



# OVERVIEW

## RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING IN THE AUSTRALIAN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM

August/2025

# List of Abbreviations

ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
ASQA	Australian Skills Quality Authority
AVETMISS	Australian VET Management Information Statistical Standard
CBA	Competency-based assessment
CBT	Competency-based training
DEWR	Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
DVCET	Department of Vocational and Continuing Education and Training
JSCs	Jobs and Skills Councils
MEM	Manufacturing and Engineering MEM05 Metal and Engineering
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
RCC	Recognition of Current Competency
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
TAC	Training Accreditation Council
TAE	Training & Education
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VCCI	Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VRQA	Victorian Registration and Qualifications
WHS	Workplace Health and Safety Authority



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# Introduction

This technical paper has been developed at the request of the Department of Vocational and Continuing Education and Training (DVCET) under the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), Vietnam. It was prepared by Aus4Skills, with technical support from Audit Express (Australia) and international skills recognition expert, Deb Carr, as part of the “Promoting Logistics Industry Engagement with Vocational Education and Training” Project (2021–2025) (Aus4Skills VET). The purpose of this paper is to support DVCET in researching and formulating regulations on the recognition of prior learning (RPL) within the framework of the revised Vocational Education and Training (VET) Law and its associated sub-law documents.

This paper is intended to be read in conjunction with the *Overview of the Australian VET System*, also developed by Aus4Skills VET and shared with the DVCET in January 2025

# 1 Overview: Recognition of Prior Learning in the Australian Vocational Education and Training System

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in Australia is a core component of the national Vocational Education and Training (VET) system. Its fundamental purpose is to formally recognise and value competencies, no matter how, when, or where they were acquired. It provides an assessment-only pathway to a nationally recognised qualification, allowing individuals to avoid redundant study for skills and knowledge they already possess. This approach delivers significant time and cost savings to individuals, employers, and the government. For example, for individuals who have years of practical work experience in a specific field but have never obtained a formal qualification. Their skills—such as project management, budgeting, or complex problem-solving developed on the job—can be assessed for credits towards a qualification. RPL is particularly useful in trades, technical, and regulated industries where skills are often learned on the job, helping experienced workers gain the certification needed for career progression or licensing. RPL can also provide an alternative and equitable entry pathway into higher education or vocational training for individuals who may not meet the formal entry requirements for traditional admission. The process is a vital mechanism for migrants, refugees, older workers, and those with low levels of formal schooling to gain qualifications and improve their economic and social mobility. RPL is increasingly important as the rapid pace of technological and economic change requires more people to transition between occupations during their working lives. RPL provides a vital pathway for these career changers, allowing them to gain credit for existing transferable skills and reskill for a new role more efficiently.

The impetus for RPL in Australia came from industry during a period of major economic and industrial reform in the 1980s and 1990s. The Australian government, in partnership with unions and employers, sought to create a more skilled and flexible workforce to boost national productivity. Early momentum was generated by pioneering industry-led initiatives, most notably a collaboration between the Ford Motor Company and a public VET provider (TAFE), which developed a model for recognising skills learned in the workplace against formal qualifications.

This industry-driven need led to the formal institutionalisation of RPL within the national training reforms of the 1990s. It was enshrined in foundational policy documents like the National Framework for the Recognition of Training (NFROT) in 1992, which committed all Australian states and territories to the principles of RPL.

Today, all Registered Training Organisations (RTOs)—the government-regulated providers authorised to deliver VET—are required by national standards to offer RPL to every student upon enrolment. This ensures that RPL remains a universally accessible pathway, reinforcing the principle of lifelong learning that is central to Australia's skills and workforce development agenda.

## 2 Definition and Scope of RPL

In the Australian context, RPL is formally defined as an assessment process that involves the evaluation of an individual's relevant prior learning to determine the credit they may be granted towards a VET qualification. A defining philosophical principle of the Australian model is its holistic and comprehensive scope, which acknowledges that valid, assessable learning can be acquired through three distinct channels.

These categories of learning are defined in the Australian Qualifications Framework<sup>1</sup>:

**Formal Learning:** This refers to learning that takes place within a structured program delivered by a registered education or training institution, which leads to an officially accredited qualification. Examples include a university degree, a diploma from a TAFE institute, or a certificate from a private college.

**Non-formal Learning:** This encompasses structured learning activities that do not typically lead to a formal, accredited qualification. Common examples include in-house professional development programs conducted by business, industry seminars and workshops, online short courses (such as those on platforms like Coursera), or structured volunteer training programs.

For example, Anh, a 38-year-old Production Supervisor at a multinational electronics factory in Bac Ninh, is highly respected for his technical and leadership skills. He is being considered for a promotion to a Department Manager role, but the position requires a formal Diploma of Leadership and Management. Anh has never attended college, but over his twelve years with the company, he has completed numerous structured training programs in and outside the company to build his skills. For his RPL application, he can gather evidence including:

- A certificate of completion from a one-week in-house training course on "Lean Manufacturing and Quality systems"
- Records showing, he attended a three-day "Advanced Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) for Supervisors" program, run by an external safety consultant.
- A training certificate from a German equipment supplier for operating and maintaining a new automated production line, which was a mandatory vendor training for all supervisors. Proof of attendance at several annual supply chain and logistics seminars hosted by the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI).

Through RPL, an assessor can review these structured, non-accredited training activities and map his learning directly against several units of competency in the formal Diploma, recognising that he has already acquired much of the required knowledge without needing to study it again.

**Informal Learning:** This category covers the diverse learning that results from experience in work-related, social, family, hobby, or leisure activities. Unlike formal or non-formal learning, informal learning is not organised or externally structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. For example, the project management and budgeting skills gained from organising a large community festival, the complex problem-solving skills developed over years of working as a

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Qualifications Framework. AQF Glossary. <https://www.aqf.edu.au/publication/aqf-glossary>

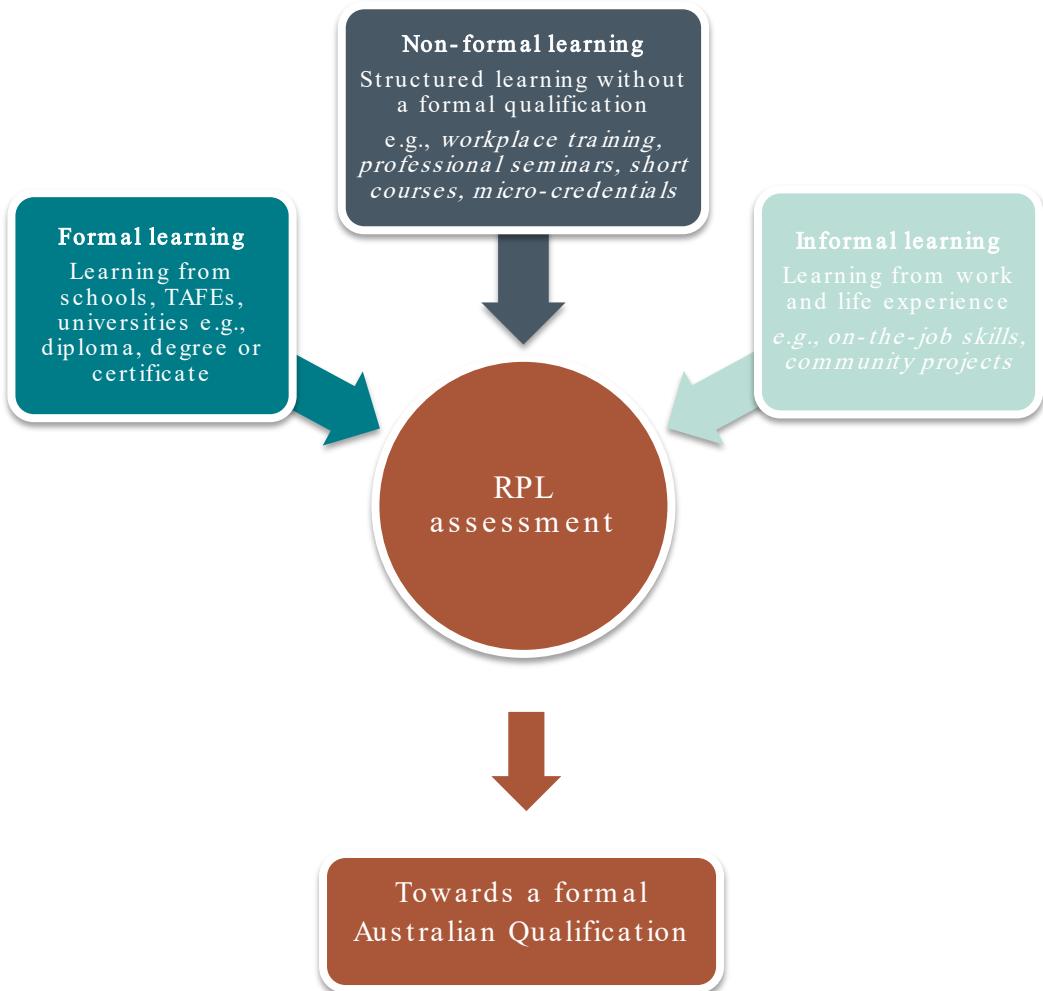
mechanic, or the interpersonal and leadership skills honed while coaching a local sports team are all forms of informal learning.

Lien is 45 and has successfully managed her family's small construction business in Da Nang for over twenty years. She learned the trade from her father and through years of hands-on work, but she has no formal qualifications. Her company now wants to bid on larger, more lucrative commercial projects, which require the lead contractor to have a nationally recognised Certificate IV in Building and Construction.

Lien applies for RPL based entirely on her informal learning. With guidance from an RPL advisor, she collects a portfolio of evidence to demonstrate her competence, including:

- **Work Samples:** Photographs of completed projects (houses, shop renovations) at various stages, from foundation to finish, to demonstrate the quality and scope of her work.
- **Project Documents:** Copies of building plans she has interpreted, lists of materials she has ordered, and basic budgets she has managed for past projects.
- **Third-Party Reports:** A signed letter from a long-term client testifying to her professionalism and skill, and a statutory declaration from a licensed architect confirming he has worked with her on several projects and can vouch for her site management capabilities.
- **A Practical Demonstration and Competency Interview:** An RPL assessor visits her current worksite to directly observe her supervising her team, conducting a safety briefing, and solving a logistical problem, providing real-time proof of her skills.

In this case, Lien's decades of unstructured, experience-based learning are made visible and are formally assessed, allowing her to gain the qualifications she needs to grow her business.



**Figure 1 Recognition of Prior Learning Recognises all Learning**

Formal definitions for RPL can be found in the AQF, AVETMISS and the Revised RTO Outcome Standards (2025).

The Revised RTO Outcome Standards define RPL as:

An assessment process that involves assessment of an individual's relevant prior learning and experience (including skills and knowledge obtained through formal and informal learning) to determine the extent to which the individual meets requirements specified in the training product. (Australian Government - Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2025, p. 3)

The AQF defines RPL as:

"an assessment process that involves assessment of an individual's relevant prior learning (including formal, informal and non-formal learning) to determine the credit outcomes of an individual application for credit"<sup>1</sup> (Australian Qualifications Framework Council, 2021, p. 1)

AVETMISS defines RPL as:

a process that assesses the competency of an individual that may have been acquired through formal, non-formal (such as previously unrecognised skills and knowledge), or informal learning. This process determines the extent to which an individual has achieved the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes, or standards for entry into, and/or partial or total completion of, a program of study. (National Centre for VET Research, 2016, p. 106)

For other definitions, see [VET Knowledge Bank – Glossary of VET, Recognition of prior learning | Education and training | Queensland Government](#) and [jswa-training-rpl-faqs-nov2016.pdf](#).

