

LASER Access to HE Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) & Credit Transfer Policy and Procedures

Policy Statement

Laser Learning Awards (LASER) is committed to providing a high-quality service and to maintaining the highest standards for its learners, centres, and other stakeholders.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is the process of formally recognising a learner's previous achievements, using evidence of prior learning to demonstrate that an Access learner already possesses the knowledge, understanding and skills required for a unit/s and they therefore can be exempted from studying those units.

Credit transfer allows learners who have previously achieved credits towards an Access to HE Diploma to import those into their current course of study.

This policy explains what is defined as RPL and credit transfer, the circumstances in which they may be applicable to learners, and the policies for applying them where relevant. Both options are only available to learners at the discretion of the provider.

Policy Relevance

This policy applies to any LASER regulated and unregulated qualification or provision. The policy sets out the principles and procedures which should be followed in each case and explains what is valid and permitted in each case.

Policy Responsibility and Review

This policy is the responsibility of the Head of Access and will be reviewed by April 2028 at the latest.

Recognition of Prior Learning

The recognition of prior learning (RPL) provides a means by which students who have already achieved some of the requirements for the award of the Access to HE Diploma, through means other than study on an Access to HE Diploma without necessarily being required to undertake units for which equivalent achievement has already been demonstrated.

No more than 50% of the credits (30 credits) required for the award of the Access to HE Diploma may be awarded through RPL. The limit for individual programmes (which might be lower than 50% in some instances) is set at the point of programme validation and is stipulated within the rules of combination.

The rules of combination for each Access Diploma will also identify any specific units for which RPL is not permitted.

Credit achieved via RPL is NOT eligible for grading.

Within the Access to HE credit framework, the concepts of, and processes of operation for, RPL are commonly defined (see below) and consistently applied within the rules of combination of Access to HE Awards.

LASER operates a system of RPL based upon the mapping of prior learning against learning outcomes within units contained on Access Diploma rules of combination.

If all the learning outcomes within a specific unit can be shown to be met via the prior learning (either via RPCL¹ or RPEL² - see below), then subject to any specific RPL limits within the rules of combination pertaining to that Diploma and subject to the QAA set maximum of 50% of credit overall, the unit can be awarded. The achievement of units awarded via RPL will be identified as such within a student's credit transcript.

Each student making a claim for any RPL must have the appropriate form (RPL_Claim_Form) completed by the Access centre and the final claim must be noted and approved at the Final Awards Board.

¹ RPCL = Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning

² RPEL = Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning

Grading

Level Three units awarded via RPL are NOT eligible to be graded and will be awarded as achieved/pass.

Recognition of prior certificated learning (RPCL)

RPCL is the process through which previously assessed and certificated learning is recognised as equivalent in relation to meeting some of the requirements for the achievement of the Access to HE qualification.

Achievement of specific units in the Access Diploma via RPCL (use RPL Claim Form)

RPCL can be used as the vehicle for the achievement of specific units or groups of units within an Access Diploma or can be used to meet any additional requirements contained within the rules of combination.

Example: A student has achieved a module from an 'A Level' in Critical Thinking in Philosophy. Scrutiny of the syllabus confirms that it meets all the learning outcomes for an Access Unit entitled 'Critical Thinking' at Level Three. The relevant forms are completed, and the Access Unit is awarded via RPL.

In this example the student achieves the LASER Access Unit on his credit transcript via RPL.

Credit Exemption (use RPL Claim Form)

Credit exemption is where students are not required to achieve some of the credits which are necessary to achieve an Access Diploma. LASER will acknowledge this by issuing an RPL unit which identifies the prior qualification being used to exempt the student from a specified volume of credits. This constitutes a form of credit exemption based upon an agreed AVA tariff for a previously achieved and certificated qualification.

Centres must check with the AVA re existing credit rating tariffs for specific qualifications before agreeing to this process for students.³ Where a qualification is presented which is not formally covered by the current AVA credit rating tariff the centre, with the support of its Access external moderator must contact the LASER Access office to seek approval for any credit rating proposals.

Centres are advised that 'credit rating' of significant amounts of credit other than for GCSEs, is generally intended for use in exceptional circumstances where a student's progression opportunities would be enhanced by counting prior qualifications towards the achievement of an Access Diploma. This would usually be in cases where a student was unable to attend all the timetabled Access sessions or had other commitments which effectively prevented them from achieving the qualification. It might be particularly appropriate for part-time Access provision, where students enter the course with better developed Level Three skills but who need preparation for HE to enable them to change career or study direction.

Example A: A student has recently achieved a GCSE in English at grade C or above. By agreement with the Access course team and supported by the external moderator, the student wishes to claim exemption from 12 credits at Level Two.

Example B: A student has an NVQ in Health & Social Care and is attending an Access course on a part-time basis to continue supporting themselves via employment. The course team agree that one of the health care units' learning outcomes are all met by the NVQ syllabus and agree to this 6-credit unit being exempted as a requirement for the student. A copy of the NVQ certificate is obtained and an APL Claim Form completed. To further ensure the validity of the claim an APL Evidence Form is completed mapping the Access unit to the key NVQ units.

In these examples the students' unit/credit transcripts will show a special APL unit to the value indicated in the examples with a suitable title see below.

³ GCSEs achieved at grade C/4 or above are recognised as being equivalent to 12 credits at Level Two in LASER's credit tariff.

