

## The Recognition of Prior Learning

The recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a process that enables a person to have competencies developed through formal learning, non-formal learning, informal learning and experience to be assessed and certificated by an RTO. An important outcome of a competency-based system is that any person who can demonstrate the requirements of a unit of competency to the level of rigour required by the *Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015* (Standards for RTOs) can be awarded that unit of competency (unit) without undertaking a training program.

RPL is a formal assessment process where all unit requirements are addressed, and the judgement is made using evidence that meets all the rules of evidence.

This Fact Sheet suggests strategies to ensure that RPL is implemented in a way that is credible and consistent with the Standards for RTOs.

### Relevant Clauses from Standards for RTOs:

A unit of competency can only be awarded and certificated once an RTO has conducted an assessment process that meets the requirements of Clause 1.8 of the Standards for RTOs and has been reviewed through the assessment validation processes required by Clauses 1.9 – 1.11.

To establish if the competency has been achieved through prior learning, the person needs to undergo a competency assessment process consistent with Clause 1.8. This may be based entirely on evidence from the past provided by the candidate, and/or additional evidence derived from formal assessment conducted by the RTO.

## **The first step –**

### **Are there grounds for the applicant to undertake the RPL pathway?**

When a learner applies for RPL the RTO first needs to determine if there are grounds to allow the applicant to undertake the RPL pathway. The applicant needs to provide sufficient evidence to enable that decision to be made. This evidence may be from any source and may be derived from formal learning (leading to an AQF qualification), non-formal learning (not leading to an AQF qualification) and/or informal learning (such as workplace experience, hobbies or leisure activities). As this evidence is being used to determine if RPL is the appropriate pathway and is not yet being used to determine competence, it does not need to meet the rules of evidence.

The mere possession of this evidence does not signify the applicant's competence but may be sufficient to persuade the RTO that the RPL pathway is appropriate. Once it has been decided to offer RPL, a comprehensive assessment process needs to be conducted by the RTO. These assessments must comply fully with all the requirements of Clause 1.8, including the Principles of Assessment and the Rules of Evidence.

### **Common issues**

Some RTOs have adopted a shortcut assessment approach and therefore the rules of evidence have been compromised. For example, they might accept documented past evidence provided by the candidate that may not truly reflect on their own performance (authenticity), it may only reflect their previous performance (currency), it may not be a meaningful match to the unit requirements (validity), or there may not be enough credible evidence to make a competency decision (sufficiency).

Evidence provided by the candidate must be closely scrutinised to ensure that all the requirements of Clause 1.8 have been met. If this can be assured, then the evidence provided by the candidate can be used to make the assessment decision.

Other RTOs simply map the content of previous training courses onto the requirements of the unit applied for. This might reveal previous training experiences, but it is not an indicator of previous training outcomes, nor does it provide an assurance of currency. This mapping may be useful, but must be supplemented with evidence of the outcomes of that training and of current competence.

Finally, RTOs do not always acknowledge that undertaking RPL is a challenge for the candidate as they are usually unfamiliar with the RTO, the VET sector and competency standards. RPL applicants need additional support so they can be assessed fairly.

## What does a typical RPL process look like?

1. Before you offer RPL to an individual you need to establish that they are likely to be ready for RPL. This can be achieved by asking the applicant to conduct a self-assessment of their skills and knowledge relevant to the unit(s) using a guide provided by the RTO. You will need to use the evidence they have gathered from their past and if necessary conduct an interview to decide whether to go ahead with the full assessment process or advise them to undertake the training. If they are to go ahead with RPL, then they will now need to gather a comprehensive portfolio of documented evidence mapped to each of the unit's requirements. As this task will be unfamiliar to them, you will need to provide guidance and forms to assist them to undertake this process.
2. Once they have prepared their portfolio of evidence, you need to review each item of evidence provided by the candidate to determine if it meets each of the rules of evidence and can contribute to the judgement of competence (see example form on page 5). You may need to conduct an interview with the individual or contact employers for third-party reports to ensure that the evidence is authentic, current, valid and sufficient. If the evidence meets those requirements then you can make the assessment decision and the candidate would not need to undertake any further assessment. Your decision needs to be fully documented relating the evidence provided to the unit requirements.
3. If any of the evidence provided by the candidate does not meet all the rules of evidence, then you will need to implement formal assessment tools and processes to address any gaps, keeping in mind that the candidate has not had the benefit of being immersed in your RTO during the training phase, so they may need some additional assistance and support to understand the requirements.