It is crucial to distinguish RPL from other similar concepts, particularly **Credit Transfer**. Credit Transfer is a process for recognising previous *formal learning* to grant credit for an equivalent (based on content and learning outcomes) unit of competency. The *AVETMISS Data Elements Definitions*<sup>2</sup> defines credit transfers as essentially administrative processes “because they involve neither delivery nor assessment of the student’s knowledge” (National Centre for VET Research, 2016, p. 106). The *Revised RTO Outcome Standards* (2025) define credit transfer as the process of recognising and awarding credit for prior successful completion of an equivalent unit of competency or module (Australian Government - Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2025, p. 2). RPL, in contrast, is an *assessment process* for knowledge and skills gained through all forms of learning—formal, non-formal, and informal. One of Australia’s VET regulators, the Western Australia Training Accreditation Council, advises that RTO documentation, such as marketing material, the Student Handbook or RTO policies and procedures should not address credit transfer and RPL together (2023). While both lead to credit, RPL is broader in scope as it assesses demonstrated competence, not just previous study.

The recognition of current competency (RCC) is a similar concept to RPL. The AVETMISS notes RCC as an assessment process for candidates who have “successfully completed the requirements for a unit of competency or module previously and are now required to be reassessed to ensure that the competence is being maintained” (NCVER, 2016, p. 106). For national reporting, both RPL and RCC are recorded as the same code.

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<sup>2</sup> The Australian VET Management Information Statistical Standard (AVETMISS) for VET providers is the data standard for the National VET Provider Collection and the VET in Schools Collection, which collects training information from government-funded and privately-operated training providers.

Recognition of Prior Learning	Credit Transfer	Recognition of Current Competency
An assessment process that involves assessment of an individual's relevant prior learning and experience (including skills and knowledge obtained through formal, non-formal, and informal learning) to determine the extent to which the individual meets requirements specified in the training product.	A process of recognising and awarding credit for prior successful completion of an <i>equivalent unit</i> of competency or module.  Candidates do not undergo an assessment process.	An assessment process for candidates who have successfully completed the requirements for a unit of competency or module previously and are now required to be reassessed to ensure that the competence is being maintained.

## 3 The Benefits of RPL

RPL offers multifaceted benefits that extend across social and economic dimensions, impacting on a wide range of stakeholders from the individual candidate to the national economy.

While there are many cited benefits of RPL, the evidence base in Australia has significant limitations. It indicates that much of the evidence comes from qualitative data, case studies, and smaller-scale projects rather than comprehensive, large-scale empirical or longitudinal studies. The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2018) stated that quantitative research on the benefits of RPL is limited and there has “never been a systematic effort to collect data and comprehensively track the impacts of RPL over time and on a large scale” (9p. 18).

### 3.1 For Individuals

Research indicates that RPL positively affects individuals beyond merely obtaining credentials and economic benefits. Evaluating the impact of skills recognition on individuals is a complex and challenging task. The success of a skills recognition system may become apparent years after its implementation. It is also challenging to separate the specific effects of the system from those of other measures and policies, as well as from broader economic developments, which may either enhance or diminish its influence. Australia's RPL origins were driven by the belief that RPL was a “powerful tool for bringing people into the learning system—it reassures them that they don't have to start from scratch and that the skills they already have are valuable” (Australian National Training Authority [ANTA], 2000, p. 93).

- **Accelerated and Affordable Qualification Pathways.** By gaining credit for what they already know, candidates can significantly reduce the time and cost required to obtain a formal qualification (Hargreaves, 2006; ILO, 2018). This makes education more accessible, particularly for adults with work and family commitments.
- **Career Advancement and Mobility.** A formal qualification gained through RPL can unlock new employment opportunities, facilitate promotions, and lead to higher wages ANTA,

2000; Werquin, 2010). It makes an individual's skills visible and portable in the labour market (Branka, 2016b) and satisfies industry licensing arrangements (Hargreaves, 2006).

- **Increased Confidence and Lifelong Learning Motivation.** The process of reflecting on and articulating their skills, and having them formally validated, can be a profoundly empowering experience for candidates. This boost in self-esteem often encourages a mindset of continuous professional development and further learning (ANTA, 2000; Carr, 2023a, 2023b; Werquin, 2010).
- **Access to Further Education.** RPL provides an alternative and equitable pathway into higher education and vocational training, particularly for individuals who may lack the formal entry qualifications required for traditional admission routes (Werquin, 2010).

See [Military Skills Recognition](#) and, specialist providers [Knowledge Access](#) and [Churchill Education](#) for examples of the benefits of RPL for individuals.

### 3.2 For Training and Assessment Providers

- **Generates New Demand for Gap Training.** RPL acts as a diagnostic tool that identifies a candidate's skill gaps. When an applicant does not meet all the requirements for a full qualification through RPL, it creates a direct opportunity for the provider to offer specific, targeted "gap training" to address the missing competencies. This turns an assessment process into a new enrolment (Branka, 2016b).
- **Increases Overall Demand for Training and Lifelong Learning.** The availability of RPL can encourage more people to engage with the education system (ANTA, 2000). The ILO notes that individuals who are unsuccessful in an RPL attempt may be more motivated and confident to enrol in training to overcome their identified skills gaps (Branka, 2016b; Smith, 2004).
- **Enhances Market Position and Business Specialisation.** RTOs that develop expertise in RPL can position themselves as specialist providers, which can be a competitive advantage in the market. It allows providers to showcase their unique approach, efficiency, and methodology to attract enterprise clients who are looking for effective workforce development solutions.
- **Improves the Quality and Relevance of Training Programs.** Engaging in RPL helps providers ensure their training materials are relevant to current industry needs (Branka, 2016b). Feedback gathered from RPL candidates can provide valuable insights that allow for the continuous improvement of the RTO's assessment systems and practices. Students who gain entry via RPL can enrich the learning experience for all, bringing extensive applied knowledge into the classroom environment.
- **Builds Institutional Capability and Expertise.** RTOs that specialise in RPL can develop deep expertise and advanced capabilities in their workforce, particularly in complex assessment and candidate support. Having a critical mass of RPL activity allows assessors to become highly familiar with a wide range of competencies and how they are applied in the workplace, improving the efficiency and quality of assessment.
- **Strengthens Relationships with Industry.** To be effective, RPL systems require the deep involvement of employers and industry stakeholders. For providers, participating in this process strengthens their networks and partnerships with industry, ensuring their

programs remain current and valued (Bateman & Knight, 2003; Branka, 2016b; Werquin, 2010).

### 3.3 For Employers and Industry

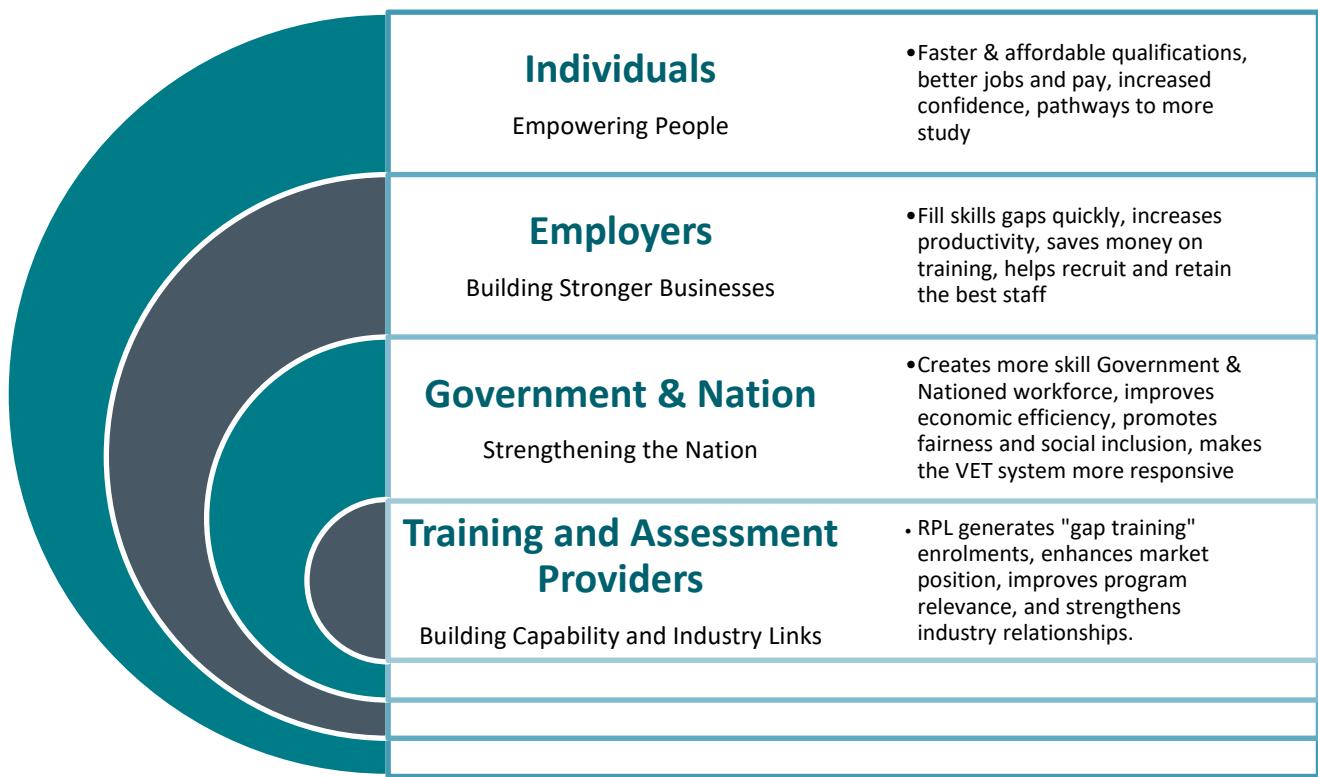
- **Strategic Workforce Development.** RPL serves as a powerful tool for conducting skills audits of an existing workforce, identifying both competencies that can contribute to business development and skill gaps for targeted training (Hargreaves, 2006). This allows businesses to implement targeted and cost-effective upskilling programs. Early consultations with employer stakeholders believed RPL will “influence employers to support further training for employees to achieve qualifications and to motivate many small business operators to put a higher value on the skills they and their employees already have” (ANTA, 2000, p. 93).
- **Improved Productivity and Efficiency.** By formally recognising employee skills, businesses can better deploy their workforce (Hargreaves, 2006), reduce time away from the workplace for redundant training (Carr, 2023b; Werquin, 2010), and align staff capabilities with strategic business needs. There is some evidence in the Early Childhood Education and Care industry that RPL can improve centre practice (Carr, 2023b).
- **Addresses Industry-Wide Skills Shortages.** On a broader scale, RPL helps identify and credential the existing skills within an industry, providing a rapid mechanism to address skills gaps and increase the pool of formally qualified workers (Branka, 2016a).
- **Enhanced Recruitment and Retention.** Using RPL can streamline recruitment by providing a reliable benchmark on a candidate's skills. Offering RPL as a professional development tool can also significantly improve staff morale, loyalty, and retention (Carr, 2023b). RPL can also help foster a workplace learning culture; it motivates and builds confidence to undertake further education and training (Hargreaves, 2006).

