Assessment Reference Framework

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Completed by:
ETBI National Assessment Working Group
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Contents

1. Principles of Assessment in relation to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Quality assured assessment ensures that in criterion referenced assessment "learners are assessed and the assessment judgment is made based on whether the learner has reached the required national standards of knowledge, skill and competence for the award" (QQI, 2013 p.5). Central to quality assured assessment is the assumption that learners are assessed in a fair and consistent manner in line with the award standard. Quality assured assessment ensures adherence to the principles of assessment.

The following sets forth the principles of assessment which apply to this document: these principles are based on the QQI (2013) principles for assessment.

1. Validity

Validity is a fundamental assessment principle ensuring that an assessment measures what it is designed to measure: the relevant standard of knowledge, skill or competence required for an award should be assessed.
Validity in assessment occurs when:

- Assessment is fit for purpose (i.e. a practical assessment assesses a practical skill)
- Learners can produce evidence which can be measured against the award standard
- Assessors can make accurate assessment decisions
- Assessment is accessible to all candidates who are potentially able to achieve it

2. Reliability

Reliability in assessment ensures that assessment measurement is accurate: the knowledge, skills and competence which the assessment measures should produce reliable and accurate results. Reliability in assessment ensures that results are consistent under similar conditions.
Reliability in assessment occurs when:

- The assessment is based on valid assessment techniques
- Assessment conditions are consistent
- Learner evidence is reliable
- Results are consistent across various assessors, contexts, conditions and learners over time.

3. Fair

Fairness in assessment supports the validity and reliability principles and provides equal opportunity to all learners. Fairness in assessment ensures: learners have access to appropriate resources/equipment in assessment; assessment design and implementation are fair to all learners; and policies and procedures exist to ensure fair assessment of learners.

4. Quality

Quality in assessment ensures that all assessment processes are quality assured.

5. Transparency

Transparency in assessment ensures that assessment policy and procedures provide clarity to all relevant stakeholders.

Based on QQI Principles for Assessment (QQI, 2013)

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 sets out the statutory basis for QQI's (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) engagement with RPL. QQI have responsibility for policy of access, transfer and progression of learners (QQI 2017). The provider, is responsible for having a consistent approach to RPL and implementation must be in accordance with the provider's policy on Access, Transfer and Progression. The provider's Quality Assurance System overarches these principles and ensures learner achievement is assessed in a fair and consistent manner in line with the award standard.

The provider is committed to utilising RPL as an instrument for: (i) determining standard access equivalences; (ii) for the award of credit; (iii) exemptions to learners with qualifications or prior experience in the area.

The complexity of RPL practices in the Further Education and Training (FET) sector is acknowledged (QQI, 2017). This document should be viewed as a guiding document for RPL in order to aid ETBs in developing their own RPL procedures.

2. Glossary

CAS   Common Awards System

EQF   European Qualifications Framework

FET   Further Education and Training

NFQ   National Framework of Qualifications

RPCL   Recognition of Prior Certified Learning

RPEL   Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning

RPL   Recognition of Prior Learning

2. Glossary

3. Definitions

3.1. Credit

Credit (in terms of RPEL) for learning from experience (i.e. learning which has not previously been academically accredited) may be granted where there is evidence that the required learning outcomes have been achieved. Where such evidence exists, learners may be entitled to advanced entry to a programme and/or awarded marks/grades for the learning.

3.2. Exemption

Exemptions exist where learners have been awarded accredited certification for learning by an awarding body such as Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) or other recognised universities, colleges/institutes and awarding bodies. In such cases, the accredited certification has already been graded and when used as RPL is grade neutral. Exemptions may allow learners advanced entry to a programme and/or may be used for the achievement of the overall award.

3.3. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Recent Irish research suggests that a commonly agreed definition of RPL does not currently exist (QQI, 2017). For the purpose of this document, the following definition has been used. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) can "be used by the learner to gain entry to a programme; gain exemptions within a programme; gain credit towards an award: a learner may gain a credit towards an award using previous certification and/or attain an Award: a learner may be awarded a Major or Minor Award on the basis of previously acquired learning for which they do not have a formal certificate" (CEDEFOP, 2016).

RPL involves awarding the learner recognition in the form of initial or advanced admission to a programme, credits within a programme, exemption(s) from element(s) of a programme, or a full award. RPL cannot be claimed for based on the completion of an element of a module.

