

Flowers Design School

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Guidelines for FDS Team Members Compliance to the RPL National Principles

1 Preamble

RPL may be defined in a number of ways, some more expansive than others. All definitions however, including the key notion that RPL involves the assessment of previously unrecognized skills and knowledge that an individual has achieved outside the formal education and training system. RPL assesses this unrecognized learning against the requirements of the qualification, in respect of both entry requirements and the outcomes to be achieved. By removing the need for duplication of learning, RPL encourages a individual to continue upgrading their skills and knowledge, through structured education and training, towards formal qualifications and improved employment outcomes.

The AQF sets out the qualification standards upon which RPL ultimately relies for its credibility. Under the AQF, each qualification guideline provides for an RPL pathway as an 'alternative' or 'non-institutional' access point or source of credit. This keeps the system of qualifications open to recognition of the value of learning achieved outside the formal system, as part of everyday living in a continuum of learning throughout one's life.

With the introduction of the AQF in 1995, the AQF Advisory Board commenced the development of 'readily available, transparent and consistent RPL policy and procedures' within and across each of the schools, vocational education and training, and higher education sectors. In 1997 the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs gave the support of the jurisdictions to this policy objective, together the recommendations on monitoring key indicators, such as parity of esteem for qualifications gained through (or partly through) RPL assessment, RPL funding arrangements which maximize savings for the taxpayer, and widely accessible models of good RPL practice.

The National Principles and Operational Guidelines for RPL represents the progression of these Ministerial objectives into a set of national cross-sector guidelines to support implementation of RPL as an important element of Australian education and training. They have been derived from intensive consultations with all the interested parties in the period

of 2002 – 2003. The National Principles and Guidelines are not prescriptive in intent but, acknowledging the wide diversity of RPL policy and practice, seek to encourage national consistency through sharing and facilitating good practice across sectors and jurisdictions. The National Principles and Operational Guidelines for RPL complement the National Guidelines on Cross-Sector Qualification Linkages (2002) which provide guidance on credit transfer and articulation agreements and arrangements within and between sectors.

2. Principles

- 2.1 The AQF provides an agreed framework for designing, developing and issuing recognized qualifications within Australia.
- 2.2 The AQF supports the development of pathways between qualifications based on access and credits that may consist of, or may include RPL.
- 2.3 RPL is critical to the development of an open, accessible, inclusive, integrated and relevant post-compulsory education and training system, and is the key foundation for lifelong learning policies that encourage individuals to participate in learning pathways that include formal, non-formal and informal learning.
- 2.4 There is no one RPL model that is suitable for all qualifications and all situations, in particular, different sectors give rise to different models. The model of RPL that is implemented must be aligned with the outcomes, goals and objectives of the qualification.
- 2.5 RPL should recognize learning regardless of how, when and where it was acquired, provided that the learning is relevant to the learning or competency outcomes in a subject, unit module, course or qualification.
- 2.6 RPL will be more accessible to the individual if there is consistency in definition across sectors.
- 2.7 RPL can be used for;
 - access into a course when the specified prerequisites based on completion of a formal course of education and training have not been undertaken; and
 - the award of credit for the partial or complete fulfillment of a qualification, within the relevant institutional or sectoral guidelines that specify the maximum amount of credit that may be granted.
- 2.8 RPL processes should be timely, fair and transparent.

2.9 RPL assessment should be based on evidence, and should be equitable, culturally inclusive, fair, flexible, valid and reliable.

2.10 RPL assessment processes should be

- of a comparable standard to those used to deliver and assess the qualification
- evidence-based, transparent and accountable, and
- explicitly subject to the quality assurance processes used to ensure the standard and integrity of assessment processes within sectors, or institutions, and be validated and monitored in the same way other assessment processes are validated and monitored.

2.11 RPL policies, procedures and processes should be explicitly included in quality assurance procedures within institutions to ensure that qualifications achieved in part or full through RPL are of the same quality and have the same standing as qualifications achieved as a consequence of formal education and training.

2.12 RPL assessment should be structured to minimise costs to the individual.

2.13 RPL decisions should be accountable, transparent, and subject to appeal and review.

2.14 RPL information and support services should be actively promoted, easy to understand and recognise the diversity of learners.

2.15 Jurisdictions, institutions and providers should develop advice and information about RPL for employers of students and potential students to promote RPL among those employers; help employers understand the possible benefits to their business that may ensue through implementing RPL; and encourage employers to support staff in undertaking RPL.

2.16 Jurisdictions, institutions and providers should include RPL in access strategies for disadvantaged learners who are not in the work force, or are marginally attached to the work force, and who are not engaged with studying or training.

2.17 Funding models should not impede the implementation of RPL.

3. Objectives of the Policy Principles and Operational Guidelines

These principles and operational guidelines have been developed to provide advice at the national level about RPL, and to guide the four sectors of post-compulsory secondary education and training (senior secondary, adult and community education, vocational education and training, and higher education) to develop RPL policies and procedures that ensure:

- opportunities for Australians to have their non-formal and informal learning recognised

and counted towards a qualification;

- diverse and inclusive pathways to lifelong learning;
- consistency in the principles used in implementing RPL within sectors and between sectors; and
- the quality, integrity and standing of Australian qualifications.

