

Recognising learning for credit: Guidance for Tertiary Education Organisations

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Purpose

This guidance sets out NZQA's expectations and advice for tertiary education organisations to develop and implement regulations, policies and processes that assist learners to have their relevant learning recognised and credited.

The effective recognition of learning to award credit assists learners to move readily between education organisations and progress in work and education without having to repeat learning.

Definitions

NZQA uses two terms to describe the recognition of learning to award credit. These are defined in the Programme Approval, Recognition and Accreditation Rules 2026 and the Micro-credential Approval and Accreditation Rules 2026.

Credit recognition and transfer (CRT) is a formal process where credit for outcomes already achieved by a student in relation to a qualification (or micro-credential) is recognised as credit for comparable outcomes in another qualification (or micro-credential).

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a process that involves formal assessment of a student's relevant and current knowledge and skills (gained through prior learning) to determine achievement of learning outcomes of a programme leading to a qualification (or a micro-credential) for the purpose of awarding credit towards that qualification (or micro-credential).

This guidance also refers to formal, non-formal and informal learning. These can be differentiated as:

Formal learning takes place in structured and recognised educational settings.

Non-formal learning is planned or structured learning that takes place outside of the formal education system.

Informal learning takes place through daily activities without formal structure or recognition.

Regulations and requirements

Tertiary education organisations are required to have clear, relevant, and appropriate regulations that specify requirements for CRT and RPL (Rule 4.1 criterion 5 of the *Programme Approval, Recognition and Accreditation Rules 2026*).

Providers should keep in mind their responsibility to ensure that any qualification they award accurately reflects that a person has achieved that qualification (section 392 of the *Education and Training Act 2020*).

When a qualification or micro-credential is awarded, it must be reported to NZQA within 3 months via the provider portal, or through TEC's Single Data Return in the next reporting round (rule 19 of the *Qualification and Micro-credential Listing and Operational Rules 2026*).

Awarding credit

Credit can be awarded for comparable outcomes in a programme

Where a learner has previously gained skills or knowledge through **formal education**, you may be able to recognise this and award credit towards the relevant outcomes in your programme. You cannot award more credit than the learner has achieved, nor award credit at a higher level than it was achieved at.

If you are recognising credit from a system or framework other than the NZQCF, you will need to understand how the systems compare to award the appropriate credit. A credit on another framework may not represent the same number of learning hours as a credit on the NZQCF, and a level on another framework may not correspond directly to the levels of the NZQCF.

Where a learner has previously gained skills or knowledge through **non-formal or informal learning**, you may also be able to recognise it as credit towards your programme outcomes. You will need to assess the learner's knowledge and skills against the learning outcomes of the programme to award the credit associated with that learning outcome.

Generally, a learner is not likely to complete a whole programme through the recognition of prior learning or credit recognition. This is because all learning outcomes for the programme must be met, which may include specific New Zealand content, codes, regulations and cultural contexts. A learner who has learned on the job or partially/fully completed a different programme may not have covered every component or achieved every learning outcome in the approved programme.

Credit can be awarded for comparable outcomes in a micro-credential

You may be able to award credit towards a micro-credential following the same practices as for programmes (above).

Standards may be awarded through RPL

Where a learner has previously gained the skills or knowledge relating to a standard, you may be able to recognise it and award the standard. If you award a standard through RPL you must report it and include it in your usual moderation processes. The record of how the RPL decision was made should be provided if the learner sample is called for moderation.

Skills and knowledge must be current

When awarding credit, you should consider how long ago the knowledge or skill was gained and how it compares to someone currently learning that knowledge or skill. For example, if credit was gained 10 years ago through formal learning, what the person knows may not be up to date. If a skill was gained some time ago, it is important to assess that the learner still has that skill. In some areas, especially in areas that advance quickly, it may be appropriate to put a time limit on CRT.

Specific qualification requirements must be met

All requirements associated with a qualification need to be met for the qualification to be awarded.

Some professional bodies may have specific requirements for graduates wishing to enter their profession. For example, there may be requirements for:

- specific standards, learning outcomes or qualifications that cannot be gained through RPL or CRT
- specific New Zealand or industry/profession content that must be covered
- limits on the amount of credit that can be recognised.

Records and assessments must be kept

You must keep clear records of credit that is awarded through CRT or RPL. These records should show:

- how much credit was awarded
- how it meets the relevant learning outcomes in the programme
- how it was assessed and verified.