The provider, shall ensure that all learners are made aware of the potential benefits of RPL. Appropriate supports relating to portfolio preparation shall be made available within the ETBs to interested learners.

RPL can be subdivided into Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL) and Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)

3.4. Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL)

Recognition of Prior <u>Certified</u> Learning is learning that has already been accredited by an awarding body such as Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) or other recognised universities, colleges/institutes and awarding bodies. Prior certified learning can also include qualifications awarded by bodies abroad, such as the City & Guilds of London Institute.

Prior certified learning may entitle the learner to exemptions on a programme, not credits.

As this certified learning has already been awarded credit, the learner does not receive credits for it again, but recognition in the form of exemptions. RPCL may be recognised for exemptions on a programme. Exemptions are grade neutral and do not contribute to the overall calculation of the grade of the major award.

3.5.   Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)

Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (Non-Certified Learning) is formal, informal and non-formal learning acquired through life or work experience; learning achieved from non-accredited bodies; or certifying bodies outside of the EQF.

CEDEFOP (2011) provides the following definitions:

Formal Learning	Learning that occurs in an organised and structured environment (in an education or training institution or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically leads to validation and certification.
Informal Learning	Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective.
Non-formal Learning	Learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view.

4. RPL Roles and Responsibilities

4.1.　　The Programme Coordinator

The Programme Coordinator must ensure that all staff and learners are made aware of:

- the existence of an RPL policy and RPL requirements
- the potential benefits of RPL
- the appropriate support relating to portfolio preparation (RPEL only)
- the appropriate support relating to mapping of outcomes to assessment standards (RPCL only)

The Programme Coordinator must inform the learner of the outcome of the RPL decision.

The Programme Coordinator must also submit any appeals application to the Independent Appeals Committee and inform the learner of the outcome of the appeals application.

4.2.　　The Learner

Recognition of Prior <u>Certified</u> Learning (RPCL)

It is the learner's responsibility to apply for the RPCL. Learners must submit their application on the RPL Application Form (Appendix 1) to their Programme Coordinator within a reasonable timeframe (recommended timeframe: ten (10) working days) of the module commencement.

Learners should also include original certificates, results, programme details and, where possible, learning outcomes of certified modules completed. Learners should be advised to participate in the module(s) until a decision has been made (and written confirmation received) on whether to grant the exemption or not (in line with the individual Centre policy).

Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)

It is the learner's responsibility to apply for the RPEL. Learners must submit their claim on the RPL Application Form (Appendix 1) to their Programme Coordinator within a reasonable timeframe (recommended timeframe: ten (10) working days) of the module commencement.

It is the learner's responsibility to gather and present the evidence required for assessment according to the instructions given by the RPL Mentor/Facilitator. Evidence may include, but are is not limited to: CV, references, certificates or testimonials, products or samples, job descriptions and/ or evaluations, evidence of attendance at training courses or workplace assessments. Evidence for assessment may be presented in a portfolio of evidence and mapped to the requirements of the award for which the exemption is being sought.

4.3.　　The RPL Mentor/Facilitator

The RPL Mentor/Facilitator is responsible for guiding and supporting the learner through the RPL process and facilitating the learner to ensure the evidence is consistent with the award standard.

4.4.   The RPL Assessor

The RPL assessor will be a suitably qualified, experienced assessor and subject matter expert with ability to assess both Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL) and Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL). The RPL assessor is appointed by the ETB.

The RPL assessor is responsible for assessing submitted assessment materials/portfolio in accordance with RPL process and the award standard.

4.5.   Independent Appeals Committee

An Independent Appeals Committee must:

- Examine the learner appeal on RPL application outcome
- Investigate whether relevant assessment procedures were followed
- Make a decision on the appeal

5. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Process

The RPL Process can follow the:

