

What is RPL?

People can gain a range of strengths and skills through:

- family life (home-making, caring, parenting)
- work (paid or unpaid)
- community, voluntary or leisure activities or training experiences
- key experiences and events in life.

We call this informal learning. It includes all learning which you have done up to this point which has not already been assessed or credit-rated.

Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) is a process through which the learning you have gained from your experiences can be counted. RPL can help you to:

- think about the learning you have already achieved and help you plan how to build on this learning to meet your goals
- get a place on a programme at college or university or training provider, if you don't have the normal entry qualifications but can show that you have the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding
- gain credit towards a qualification to shorten the normal period of study by showing that you already have knowledge, skills and understanding needed for particular parts of the programme or qualification (eg units or modules) 'Credit' is the currency used in education which indicates how much learning has been achieved at a given level.

What does RPL involve?

Before you go through the process of RPL there is an important guiding principle you should know about:

It is what you have learned that is being recognised, not what you have done.

So, for example, two people might have the same experience through doing identical jobs but one might have learned much more from the task(s) involved than the other. You may have said about someone, 'They never learned any lessons from'. People who have learned something are able to use that learning to help them in other related situations. Again you will have heard it said, 'They used all their experience to overcome the problem'. So you need to show what you have learned from your experiences, not just describe what you've done.

You need to provide evidence of what you have learned. This involves reflecting on your experiences and drawing out from them what you have learned, then writing this down or talking about it with your mentor. The writing or the talk will provide your evidence. That evidence is then assessed – for example, by a college or a university or a community or private training provider. Once assessed and once it is decided that your evidence meets the performance or assessment criteria you can be awarded credit towards a vocational or academic qualification or gain entry to another programme of learning.

By going through an RPL process you will be encouraged to value your personal experience as a way of helping you to make choices and prepare for moving on to further opportunities in education or work.

Recognition of Prior Informal Learning

(Children's Care, Learning & Development 4)

RPL can help you because it shows other people (and yourself) that you have learned significant things from your experiences and that you are capable of learning more from future experiences.

In summary then, RPL can be useful to you in the following ways:

- access to further learning at all levels
- confidence-building
- gaining credit within vocational or academic programmes or towards qualifications
- personal/self development
- improve your learning skills
- professional development
- valuing life experiences.