**Literature Review of PLAR in Australia and New Zealand**

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TRU- PLAR

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**Abstract**

This literary review examines the frameworks, policies, and governing bodies that dictate the evaluation of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Both RPL and PLAR are used interchangeably during the report, as they both represent a global concept although the exact terminology varies based on country. Both New Zealand and Australia have inclusive PLAR programs that are undergoing refinement to help applicants receive formal recognition and accreditation for their experiences, that will enable them to participate in the work force and meet industry needs (Te Tahuhu o te Matau range, 2023; Competenze, 2023; NZQA, Dec.6th, 2023). Both countries also have policies and processes specific to the transferability of credentials earned overseas (Skills Recognition International, 2023; The State of Queensland, Jan. 10th, 2020; Te Tahuhu o te Matau range, 2023; Visa Envoy, 2023). New Zealand in particular places an emphasis on increasing equity and making RPL services accessible to diverse populations (Te Tahuhu o te Matau range, 2023).

Examining successful PLAR programs and learner-centered policies in these two countries could lead to findings that enable the advancement of TRU’s PLAR program and address learner needs identified in the TRU PLAR Experience Review findings (Forseille, S., 2019).

**Introduction**

**Overview of New Zealand PLAR/RPL**

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority has declared Recognition of Prior Learning programs as tertiary education and seeks to award academic credits or trades certification to those who have gained skills through “formal education, independent study, workplace and life experience” (NZQA, 2023). Qualifications are available in a diverse array of fields, and the process to prepare for Assessment of Prior Learning (APL) is at the applicant’s own pace, to avoid interfering with work or other responsibilities (Ara Institute of Canterbury, 2023). The applicant’s program is customized to their needs and circumstances, and application packs are specific to the qualification level and program being applied for (Are Institute of Canterbury, 2023). To receive credit, the learner’s knowledge is compared to “the outcomes of a: qualification, program, course, module, or assessment standard”; knowledge gaps are identified, and a customized educational program is created so the learner does not have to repeat learning that has already been achieved (NZQA, 2023; Unitec, 2023). Accredited organizations and post-secondary institutes are able to provide RPL services for a fee below the cost of achieving the qualification in full and are expected to provide support to learners in completing the evaluation process.

The two main programs recognizing learning for credit are called Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Recognition and Transfer (CRT) (NZQA, 2023). In CRT, the applicant’s “verified official transcript” is assessed, and compared to New Zealand’s qualification standards (NZQA, 2023). New Zealand also directs RPL programs to specific industries, such as the trades, to “help those that perhaps missed out on getting their trade qualification when they were younger, or people skilled in more than one trade or trained outside of New Zealand (Competenz, 2023). This is advantageous as it enables more skilled trades people to be recognized and mobilized in strengthening the countries infrastructure and economy in helping applicants obtain “nationally recognized qualifications valued by industry” (Competenz, 2023).

**Overview of Australian PLAR/RPL**

Australian RPL programs evaluate learning gained through a range of experiences, including paid and volunteer work, and life experience, in their evaluation of prior learning compared to certificate or degree standards (The State of Queensland, Jan. 10th, 2020). Successful applicants receive formal recognition in the form of credits towards the field they have experience in; diplomas for business and administration capabilities; and certificates for agriculture, youth work, and similar (The State of Queensland, Jan. 10th, 2020). Like New Zealand, RPL deals with both trades and academia (The State of Queensland, Jan. 10th, 2020). Skills and knowledge are compared to industry standards by RPL assessors, and the assessment may include demonstrating the tasks required of the job, explaining, or providing samples of the applicant’s work (The State of Queensland, Jan. 10th, 2020). Rather than the applicant applying for a specific certification, the assessor examines their “skills and knowledge… (to) match them against a suitable qualification (The State of Queensland, Jan. 10th, 2020).

Australia in encouraging greater awareness of RPL by mandating all Registered Training Organizations (RTOs) to offer RPL assessments to students (The State of Queensland, Jan. 10th, 2020). RTOs can offer RPL because it meets the Australian Quality Training Framework Qualifications (AQTFQ) as well as the needs for individuals and employers to have a time and cost effective way to upskill or validate on the job learning (NCVER, 2006, p.3). It prevents redundancy in training and allows learners to create a personalized educational program that only requires them to complete courses they are lacking knowledge in, rather than do an entire program (NCVER, 2006, p.3). It advantages the individual as they can gain upward mobility in their career, accreditation; it benefits the employer as they can upskill their staff more affordably and efficiently; and it benefits Australia’s economy and operations by providing skilled workers to meet industry needs. Just the process of RPL application can be encouraging and validating, as people recognize their abilities and the value of their knowledge they may not have recognized prior (NCVER, 2006, p.3). The cost for a successful RPL assessment is less than the full course equivalent, and financial assistance is available for applicants based on circumstances (The State of Queensland, Jan. 10th, 2020). They will also assess previously earned credits and transfer them at no cost if relevant and verifiable (The State of Queensland, Jan. 10th, 2020).

