

Assessment for recognition of prior learning in technical and vocational education and training in Australia: Where to from here?

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Recognition of prior learning (RPL) provides formal recognition for vocational knowledge or skills gained on-the-job or as a result of other informal or unstructured learning experiences. RPL, if granted, can count towards completion of recognised vocational qualifications.

RPL provides a range of potential benefits for both learners and providers of technical and vocational educational and training (TVET) but also presents challenges. Assessment for RPL is invariably individualised and one-off rather than the more usual mass-assessment situation. This has implications for both costs and validity, including maintenance of consistent assessment standards. RPL also poses difficulties for the conventional models for publicly funding TVET, which generally assume that learners will typically engage in learning activities for a period of time and be assessed at the end. By contrast, RPL involves an up-front assessment, turning the conventional assessment situation on its head.

Since the early 1990s, promotion of RPL has been a major policy objective of the Australian TVET system. Progress has been made and awareness has increased but to date the take-up of RPL has not met expectations. This paper will review the current situation with a particular focus on the issues thrown up by RPL assessment and recent Australian government policy initiatives designed to address them.