See specialist providers [Knowledge Access](#) and [VETASSESS](#) for the benefits of RPL for employers. For more evidence-based benefits for employers and employees see '[What's in it for me: RPL in enterprise-based RTOs](#)'

### 3.4 For the Government, VET System, and the Nation

- **A More Skilled and Adaptive National Workforce.** RPL contributes directly to the national goal of upskilling the workforce by providing a flexible, efficient, and responsive pathway to qualifications.
- **Economic Efficiency and Productivity.** By reducing unnecessary training and better matching skills to jobs, RPL enhances labour market efficiency and contributes to national productivity (ILO, 2018).
- **Social Inclusion and Equity.** It offers a vital mechanism for disadvantaged and non-traditional learners—including migrants, refugees, older workers, and those with low levels of formal education—to gain qualifications, improve their economic participation, and achieve greater social mobility (ILO, 2018).
- **Strengthening the VET System.** By providing an alternative pathway, RPL makes the entire VET system more open, flexible, and responsive to the needs of a diverse population and a dynamic economy (Werquin, 2010).

- **Increases Labour Mobility.** Increased ability of employed people to change careers and employers. Expanded opportunities for movements of workers from rural to urban areas and across borders (ILO, 2018).



**Figure 2 Recognition of Prior Learning: A Win-Win for Everyone**

# 4 The Australian Recognition of Prior Learning Framework

The integrity, quality, and consistency of RPL in Australia are maintained by a robust and multi-layered national regulatory framework. This framework is comprised of several key components that work in concert to govern how vocational education is delivered, assessed, and quality-assured across the country. Understanding this architecture is key to understanding how RPL operates.

## Core Components of the Framework

### **The Australian Qualifications Framework**

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is the national policy for all regulated qualifications in Australian education and training, from secondary school certificates to university doctoral degrees. It establishes the standards for qualification levels, ensuring that a Diploma, for example, has a consistent meaning and value regardless of where in Australia it was issued. A core objective of the AQF since its inception in 1995 has been to support flexible learning pathways and recognise prior learning. The framework is not just a set of qualification levels; it includes embedded policies that are mandatory for all providers.

### **The AQF Qualifications Pathways Policy**

This is the key instrument within the AQF that facilitates RPL. It states that all education and training providers issuing AQF qualifications must have policies and procedures for RPL, ensuring it is available to all students for entry into, or credit towards, a qualification. It also requires that these policies and procedures must maximise the credit that students can gain. Historically, the AQF contained more detailed *National Principles and Operational Guidelines for RPL*, but these were amalgamated into the broader *Pathways Policy* between 2007 and 2011, a change that some argue diluted the direct guidance available to practitioners.

The AQF includes explanations for [Articulation](#), [Recognition of Prior learning](#) and [Credit Transfer](#).

For more information: [Australian Qualifications Framework](#)

### **Registered Training Organisations**

Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) are a diverse range of VET providers authorised to deliver training, conduct assessments, and issue nationally recognised qualifications. There are over four thousand RTOs in Australia, comprising public Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes, private colleges, community-based providers, schools, and enterprise-based organisations that deliver training primarily to their own staff.

## Australian Regulators

While ASQA is the national regulator for Australia's VET sector, Victoria and Western Australia have retained their state-based regulatory bodies<sup>3</sup>. The Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) and the Training Accreditation Council (TAC) in Western Australia regulate training providers that deliver training to domestic students operating solely within their state's jurisdiction.

**The Australian Skills Quality Authority.** The Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) is the national regulator for Australia's VET sector. Its primary role is to ensure the quality and integrity of the VET system by regulating RTOs against a set of national standards. ASQA has the power to register RTOs, conduct audits, and apply sanctions if providers are not compliant, ensuring that qualifications are credible and trusted by students and employers. Due to persistent issues with inconsistent practice, ASQA has identified RPL as a strategic risk priority, meaning it is an area of increased regulatory focus.

For more information: [Australian Skills Quality Authority](https://www.skills.gov.au/)

**The Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority.** The Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) is a statutory authority established under the *Victorian Education and Training Reform Act (2006)*, and is responsible to the Minister for Education, the Minister for Skills and TAFE, and the Minister for Economic Growth. The VRQA regulates 128 VET providers<sup>4</sup> that deliver accredited training to domestic students in Victoria only, or Victoria and Western Australia only. RTOs operating in Victoria are registered with the VRQA or with ASQA. RTOs may choose to register with ASQA because it allows them to deliver training nationally, not just within Victoria or Western Australia. ASQA registration also allows RTOs to deliver training to international students.

A person or organisation applying to register as an RTO are required to comply with the *VRQA Guidelines for VET Providers*. The guideline's purpose is to ensure the quality of training and assessment services in Victoria reflects a nationally consistent approach to VET regulation. The guidelines align Victoria's regulatory settings to the national 'Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015' (these have been revised and enacted on 1 July 2025). The Guidelines are divided into five parts: Guideline 1 - Governance, financial viability and management systems; Guideline 2 - Transparency and oversight of third parties; Guideline 3 - Trainer and assessor qualifications; Guideline 4 - Delivery of training and assessment services; Guideline 5 - Annual declaration of compliance.

For more information: [Victorian Registration & Qualifications Authority](https://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/)

**Training Accreditation Council.** The Training Accreditation Council (TAC) is Western Australia's (WA) VET Regulator and is established under the *Vocational Education and Training Act (1996)*. The TAC is responsible for the quality assurance and recognition of VET services in WA. The TAC registers training organisations under the Standards for Registered Training Organisations (2015)

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. National Regulatory Framework. <https://www.dewr.gov.au/national-regulatory-framework>

<sup>4</sup> Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority. Trends and Statistics. RTO by Provider Type. <https://www2.vrqa.vic.gov.au/registered-training-organisations-trends-and-statistics>

(these have been revised and enacted 1 July 2025) and accredits courses under the *Australian Qualification Training Framework (2021) Standards for Accredited Courses*.

For more information: [Western Australia's Training Accreditation Council](#)

### **Standards for RTOs**

These are the legislated standards that all RTOs must meet to maintain their registration. The Standards govern all aspects of an RTO's operations. The VET Quality Framework comprises these standards and the Financial Viability Risk Assessment requirements (2021), the Data provision Requirements (2020) and the AQF.

More information can be found at:

- Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations
  - [Outcome Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations](#)—standards to ensure nationally consistent, quality outcomes for learners and employers. Divided into 4 parts: Quality Area 2 – Training and assessment, Quality Area 2 – VET student support, Quality Area 3 – VET Workforce, and Quality Area 4 – Governance.
  - [Compliance Standards for NVR Registered Training Organisations and Fit and Proper Person Requirements](#)—Requirements which all RTOs must comply with, comprised of administrative, binary or process-oriented requirements. Divided into 3 parts: Division 1- Information and Transparency, Division 2 – Integrity of nationally recognised training products, and Division 3 – Accountability.
- [The Credential Policy \(2025\)](#) —which outlines relevant credentials for trainers and assessors undertaking particular training and assessment activities or roles.
- [Financial Viability Risk Assessment Requirements 2021](#)—which relate to training organisations' ability to meet financial viability requirements
- [Data Provision Requirements 2020](#)—which sets out the requirement for providers to supply ASQA with data upon request, and to submit quality indicator data annually
- [Australian Qualifications Framework](#)—which is the national policy for regulated qualifications in Australian education and training.

For RPL practice and validation, the most critical components are the requirements for assessment, which are underpinned by two sets of strict criteria:

**Principles of Assessment.** The assessment system facilitates assessment which must be conducted in accordance with the following principles:

- fairness – assessment accommodates the needs of the VET student, including implementing reasonable adjustments where appropriate and enabling reassessment where necessary.
- flexibility – assessment is appropriate to the context, training product and VET student, and assesses the VET student's skills and knowledge that are relevant to the training product, regardless of how or where the VET student has acquired those skills or that knowledge.
- validity – assessment includes practical application components that enable the VET student to demonstrate the relevant skills and knowledge in a practical setting; and

- reliability – assessment evidence is interpreted consistently by assessors and the outcomes of assessment are comparable irrespective of which assessor is conducting the assessment.

**Rules of Evidence.** Assessors make individual assessment judgements that are based on the following rules of evidence:

- validity – assessment evidence is adequate, such that the assessor can be reasonably assured that the VET student possesses the skills and knowledge described in the training product.
- sufficiency – the quality, quantity and relevance of the assessment evidence enable the assessor to make an informed judgement of the VET student's competency in the skills and knowledge described in the training product.
- authenticity – the assessor is assured that a VET student's assessment evidence is the original and genuine work of that VET student; and
- currency – the assessment evidence presented to the assessor documents and demonstrates the VET student's current skills and knowledge.

The following tables are the author's interpretation of the principles of assessment and rules of evidence for RPL assessment.

**Table 1: Principles of Assessment Applied for RPL Practice: Conducting the Assessment Process**

Assessment Principle	Interpretation of requirements in relation to RPL
Fairness	The RPL process must consider the individual needs of the candidate. This includes providing reasonable adjustments where necessary and ensuring that candidates are informed about the RPL assessment process. Candidates can also challenge the assessment results and be reassessed if needed.
Flexibility	RPL assessments must be flexible to accommodate the diverse backgrounds of candidates. This means assessing competencies regardless of how or where they were acquired and using a variety of assessment methods appropriate to the context and the individual.
Validity	RPL assessment must accurately measure the candidate's competencies against the unit of competency and associated requirements. This ensures that the assessment covers the necessary skills and knowledge and that the evidence provided demonstrates the candidate's ability to apply these in real-world situations. Valid RPL assessments integrate knowledge requirements.

Assessment Principle	Interpretation of requirements in relation to RPL
<b>Reliability</b>	<p>RPL assessment outcomes must be consistent and comparable, regardless of who conducts the assessment. This means that different assessors should interpret the evidence in the same way and reach the same judgements about a candidate's competency. RPL assessment tools and processes provide for consistent competency judgements.</p>

**Table 2 Rules of Evidence Applied for RPL Practice: Assessing Evidence**

Rule of evidence	Interpretation of requirements in relation to RPL
<b>Validity</b>	<p>The evidence of a candidate's competency must align with the unit of competency specification and cover the required elements, performance criteria, and foundation skills.</p>
<b>Sufficiency</b>	<p>The quality, quantity, and relevance of RPL evidence must be enough to make a reliable judgement about the candidate's competency. This means the evidence should be comprehensive and cover all aspects of the competency.</p>
<b>Authenticity</b>	<p>RPL evidence must clearly indicate which parts are attributed to the candidate, especially for evidence such as 'products' where the candidate may have contributed to parts of the production. Assessors need to verify that the provided evidence is genuine.</p>
<b>Currency</b>	<p>RPL evidence must demonstrate that the candidate's skills and knowledge are current. This typically means that the evidence should be from the present or very recent past to ensure that the candidate's competencies are up to date.</p>

**Assessor competency and credential requirements.** Assessors must hold specific credentials and competencies to make assessment judgements independently. The required credentials include the TAE40122 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (or its predecessors TAE40116 and TAE40110), or a diploma or higher-level qualification in adult or vocational education. Alternatively, individuals with a secondary teaching qualification must also hold a specific VET assessor skill set, such as the TAESS00019 Assessor Skill Set. Crucially, in addition to these formal qualifications, all assessors must demonstrate current industry competence, which includes possessing skills and knowledge relevant to, and at least at the level of, the training product being assessed, as well as maintaining an understanding of current industry practices. Individuals who do not meet these credential requirements but are actively working towards them or hold other specified skill sets, may contribute to assessment evidence collection but are not permitted to make assessment judgements and must work under the direction of a fully qualified assessor (Australian Department of Employment and Workplace Relations [DEWR], 2025).