The principles and guidelines have also been developed to provide information to individuals and organisations about:

- how RPL is defined;
- the principles and processes used by institutions to implement RPL; and
- how to promote greater awareness and understanding of RPL and how it can be used.

4. Definition

4.1 RPL and Credit Transfer

Although RPL and credit transfer are related, and the boundaries between them are often blurred, they are distinguished as alternative pathways to an AQF qualification. They are distinguished by the way they relate to learning achieved through formal education and training (credit transfer) and learning achieved outside the formal education and training system (RPL).

RPL is an assessment process that assesses the individual's non-formal and informal learning to determine the extent to which that individual has achieved the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes, or standards for entry to, and/or partial or total completion of, a qualification.

Credit transfer assesses the initial course or subject that the individual is using to claim access to, or the award of credit in, the destination course to determine the extent to which it is equivalent to the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes, or standards in a qualification. This may include credit transfer based on formal learning that is outside the AQF framework.

4.2 How RPL is Used and Assessed

The key distinguishing characteristic is that it is the student who is assessed in the case of RPL, and the course or subject in the case of credit transfer. In credit transfer the judgement is about the learning program, outcomes and assessment in the initial course or subject.

Both credit transfer and RPL are learning pathways that can be used in two ways:

- as alternative mechanisms for access to a course or qualification. A student may gain entry to a course or qualification using credit transfer or RPL as an alternative to having undertaken and completed the prerequisites for entry based on formal education and

training. An example of this is a student who obtains a place in a degree program in a university using RPL (based on life or work experience) or credit transfer (based on having completed an alternative course at an equivalent level) when they have not completed the senior school certificate; and/or

- for the award of credit in a course or qualification, leading to the partial or full completion of the requirements for that course or qualification.

In order to recognise prior learning it is necessary to:

- compare the informal or non-formal learning the individual has achieved against the learning outcomes or performance criteria of the course or qualification for which the student is using as a basis for seeking entry or the award of credit; and
- determine appropriate evidence to support the claim of prior learning.

The processes used to assess RPL applications may take several (not mutually exclusive) forms, for example:

- Participation in exactly the same or modified versions of the assessment the student would be required to complete as part of the full course.
- Assessment based on a portfolio of evidence.
- Direct observation of demonstration of skill or competence.
- Reflective papers, journals or portfolios that relate past learning to the learning or competency outcomes of the current course or qualification.
- Provision of examples of the student's work drawn from the workplace, social, community or other setting in which the student applies their learning, skill or competence.
- Testimonials of learning, skill or competence.
- Combinations of any of the above.

5. Operational Guidelines

5.1 Development of Institutional RPL Policies

The bodies authorised to develop and/or issue AQF qualifications should consider the development of RPL policies as part of their responsibilities under the AQF. The sectors differ in the extent to which RPL can be used for the partial or complete fulfilment of the requirements of a qualification. For example:

- RPL can be used for access and for the award of credit in a higher education course leading to an AQF qualification, but it is not normally possible to gain an entire higher education qualification using RPL.
- RPL can be used for access and for the partial or complete fulfilment of the requirements

of a qualification in the vocational education and training (VET) sectors and the adult and community education (ACE) sectors, and for VET accredited qualifications in the ACE and senior secondary school sectors. VET accredited qualifications are required to make RPL available to all students in compliance with the Australian Quality Training Framework.

- RPL can be used for access and for the award of credit in many of the senior secondary school certificates (particularly for the VET components), but cannot normally be used to gain the entire school certificate.

5.2 RPL Models

All providers and institutions within each sector should develop and maintain quality assured procedures that promote RPL to the individual/learner. This may be in the form of:

- Information and advice to students about which subjects, modules, competencies, courses and qualifications for which RPL can be used to establish access and exemptions.
- Information for students about how to apply for RPL, who to contact for further information concerning the process, who to contact for support in preparing their application, and information about time lines, appeals processes and fees.
- An outline of the learning competency outcomes against which students will be assessed.
- Advice to students as to the nature of the RPL assessment process, the kind of evidence that can be used, the forms in which it can be presented, and, where appropriate, a guide as to what is considered sufficient and valid evidence.
- Administrative processes for receiving RPL applications, administering assessment, recording results, advising students of the outcome, and administering appeals processes.
- Designation of responsibilities and accountabilities for undertaking RPL assessments, and a statement of the qualifications and skills assessors are expected to possess.
- An outline of the different assessment processes that may be used.
- An outline of the way in which RPL policies, processes and assessments are quality assured.

5.3 RPL Processes

- Processes should ensure that, where possible, the student is able to complete the qualification in less time.
- Processes should include and clearly label academic and administrative responsibilities and accountabilities, and these should be widely publicised in information about RPL.
- Processes should be timely, and, where possible, decisions made prior to the subject commencement of the course, subject or unit for which RPL is being claimed.