- **Recognition of Prior CERTIFIED Learning (RPCL) process** (See Section 3.4 for definition and Section 6 for process)

and/or

- **Recognition of Prior EXPERIENTIAL Learning (RPEL) process** (See Section 3.5 for definition and Section 7 for process)
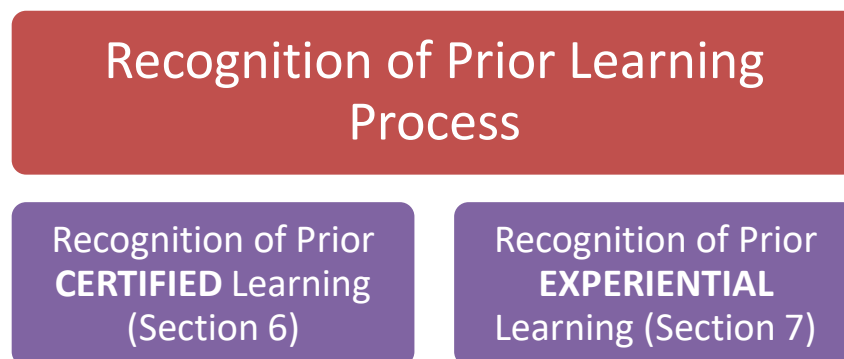
as outlined in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1 Recognition of Prior Learning

6. Recognition of Prior CERTIFIED Learning (RPCL) Process
6.1.   About RPCL

RPCL is learning that has already been accredited by an awarding body such as Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) or other recognised universities, colleges/institutes and awarding bodies. Prior certified learning can also include qualifications awarded by bodies abroad, such as the City & Guilds of London Institute.

This prior learning can be recognised on the National Framework of Qualifications and may entitle the learner to:

- Admission to a programme or programme of study
- Advanced entry on the programme
- Exemptions from some parts of a programme

QQI (2015) provide details regarding exemptions for the Purpose of a Compound (Major/Special Purpose/Supplemental) Award.

6.2.   Types of RPCL

There are 3 types of RPCL considered in this process (see Figure 1.2)
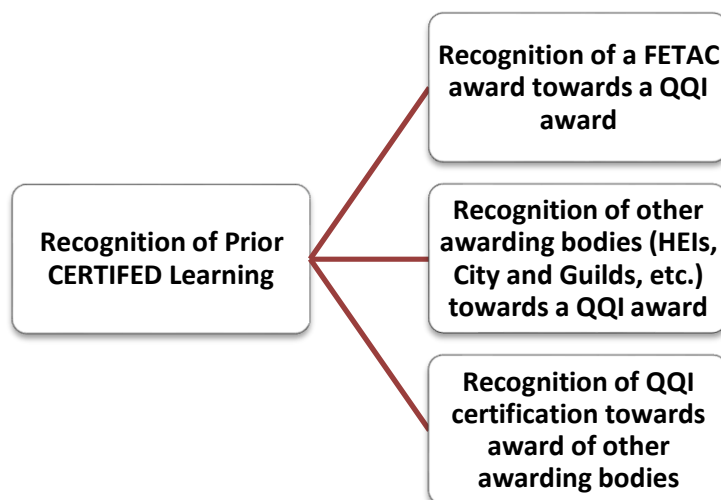
Figure 1.2 Types of RPCL

a)   Recognition of a FETAC award towards a QQI award

"Where a FETAC component is not mapped to a CAS (Common Award System) component, then direct exemption using that FETAC component is not possible" (QQI, 2015, p.1). In this instance, **RPCL will apply**.

Where a FETAC component is mapped to a CAS component, but is more than 5 years old, then an exemption is not possible, and **RPCL will apply**.

Where a FETAC component is mapped to a CAS component and is less than 5 years old, then an exemption is possible, and **RPCL will not apply**.

Where a learner has achieved CAS award, and has thus met the learning outcomes for that award as currently published on the QQI website, then the learner has achieved that award, regardless of the age of the certificate. In this instance, the 5-year rule does not apply: the learner's award will be recognised by the QBS, and it is not necessary to apply for either an exemption or RPCL.

If the learning for which recognition is sought for a QQI award, is certified outside of CAS, **RPCL will apply**.

The following must be considered as part of this process (see Table 1.1).

Comparison of Learning Outcomes	It is recommended that the RPL assessor compares the learning outcomes of the prior certified learning to the learning outcomes of the module(s)/programme in which the learner is seeking the exemption(s): this must be completed in line with the provider's RPL policy while adhering to the award standard and principles of assessment. Gaps in learning may be identified and supports put in place to address these gaps.
Currency of RPCL	It is recommended that the RPCL must have been achieved in an appropriate timeframe (timeframe dependent on discipline) and in line with the provider's RPL policy. For example, ICT of ten years ago is of limited benefit today on a current programme, while some culinary training outcomes or communication skills may be more timeless.