Whilst not a requirement, experienced VET assessors may choose to undertake training in the *TAEASS514 Develop and implement plans for recognition of prior learning*<sup>5</sup> upskill in the practice of RPL assessment. The unit includes preparing information and advice on recognition and identifying evidence-gathering opportunities.

### Training Packages

Training Packages are a key component of the Australian VET system. They specify the knowledge and skills required by individuals to perform effectively in the workplace, expressed in units of competency. Training packages also detail how units of competency can be packaged into nationally recognised and portable qualifications that comply with the AQF<sup>6</sup>. Training packages are used for a range of purposes, but predominantly:

- by training providers, to design training curricula tailored to support individual learner needs, and the needs of employers and industry
- by employers, to assist with workforce design, development, and structure.

Training Packages form the bedrock of all VET assessments; RPL assessments are conducted against the competency standards defined within these packages. This direct link to industry ensures that qualifications gained through RPL are relevant and valued by employers. They are developed by:

**Jobs and Skills Councils (JSCs).** Not-for-profit companies that are industry-owned and industry-led. They are part of a national network of 10 JSCs that provide leadership to address skills and workforce challenges for their industry. They have four core functions, one of which is training product development in line with standards set by Skills Ministers to improve the quality, speed to market and responsiveness of training products<sup>7</sup>.

### Competency-based assessment

Competency-based assessment (CBA) is the gathering and judging of evidence to decide whether a person has achieved a standard of competence<sup>8</sup>.

Competency-based training (CBT) has been fundamental to how accredited VET is delivered in Australia for the last three decades. Competence is being able to know and being able to do. ASQA defines competency as the:

consistent application of knowledge and skill to the standard of performance required in the workplace. It embodies the ability to transfer and apply skills and knowledge to new situations and environments<sup>9</sup>.

The core principles of competency-based assessment in Australia, as mandated by government regulations, are:

- **Criterion-Referenced.** Assessment is measured against a prescribed standard (the unit of competency), not against the performance of other learners.

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<sup>5</sup> Australian Government. Training.gov.au. <https://training.gov.au/training/details/TAEASS514/unitdetails>

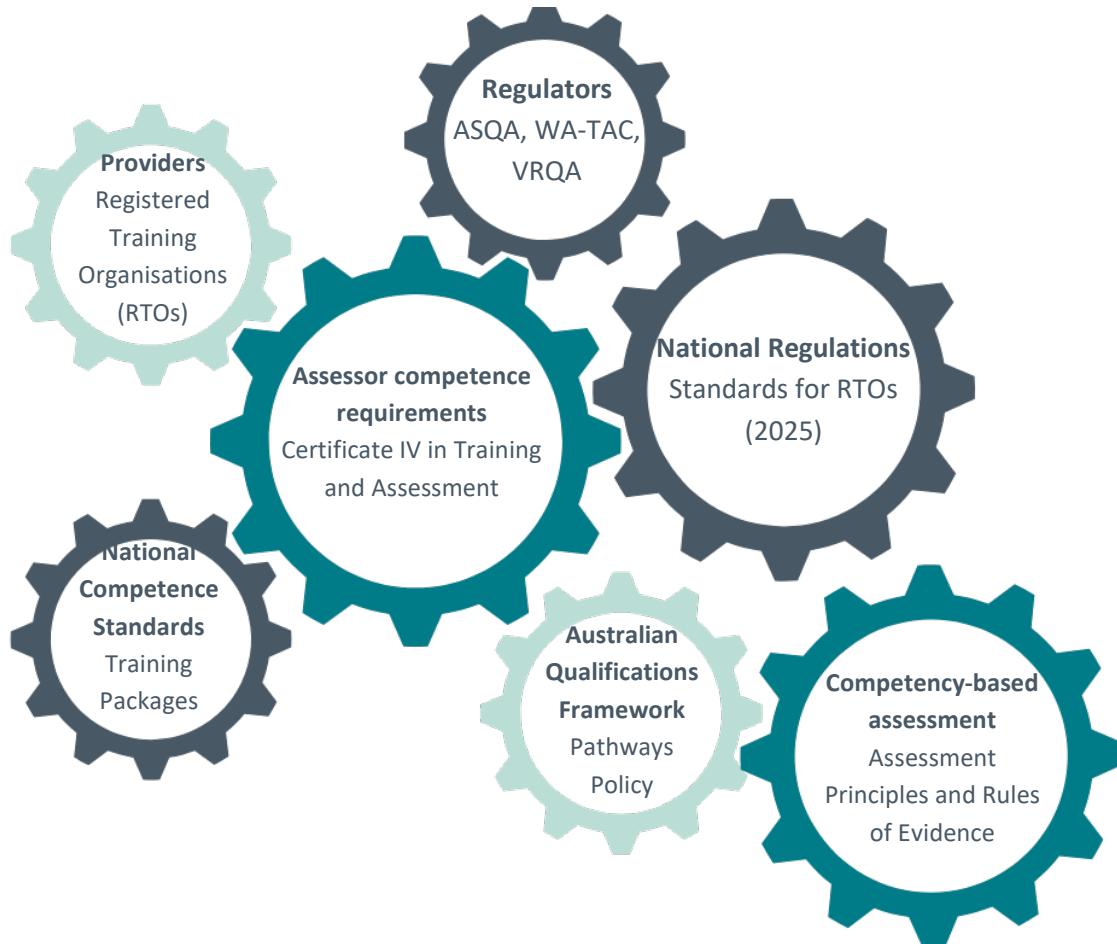
<sup>6</sup> ASQA Training packages. <https://www.asqa.gov.au/about-us/vet-sector-overview/training-packages>

<sup>7</sup> Australian Department of Employment and Workforce Relations. JSC Functions <https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-reform/jobs-and-skills-councils>

<sup>8</sup> VOCEDplus Glossary of VET <https://glossary-vet.voced.edu.au/>

<sup>9</sup> ASQA Glossary. <https://www.asqa.gov.au/resources/glossary/c>

- **Evidence-Based.** Assessors must gather sufficient, valid, authentic, and current evidence to make a reliable judgment of competence. This evidence can be gathered through a variety of methods, including observation, questioning, portfolios, and third-party reports.
- **Judgment of Competent or Not Yet Competent.** The outcome of the assessment is a binary decision. A learner is either deemed "Competent" or "Not Yet Competent." If found to be not yet competent, the learner is given further opportunities to undertake training and be reassessed.



### The Architecture of Quality RPL in Australia

This system of competency-based training and assessment is designed to produce a skilled workforce with nationally recognised qualifications that are valued by employers.

See more information: For more on CBA, see [Training Accreditation Council](#) fact sheet. For more technical information on CBA in the Australian context, see the book [Working Away at Competency Based Assessment: Improving assessment practice](#) and the report [Adding Value to Competency-based training](#).

## 5 The Recognition of Prior Learning Process in Australia

While the specific approach can vary between providers, a high-quality RPL process in Australia is candidate-centred, developmental, and follows a structured, multi-stage model. This ensures the assessment is both rigorous and supportive. The most comprehensive model, which evolved from good practice in the early 1990s, involves six distinct stages (Toop & Burleigh, 1993). This model is notable because it includes both a **formative phase** (where candidates receive advice, guided reflection, and prepare for RPL) and a **summative phase** (the formal assessment itself). The formative phase is considered a critical enabler of effective assessment and enhanced candidate outcomes.

## Stage 1: Information and Outreach

- **The candidate** might learn about RPL through a poster, article, or referral. They can easily access clear information about what RPL is, who it's for, the benefits, costs, and how to get started.
- **The RTO** must provide clear, jargon-free information and have trained staff available to answer questions. Materials should be accessible, including in other languages where needed. The aim is to help individuals decide if RPL is right for them.

## Stage 2: Initial Support and Counselling

- **The candidate** meets with a trained RPL advisor to discuss their work history, career goals, and reasons for seeking a qualification. Together, they explore suitable qualifications and review the skills and standards required. This helps the candidate reflect on their experience, build confidence, and better understand their own skills.
- **The RTO** creates a welcoming space for candidates to explore their skills. Advisors, with deep knowledge of qualifications and industry standards, guide candidates in mapping their experience and understanding the evidence needed. This stage also supports career planning, even if the candidate doesn't proceed to full assessment.

RPL not appropriate  
Candidate has the option to enrol in training

## Stage 3: Application and Evidence Preparation

- **The candidate** receives an RPL kit from the RTO with clear forms, instructions, and evidence examples. They collect and organise a range of evidence, not just documents. This can include:
  - Workplace documents (e.g. job descriptions, reports, emails)
  - Work samples (e.g. photos, videos, presentations)
  - Third-party evidence (e.g. supervisor letters, testimonials)
  - Certificates from formal or informal training
- **The RTO** supports the candidate through the RPL process by offering self-assessment tools and access to an assessor for guidance. Some RTOs also use e-portfolios—online tools that help candidates collect and present their evidence in a clear, structured way.

## Stage 4: Assessment

- **The candidate** submits their portfolio, but assessment isn't just reviewing documents. It's often interactive. The assessor may hold a "competency conversation" to discuss the candidate's skills and ask technical questions. A practical demonstration may also be required, either on the job or in a simulated setting.
- **The RPL assessor** must be a qualified trainer with up-to-date industry experience. They use flexible methods to gather enough evidence and assess it against the four rules of evidence: validity, sufficiency, authenticity, and currency. The process also follows the four principles of assessment: fairness, flexibility, validity, and reliability. The assessment must be efficient but rigorous to protect the integrity of the qualification.

If required, candidate provides further evidence for assessment.

## Stage 5: Post-Assessment Guidance & Feedback

- If **the candidate** meets all requirements, they're informed of a successful outcome. If not, they're given a clear explanation of the skill or knowledge gaps. Instead of failing, they receive a plan for targeted "gap training" to help them meet the standards.
- **The RTO** provides targeted, flexible training to address only the candidate's skill gaps—this might include completing a few units, a short course, or workplace coaching. This efficient approach helps candidates progress without repeating learning. The RTO also collects feedback to improve the RPL process and informs candidates of their right to appeal if they're unsuccessful.

