – 20 working days of the internal verification decision.

A diagram providing an overview of the RPL process is shown in Section 11.

## 8. Internal assessment

Centres must ensure that there are suitably trained and qualified assessors who can support students through the RPL process and assess evidence of prior learning against the relevant assessment criteria. Details of the qualifications required for assessors is provided in the **AAT Code of Practice**.

All evidence of prior learning, including supplementary evidence, must be mapped by the student to the assessment criteria and subsequently submitted for assessment. It is critical that assessment is planned carefully by the assessor, in agreement with the student, so that the student knows what is happening and when.

Assessors must be confident that a student's prior learning relates to the current standards of competence. The assessor must identify the student's knowledge and skills and determine how these can be mapped and assessed against the current standards. In doing so, they should consider whether there has been any new legislation and/or whether technical changes in working methods have taken place since the student gained his/her knowledge. It may be that student's skills need refreshing or updating. Normally evidence up to 24 months old will be accepted, except for areas where change is rapid and the 24 months guideline would be too long, or the student can prove evidence is still valid.

All assessment criteria must be 100% evidenced. However, any minimal gaps in a student's skills and knowledge can be addressed through appropriate tuition and/or supplementary evidence, which may include assessor devised questions/tasks and answers, or workplace documents produced by the student and authenticated by their employer. In all cases, assessors must consider the nature of the gaps in the evidence. If those gaps relate to fundamental areas of the unit, then top up assessment will not be appropriate. Assessors should take note of AAT qualification specifications for further explanation of the assessment criteria and the range of evidence required.

Some students may be able to generate evidence from activities undertaken in their workplace. Students who wish to present workplace evidence for assessment should be tasked to:

- collect workplace documents that evidence the assessment criteria for the unit
- explain their role in the production of the evidence - this explanation can be through a personal statement or statements on each piece of evidence and will provide the context for the assessor.

Workplace evidence must always consist of workplace documents, questions and answers and witness testimony. The witness testimony from the employer is a vital part of the evidence as it confirms that the evidence has been produced by the student. The testimony must be on

letter-headed paper, dated, signed and identify the position of the witness within the organisation. If a student does not wish their employer to know that he/she is studying for an AAT qualification, or cannot obtain an employer witness testimony for some reason, then they must undertake the relevant assessment.

All assessment decisions must be made within 10 working days of evidence being presented.

## 9. Internal verification

Centres must ensure there are suitably trained and qualified internal verifiers, who can support assessors and, through sampling activities, ensure RPL assessment decisions are valid and reliable. Details of the qualifications required for internal verifiers is provided in the **AAT Code of Practice**.

At the beginning of a programme the internal verifier should plan any activities that will need to take place for students intending to present RPL evidence and record those plans. Plans can be on a week by week or month by month basis and whilst it will be a working document and subject to change, will ensure that no activity is overlooked.

The internal verifier should undertake a range of sampling activities in accordance with the plan. Sampling rationales should be clearly recorded and there should be an appropriate internal verifier policy in place, which should be adhered to.

It's important for internal verifiers to observe/review assessor performance in the assessment process. The opportunity to observe assessors occurs when an assessor is undertaking the assessment planning process or giving feedback to students.

Choosing the sample for internal verification should not be a number driven exercise but should, as appropriate, ensure the whole of the population is reflected, for example, different delivery modes, different types of candidates following an RPL route, different assessors etc. Once the sample has been selected, the percentage should be considered for sufficiency. This should be around 20% for experienced assessors, with a larger sample (up to 100%) for less experienced assessors. Where there is only a very small number of students following an RPL route then sampling evidence across all students should be undertaken.

The internal verifier should ensure all assessment decisions are accurate and timely. As indicated above, assessment decisions must be made within 10 working days of evidence being presented. Internal verification must take place within 10 working days of the assessment decision.

The internal verifier should ensure that assessors meet the assessor requirements set out in the **AAT Code of Practice**, follow the assessor guidance provided above, are able to use the e-portfolio system with confidence, and that there is an accurate audit trail of names and dates (and signatures where applicable).

The process of sampling evidence should be followed by comprehensive feedback to the assessor, which must be suitably recorded.



## 10. External quality assurance

One of the roles carried out by External Quality Assurers (EQAs), appointed by AAT, is to ensure that assessment outcomes are fair, valid and reliable. In order to do so EQAs will sample the RPL assessment decisions made by centres following specified guidelines. This sampling will take place before results are agreed and issued to students.

### **Timing of sampling activities**

AAT assessments are all online, which allows EQAs to sample RPL assessed student evidence remotely. Sampling takes place on an ongoing basis, as submissions are received.

### **Sample selection**

Sampling activities will include all assessors and internal verifiers and competent and not-yet-competent assessment decisions over time. Where a centre has more than one site, the sample chosen will reflect assessment decisions made at each site and the variance in assessors and internal verifiers. The sample will reflect the student cohort in terms of gender, ethnicity, disability and age and also different modes of delivery.

### **Sample size**

The sample size will be a minimum of 10% of the total number of students within a single cohort, but can be increased by up to 100% depending on when the centre was approved, the experience of the assessors and internal verifiers, the number of students taking each qualification, whether there have been any previous quality issues at the centre and any issues that have been identified during the sampling process.

The key consideration is that the sample selected must give confidence in the assessment decisions that have been made, including for those assessments that have not been sampled. Ultimately, sampling is not about numbers of assessments inspected, but whether the sample presents a sufficiently accurate picture of the quality of assessment and related quality assurance within the centre.

