



EQF Mapping System for Older Adults

Advisers' Guide

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Introduction

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is based on the principle that people can and do learn throughout their lives in a variety of settings. This informal or experiential learning often results in skills, knowledge and abilities that are equal to those gained by people who have followed more traditional routes through formal education.

People can gain a range of strengths and skills through:

- Family life (home-making, caring, domestic organisation)
- Work (paid or unpaid)
- Community, voluntary or leisure activities
- Key experiences and events in life

For the student who is leaving school with no formal qualifications, RPL can be an opportunity to get recognition for achievements they have gained outside the classroom and help to point the way for future steps in gaining employment, seeking training or returning to education. For the individual who is faced with redundancy or wants to change direction or jobs, RPL can help them to identify more clearly the skills and experiences they have that will assist them in taking their next steps – be it in employment or education/training.

Through the experience of undertaking the RPL profiling activities, the participant will be encouraged to:

- think about what they have achieved so far through their experiences in terms of strengths and skills.
- consider all available options and make decisions about the direction they want to take.
- think about their goals and what they need to do in order to achieve them.
- recognise the importance of lifelong learning through experience and to feel confident in the skills and knowledge they have gained so far.

Benchmarking learning against the EQF

In addition to helping people to identify and value the types of skills they have developed through ordinary life experiences, this Profiling Toolkit will also help you and the participant to benchmark those skills against the **European Qualifications Framework (EQF)**.

The purpose of the benchmarking activity is to give individuals an idea of their skill level in each of the four EQF Skill Areas. Individuals may lack confidence in understanding or describing their own skills and experiences, and the level of knowledge they have. Those with an understanding of where their learning fits on the Framework can understand the value of their skills and experiences and can have more confidence in applying them in different situations. In particular it helps those who do not have many qualifications to understand and identify their transferable skills. By mapping knowledge and skills against the Framework, individuals can begin to think about the way in which the learning they have gained through their experiences may be seen as 'comparable to' a particular level on the framework.

Each Skill Area has a set of Descriptors to depict the kinds of skills, knowledge and experience an individual would have at each EQF Level. These Descriptors have been contextualised for the purposes of this Toolkit and expressed in terms of learning outcomes, in order to provide language and examples that participants will recognise and identify with more readily. Further, examples at each level have been provided in order for participants to understand the Descriptors more easily and recognise their learning and skill.

The informal process of mapping learning against the EQF Level Descriptors is viewed as a means of motivating people to recognise the skills gained that have not been previously formally assessed or recognised. While the use of the EQF Level Descriptors is encouraged it has to be recognised that benchmarking:

- Is **not** a formally recognised process;
- May have involved a robust deliberate estimation by experts but equally may have been a relatively swift estimation of where learning sits on the EQF by using a limited data source by personnel with varying degrees of expertise and knowledge of the values of the Framework; and
- Is an informal process and is not subject to quality assurance.

Each country that has a National Qualifications Framework (for example, the SCQF in Scotland) can be mapped against the EQF. Please see the table below for your area.

European Qualifications Framework Level	National Qualifications Framework for ...	Example Qualifications
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		

Colour Coding

For ease of use, colour has been used to not only brighten up the resources but also to be used as reference points. Each Skill Area has been attributed an icon and a colour, as seen on the table on Page 10.

Each Level has also been attributed a colour, most useful in the 'Benchmarking Exercise' activity, where participants will be selecting a variety of coloured statements without knowing the significance of the colours.

Developing a Personal RPL Profile

This Toolkit will support individuals in identifying activities, experiences and/or interests which they can use to create a personal profile of their skill areas and to determine at what level on the EQF they are currently situated. There is also space to note any formal or non-formal qualifications held. This personal profile will help them to make informed decisions about what to do next.

There are **seven main steps** involved in the RPL profiling process. Completion of these steps will result in a personal profile being completed for the selected skill area.

An outline of the process, as well as a breakdown of each activity, can be found on the following pages.