Recognition of prior experiential learning (RPEL) (use RPL Claim Form)

RPEL is the process by which non-certificated learning achieved in a range of learning contexts is recognised in relation to meeting the credit requirements of the rules of combination for the Access to HE qualification. In this process, credit is awarded by the AVA in recognition of learning achievement, for specific units within the Diploma for which achievement has already been demonstrated.

Centres offering RPEL must have their own robust processes and procedures in place for verifying and approving claims against units within an Access Diploma. The Access External Quality Assurer must be closely involved with any such claims and must approve the final award of any RPEL credit via the awards board and when signing off results.

Example: An Access Diploma contains a 6-credit unit at Level Three entitled 'Understanding Issues in a Social Care Context'. An experienced care worker who has NVQ Level Two in Care wishes to claim RPEL. If the Access team agree to accept the application for RPEL the following process could take place. Since the prior certificated learning is below Level Three, it is not enough to use an RPCL approach. However, when the NVQ2 is considered in combination with the experience of the student, backed up by references from a previous employer and an assessment made by the Access course tutor for Healthcare, it is agreed and then subsequently endorsed by the Access External Quality Assurer, that this unit can be achieved via RPEL.

Ensuring the validity of evidence for RPL

It is the responsibility of the Access providing centre to take all reasonable steps to verify the validity of evidence presented by students in support of claims for RPL. Where RPCL is used, staff from the centre must see and take copies of original certificates. Where RPEL is applied it is important that staff in centres take steps to verify the validity of such claims by taking up references, contacting former employers, etc. The Access external moderator, acting on behalf of the AVA, will have final say in approving RPL claims. All such claims must be considered at the final Access Awards Board.

Access units where use of RPL is NOT recommended

A centre must identify any units which cannot be used for RPL in its Diploma rules of combination. The AVA suggests that these should include the Independent Academic Study units, any mandatory Level Three units for completion of the Access Diploma, and in any which the main method of assessment is under examination conditions. The centre might wish to preclude 'study skills' type units, which are usually very important to learners who have been out of education for a considerable period and who may lack these skills which are essential for HE study.

Potential impact on funding for centres

Centres should be aware that if RPL is used with a student and if, as a part of that arrangement, a student attends the course for fewer hours than would otherwise be required, then there will be implications for the funding income to the centre for that student. Centres may wish to use RPL for some students but still require full attendance at sessions which make up the guided learning hours of the course.

Credit Transfer

Credit transfer relates to certificated credit that has been acquired at another institution, normally within another validated Access or Pre-Access programme. These credits must be accepted as relevant for the Access programme to which the learner wishes to transfer. This might occur if a learner has moved geographically during the course, or if there has been a deferment, such as a break for illness or other personal circumstances.

Credit transfer might be available for credit within subject-related pathways, ie specific credit, or generic credit achievement. Each Access course or pathway can have its separate regulations, depending on the requirements of the centre, and of relevant HEI benchmarks. However no more than 50% (up to 30 credits) can be claimed via credit transfer.

It might also be relevant for 'internal' pathway transfer, for example where Access students are registered in the first year of a two-year diploma title and opt to change to an alternate title in the second year, but the two internal diploma titles may have different units within their respective subject modules which do not allow for direct transfer.

Credit transfer means that this credit does not have to be acquired again by assessment within the Access course and might result in the learner not having to attend relevant teaching sessions.

Example A: a student transfers to an Access course from another centre having already achieved 12 credits at Level Three in 2 units which are directly relevant to the course. The centre uses the RPCL process to map the 12 credits against 12 credits worth of learning within the Access Diploma and awards these units via RPL.

Example B: a student transfers to an Access course from another LASER centre having achieved 15 ungraded study skills credits. The centre uses the Credit Transfer process to allow those units to be added to their Access Diploma for this student, so they do not need to undertake the ungraded credits on their new course.

The learner must provide evidence of certification for the unit(s) to the centre (the certificate itself is not required where previous credit achievement was awarded by LASER).

Credit transfer may be claimed against a whole unit or several units. It is not possible to claim part units.

Eligibility should be checked by the centre’s internal quality assurer who should inform LASER and:

- Provide evidence of units achieved, usually by way of original certificate (not required where previous credit achievement was awarded by LASER).
- Make an application for credit transfer to LASER.
- Identify approved credit transfers on the DER when achievement is being claimed.

Centres must have a Credit Transfer Policy, which may be included within its RPL Policy.

Where credit transfer is used towards a learner’s achievement of a qualification, a centre will still be charged the full fee for the qualification being claimed, as the full qualification is still subject to full external quality assurance by LASER, which includes checking eligibility for credit transfer and authentication of certificate(s).

Policy Approval

Approved internally by CEO, 8 June 2023

Approved externally by AQDC, 8 June 2023

Latest review date: April 2028 for approval at AQDC in June 2028

Document	Description
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Form	Mandatory: this form must be completed for each student claiming credit exemption or RPCL. It identifies which units within the diploma are being claimed by RPL and what evidence is available. It is signed by the Access coordinator/tutor and the External Quality Assurer. A copy of this form must be sent to the AVA to verify student achievement for certification.
Credit Transfer Claim Form	Mandatory: this form must be completed for each student claiming credit transfer from existing LASER/QCF units. It is signed by the Access coordinator/tutor and the External Quality Assurer. A copy of this form must be sent to the AVA to verify student achievement for certification.

Please note:

This policy is specifically relating to delivery of Access to HE qualifications, for corresponding policies relevant for all other LASER and Trident Awards (security industry qualifications) please click here: <https://laser-awards.org.uk/about/policies-and-procedures/>