Overseas skills recognition helps combat the ‘brain drain’ that comes from underutilizing immigrants due to failure to recognize credentials and experience gained abroad (The State of Queensland, Jan. 10th, 2020). Evaluation of these credentials, skills, and knowledge can allow migrants and immigrants to have their abilities “officially recognized in Australia” (The State of Queensland, Jan. 10th, 2020). Skills Recognition International is one organization that offers RPL to migrants and immigrants and available as online certifications and diplomas to transfer international training and experience into accredited Australian Qualifications (Skills Recognition International, 2023). It sees applicants for RPL as having “advanced standing in the Australian tertiary education system”, enabling faster, cheaper, and more accessible qualifications (Skills Recognition International, 2023).   
 Despite the promotion and inclusivity of Australia’s RPL programs, a study through the National Center for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) on the behalf of the Australian government, found that both participation and completion of RPL was less than expected (NCVER, 2006, p. 1). Possible explanations for this could be how data is categorized, especially if accreditations are not recorded as RPL (NCVER, 2006, p.1). For example, RPL is often used for “accelerated progression… a practice adopted by some providers where the student enrols in the course properly but receives some RPL as they progress towards a pass in the course” and is hidden in VET RPL statistics (NCVER, 2006, p.3). VET statistics also only record successfully completed RPLs that have been awarded credits, so their participation estimate is likely lower than reality (NCVER, 2006, p.4). Other possibilities for the low completion rate include individuals and employers not fully being aware of the advantages of RPL, understanding the process, or seeing themselves as eligible (NCVER, 2006, p.1). If it seems out of reach, they may prefer to remain uncertified, give up on their certification, or return to school (NCVER, 2006, p.1). NCVER considered factors affecting participation and completion rates and found that “more effective RPL requires greater promotion; using clean, concise, and jargon-free language; recognition that RPL is a valuable learning experience in its own right; improved support and approaches to assist students to gather evidence; experiences professional assessor; continual efforts to achieve cost effective RPL” (2006, p.1). RPL has the enormous potential to substantially benefit successful applicants, yet it continues to be underutilized (NCVER, 2006, p.2).

**PLAR/RPL Frameworks and Policies**

Australia

RPL entered Australian educational policy as part of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), and is now cemented into “the national Vocational, Educational, and Training (VET) system… (has been) written into the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) charter and into the standards for registered training organizations (RTOs) delivering accredited vocational training programs (NCVER, 2006, p.2). Successfully applicants may receive credits onto their academic transcript to put towards graduation of their program, an official qualification, and/or a RPL certificate- “a document that recognizes an individual’s prior learning and experiences” (My RPL Australia, 2023).

The Australian Skills Assessment is mandatory for the majority of migration visas and employer sponsored visas and compares individual skills and knowledge to the “requirements of a specific qualification or set of learning outcomes” (My RPL Australia, 2023). It is affiliated with other certifying agencies, such as ACWA (Australian Community Workers Association) and Trades Recognition Australia (My RPL Australia, 2023).

Regardless of whether the applicant is domestic or international, RPL assessments can be in the form of “interviews, written assessments, workplace observations, or recognition of qualifications or other forms of certification” and are executed by an assessor from a relevant field authority (My RPL Australia, 2023). Each vocational or degree-specific “assessing authority has its own specific requirements and criteria for assessing and applicants qualifications and experience” but all are measured against the national Australian Standards (My RPL Australia, 2023).

**PLAR & National regulatory bodies, employers, or professional practices**

**Te** Pukenga is part of the New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology and under the Tertiary Education Commission- it’s focus is on graduating learners with practical skills to meet business and community needs (Te Pukenga, 2023).

**Findings relevance to TRU-PLAR program**

***International students***

***Military/RCMP/first responders/veterans***

Aimpoint is an Australian RTO that focuses on military veterans who are building a career outside of the military (Aimpoint, 2018). It sees the value of military experience and training that may go unrecognized by people who have not served and are unfamiliar with how skills developed in service can apply to a civilian career. Aimpoint was developed by ex-military members and currently offers two courses that are accredited through Australian RTOs: a Diploma of Project Management, and a Diploma of Leadership and Management (Aimpoint, 2018). Veterans can apply for an RPL assessment for either or both of the courses, and application is a streamlined and efficient process (Aimpoint, 2018). According to the Aimpoint website (Aimpoint.edu.au), applicants have a brief, initial phone chat to set up further appointments and ask questions (Aimpoint, 2018). Next, they complete a self-paced webinar that addresses frequently asked questions and explains the RPL process and procedure (Aimpoint, 2018). Evidence collection and assessment is personalized for each applicant, and determined during a video call or interview with the applicants to decided what evidence and documentation is required; most applicants are required to present 7 pieces of documentation of their service (Aimpoint, 2018). After all documentation has been submitted, the Aimpoint team reviews the submission and applicants will usually receive a reply within 24 hours of whether or not they would be likely to successfully complete an RPL assessment (Aimpoint, 2018). If yes, they are enrolled in the RPL diploma courses and charged based on the assessment method, the number of modules they need to complete for the diploma, and whether they choose to do in person training for their deficits or complete a self-paced online course (Aimpoint, 2018).

Aimpoint has partnered with defense companies seeking employees, the Edinburgh Industry Alliance, is a Veteran Owned Business, and a “proud supporter of Veteran’s employers” (Aimpoint, 2018).

Contact: [enquiry@aimpoint.edu.au](mailto:enquiry@aimpoint.edu.au)

Phone: 08 7078 4166 or 0435 109 522

RTO code: 45936

***Inclusivity – variety of programs***

***Promotion***

***Individualization/customization***

***Improved accessibility***

***Time/duration/length of program until assessment***

***Communication***

***Managing evidence – solutions for reference letters (alternatives), etc.***

**PSI Institutions offering PLAR**

**Summary**

**Contacts?**

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