### **Sample reporting**

If any significant issues are identified during the sampling activity, EQAs will advise the Centre Compliance team and the centre within 48 hours and recommend appropriate remedial action. In some instances, the remedial action may involve changing an assessment decision from competent to not yet competent, or vice versa. In all cases, clearly documented and comprehensive information will be given to the centre.

Through the sampling activity, EQAs not only ensure AAT guidance is being followed by centres but are also able to identify if any guidance requires clarification. For example, where improvements to assessment guidance are identified, these will be reported to the Qualification Development and Centre Compliance teams within 48 hours, so that appropriate remedial action can be taken.

### **Potential malpractice and maladministration**

Through the EQA sampling, one key factor is to ensure the assessment decisions are fair, valid, reliable and authentic. EQAs will need to assure themselves that the evidence presented is the student's own work and that the assessment and verification process within the centre is sufficiently robust in identifying potential anomalies.

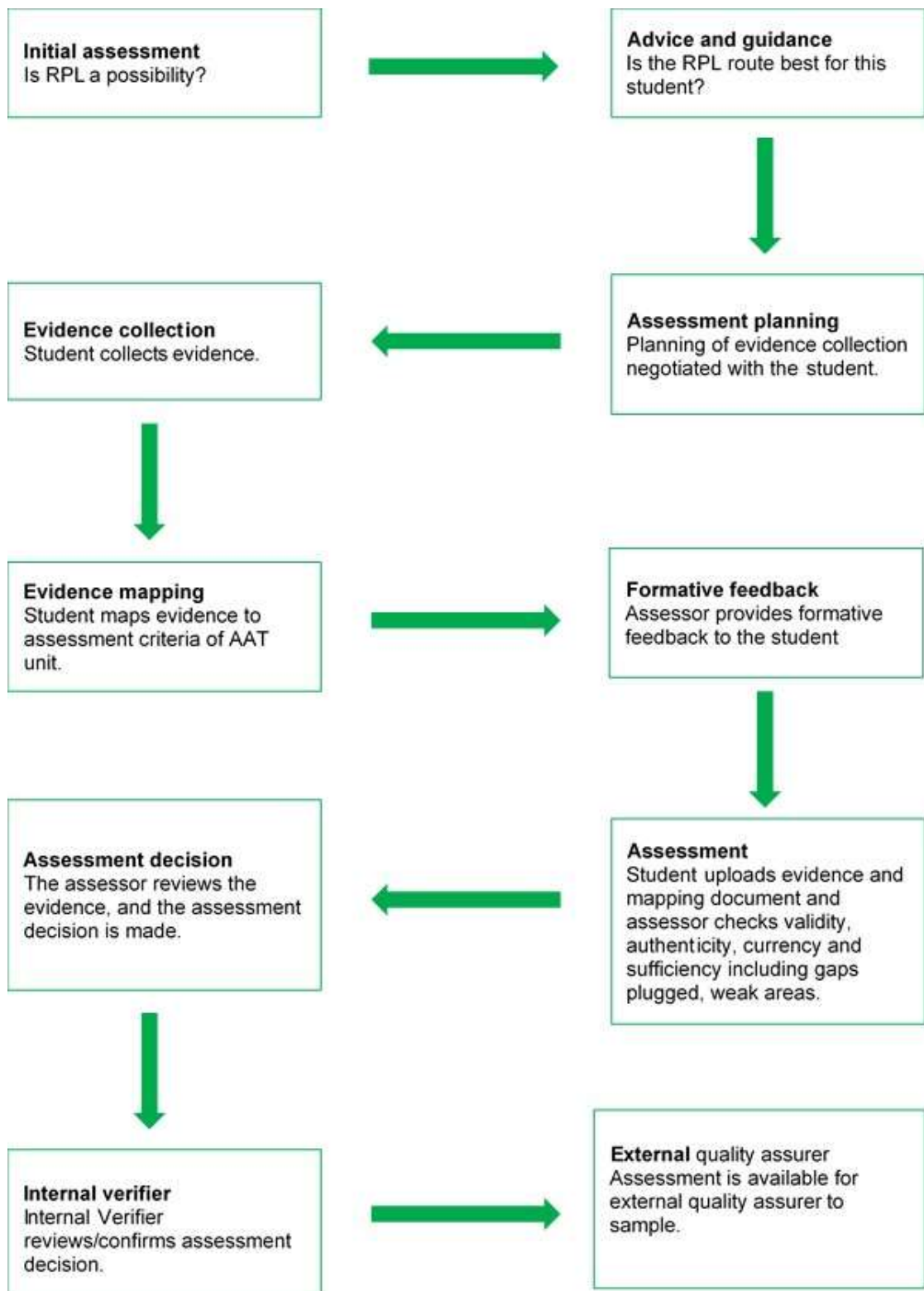
If issues are identified, these will be reported to the Centre Compliance team within 48 hours and before any results are released. This will then be followed up with the centre and a decision made as to whether the results can stand, if the sample needs to be increased, or a sanction needs to be imposed on the centre.

Where potential malpractice or maladministration has been identified then the *Policy and supporting guidance on preventing, investigating and dealing with malpractice and maladministration* will be followed.

### **On-going monitoring of RPL activity**

EQAs will review and monitor the implementation of RPL policy and practice in approved centres on an on-going basis through centre visits, centre self-assessment and other quality assurance activity. The aim of this will be to ensure compliance with AAT requirements.

## 11. The RPL process at a glance



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