Table 1.1 Considerations for RPCL

b) Recognition other awarding bodies (HEIs, City and Guilds, etc.) towards a QQI award

QQI recognises the value of awards made by another awarding body where the awarding body is:

- nationally recognised in its own country
- operating a quality assured awarding process (QQI, 2018)

QQI has identified a listing of awards to which RPCL may be applied (QQI, 2018). Where an award is not on the published list, the learner is required to provide the relevant learning programme and original transcript of results, with their application, in order to apply for RPCL.

Learners seeking *Statements of Equivalence* for foreign qualifications may be referred to NARIC (http://qsearch.qqi.ie/WebPart/Search?searchtype=recognitions) to have their qualifications aligned with the appropriate Irish qualification. *Qualifications Recognition* is the QQI body responsible for the recognition of foreign qualifications.

c) Recognition of QQI certification towards award of other awarding bodies

The recognition of QQI certification towards an award of any other awarding body is dealt with in line with the procedures of the specific awarding body.

6.3.   RPCL Application Process

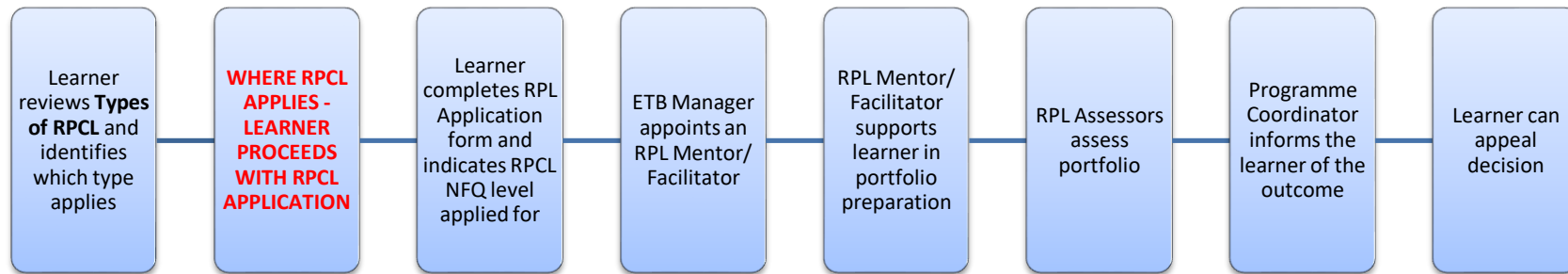| Learner reviews **Types of RPCL** and identifies which type applies	**WHERE RPCL APPLIES - LEARNER PROCEEDS WITH RPCL APPLICATION**	Learner completes RPL Application form and indicates RPCL NFQ level applied for	ETB Manager appoints an RPL Mentor/ Facilitator	RPL Mentor/ Facilitator supports learner in portfolio preparation	RPL Assessors assess portfolio	Programme Coordinator informs the learner of the outcome	Learner can appeal decision

Figure 1.3 RPCL Application Process

In the case of exemption applications, the prior certified learning, which the learner is basing his/her exemption on, should be at the same (or higher) NFQ level than the level the learner is seeking the exemption in. The process of recognising prior learning should maintain the standards of the National Framework of Qualifications and its awards.

1. Learner reviews **Types of RPCL** and identifies which type applies (see Section 6.2)

WHERE RPCL APPLIES - LEARNER PROCEEDS WITH RPCL APPLICATION

2. Learner completes RPL Application form and indicates RPCL NFQ level applied for.
   The Programme Coordinator forwards the application without delay to the ETB Manager.

3. The ETB Manager appoints a RPL Mentor/Facilitator

4. The RPL Mentor/Facilitator supports learner in portfolio preparation.
   See Table 1.1 for considerations in this process.

5. The ETB Manager nominates two RPL assessors to assess the portfolio. The RPL assessors shall consider the application and agree a decision regarding it within a reasonable timeframe (recommended timeframe: ten (10) working days) of receipt of the application in line with the provider's RPL Policy.

6. The Programme Coordinator informs the learner of the outcome. The assessment evidence is presented at the next assessment period.