## Stage 6: Certification

- **The candidate** receives a formal, government-recognised credential. This may be part or whole of a qualification.
- **The RTO** must have a clear system for recording outcomes and issuing the right certification. If the candidate meets all requirements, they receive the full AQF qualification (e.g. Diploma of Project Management). If only some units are completed, they receive a nationally recognised Statement of Attainment, which can be used for credit at any RTO in future studies.

## 5.1 The Six-Stage RPL Model: A Detailed Journey

Stage 1 and Stage 2 can be considered as the formative phase that is the candidate-centred preparatory stage occurring before the summative assessment. Its primary focus is on guidance, reflection, and support rather than competency judgment. Whilst stages 3-6 can be considered as summative assessment activity that leads to a nationally recognised credential.

### 5.1.1 Stage 1: Information and Outreach

This initial stage is focused on raising awareness and providing clear, accessible information to potential candidates. Good practice involves proactive outreach, not just waiting for candidates to apply. RTOs use a variety of channels, including websites with clear Frequently Asked Questions and video testimonials, online information sessions and webinars, and partnerships with employers, industry bodies, and community organisations.

***The Candidate's Experience.*** An individual might see a poster at their workplace, read an article on an industry website, or be referred to by an employment services provider. They can access information that explains in simple terms what RPL is, who it is for, the potential benefits and costs, and how to begin the process.

***The RTO's Role.*** RTO's responsibility is to provide information that is easy to understand, avoiding jargon. This includes having trained staff available to answer initial questions by phone or email and ensuring materials are available in different languages where appropriate. The goal is to empower the individual to make an informed decision about whether RPL is the right pathway for them.

#### ***Alignment with RTO standards (2025)***

##### Outcome Standard 1.6

VET students with prior skills, knowledge and competencies are supported to seek RPL to progress through the relevant training product.

##### Performance Indicator

1.6a VET students are offered opportunities to seek RPL and are made aware of the organisation's policies for seeking RPL.

Please note: The following outcome standards whilst not specific for RPL encompass the provision of information for all enrolling students inclusive of potential RPL enrolments.

Standard 2.1 requires that all students have access to clear and accurate information concerning the organisation and the relevant training product.

Standard 2.2 requires all students to be advised, prior to enrolment, about the suitability of the training product (RPL) for the student, taking into account the student's skills and competencies.

### ***Advice from Regulators***

RTOs can demonstrate this standard by making students aware of their right to have prior learning recognised and by their organisation's RPL policy and processes (Australian Skills Quality Authority, 2025).

RTOs must ensure that students know that RPL provides an alternative pathway to course attendance and information about RPL should be actively promoted and accessible to a diverse audience of students. Where possible, it should also be promoted as widely as possible through industry and community channels, to tap into the adult learning market. RTOs should develop advice and information about RPL for employers of students/potential students to promote RPL among employers and the benefits of this should be promoted to employers. RTOs should include RPL in access strategies for disadvantaged groups such as migrants, people with disabilities, women returning to the workforce and the unemployed returning to the workforce (Department of Training and Workforce Development, 2013).

### ***Advice from Superseded AQF Implementation Handbook (2007) (Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board, 2007)***

This initial phase should focus on making RPL accessible and understandable for a wide range of individuals. Good practice involves proactively promoting RPL policies and providing clear, accessible information to potential students, their employers, and the wider community. Providers can:

- **Provide clear and comprehensive information:** Advice should be available on how to apply for RPL, who to contact for support, relevant timelines, appeal processes, and any fees involved. This information should be written in plain, accessible language that considers the diverse literacy and cultural backgrounds of learners.
- **Promote RPL to employers:** It is good practice to develop advice for employers that explains the process and potential benefits of RPL, encouraging them to support their staff in undertaking it.

## ***Alignment with RTO standards (2025)***

### **Outcome Standard 1.6**

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#### **Performance Indicator**

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- **Provide clear and comprehensive information:** Advice should be available on how to apply for RPL, who to contact for support, relevant timelines, appeal processes, and any fees involved. This information should be written in plain, accessible language that considers the diverse literacy and cultural backgrounds of learners.
- **Promote RPL to employers:** It is good practice to develop advice for employers that explains the process and potential benefits of RPL, encouraging them to support their staff in undertaking it.

### 5.1.2 Stage 2: Initial Support and Counselling

This is a critical formative stage where a candidate-centred approach truly begins. It is more than just an administrative step; it is a guided process of reflection and planning. This stage is often what distinguishes a purely transactional summative RPL assessment from a transformative learning experience. Early national consultations found that the RPL process itself has real learning outcomes, regardless of whether RPL was awarded or not; the preparatory stage can be a powerful process to assist student career planning (Hargreaves, 2006). Early implementation had one RTO offering students an opportunity to enrol in a module, '*Preparation for skills recognition*', to provide them with extensive support in preparing their RPL application acknowledging teachers' time in supporting and implementing RPL (Bowman et al., 2003) and the benefit for candidates in learning how to be recognised.

**The Candidate's Experience.** The candidate meets with a trained RPL advisor or assessor. In this session, they discuss their work and life history, their career goals, and their motivations for seeking a qualification. The advisor helps them to reflect on their experiences and begin to articulate the skills and knowledge they have gained. They explore different qualifications to find the best fit and receive a clear explanation of the competency standards they will need to meet. This process builds the candidate's confidence and their "skills literacy" - their ability to understand and describe their own competencies.

**The RTO's Role.** The RTO provides a welcoming and supportive environment for this conversation. The advisor must have a deep knowledge of the relevant qualifications, competency standards, and industry skill requirements. Their role is to act as a guide; helping the candidate to map their experience against the standards and understand the evidence they will need to collect. This stage can be a valuable service, helping individuals with career planning even if they do not proceed to a full assessment.

#### **Alignment with RTO standards (2025)**

##### Outcome Standard 1.6

VET students with prior skills, knowledge and competencies are supported to seek RPL to progress through the relevant training product.

##### Performance Indicator

1.6a VET students are offered opportunities to seek recognition of prior learning and are made aware of the organisation's policies for seeking recognition of prior learning;

1.6b Decisions relating to recognition of prior learning are based on evidence of prior skills, learning and experience, and are undertaken in accordance with the organisation's assessment system

#### **Advice from Regulators**

RTOs can demonstrate this standard by accommodating a variety of experiences and learning pathways and not guaranteeing a successful outcome (ASQA, 2025).

RTOs must ensure the initial contact with an RPL applicant is a supportive and interactive process designed to determine if the RPL pathway is appropriate for them. Assessors must provide clear information and guidance to help applicants interpret unit requirements and

identify potential evidence (Western Australia Department of Training and Workforce Development, 2013; Training Accreditation Council, 2023).

To facilitate this, RTOs should (Western Australia Department of Training and Workforce Development, 2013; Training Accreditation Council, 2023):

- **Utilise a self-evaluation tool:** Ask the applicant to complete a self-assessment of their skills and knowledge using a guide or checklist written in plain English, not training package jargon. This helps determine if the candidate is likely to be ready for a full assessment and identifies potential skill gaps.
- **Conduct a professional conversation:** An assessor must conduct an interview to have a professional conversation about the applicant's skills and knowledge. This interview is a crucial step in deciding whether to proceed with the full assessment or to advise the candidate to undertake training.
- **Create a supportive interview environment:** Whenever possible, this conversation should occur at the candidate's workplace, as it allows them to be more relaxed and refer to handy documents or processes. Using broad, open-ended topics for discussion rather than a rigid question bank can elicit more comprehensive information and allow applicants to tell their story through personal experience.

Ultimately, providers must use this initial stage to make a fair and transparent decision, ensuring the applicant is well-supported and fully informed of the process and potential outcomes.

***Advice from Superseded AQF Implementation Handbook (2007) (AQF Advisory Board, 2007)***

Providers can:

- **Offer dedicated support:** Support should be available to students to help them understand the process and, if needed, learn the skills required to prepare a successful RPL application. This support should be available before and at the time of enrolment.

### **5.1.3 Stage 3: Application and Evidence Preparation**

In this stage, the candidate formally applies for RPL and begins the task of compiling their portfolio of evidence. A good RPL process is not a "paper chase"; it is a structured and supported process of evidence curation.

***The Candidate's Experience.*** The candidate receives an RPL Kit or guide from the RTO. This kit should contain user-friendly application forms, clear instructions, and examples of relevant evidence. The candidate gathers and organises their evidence, which can be diverse. A well-supported candidate can negotiate the form of assessment and is not limited to documentary evidence. They can include:

- **Workplace Documents:** Job descriptions, performance reviews, reports, project plans, and emails from managers praising their work.
- **Work Samples:** Photographs of completed work, videos of them performing a task, design portfolios, and presentations they have delivered.

- Third-Party Evidence: Letters of support from current or former supervisors, testimonials from clients, statutory declarations<sup>10</sup>.
- Formal/Non-Formal Credentials: Certificates from previous study or training courses.

**The RTO's Role.** The RTO's role is to support the candidate through this often-challenging process. This includes providing opportunities for self-assessment against competency standards and having an assessor available to provide guidance if needed. Some RTOs use e-portfolios, which are online tools that help candidates gather, organise, and present their evidence in a structured way.

### ***Alignment with RTO standards (2025)***

#### Outcome Standard 1.6

VET students with prior skills, knowledge and competencies are supported to seek RPL to progress through the relevant training product.

#### Performance Indicator

1.6b Decisions relating to recognition of prior learning are based on evidence of prior skills, learning and experience, and are undertaken in accordance with the organisation's assessment system

#### ***Advice from Regulators***

RTOs can demonstrate this standard by making students aware of the role any third party will play in their RPL assessment and ensuring students are aware of their RPL processes (ASQA, 2025).

Following an initial determination that a candidate is suitable for the RPL pathway, RTOs must manage structured evidence gathering and review process. It is the provider's responsibility to ensure this stage is thorough and that all evidence is properly scrutinised. RTOs must (Western Australia Department of Training and Workforce Development, 2013; Training Accreditation Council, 2023):

- **Guide and Support the Applicant:** As the task of compiling evidence is often unfamiliar to candidates, providers must offer guidance and forms to assist them in gathering a comprehensive portfolio of documented evidence mapped to unit requirements.
- **Advise on Diverse Evidence Types:** Applicants should be informed that documentary evidence can support their claim to competence. This can include a variety of sources such as licences, résumés or work histories, certificates or results of assessment, photographs of work undertaken, logbooks or job sheets, and third-party verification reports from employers or supervisors.

#### ***Advice from Superseded AQF Implementation Handbook (2007) (AQF Advisory Board, 2007)***

The process should be flexible, acknowledging that evidence can come in many forms. The guidelines suggest should provide advice to candidates on:

<sup>10</sup> See ASQA's Fact Sheet, "Using other parties to collect assessment evidence"

[https://www.asqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-01/FACT\\_SHEET\\_Using\\_other\\_parties\\_to\\_collect\\_assessment\\_evidence.pdf](https://www.asqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-01/FACT_SHEET_Using_other_parties_to_collect_assessment_evidence.pdf)

Please note: This is based on the superseded RTO Standards (2015)

- **The nature of evidence required:** Candidates should receive guidance on the kind of evidence that can be used and what is considered sufficient and valid for the assessment.
- **Diverse evidence-gathering methods:** It should be made clear that evidence is not limited to one format. It can include a portfolio, direct observation of skills, reflective papers or journals, examples of work, and testimonials.
- **How to prepare evidence:** Candidates should be given enough information to enable them to prepare their evidence to the standard required for the assessment process.