You will have already constructed assessment tools for the unit when you included the units on your scope of registration, so you do not need to invent any new ones, all you need to develop is a means to administer those assessments to a person who has not undertaken the training component. Through your own assessment process you must be able to verify that every aspect of each competency is being demonstrated in a manner that meets the rules of evidence. Since the candidate is using validated assessment tools, the evidence will be valid, current, and authentic.

4. Once you have established that the applicant has demonstrated all the competency requirements, you can award the unit of competency, a statement of attainment or qualification. The combination of evidence from the past together with any necessary new evidence gathered through your assessment processes will meet the requirements of the rules of evidence of validity, authenticity, sufficiency and currency.
5. Make sure you keep full documentation of the process and the outcomes for validation, appeals and for audit compliance purposes.

Should you find that the candidate does not demonstrate all the qualities required for competency, then you can offer supplementary training and later, re-assessment.

## **Demonstrating compliance**

In consideration of Clauses 1.8 - 1.12 the auditor will be looking for evidence of the following:

1. Strategies to inform individual learners of the availability of RPL and how to apply for RPL, and the costs and time involved;
2. Strategies to support applicants undertaking the RPL process, including: information to guide them through the application process; interpreting the unit requirements; identifying potential past evidence; understanding the need to meet the rules of evidence; gathering and presenting evidence for RPL; possible formal assessment processes; and the possible outcomes of the RPL process;
3. Strategies to ensure that the RPL assessment process meets all the principles of assessment and all the rules of evidence, and is conducted by suitably qualified assessors;
4. Evidence of how the RPL processes will be (or have been) validated pre-use and post-use; and
5. Examples of individual RPL assessment records from initial contact to final outcome, including details of the RPL assessment processes followed, assessment outcomes, and any complaints or appeals associated with the RPL process.

Internal and external audits of an RTO would address all of the above. For initial registration the focus would be on items 1 - 4.

## **Postscript:**

It is no accident that Clause 1.8 of the Standards for RTOs makes explicit reference to assessment for RPL. This reminds us that RPL is fundamentally a process through which we assess the competencies of the applicant and can award a statement of attainment for the unit.

RPL is a process that sits within the general area of 'recognition' which also includes credit (Clause 3.5). However, as credit is a very different process, credit and RPL should not be addressed together within RTO documentation such as marketing material, the Student Handbook or RTO policies and procedures.

# FACT SHEET

## Example form to record RPL evidence and to make the assessment judgement

RECORD OF RPL EVIDENCE AND ASSESSMENT JUDGEMENT							
Name of learner:				Contact number:			
Unit applied for:							
Date of application:							
RPL assessor:				Contact number:			
Unit requirement	Learner evidence	RTO evidence	Rules of evidence				
<i>List all requirements</i>	<i>Location in source</i>	<i>Assessment tool</i>	V	A	C	S	✓/✗
1 Conduct pre-operational checks	<i>A: pages 3-4 C: para 2</i>	<i>Practical demonstration</i>	✓	✓	?	✓	✓
2 Utilise equipment	<i>B</i>	<i>Not required</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
KE1 Safety rules		<i>Knowledge test item 3</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pre-requisite(s) completed?							<i>NA</i>
Assessment judgment: C / NYC			RTO assessor signature:			Date:	
<p><b>Key:</b> V: Validity; A: Authenticity; C: Currency; S: Sufficiency; ✓/✗: demonstrated/not demonstrated, ? more evidence required.</p> <p><b>Unit requirements</b> to include all elements of competency, any foundation skills (FS), all performance evidence (PE) and all items of knowledge evidence (KE).</p> <p><b>Prerequisites required</b> (list code and title): <i>Nil</i></p> <p><b>Evidence sources provided by learner:</b></p> <p>A: <i>Completed start-up log</i></p> <p>B: <i>Video of equipment use</i></p> <p>C: <i>Employer reference</i></p> <p>D:</p> <p><b>Assessment tools administered by RTO:</b></p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Practical demonstration</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Workplace observation</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Knowledge assessment</p>							

## A typical RPL process