7. The learner can appeal the decision (see section 8).

7. Recognition of Prior EXPERIENTIAL Learning (RPEL) Process

7.1. About RPEL

RPEL is **non-formal and informal learning** acquired through experience or learning achieved from non-accredited bodies, e.g. learning acquired in the workplace.

7.2. RPEL Process

1. Learner completes RPL Application form and indicates RPEL

2. ETB Manager appoints Mentor/Facilitator

Mentor/Facilitator supports learner in accordance with procedure

3. RPL Assessors assess evidence and make a decision

4. Programme Coordinator informs learner of outcome
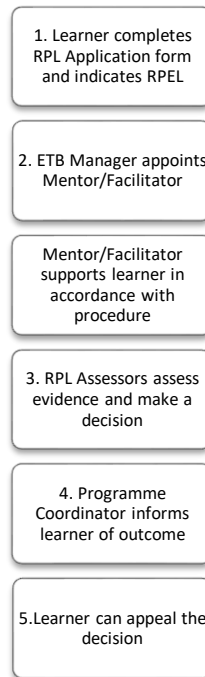
5.Learner can appeal the decision

Figure 1.4 RPEL Process

1. The learner completes an RPL Application Form (see Appendix 1) and indicates the RPEL being applied for. This should be in line with the award being applied for/learning outcomes of the award

2. The ETB Manager assigns an RPL Mentor/Facilitator to support the learner through the RPEL process. This involves the awarding of credit for non-formal learning gained from experience. In this case, the learner must demonstrate that the required equivalent learning has been achieved by producing a Portfolio of Evidence to support the claim for access or credit (the provider will have a support service (RPL Mentor/Facilitator) in place to help learners with the production of the portfolio). The portfolio of evidence must be presented in such a way that the matching of the knowledge, skills and competencies of the module learning outcomes to the prior learning is clearly demonstrated. Other assessment tools such as examination, assignment, interview or observation can also be used to assess prior experiential learning. The evidence the learner has to submit will be based on the learning outcomes of the module(s)/programme he/she seeks credits for. Evidence may include (but are not limited to):

    - References
    - CV

- Job descriptions and experiences
- Personal statements
- Details of any training completed
- Certificates for qualifications, training programmes, etc.
- Sample work (e.g. drawings, minutes from meetings, business plan, etc.)
- Evidence from the learner's personal life
- Published work
- Professional licenses/registrations or membership of professional organisations
- Acknowledged accomplishments
- Video/audio recordings
- Relevant recreational activities or hobbies

The learner may be required to provide verification from previous or current employers that the learning stated has been achieved by the learner.

3. The ETB Manager appoints two RPL assessors to consider the portfolio evidence. The assessors should examine the submitted portfolio and agree a decision within a reasonable timeframe (recommended 10 working days). The portfolio is assessed and an agreed grade is assigned by the assessors.

Learners should receive a grade for their portfolio of evidence which carries equal weight to modules taken in the conventional method. Assessors must satisfy themselves that the assessment techniques used to determine the standard of the experiential learning gained be equivalent to assessment methods applied to the module.

Portfolios of evidence should go through the same quality assurance procedures as other assessment evidence (e.g. examinations/assignments) submitted by learners completing the programme in the conventional manner. **Portfolios must demonstrate evidence of the required standard albeit using an alternative method**.

Submission of a portfolio does not guarantee that the learner gains credits.

4. The Programme Coordinator informs the learner of the outcome.

5. The learner can appeal the decision (see section 8)

8. RPL Appeals

The learner has the right to appeal the decision in relation to RPL (can appeal decision on application or grade awarded). Appeals must be made within a recommended timeframe (recommended: five (5) days of the decision. In exceptional circumstances, the Programme Coordinator may extend this time limit. All appeals must be made in writing using the Appeals Application Form (see Appendix 2).

