

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Accreditation of Prior Achievement (APA) Policy

1. Introduction

VetSkill acknowledges that there are several ways for centres/providers to recognise the prior learning and achievement for their learners and VetSkill encourages the use of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), and Accreditation of Prior Achievement (APA) where they are of value to centres/providers and learners.

The use of RPL and APA are optional but where a centre/provider chooses to apply it they must have an internal policy for RPL and APA, which encompasses both non-certificated and certificated achievements, and the proper resources to do so.

RPL relates to learners providing evidence of prior learning that has not been formally recognised.

APA relates to learners providing evidence of prior achievement that has been formally recognised. This may be in the form of Credit Accumulation and Transfer/ Credit Transfer, Exemption or Equivalent Units.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all regulated VetSkill qualifications including those regulated by Ofqual, CCEA, Qualifications Scotland Accreditation, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), Farrier's Registration Council (FRC), and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD). This policy applies to prospective and existing VetSkill centres/providers offering VetSkill qualifications.

This policy is provided for the following purposes:

- To provide a definition of RPL and APA
- to provide support, clarification and guidance to stakeholders on the potential use of RPL and APA;
- To provide centres/providers, staff and learners with guidance on process and procedure when considering the use of RPL and APA and outlining the requirements for the implementation of RPL and APA in the delivery and assessment of VetSkill qualifications;
- To set out the requirements for centres/providers to have their own RPL/APA policy in place.

3. Definition and Purpose of Recognised Prior Learning

RPL is defined as an assessment process which makes use of evidence of a learner's **previous non-certificated achievements**, knowledge, understanding, or skills they already possess (and can evidence) to demonstrate competence or achievement within a unit or qualification. RPL should be considered a process for recognising learning that has its source in experience and/or previous formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts. This may include knowledge and skills gained within school, college and university and outside formal teaching situations such as through life and work experiences. RPL is the preferred term which VetSkill have chosen to use; some centres/providers may prefer to this using other terms. For instance, APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experience and Learning).

Through the RPL process, evidence of a learner's previous learning is assessed against the learning outcomes (LO) of a unit.

Assessment for RPL must be subject to exactly the same rigour of internal and external quality assurance requirements as any other kind of assessment to ensure that all parties can be confident of the reliability of the assessment decisions and outcomes.

RPL allows an individual to avoid unnecessary learning, meaning they complete summative assessments without repeating learning in areas where they can demonstrate achievement of the LO.

Where appropriate, RPL can be used to claim credit for a learner's achievements. This process can give them either a part or full (less common) qualification, irrespective of how their skills and knowledge were acquired.

Content, as well as assessment, can be used as RPL. This recognises that learning occurs in many different contexts, as well as via formal learning, training or within the workplace. Assessment of the learning must be valid and reliable to ensure the integrity of the award of unit(s). The evidence gathered needs to fully meet the requirements of the unit, or part of a unit for which claims are being made. Please see Appendix A for qualifications with a Professional Statutory Regulatory Body approval or recognition.

Under no circumstances does the RPL process mean that any required qualification summative assessments can be avoided. The summative assessment is the process through which the RPL is evaluated.

4. Accreditation of Prior Achievement (APA)

Accreditation of Prior Achievement (APA) is defined as a process which makes use of evidence of a learner's formal **certificated achievements** (usually unit or module certification), and may cover knowledge, understanding, behaviours or skills that have been summatively assessed and certificated by an Awarding Organisation (AO) or Higher Education Institution.

Through the APA process, evidence of a learner's previous certificated achievement is assessed against the learning outcomes (LO) of a unit or units.

APA allows an individual to avoid unnecessary learning, meaning they complete summative assessments without repeating learning in areas where they can demonstrate achievement of the LO.

Where appropriate, APA can be used to claim credit for a learner's achievements. This process can give them either a part or full (less common) qualification, irrespective of how their skills and knowledge were acquired.