Outline: RPL Profiling Process

The Recognition of Prior Learning profiling process is outlined below, along with an indication of the resources to be used and the outcomes of each step. It is recommended that the process is done in small steps, rather than all in one session.

Step	Description	Resources	Outcomes
1	<p>“My Experience” Activity: Ask the participant to select all the skills that reflect his or her most frequent and preferred experiences both within and out with the workplace.</p>	<p>“My Experience” card</p>	<p>Greater awareness of the range of skills that can be associated with previous employment and/or leisure activities & interests</p>
2	<p>Review: With the participant, review the skills listed on the back of the card selected and tick the boxes next to the skill(s) that apply to him/her.</p> <p>Each skill is tagged with one or more symbols, which correspond to the four skill areas outlined by the EQF. At the bottom of the card is a table with descriptions of each skill area, and a place to write in the total number of symbols, tallied up from the skills that were ticked.</p>	<p>“My Experience” card</p>	<p>“Ownership” of skills and abilities gained through previous employment and/or leisure activities & interests</p>
3	<p>“Who Do You Think You Are?” Activity: Ask the participant to transfer the number of each symbol (skill area), as revealed by the previous step (for example, “How many red triangles do you have?”), onto the WDYTIA worksheet, and discuss the results. Example: Are you an Organiser? A Communicator?</p>	<p>“My Experience” Card</p> <p>&</p> <p>WDYTIA profile worksheet</p>	<p>Completed “WDYTIA” Profile Sheet</p> <p>An opportunity to discuss the participant’s strengths & ways to build upon them</p>

Step	Description	Resources	Outcomes
4	<p>“My Examples” Activity: This reflective exercise gives the participant the opportunity to discuss an experience in more detail to uncover more about the skills and experience gained. The end result will be language suitable to be used on future job or education applications.</p>	<p>“My Examples” Worksheet</p> <p>&</p> <p>Worked example</p>	<p>Specific examples and language that can be used to express skills and ability levels for future job or education applications and CV</p>
5	<p>Benchmarking Activity: Give the participant the appropriate Worksheet, depending on the Skill Area identified in the “Who Do You Think You Are?” exercise. Ask the participant to read through each of the statements to identify which skills they recognise as applying to him/her. <u>Do not tell the participant that the colours indicate different EQF levels.</u></p> <p>Once complete, tally up the number of each coloured box that are ticked. The colour with the most ticks is the participant’s self-evaluated notional EQF Skill Level – add this to the Skills Profile.</p>	<p>EQF Benchmarking Tickbox Exercise Worksheet</p> <p>&</p> <p>EQF Skills Profile</p>	<p>A collection of statements that represents the participant’s own understanding of his/her abilities</p> <p>An opportunity to identify additional strengths and skills</p> <p>The participant’s self-evaluated EQF level</p>
6	<p>“My Skills” Activity: Select the worksheet appropriate to the Skill Area identified in the “Who Do You Think You Are?” exercise. Read through the statements and ask the participant to select the ones that apply to him/her. Encourage the participant to think of some examples themselves, perhaps looking back to the “My Examples” exercise.</p>	<p>“My Skills” Worksheet</p>	<p>A collection of statements that the participant can use in future to represent their skills and experience</p>
7	<p>“My Future” Skills Profile Activity Having already noted the participant’s notional EQF Skill Level, complete the rest of the Skills Profile, pulling together all the information from all the other activities completed. This form can be taken away and used for future reference by the participant.</p>	<p>EQF Skills Profile</p>	<p>Completed EQF Skills Profile</p>

Steps 1 and 2: “My Experience” Activity & Review

The “My Experience” card is a mixture of all the kinds of skills and experiences that someone could gain from both a learning environment and a work environment. Further to this, you may recognise skills gained in activities he/she may undertake out with a formal environment. Each of the skills on the list will be tagged with one or more graphic symbols which will correspond to one of the five broad skill areas described by the EQF:

Symbol:	What it means:
	Knowledge – (Theoretical and/or factual knowledge) (Knowing a lot about a particular subject, such as how subjects link together to prove a theory, how a car engine works or how best to look after small children)
	Skills – Practical (applied knowledge and understanding) (Hands-on skills, like the ability to operate equipment, design and make a table, draw a picture or repair a broken bicycle)
	Skills – Cognitive (e.g. evaluation, critical analysis) (Figuring things out, solving puzzles, sizing up situations, solving problems)
	Competence - (responsibility and autonomy) (Planning things, prioritising, getting things done, working on your own or with others, making sure that work is finished and is of good standard)

Action –

Ask the participant to read the ‘My Experience’ card ‘Skills for Work and Learning’.

Together, review the skills on the back of the card, and ask him/her to place a tick mark next to the skills that reflect his/her actual experience.

Step 3: “Who Do You Think You Are?” Activity

The bottom of the card features a table with a space to write in the total number of each symbol (i.e. EQF Skill Area) that applies to the participant’s actual experience.

Action –

After the participant has tallied up the symbols that apply to him/her on the card, ask the participant to count up the **total** number of symbols, and record these totals on the “Who Do You Think You Are?” Profile Worksheet.

Take this opportunity to point out to the participant their **areas of strength** (i.e. high numbers) and **areas for future development** (i.e. low numbers) to help them recognise the skills and abilities they have developed through the activities they have chosen.



Step 4: “My Examples” Activity

This exercise is designed to give the participant a fuller description of his/her experiences in the skill area identified in the previous exercise. Once this exercise is complete, the participant will have a specific example and more descriptive language that will be useable in college, university, training or job applications.

Action –

In discussion with the participant, help them to choose one of the cards that they selected in the My Experience exercise.

Action –

Help the participant to come up with the best example of the selected activity/experience that they can think of to demonstrate their skills and experience. NB: This can be a single event or a regular activity

Action –

With the participant, refer to the Worked Example to get an idea of the level of detail required. Complete the Worksheet by answering each of the questions with the specific example in mind.

Step 5: “Benchmarking Exercise” Activity (Guidance for Participants)

The benchmarking activity will provide the participant with a notional level against the EQF Skill Area they have the most experience in. In order to do this, the participant is provided with the Level Descriptors for that Skill Area (Levels 2-6) and is asked to select the ones relevant to them. By doing this, with your guidance, they are selecting themselves their **notional** level. As with other aspects of the Toolkit, this will provide them with information for future use.

EQF Level Descriptor Tickbox Activity

Give the participant the Tickbox Activity sheet for the relevant Skill Area. With the previous experience in mind, ask the participant to **select all of the statements that are true** of his/her experience with the specific activity you are discussing. Do not tell the participant that the colours of the cards correspond to an EQF level until after s/he has finished selecting.

Remember!

The participant should make the tick selection without being told that the colours indicate different EQF levels.

Step 5: “Benchmarking Exercise” Activity (Advice for Advisers)

The purpose of this activity is to work on a one-to-one basis with participants to identify the *notional* EQF Level of their skills in relation to the activity or experience they have chosen to discuss, using the EQF Level Descriptors.

The Descriptors are written in straightforward language, with examples, so that participants can more easily relate to the skills described. The aim of the contextualised descriptors is also to enable you and the individual to distinguish more clearly between the different levels.

Below is a colour key of the EQF Levels for reference. Remember it is important for the participant not to know the significance of colour until they have completed the exercise.

Key	
Level 8	
Level 7	
Level 6	
Level 5	
Level 4	
Level 3	
Level 2	
Level 1	

Your role is to assist the participants closely in identifying the level of skills or characteristics they think most accurately reflects what they have achieved through their experience.

EQF Level Descriptor Tickbox Activity: Review the participant's selection of EQF Level Descriptor statements and refer to the key to find out which EQF levels are represented by the colours in their selection. Ensure that you talk through with them each Descriptor to make sure they feel confident in their choices.