### 5.1.4 Stage 4: Assessment

This is the formal evaluation of the candidate's evidence against the competency standards. It is a process of professional judgement, not simply ticking boxes.

***The Candidate's Experience.*** The candidate submits their portfolio. The assessment is not just a passive review of documents. It is often an interactive process. The assessor may conduct a "**competency conversation**" - a structured interview where the candidate discusses their skills and knowledge and answers technical questions. They may also be asked to perform a **practical demonstration** of their skills, either in their workplace or in a simulated environment.

***The RTO's Role.*** The RPL assessor, who must be a qualified trainer and have current, relevant industry expertise, conducts the assessment. They must be flexible and responsive, using a range of methods to gather enough evidence to make a valid judgement. They systematically review all the evidence against the four rules of evidence: validity, sufficiency, authenticity, and currency. They conduct assessment against the four principles of assessment: fairness, flexibility, validity and reliability (or impartiality). The assessment must be cost- and time-effective, but rigorous enough to ensure the integrity of the qualification.

#### ***Alignment with RTO standards (2025)***

##### Outcome Standard 1.6

VET students with prior skills, knowledge and competencies are supported to seek RPL to progress through the relevant training product.

##### Performance Indicator

1.6b Decisions relating to RPL are based on evidence of prior skills, learning and experience, and are undertaken in accordance with the organisation's assessment system.

1.6c Decisions relating to RPL are documented and decided in a way that is fair, transparent, consistent amongst VET students, and maintains the integrity of the training product.

Please note: The following outcome standards whilst not specific for RPL encompass all assessment activity, inclusive of RPL assessment.

Standard 1.3. requires that the assessment system is fit-for-purpose and consistent with the training product.

Standard 1.4 requires that the assessment system be conducted in a way that is fair and appropriate and enables accurate assessment judgment of VET student competency

and must be conducted in accordance with the four principles of assessment and four rules of evidence.

Standards 3.2 and 3.3 require that assessment is conducted by credentialled people with current skills and knowledge in training and assessment and, with current industry skills and knowledge relevant to the training product being assessed.

#### ***Advice from regulators***

RTOs can demonstrate this standard with RPL policies, processes and tools that are designed and applied with the same rigour as course assessment, including that they (ASQA, 2025):

- are consistent with, and maintain the integrity of, the training product requirements
- ensure currency of evidence provided by the VET student
- meet the requirements of the principles of assessment and rules of evidence (Standard 1.4)
- result in transparent, defensible and documented decisions

RTOs can ensure that the assessor meets the requirements of Standard 3.2 and 3.3 and ensure staff understand that granting RPL where the student does not meet the requirements of the training product may have serious consequences for the VET student, and for public safety, industry confidence and the reputation of the VET sector (ASQA, 2025).

- **Scrutinise All Evidence:** Assessors must review each item of evidence provided by the candidate to determine if it meets all the rules of evidence: validity, sufficiency, currency, and authenticity. This is a critical step, and providers must not adopt shortcut approaches by simply accepting documented past evidence without question, as this can compromise the integrity of the assessment. To verify authenticity and currency, it may be necessary to conduct an interview or contact employers.

If the candidate's portfolio of evidence from Stage 3 is insufficient or does not meet all the rules of evidence, providers must implement their own formal assessment tools to address any gaps (Western Australia Department of Training and Workforce Development, 2013; Training Accreditation Council, 2023).

**Direct Assessment Methods are Used:** The assessment must move beyond just reviewing documents and focus on the direct demonstration of skills and knowledge. Required methods include (Western Australia Department of Training and Workforce Development, 2013; Training Accreditation Council, 2023):

- **A Professional Conversation/Interview:** The assessor must conduct a structured conversation with the candidate to discuss their required knowledge and skills. Conducting this interview in a workplace or work-related environment is preferable.
- **A Practical Demonstration:** The assessor must observe the candidate performing practical tasks, either in their workplace or a simulated environment, to assess the application of their skills. Observation checklists must be used to record the details of the practical assessment.

**Validated Tools are Administered:** Providers must use the validated assessment tools they have already developed for the unit(s) of competency. The challenge is not creating new tools but developing a way to administer them to a person who has not undertaken the associated training program (Western Australia Department of Training and Workforce Development, 2013; Training Accreditation Council, 2023).

**A Final, Defensible Judgment is Made:** Through the combination of past evidence and new evidence gathered via formal assessment, the provider must be able to verify that every requirement of the competency has been demonstrated. If the candidate is judged competent, they can be awarded the unit or qualification. If they do not demonstrate all the required competencies, the provider can offer gap training and re-assessment. All records of the process and outcomes must be kept for validation and audit purposes (Western Australia Department of Training and Workforce Development, 2013; Training Accreditation Council, 2023).

***Advice from Superseded AQF Implementation Handbook (2007) (AQF Advisory Board, 2007)***

Guidance for this stage emphasises that assessment processes should be:

- **Fair and flexible:** The assessment should be equitable, culturally inclusive, and flexible, accommodating the literacy levels and experiences of the candidate. A range of methods should be available for students to demonstrate their competence.
- **Evidence-based and transparent:** All RPL decisions must be based on evidence. The process should be transparent and accountable, and of a comparable standard to other assessments used for the qualification.
- **Conducted by experts:** The assessment should be undertaken by academic or teaching staff who have expertise in the subject area as well as knowledge of RPL policies and procedures.

***Advice from government-sponsored research.***

*Maximising confidence in assessment decision-making: current approaches and future strategies for quality assurance (Clayton et al., 2004).* This report provides a literature review and history of approaches to quality assurance of assessment in the vocational education and training (VET) sector in Australia and overseas. It also examines eight potential models that can be used by individuals or groups of assessors within a training organisation. The models include a diagnostic assessment tool, an assessment principles checklist, and guidelines for the development of assessment instruments.

### **5.1.5 Stage 5: Post-Assessment Guidance and Feedback (The Gap Training Model)**

This stage is what makes the Australian RPL model fundamentally developmental. After the assessment is complete, every candidate receives clear, prompt, and constructive feedback.

***The Candidate's Experience.*** If the candidate has successfully demonstrated competence in all required units, they are informed of the positive outcome. If, however, the assessment identifies areas where the candidate does not yet meet the standard, they are not simply failed. Instead, the assessor provides a detailed explanation of the specific "gaps" in their skills or knowledge. The candidate is then provided with a plan for "gap training".

***The RTO's Role.*** The RTO's key responsibility here is to offer targeted and flexible training that addresses *only* the identified gaps. This could involve completing one or two specific units from the qualification, undertaking a short course, or receiving targeted coaching in the workplace. This model is highly efficient and motivating for the candidate, as it provides a clear and constructive pathway to a full qualification without requiring them to repeat learning. The RTO also uses this

stage to seek feedback from the candidate about the RPL process to drive continuous improvement. Unsuccessful candidates are also informed of their right to appeal the decision.

### ***Alignment with RTO standards (2025)***

#### **Outcome Standard 1.6**

VET students with prior skills, knowledge and competencies are supported to seek RPL to progress through the relevant training product.

#### **Performance Indicator**

1.6b decisions relating to RPL are documented and decided in a way that is fair, transparent, consistent amongst VET students, and maintains the integrity of the training product.

Please note: The following outcome standards whilst not specific for RPL encompass all assessment activity, inclusive of RPL assessment.

Standard 1.4 requires that the fairness principle of assessment is demonstrated by the offer of reassessment where necessary.

Standard 2.8 requires that an effective appeal process is available to VET students where decisions of the RTO adversely affect the student.

Standard 4.4 requires that feedback is received from VET students towards the continuous improvement of services.

### ***Advice from Regulators***

RTOs can demonstrate this standard where assessment of a VET student's RPL evidence identifies gaps. RTOs can demonstrate how they work with them in relation to the amount of gap training required, how that training will be delivered and any costs associated with it (ASQA, 2025).

Following the assessment judgement, providers have a responsibility to deliver clear outcomes and guidance. This stage is crucial for maintaining a fair and developmental process, especially for candidates who have not yet demonstrated full competence. RTOs must (Western Australia Department of Training and Workforce Development, 2013; Training Accreditation Council, 2023):

- **Provide Clear Guidance and Feedback:** The outcomes of the RPL assessment should be clearly explained to all students, and they should be kept informed of their status at reasonable intervals. For a candidate deemed "Not Yet Competent", the provider must offer guidance on the pathway forward.
- **Offer Pathways for Gap Training:** If the assessment identifies gaps in a candidate's skills or knowledge, the provider should offer supplementary training or additional learning experiences to address them. This may involve the candidate enrolling in training to cover the identified gaps before undertaking a re-assessment.
- **Ensure an Appeals Process is Available:** All RPL decisions must be transparent and subject to appeal and review. Providers must make the mechanisms appeal available to all students throughout their enrolment. Candidates who are not yet competent must be advised of their right to appeal the assessment decision.
- **Use Feedback for Continuous Improvement:** RPL policies and procedures must be explicitly included in the provider's quality assurance measures. The provider must

review and validate its RPL processes, including any complaints or appeals, to ensure transparency, consistency, and continuous improvement.

***Advice from Superseded AQF Implementation Handbook (2007) (AQF Advisory Board, 2007)***

After an assessment is made, it is important to provide clear feedback and outline the next steps, including pathways for further learning or appeal. The guidelines recommend that providers:

- **Ensure decisions are transparent and appealable:** RPL decisions should be accountable and subject to appeal and review. Information about the appeal mechanisms should be provided to students at the beginning of the RPL process.
- **Provide advice on learning pathways:** Support should be offered to help students engage in appropriate learning pathways following the RPL process. This includes providing advice about any 'gap' training or education that may be needed to meet the full requirements of the qualification.

**Incorporate RPL into quality assurance:** All RPL policies, procedures, and assessment outcomes should be explicitly included in the institution's quality assurance mechanisms to ensure confidence and integrity

## 5.1.6 Stage 6: Certification

The final stage is the official recognition of the assessment outcome.

***The Candidate's Experience.*** The candidate receives a formal, government-recognised credential. This may be part of or the whole of a qualification.

**The RTO's Role.** The RTO has a streamlined and robust system for recording the outcome and issuing the correct certification promptly. If the candidate has met all the requirements of the qualification, they are awarded the full AQF qualification (e.g., a Diploma of Project Management). If they have only been granted credit for some units, they receive a **Statement of Attainment**, which lists the specific units of competency they have successfully completed. This Statement of Attainment has national currency and can be used to gain credit in future studies at any RTO in Australia.

### ***Alignment with RTO standards (2025)***

Please note: The following Outcome Standards and Compliance Requirements whilst not specific for RPL encompass all issuance activity.

#### Outcome Standard 1.6

VET students with prior skills, knowledge and competencies are supported to seek recognition of prior learning to progress through the relevant training product.

#### Performance Indicator

1.6c decisions relating to recognition of prior learning are documented and decided in a way that is fair, transparent, consistent amongst VET students, and maintains the integrity of the training product.

Compliance Requirement 9 requires that AQF certification documentation be issued to the student within 30 calendar days from completion of the assessment.