4.1 Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)

VetSkill may attach credit to a unit of a qualification. Credit transfer is the process of using certificated credits achieved in one qualification and transferring that achievement as a valid contribution to the award of another qualification. Units transferred must share the same credit value, LO and Assessment Criteria (AC). It is, therefore not possible to apply Credit Transfer from a qualification or unit(s) achieved through a different AO where the credit value, LO, AC or assessment vehicle differ. In these instances, RPL or another form of APA such as Exemption may be more appropriate.

CAT is, therefore, the term used to describe the system which supports credit transfer. Credit transfer gives recognition to the fact that some units are the same, irrespective of the fact they appear in different qualifications. This recognition promotes progression within and between occupations and avoids unnecessary duplication of learning.

Credit transfer is relevant where a unit in a qualification is the same as a unit in another qualification.

A specific example of credit transfer would be a learner who achieves a Certificate which is comprised of units '1, 2 and 3' transferring their credits to progress towards a Diploma

comprised of units '1, 2, 3, 4 and 5'. In this scenario, the units in the Certificate have been nested in the Diploma enabling the recognition of the previously achieved units.

If, on the other hand, a learner registered for the Diploma containing units '1, 2, 3, 4 and 5' without having done the Certificate, but then withdrew from their programme of learning after completing only '1, 2 and 3', they could transfer their credits and consequently obtain the Certificate (which would be subject to additional registration costs).

4.2 Exemption

Exemption can be described as: the facility for a learner to claim exemption from some of the achievement requirements within a qualification using evidence of certificated achievement (qualification, unit or module certification), on the same or an alternative regulated qualification, deemed to be of equivalent value or higher value to the unit(s) or module(s) being exempted. These certifications may be used for part or all of a unit/qualification.

The centre/provider must ensure that the components of the certificated unit, module or qualification are sufficient to cover the requirements of all learning outcomes, unit(s) or module(s) that it is being examined against.

Exemptions do not attract credit, as the skills, knowledge and/or competencies described in the unit have already been recognised. However, there may be restrictions to the application of exemption dependent upon the currency and equivalence of the unit.

5. VetSkill's Responsibility for the RPL/APA Process

On occasion, VetSkill may provide guidance regarding mapping of shared content across units or qualifications. It however remains the centre's responsibility to map and check that the learners' previous achievements broadly meet VetSkill's qualification LO. Centres/providers must clearly record where LO and AC have been met and retain records of mapping, which will be audited by VetSkill.

On completion of the centre's RPL or APA process, an occupationally competent VetSkill External Quality Assurer (EQA) will review the mapping, sample the RPL/APA evidence and assessment and quality assurance decisions prior to certification.

Access to some qualifications will require the learner to have a specific level of experience, have reached a specific standard, or to have achieved a specific qualification. All such requirements are stipulated in VetSkill's *Qualification Handbooks*.

6. Centre's/Provider's Responsibility for the RPL Process

Centres/Providers can apply RPL and APA to internally assessed parts of VetSkill qualifications, including those on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). APA may provide exemption for learners from external assessment, set exams or set assignments. However, this is not guaranteed and will be subject to review by VetSkill.

The centre is responsible for RPL/APA assessment and claiming credit where required.

Centres/providers must determine whether evidence used for RPL/APA is current, valid, authentic, sufficient and reliable.

For RPL/APA to be considered to be current, it should usually have been completed within the last five years, but consideration should also be given to whether the evidence meets current practice standards and up to date demands. For exemptions to be considered, evidence must be no more than five years from the start of the original award to the point at which the learner registers with the centre, on the course for which the claim is to be made. Various regulators may stipulate their own guidance on timelines, and it the responsibility of the centre to comply with this, in addition to VetSkill requirements.

It is the responsibility of a centre recognised by VetSkill to have an RPL/APA policy in place, a process of their own, and to ensure all staff within the centre are familiar with the content.

Centres/providers wishing to use RPL/APA processes with their learners must ensure it is carried out by designated staff with relevant levels of expertise to meet the requirements of the delivery and assessment strategy for the qualification they are working with.