Appendix 1: Recognition of Prior Learning Application Form

Please complete all sections of the application form

PART A	
Centre Name:	
Learner Name:	
Learner Address:	
Learner Contact Number:	
Learner Email Address:	
Programme Code/Title:	
Award Code/Title:	
Date of Application:	

PART B	
Recognition for Prior CERTIFED Learning (RPCL) If yes, please indicate which RPCL you are applying for:	**Yes/No**
a) Recognition of FETAC award towards a QQI award	Yes/No
b) Recognition other awarding bodies (HEIs, City and Guilds, etc.) towards a QQI award	Yes/No
c) Recognition of QQI certificate towards award of other awarding bodies	*Please see specific awarding body procedures*
Recognition for Prior EXPERIENTIAL Learning (RPEL)	**Yes/No**

PART C
Details of application:
Supporting evidence: (Please list all supporting evidence included in this application)
Exemptions (based on RPCL) in respect of:

Module Code	Module Title	Module Level

Learner Signature: Date:

Programme Coordinator Signature: Date:

Programme Coordinator Name:

Appendix 2: Learner Appeals Process

Where possible, the learner discusses the appeal application with the Learning Practitioner and/or Programme Coordinator.

Learner completes the Assessment Appeals Application Form and submits form to Programme Coordinator within 24 hours of decision. Appeals after this period will not be processed.

Programme Coordinator submits application to Independent Appeals Committee; details of original application and any other required evidence.

Independent Appeals Committee processes the application and makes a decision on the appeal

Independent Appeals Committee informs the Programme Coordinator of the outcome of the appeal within a reasonable timeframe (recommended timeframe 24 hours)

Programme Coordinator informs the learner of the outcome within a reasonable timeframe (recommended timeframe 24 hours). If successful, the appeal fee is refunded to the learner.
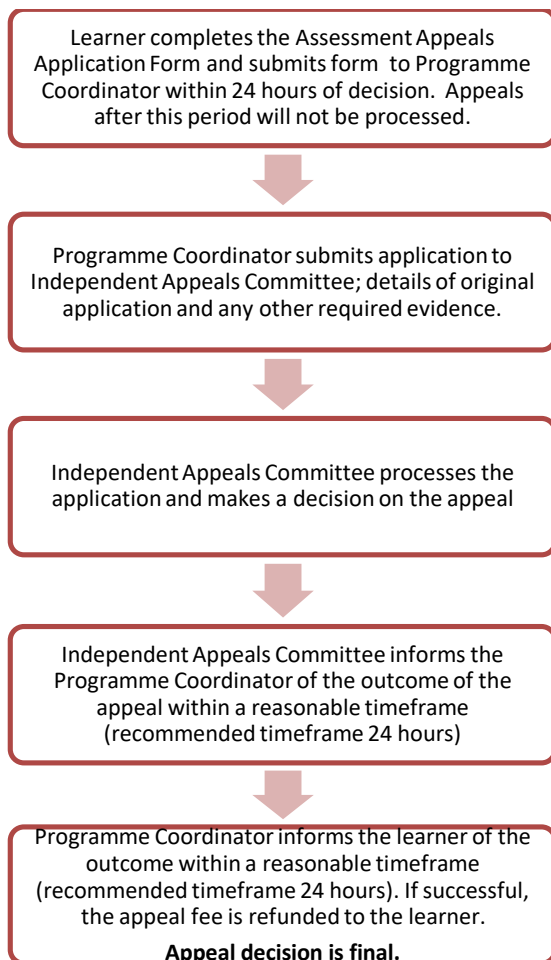**Appeal decision is final.**

Figure 1 Learner Appeals Process

Learner Appeals Application Form

Part A: To be completed by the learner and returned to the Programme Co-ordinator by a specified deadline	
Centre Name:	
Learner Name:	
Learner Address:	
PPSN No (if required)	
Programme Code/Title:	
Are there impending deadlines which may need to be considered with this application: CAO Applicant/Other Applicant:	Yes/No
If yes, please give details:	

Please circle appropriate appeal:

Reasonable Accommodation in Assessment outcome	Yes/No
Assessment Deadlines (short-term extension) outcome	Yes/No
Assessment Deadlines (compassionate consideration in extenuating circumstances) outcome	Yes/No
Learner Assessment Malpractice outcome	Yes/No
Recognition of Prior Learning outcome	Yes/No
Other (please give details):	Yes/No
Details of appeal application (please provide full details of reasons for appeal):	

Learner Signature: Date:

Programme Coordinator Signature: Date:

Programme Coordinator Name:

Part B: To be completed by the Independent Appeals Committee		
Independent Appeals Committee Members:		
Details of evidence received:		
Date received:		
Outcome of decision:	Successful/Unsuccessful	
Date:		
Decision Details:		
Independent Appeals Committee Signatures and Date:	Signature	Date

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