#### **Guidance from Regulators**

RTOs can demonstrate this standard by ensuring RPL policies, processes and tools are designed and applied to result in transparent, defensible and documented decisions (ASQA, 2025). RTOs must ensure that (Western Australia Department of Training and Workforce Development, 2013; Training Accreditation Council, 2023):

- **Certification Follows a Compliant Assessment:** A unit of competency, Statement of Attainment, or a full qualification can only be awarded and certificated after the provider has conducted a formal assessment process that is rigorous and meets all regulatory requirements and the rules of evidence.
- **The Correct Credential is Issued:** The credential issued depends on the assessment outcome.
  - If a candidate demonstrates competence in one or more individual units but not enough for a full qualification, they must be awarded a Statement of Attainment.
  - If a candidate successfully completes the requirements for all units within a qualification through the RPL process, they must be awarded the full qualification.

#### **Advice from Superseded AQF Implementation Handbook (2007)**

The Handbook advises that a successful RPL assessment can lead to the "award of credit for the partial or total completion of a qualification" (AQF Advisory Board, 2007, p. 85). However, it does not contain specific guidance on the protocols for issuing the final certificate or Statement of Attainment.

The Western Australia Training Accreditation Council's webinar<sup>11</sup> on RPL deals with common misunderstandings and confusions about RPL and related concepts, examines the requirements of the Standards, and presents an approach to RPL that supports the needs of the individual, industry, the RTO, the Training package, and the Standards.

## **5.2 Quality Assurance of the Recognition of Prior Learning Process**

The quality and integrity of RPL are managed through systematic quality assurance processes mandated by the *Outcome Standard for RTOs (2025)*, the *Compliance Standards for RTOs and Fit and Proper Person Requirements (2025)* and the *Credential Policy (2025)*.

A key mechanism is **validation**. Validation is a quality review process where an RTO systematically reviews its assessment processes, assessment tools and judgements so that assessment tools are a) consistent with the training product and the requirements of the Outcome Standards and, b) processes and judgements are producing consistent outcomes (Australian Government - Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2025). RTOs apply a risk-based approach to determine what parts of the assessment system<sup>12</sup> will be validated and the sample size of

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<sup>11</sup> Government of Western Australia. RPL webinar. <https://www.wa.gov.au/service/education-and-training/vocational-education/recognition-of-prior-learning-rpl-webinar>

<sup>12</sup> Definition of Assessment System as per Outcome Standards for RTOs (2025): assessment system means a coordinated set of documented policies, procedures and assessment tools designed to ensure that assessment, including RPL learning, produces consistent and valid judgements of VET student competency and meets the requirements of this instrument.

assessments to be validated in respect of a particular training product (Australian Government - Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2025). Assessment processes will be reviewed to ensure that RPL assessment processes and judgements meet all the principles of assessment and rules of evidence. The RPL processes and tools will be validated pre-use and post-use (Training Accreditation Council, 2023).

Typically, a post-assessment validation meeting will involve a group of assessors, along with industry experts, who review a sample of completed candidate portfolios and assessment decisions. They checked that the evidence was valid, reliable, sufficient, authentic, and current and the process and judgements were fair, flexible, valid and reliable. This process of peer review helps to ensure consistency in assessment judgements and drives continuous improvement in the RTO's RPL practices, thereby maintaining public and employer trust in the qualifications awarded.

# 6 Volume of Recognition of Prior Learning in the Australian VET System

Analysis of national VET data provides crucial insights into how RPL is being utilised across Australia, revealing patterns of uptake by industry, qualification level, and candidate demographics. While RPL is a mandated and important part of the VET system, its overall uptake remains relatively modest. The national RPL rate—defined as the percentage of all successfully completed subjects that were granted through RPL—has shown a slight downward trend, moving from 6.45% in 2015 to 5.20% in 2023. The national average RPL rate from 2015-2023 is 5.23%.

## Key Statistical Insights (2015-2023)

### 6.1 RPL by Funding Source

The way RPL is funded seemingly correlates with its uptake.

**Domestic Fee-for-Service:** This is the largest source of RPL funding, accounting for 63% of all RPL-granted subjects. The RPL rate in this category is the highest at 6.56%, suggesting that individuals and employers who pay directly are highly motivated to use it.

**Government Funding:** This accounts for 29% of RPL outcomes, but the RPL rate is the lowest at 3.71%. This may reflect complexities in government funding contracts or a focus on training new entrants to the workforce.

**International Fee-for-Service:** This makes up the smallest portion at 8% of RPL outcomes, with an RPL rate of 4.86%.

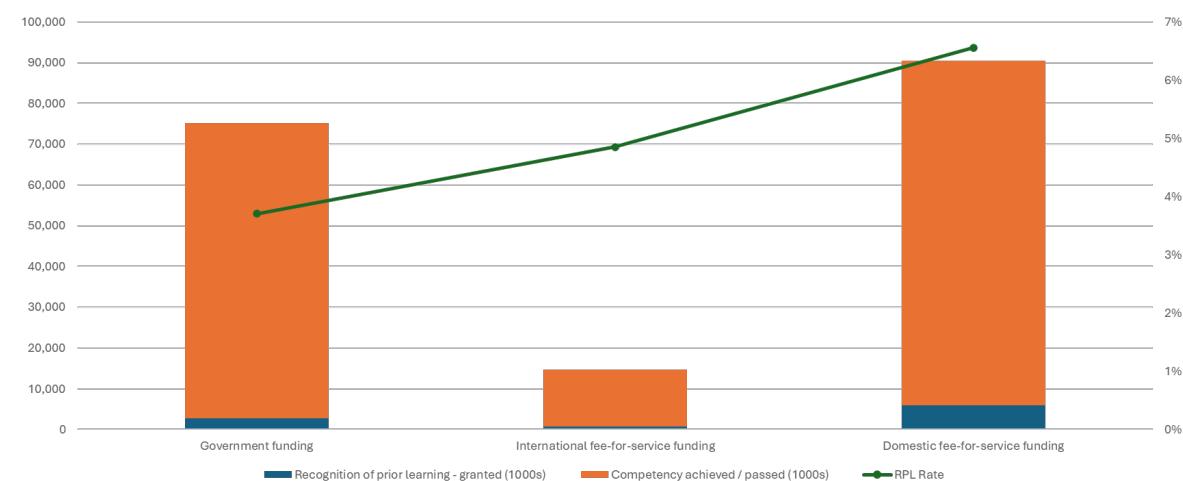


Figure 3 RPL Rate 2015-2023 per Funding Source

Source: VOCSTATS TVA subject enrolments 2015-2023, <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats>, extracted on 23/04/25

## 6.2 RPL by Provider Type

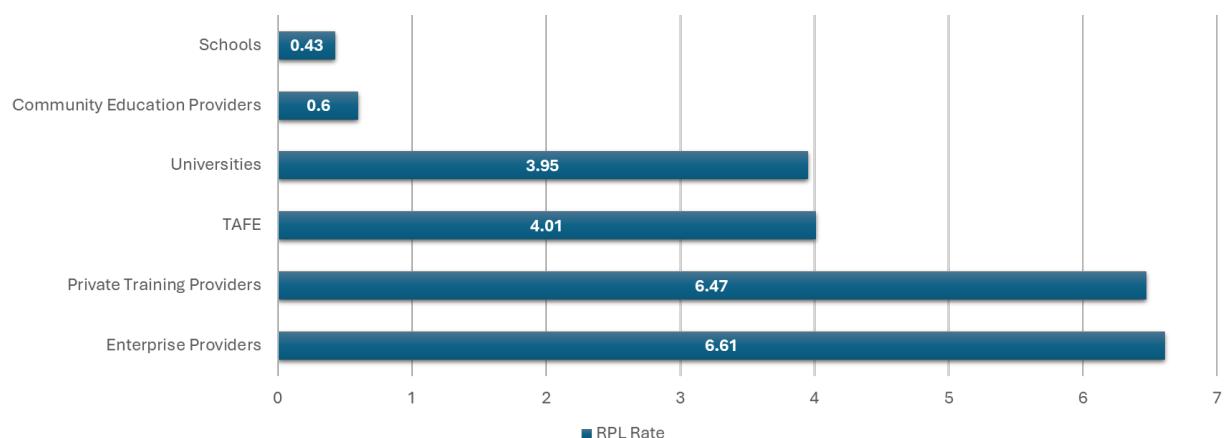
**Enterprise Providers**<sup>13</sup> (6.61%) and **Private Training Providers**<sup>14</sup> (6.47%) have the highest rates. This suggests that these providers, which are often more specialised and directly engaged with industry, may have more streamlined and effective RPL processes.

**TAFE Institutes**<sup>15</sup> (the large public providers) have a lower rate of 4.01%, which may be due to their broader scope and more complex operational structures.

**Dual Sector Universities** that are not TAFE have a rate of 3.95% and generally use RPL to create seamless and integrated pathways for students moving between VET and Higher Education qualifications within their own institution.

**Community Education Providers**<sup>16</sup> (0.60%) may have lower rates due to the fact that they are often resource-limited creating challenges in them being able to fully support RPL, which includes challenges with providing adequate staff training and raising awareness about the process (Crothers, 1996; Ryan et al., 2001).

**Schools** (0.43%) have the lowest rates, as their student cohorts are less likely to have extensive prior experience to be recognised.



**Figure 4 RPL Rate per Provider Type 2015-2023**

VOCSTATS TVA subject enrolments 2015-2023, <<https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats>>, extracted on 11/04/25.

<sup>13</sup> AVETMISS definition Enterprise RTO: An enterprise, or the training function or department of an enterprise that is registered to provide nationally accredited training according to the standards for the RTOs of the VET Quality Framework delivered to their employees or cadets. Includes government such as the Department of Defence and non-government such as Woolworths.

<sup>14</sup> AVETMISS definition Private Training Providers: Privately operated and includes professional/industry associations.

<sup>15</sup> AVETMISS definition TAFE Technical and further education institutes or similar public institutions (e.g., polytechnics) are created by an Act of Parliament and have responsibilities specified in that and other legislation and via ministerial directions. These institutes are public bodies in receipt of government funding.

<sup>16</sup> AVETMISS definition Community Education Providers: A not-for-profit, community-based organisation with a primary focus on adult education. Community-based adult education delivers courses relating to leisure, personal and community development, employment skills, preparation for VET and nationally recognised programs of study.

## 6.3 RPL by Qualification and Industry

**Qualification Level:** RPL is far more common at higher qualification levels. The rate for Certificate IV programs is 10.37% and for Diploma or higher programs is 9.12%, compared to just 1.64% for Certificate II programs. This is expected, as candidates seeking higher-level qualifications are more likely to have significant work and life experience to draw upon.

### *Training Package Usage of RPL*

The following table shows the RPL rate for each currently used training package. Following the observation by Osborne and Serich (2020) that some providers have student cohorts largely ineligible for RPL, such as those delivering foundation skills or using data-reporting exemptions. As such the Defence and Foundation Skills Training Packages have been excluded from this analysis. Of the remaining packages, 28 have an RPL rate below the national average, while 22 have a rate above the national average.