The centre/provider policy should state the requirements for staff involved in the RPL/APA process, and the steps to be taken when using RPL/APA, which must include:

- An occupationally competent assessor must assess if the evidence fully meets the assessment requirements of the unit(s) within the qualification, record the assessment process, and then record their judgement
- An occupationally competent Internal Quality Assurer must carry out a final internal quality assurance (IQA) check in order to ensure validity and consistency in the assessment judgement(s) and record their findings
- The RPL/APA process should be carried out as an entire process and should include the following centre/provider stages:
 - Induction of learner(s) into the requirements of RPL/APA, explaining how long the process takes and, if necessary, how to appeal the outcome. It is the centre/provider's responsibility to obtain and check that the learner's evidence is suitable for RPL, prior to enrolment
 - Pre-assessment – advice, support, planning and mentoring for gathering of evidence
 - Formal assessment of, and documenting evidence, against unit requirements by a competent assessor
 - Completion of IQA process and requirements
 - Feedback to the learner following the assessment process and IQA of the assessment process, confirming assessment judgement(s) and providing guidance on the available options (particularly in situations where the decision has been not to award credit or exemption)

- The learner's right to appeal using internal and external processes
- The centre/provider claims credit or exemption from VetSkill prior to certification where applicable

The centre/provider must confirm that any RPL/APA meets the following assessment requirements:

- Validity – Does the evidence demonstrate achievement of the relevant LOs?
- Authenticity – Is the work the learner's own? Have original certificates been viewed?
Centres/providers will need to authenticate copies sent to the AO as a true copy of the original.
- Reliability – All judgements must be quality assured by a centre's Internal Quality Assurer. They must be satisfied that the same judgements on the evidence would be made consistently by other assessors.
- Currency – Does the evidence meet the latest standards?
- Sufficiency – Is the evidence substantial enough to broadly meet the LO?

Once the centre's RPL/APA process has been completed, the following information must be shared with the centre's EQA for review and approval prior to certification:

- Learner name, contact details and VetSkill registration number
- Centre/provider name, centre number and contact details of the member of staff responsible for the RPL/APA process
- Details of the qualification or units being used for RPL, to include qualification/unit title, number, level and date of learner registration
- Mapping of the qualification or units to the VetSkill qualification, to include:
identifiers for supporting evidence, a description of each piece of evidence, contact details of the originator of the evidence, the VetSkill Unit number, LO and AC it links to, the previous qualification's Unit number, LO and AC, and details of how the

evidence meets the LO requirement. Please note, VetSkill reserves the right to contact the originator of any mapped evidence.

- Supporting evidence, which must clearly identify the originator, and be authenticated as true copies of the original which the centre has seen.
- A centre declaration confirming that by completing and submitting the above to VetSkill they give consent to processing of the data provided, and the information is accurate and, to the best of their knowledge and understanding, correct.
- A learner declaration confirming they have received appropriate support and guidance from their centre, and by submitting the above to VetSkill they give consent to processing of the data provided, and the information is accurate and, to the best of their knowledge and understanding, correct.
- A VetSkill template for this can be provided on request.

When making decisions about evidence of non-certificated learning or experience, centre assessors must be satisfied that the evidence produced will allow the learner to broadly meet the assessment standard described within the current qualification's LO and AC. That is, it must be subject to the same rigour of assessment and quality assurance arrangements as applied to evidence produced as part of a course.

The centre's RPL/APA policy should detail the RPL process for non-certificated learning/experience and should state its purpose is to enable the learner(s) to record and assess their knowledge, understanding, and skills acquired from their work experiences and training against the requirements of a qualification. The centre's policy should state that learner(s) can do this using a range of evidence including, for example, a Continued Professional Development (CPD) log, a portfolio of evidence put together by the learner showing the prior learning undertaken, or evidence of their learning, such as having completed an assessment.

The policy should state that all evidence provided for RPL/APA must be fully mapped to the VetSkill LOs of the qualification or unit.

All RPL and APA evidence, assessment and mapping must be assessed (where appropriate), internally quality assured and shared with VetSkill for approval prior to certification.