Remember that the highest level represented by their selection becomes their **self-evaluated** EQF level (i.e. the colour they have selected **most** – even if they have selected a higher level).

It is important to remember that EQF benchmarking of skills is an **informal** process which is **not an exact science**; you are using your **professional judgement** to assist them in completing this activity.

On the following pages you will find a step-by-step description of the process of completing **Step 5**, which you can use as a guide when working with individuals.

Step 5: Step-by-step

1

Read carefully and understand Levels 1-8 of the Skill Area that is to be discussed, in particular acquainting yourself with the subtleties between each Level.

2

Explain to the participant the importance of getting a notional Level and how it can be used by them as guidance for the next steps they can take. Remember it is not a formally recognised process and is meant to give them a rough idea of their level of skills in order to develop a future plan of action.

3

With the individual, talk through the details of the example activity or experience they wish to use, and identify with them the characteristics and skills they have used to participate in that activity or experience.



4

Give the participant the relevant worksheet and ask them to tick the statements relevant to them. Once they have done this, refer to the key to see which colour (and therefore which EQF Level), is represented **most**. Explain to the participant the Level they have selected, and talk through the Level Descriptors together.

5

Discuss with the individual why you think their characteristics and skills are at the notional Level they and/or you have selected, making sure they understand the reasons, and see if they agree.

6

Record the agreed notional Skill Level on the Skills Profile Sheet. The rest of it will be completed at the end of the process. Move onto Step 6 only when you feel the participant is confident with the reasons for the Level selected.

Step 6: “My Skills” Activity

One of the most challenging tasks for any individual is getting down on paper their skills and experience in a way that will be attractive and interesting to employers, training providers and college/university admissions staff. This activity is to help participants identify language that will enable them to express their skills and experience in a practical way.

Action –

Read through the statements on the worksheet with the participant. Help them to understand what they are saying and to identify if they are representative of their own skills and experience. Ask the participant to tick the ones that are.

Action –

Once the ticking exercise is complete, talk through some more of the participant’s experiences (perhaps covered in ‘My Experience’ activity) to see if there is any language s/he can come up with on their own to put in the blank box.

Action –

Once complete, the participant can take away the worksheet for reference. Keep the worksheet handy for help in completing the Skills Profile sheet in the next stage.

Step 7: “My Future” Skills Profile

Select the appropriate Skills Profile Sheet, based on whichever Skill Area it is that you have been discussing. You will have already recorded the notional EQF Level on the Profile after completing the Benchmarking process. Now complete the rest of the Profile so the participant has a full personal profile to take away.

Action –

Complete the details of the experience that has been discussed – write down key points you have discovered about that skill or experience. This will give the participant a record of this experience s/he can refer to in the future.

Action –

In the ‘Skills Gained’ section, the participant can refer back to the ‘My Skills’ exercise for language. Encourage the participant to think of their own language also, to get him/her into the way of writing in this kind of style.

Action –

Complete the back of the form next, to record any formal prior learning the participant may have. This means they have a complete picture of his/her skills and experience in one place.

Action –

Finally, complete the ‘Next Steps’ section. Discuss the options and write down the ideas/options that the participant is most interested in pursuing or most qualified for. This completes the process and gives the participant a full Skills Profile to take away.

Final Words

Recommendation: If you have reached this page you have probably read the entire Guide, but it may yet take some time to become thoroughly familiar with the process. We recommend that you keep this Guide on hand to refresh your memory and guide you through the steps at each stage.

Recommendation: The process outlined in this Toolkit may be completed over two sessions of around 45 minutes each. However, it can be tailored to suit your client group.

Recommendation: Feel free to add to and adapt the Toolkit to your own needs. There may be interests or hobbies that you think would fit into the *My Experience* stage or other aspects of working life that would be good to explore. A blank template for the *My Experience* cards is provided for this purpose. Please let us know if you are making any changes, as they may be worth sharing more broadly.

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