**Table 3 RPL Rate by Training Package in Australian VET, 2015-2023**

Training Package	RPL rate	Training Package	RPL rate
<b>Below the national average RPL rate 5.23%</b>		<b>Above the national average RPL rate 5.23%</b>	
CUA Creative Arts and Culture	0.82%	SHB Hairdressing and Beauty Services	5.53%
SFL Floristry	0.83%	MAR Maritime	5.77%
HLT Health	0.90%	AUM Automotive Manufacturing	5.91%
ICT Information and Communications Technology	1.47%	SIT Tourism, Travel and Hospitality	6.10%
MST Textiles, Clothing and Footwear	1.71%	NWP National Water	6.17%
ACM Animal Care and Management	1.79%	AVI Aviation	6.30%
MSS Sustainability	1.99%	CSC Correctional Services	7.10%
ICP Printing and Graphic Arts	2.00%	CHC Community Services	7.19%
MSM Manufacturing	2.07%	MSF Furnishing	7.22%
MSL Laboratory Operations	2.64%	PMA Chemical, Hydrocarbons and Refining	8.16%
SFI Seafood Industry	2.73%	UEP Electricity Supply Industry – Generation Sector	8.20%
SIS Sport, Fitness and Recreation	2.86%	PSP Public Sector	9.99%
UET Transmission, Distribution and Rail Sector	2.92%	UEE Electrotechnology	10.22%
FBP Food, Beverage and Pharmaceutical	3.20%	LGA Local Government	11.01%
SIR Retail Services	3.35%	TAE Training & Education	11.25%
PMB Plastics, Rubber and Cable making	3.41%	CPC Construction, Plumbing and Services & CPC08	11.59%
FWP Forest and Wood Products	3.49%	AUR Automotive Retail, Service and Repair (service & repair)	14.02%

<b>AMP Australian Meat Processing</b>	3.50%	MEM Manufacturing and Engineering MEM05 Metal and Engineering	19.50%
<b>RGR Racing and Breeding</b>	3.66%	UEG Gas Industry	22.86%
<b>PUA Public Safety</b>	4.11%	MEA Aeroskills	25.95%
<b>AHC Agriculture, Horticulture and Conservation and Land Management</b>	4.33%	POL Police	74.99%
<b>FNS Financial Services</b>	4.36%	PPM Pulp and Paper Manufacturing Industry <sup>17</sup>	90.68%
<b>MSA07 Manufacturing</b>	4.47%	Source: VOCSTATS TVA subject enrolments 2015-2023,	
<b>TLI Transport and Logistics</b>	4.64%	< <a href="https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats">https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats</a> >, extracted on 11/04/25	
<b>CPP Property Services</b>	4.95%		
<b>RII Resources and Infrastructure Industry (mining)</b>	4.99%		
<b>SIF Funeral Services</b>	5.19%		
<b>BSB Business Services</b>	5.28%		

**Key insights for policymakers.** The data reveals distinct patterns in how RPL is utilised across different industries. For policymakers, this can help in anticipating where demand for RPL will be highest, which sectors may require more support to implement it, and how RPL can be used as a strategic tool for workforce development.

1. RPL is most heavily utilised in trade, technical, and regulated industries. There is a clear trend showing that industries with hands-on skills, apprenticeships, and licensing requirements have the highest RPL rates. This suggests that RPL is a critical pathway for experienced but unqualified workers to gain formal certification.

- High-uptake sectors include:
  - Police: 75.0%
  - Aeroskills: 26.0%
  - Gas Industry: 22.9%
  - Manufacturing and Engineering: 19.5%
  - Automotive (Retail, Service and Repair): 14.0%
  - Construction, Plumbing and Services: 11.6%
  - Electrotechnology: 10.2%

2. RPL is significantly underutilised in service and creative industries. Conversely, many qualifications in the service, health, and creative sectors have very low RPL rates. This does not necessarily mean skills are not being developed, but that RPL is not a common pathway for their recognition. This pattern could suggest that assessing skills in service-based or creative roles may present different challenges. It could be due to a lack of awareness, difficulty in

<sup>17</sup> The reason for the high RPL rate in the PPM Training Package is that RPL was used as an industry restructuring mechanism in Victoria. For more reading, see: The Forestry Worker Support Program <https://forestworks.com.au/victorian-forestry-worker-support-program-feedback/>

gathering tangible evidence compared to trade, or an industry culture that values formal training more highly.

- Low-uptake sectors include:
  - Health: 0.9%
  - Creative Arts and Culture: 0.8%
  - Floristry: 0.8%
  - Information and Communications Technology (ICT): 1.5%
  - Textiles, Clothing and Footwear: 1.7%
  - Sport, Fitness and Recreation: 2.9%

3. Qualifications leading to management and public sector roles show strong RPL uptake.

Experienced workers often use RPL to transition into supervisory or management roles, or to have their public service experience formally recognised. RPL can be a powerful tool for professionalising the existing workforce and creating clear career progression pathways. For example, an experienced factory worker could use RPL to gain a qualification in Leadership and Management, formally recognising their supervisory capabilities. This is a key benefit for both employee retention and organisational capability.

- Relevant sectors include:
  - Training and Education (TAE): 11.3% (Often required for workplace trainers and assessors)
  - Public Sector: 10.0%
  - Local Government: 11.0%
  - Community Services: 7.2%

## 6.4 RPL by Candidate Demographics (The Equity Gap)

**Age:** The highest uptake is among mature-aged workers. The RPL rate peaks for those in the 30–39-year-old (8.56%) and 40–49-year-old (8.53%) age brackets, who have had more time to accumulate workplace experience.

**Employment Status:** There is a stark difference based on employment. Employed individuals have an RPL rate of 7.49%, whereas unemployed individuals have a rate of just 1.48%. This may be because employed individuals have better access to evidence and employer support.

**Gender:** Male students (6.86%) are more than twice as likely to be granted RPL as female students (3.30%). This is partly explained by the high RPL rates in male-dominated trade industries.

**Prior Education (The RPL Paradox):** The data reveals a significant equity challenge. Those who could potentially benefit most from an alternative pathway use RPL the least. The RPL rate is lowest for those who did not finish school and steadily increases with the level of prior educational achievement. This suggests that the complexity of the process or a lack of awareness creates barriers for non-traditional learners.

# 7 Challenges with RPL Implementation

Despite its clear benefits, robust framework, and mandated availability, the implementation of RPL in Australia faces persistent challenges that have limited its uptake and effectiveness. These are not issues with the concept of RPL itself, but rather systemic and operational hurdles that have been consistently identified in research for over two decades. Framing these as areas for continuous improvement, rather than failures, is crucial.

- **Awareness and Perceptions:** A significant and long-standing barrier is the low awareness of RPL among both potential candidates and employers. For those who are aware, the process is often perceived as being complex, bureaucratic, time-consuming, and demanding a "wheelbarrow of evidence". This perception can deter even well-qualified individuals from applying.
- **Assessor Competence and Confidence:** Conducting high-quality RPL is a specialised and complex assessment skill that requires more than just standard training qualifications. Research indicates that many assessors feel they have insufficient frameworks or training to undertake RPL effectively and lack confidence in their judgements, particularly when dealing with diverse forms of evidence. This can lead to overly rigid, risk-averse assessment practices that are not candidate-centred.
- **Funding and Cost-Effectiveness<sup>18</sup>:** Funding models have consistently been identified as a major inhibitor. The process of individualised assessment and guidance can be resource-intensive for RTOs, yet government funding models are often geared towards classroom-based training and may not adequately cover the costs of a thorough RPL assessment. This can create a commercial disincentive for providers to actively promote and deliver high-quality RPL. Fees charged to individuals can also be a significant barrier, particularly for those who are unemployed or from low-income backgrounds.
- **Inconsistent Institutional Practices and Support:** There is significant variability in how RPL is implemented across different providers. While some specialist RTOs have developed highly effective, streamlined models, many larger institutions have systems and structures primarily designed for delivering group-based training. This can result in RPL being treated as an administrative ad-on rather than an integrated pathway, leading to a lack of dedicated resources, inadequate candidate support, and complex internal processes. This inconsistency undermines learner and employer confidence in the system.

## 7.1 Risks from Training Accreditation Council Western Australia<sup>19</sup>

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).

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<sup>18</sup> For more reading on funding RPL, see the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training report: Funding validation: A thematic report for the 2016 update to the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/4146>

<sup>19</sup> RPL Fact Sheet. <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/publications/fact-sheet-recognition-of-prior-learning>

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.

## 7.2 Risks from the Australian Skills Quality Authority

As the National VET Regulator, the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) has ongoing concerns about the inadequate RPL practices of some RTOs which exploit vulnerable students and compromise the integrity of qualifications. ASQA has set RPL as a risk priority since 2023<sup>20</sup>. Known risks to quality outcomes include the following:

- Using inadequate assessment practices or business models that cut corners in issuing RPL which can lead to people without the expected competencies entering critical roles, including in industries with mandatory qualifications such as aged care, disability services and early childhood education and care.
- Promoting RPL as an easy, quick or guaranteed path to qualifications.
- Using RPL systems that do not apply the same rigour as the organisation's assessment system, including not upholding assessment record retention requirements.
- Making inadequate inquiries with students seeking RPL, or agents seeking RPL on their behalf – for example, not being wary of non-genuine students that may be seeking RPL as a vehicle to facilitate other objectives.
- Failing to verify that RPL evidence submitted by students is authentic.
- Outsourcing RPL assessments to unregulated third parties that do not understand or apply the Standards to their practices – for example, using third parties that do not engage properly qualified or trained **assessors**.
- Failing to ensure RPL assessment practices are robust enough to meet the applicable threshold for high-risk work licencing, where applicable.
- Failing to ensure that RPL evidence of overseas qualifications or competencies has been mapped to Australian legislative and regulatory requirements – for example Australian Work Health and Safety legislation or other industry-specific laws.
- Failing to robustly assess or test RPL evidence for currency against training package requirements, or against the rules of evidence.
- Automatically granting RPL for students who hold a higher AQF level qualification in the same industry.
- Having insufficient systems for identifying and addressing a student's RPL gaps.

Due to its ongoing concerns for the possible exploitation of vulnerable students, ASQA has released a *Fact Sheet for Students: RPL*<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> ASQA Risk priorities [Risk priorities | Australian Skills Quality Authority \(ASQA\)](#)

<sup>21</sup> ASQA. Fact Sheet for Students: RPL. <https://www.asqa.gov.au/media/2539>

## 8 Conclusion

This paper has provided a comprehensive overview of Australia's RPL system to support policy research for the formulation of regulations in Vietnam. At its core, RPL is a formal assessment process designed to value and recognise an individual's existing competencies, regardless of whether they were acquired through formal, non-formal, or informal learning. The benefits are extensive, offering individuals accelerated and more affordable pathways to qualifications, providing employers with a powerful tool for strategic workforce development, and contributing to national productivity and social equity. However, Australia's experience reveals persistent implementation challenges, including low awareness, inconsistent provider practices, and the need for highly competent assessors. Therefore, a successful RPL system requires a robust regulatory framework, rigorous quality assurance mechanisms like validation, and a candidate-centred assessment process to ensure the integrity and value of the qualifications awarded. As Vietnam proceeds with its policy research, these insights from the Australian model offer valuable lessons for building a credible and effective RPL framework.



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