In addition to meeting VetSkill requirements for RPL and APA, the centre must be familiar with other regulatory requirements. **Under no circumstances must RPL and/or APA be applied to qualifications accredited by a Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) without prior consent from VetSkill. Please see Appendix A for further information.**

7. RPL Outcome

- 7.1 If individuals can produce relevant evidence that meets the requirements of the qualification, then recognition can be given for their prior learning or attainments.
- 7.2 If an individual can evidence achievement that broadly meets all the LO in a unit, then they can claim credit for that unit solely on the basis of their APA.
- 7.3 If, however, evidence from RPL or APA is only sufficient to cover one or more LO, or to partly meet the need of a LO, then additional work must be undertaken by the learner. All LO and AC must be broadly met in order for an assessment decision to be reached. Please see Appendix A for conditions applicable to courses with PSRB requirements.
- 7.4 The centre must process any learner appeals against RPL/APA assessment decisions as they would any other appeal against assessment judgements initially by exhausting their own internal appeals process and if unresolved referring externally to VetSkill.

8. Notification of RPL Decisions

- 8.1 Centres/providers must notify VetSkill of RPL/APA decisions before certification. The centre is not required to submit this at transfer or registration, but the earlier this is submitted, reviewed and approved by VetSkill, the less disruption and disappointment to the learner and centre if RPL/APA is not approved.

- 8.2 Centres/providers are required to notify VetSkill when a learner transfers to them from another centre, or a centre transfers the learner from another AO to VetSkill.
- 8.3 Centres/providers are required to notify VetSkill that RPL/APA has been applied to a learner's qualification at EQA activity planning stages.
- 8.4 Centres/providers must notify VetSkill of any planned requests for credit transfer or exemption during the EQA activity planning stage and must provide the appropriate evidence of prior certificated achievement.

9. Other Relevant Documentation

VetSkill's *Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Accreditation of Prior Achievement Form*.

VetSkill's *Qualification Handbooks*.

VetSkill's *Transfer of Learner Form*.

VetSkill's *Complaints Policy*.

VetSkill's *Enquiries and Appeals Policy*.

Available from VetSkill Hub or info@vetskill.com

10. Contact Us

Please contact us If you have any queries about any aspect of this policy or process:



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11. Appendix A: RPL within PSRB Qualifications including Level 3 Veterinary Nursing (VN) and Level 4 Award for Animal Medicines Advisor (SQP)

VetSkill has qualifications and apprenticeship end-point assessments that are accredited and regulated by professional regulators including the RCVS, VMD, and FRC. These include qualifications such as: the VetSkill Diplomas in Veterinary Nursing (Companion Animal and Equine), the VetSkill VTEC Diplomas in Veterinary Nursing (Companion Animal and Equine), VetSkill VTEC Level 4 Award for Animal Medicines Advisor (SQP) and Apprenticeship Assessment in England for the Level 3 Veterinary Nurse and Level 3 Farrier.

These qualifications and apprenticeship assessments lead to the successful individual being permitted to apply for registration with the Professional Regulator and are often termed ‘License to Practice’ qualifications and assessments. VetSkill must ensure the RCVS, and/or VMD, or FRC regulatory requirements are met, in addition to the requirements of other regulators. Only evidence of achievement of assessments or complete units will be acceptable for APA to PSRB qualifications.

RPL/APA cannot be conducted onto units within a qualification mapped to or assessing Day One Skills and Competences unless the accredited prior achievement unit or qualification has been approved by the Regulatory Professional Body i.e. the RCVS, VMD or FRC as being mapped to the required Day One Skills and Competences. A full syllabus breakdown with mapping of Day One Skills and Competences must be provided to VetSkill to allow the evaluation of the use of RPL/APA on these qualifications. This includes the evidence of practical skill competence via assessment for part or all of the Day One Skills and Competences for a qualification. All evidence must be current and quality assured in accordance with this RPL/APA policy.

All centres/providers must contact VetSkill in the first instance prior to confirming RPL/APA for a qualification with a PSRB.

Version Control:

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Documented changes from previous version	
Section	Change
Section 11	Reference to End-point Assessment changed to Apprenticeship Assessment