5.4 Assessment Processes

- RPL processes and procedures may consist of the following stages:
 - establishing the purpose of the assessment;
 - identifying the evidence required;
 - using appropriate evidence-gathering methods;
 - interpreting the evidence and making a judgement;
 - recording the outcome; and

– reporting to key stakeholders.

- Assessment methods should accommodate literacy levels, cultural background and experiences of students. Assessment methods should provide for a range of ways for students to demonstrate that they have met the required outcomes. RPL assessment processes should not be proxy for assessment of skills such as literacy, except where these are intrinsic to the learning or competency outcomes in the subject, unit, module, course or qualification.

Students should be provided with advice about the assessment processes and the sort of evidence the institution will consider in assessing their RPL application. Students should be provided with sufficient information to enable them to prepare their evidence to the standard required for the RPL assessment process.

- As with all assessment, RPL assessment should be undertaken by academic or teaching staff with expertise in the subject, content or skills area, as well as knowledge of, and expertise in, RPL policies and procedures.

- RPL assessment processes should be comparable to other assessment processes used to assess whether the learning or competency outcomes in a subject, module, unit, course or qualification have been met.

5.5 Forms of Credit

- RPL may be used for access into a course when the specified prerequisites based on completion of a formal course of education have not been undertaken, or where other access mechanisms are not applicable or appropriate.

- The award of credit in a course as the result of a successful RPL application may include:
 - specified credit for designated subjects, modules, units or competencies;
 - unspecified credit, resulting in the student being required to complete fewer subjects, modules or competencies (for example, by exempting a student from undertaking elective units);
 - block credit, resulting in exemption from the requirement to undertake a block component of a course (for example, first semester of first year); and
 - exemptions or advanced standing. This involves exempting a student from preparatory subjects, units, modules or competencies in the early stages of the course or qualification, while still requiring them to undertake the same number of subjects, units, modules or competencies as they would be required to complete if they had not been granted the extension. This usually involves substituting the exempted subjects, units, modules or competencies with others.

- Credit may be awarded on the basis of a combination of credit transfer plus an individual RPL assessment for additional non-formal or informal learning.

- Once a student has been awarded credit on the basis of RPL, subsequent credit transfer based on these learning outcomes should not include revisiting the RPL assessment, but should be based on credit transfer agreements, articulation arrangements or other agreements between institutions.

5.6 Quality Assurance

- RPL policies, procedures and processes and assessment outcomes should be explicitly included in sectoral or institutional quality assurance mechanisms.
- Clear and transparent quality assurance mechanisms are essential for ensuring that one sector has confidence in the RPL decisions made by another sector. These arrangements should be included in negotiations between providers within and across sectors about credit transfer, articulation and other arrangements to link qualifications.

5.7 Support for Learners

- RPL should be offered prior to, or at enrolment, and be available at other times in the student's enrolment in a qualification. Where necessary, support should be available to students to learn the skills needed to gain RPL, in either a formal group, or an informal setting.
- Support should be offered to students to ensure they engage in appropriate learning pathways as a consequence of their RPL process. In some sectors, this may include advice about 'gap' training or education that may be necessary to meet the full requirements of the qualification. It may also include advice as to learning pathways that are available to them and how to access those pathways.

5.8 Advice and Information

- Institutions and other relevant bodies in each of the sectors should promote their RPL policies, and include information about whether RPL is offered, as well as the qualifications, courses, subjects, units, modules and competencies in which it is offered.
- Information should be provided about the processes, time lines, appeal mechanisms, who to contact for more information, and where to go for support.
- Information should be made available via institutional, faculty and school websites, in promotional material and advertising in handbooks and through the State and Territory Tertiary Admissions Centres.
- Information should be written in clear accessible language, and should take into account the literacy skills, cultural background, and educational background and experiences of students and potential students.

5.9 Fees and Funding

- Policies and procedures implemented by jurisdictions and institutions to improve cost efficiency and remove financial disincentives in the implementation of RPL may include:
 - working with groups of students from industries, enterprises or occupational areas to achieve economies of scale;
 - fee charges no higher than students would normally be required to pay if they were undertaking formal study towards the qualification;
 - incorporating RPL duties into workloads for teaching and administrative staff; and
 - funding specific RPL subjects or modules to assist students who are preparing RPL applications, which can then be credited towards the qualification.
- Institutional policy frameworks and strategies to implement RPL should be developed to encourage implementation of internal funding arrangements and allocations to support the policy framework.

5.10 Appeal Mechanisms

- An effective means of appeal should be established in each institution in relation to RPL decisions.
- Processes should be fair, transparent, accountable and subject to appeal.
- Information about appeal mechanisms should be provided at the commencement of RPL procedures and made available throughout a student's enrolment in a qualification.

Reference:

<http://www.aqf.edu.au/AbouttheAQF/Pathways/RecognitionofPriorLearningRPLpathway/tabid/158/Default.aspx>