Credit gained through CRT or RPL should be clearly indicated on the learner's transcript.

All assessment materials and evidence must be kept in accordance with your procedures for keeping assessment materials and included in quality assurance processes. Evidence must be verifiable and able to be reviewed during monitoring, moderation or programme evaluation activities.

Quality and consistency must be maintained

A learner who has gained a qualification where credit has been awarded for prior learning should have, at a minimum, the same skills and knowledge as a learner who has completed the whole programme with the education provider. Tertiary education organisations are responsible for ensuring the learners who are awarded credit towards a qualification are included alongside all other learners for the purposes of monitoring, moderation and any other quality assurance activities.

Awarding credit towards a degree

A degree can only be awarded upon completion of a programme that is taught mainly by people engaged in research (section 454(3) of the Education and Training Act 2020).

All credits at the final level of the degree (or graduate/postgraduate certificate or diploma) must be completed with the awarding provider (not awarded credit).

Where credit is being recognised from a degree that is complete (or will be completed), it is limited to one-third of the credit of the degree it is being recognised towards.

If credit is being recognised from a qualification other than a degree, or from a degree that is not and will not be completed, all but the credits at the final level of the degree may be recognised.

Assessment approaches

When developing your approach for assessing a learner's skill or knowledge gained through previous learning (whether formal, non-formal or informal), you may find the following information helpful. It is important to note that not every method or approach is suitable in every situation.

There are two main types of assessment:

- **Task assessment** – Learners are given a specific task to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in relation to an outcome.
- **Evidence assessment** – Learners provide evidence that shows they have met the outcome, and this evidence is assessed.

Whether setting tasks or assessing evidence, you should consider:

Currency

The task or evidence shows the learner's current (or recent) knowledge or ability. For example, a person who learnt something a number of years earlier could be given a task that shows they have retained the information or can apply it in a current context.

Reliability and authenticity

The task or evidence is authentic, reliable and verified. For example, any evidence provided by the learner is verified by the appropriate authority. An assessment task completed by the learner is authentically their work.

Relevancy

The task or evidence is relevant to the standards or learning outcomes being credited. For example, the task or evidence aligns to the learning outcomes and assesses the skills and knowledge required, including New Zealand specific content.

Suitability

The task or evidence is a suitable appraisal of the learner's knowledge or ability. For example, a portfolio of authentic work may be appropriate for awarding credit towards a design qualification, but a practical demonstration may be required to award credit towards a cooking qualification.

There is also information on [Assessment tools and approaches](#) on our website. Although this relates to standards, many of the principles can be applied to the assessment of prior learning for awarding credit.

Information about CRT and RPL processes

Learners should have easy access to information

You should ensure information about your CRT and RPL processes are readily available for learners. This information should inform learners about:

- when they may be able to gain credit for their prior learning or existing skills and knowledge
- how to apply for CRT or RPL
- what to expect, including how they may be assessed
- costs, timeframes and how they will be notified of a decision
- processes for appealing a decision.

A learner should be able to request CRT or RPL at any stage of their study, however we recommend engaging with learners about CRT and RPL during the application and enrolment process. Assessing previous learning and determining how much credit (if any) can be awarded can help to determine the most suitable programme of study for a learner or what parts of the programme they may not need to repeat. Doing this prior to enrolment also allows the learner to understand ahead of time how it may impact student loans, allowances or visas.

If you assess learning and award credit after the learner is already enrolled, and it results in changes to the initial programme of study, you must inform Immigration New Zealand (for an international learner) and ensure you do not claim TEC funding for the parts of the programme awarded by credit (for a funded learner).

Processes and information should be kept up to date

You should review your CRT and RPL policies and processes regularly to ensure they remain fit for purpose, align with rules and regulations, and are administered fairly, consistently and rigorously.

Information for learners and those doing assessments to award credit should also be reviewed regularly and updated as required.

This information, along with assessments and learner records, must be made available to NZQA upon request (including for monitoring or review purposes).

Examples and resources

Ireland's "National Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in Higher Education Project" was established to embed, streamline and promote RPL across the Higher Education sector. One of the areas of focus is to enhance the education sector's capacity to operate RPL by developing useful tools, materials, resources and professional development opportunities for staff, including a [digital badge](#).

The [Prior Learning website](#) has some useful context, explanations and resources for recognising learning for credit.

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) have produced [guidelines for the validating of non-formal and informal learning](#).