

Statement on Recognition of Prior Learning for Training Programs

This is a consensus statement from the Education Subcommittee of the Committee of Presidents of Medical Colleges. It summarises the results of the CPMC workshop on Recognition of Prior Learning held at the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists in June 2008. The purpose is to provide guidance to Specialist Medical Colleges on the principles of recognition of learning and experience gained prior to or outside of a College's training program.

Definitions

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) refers to the assessment and acceptance of knowledge, skills and competencies attained through experience or education and training in another program or jurisdiction. This document sets out to define RPL in the context of specialist education and training programs and to create a set of principles and processes to guide Medical Colleges in the development and application of their own RPL programs. For the purposes of this document, RPL encompasses the following concepts -

RPL is the formal recognition of the skills and knowledge a person has regardless of how or where they were attained. This could include formal or informal training, work experience, voluntary work and life experience.

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

The evidence provided for RPL must address the demonstrable currency of competencies (both knowledge-based and skill-based) being assessed.

Credit transfer is an arrangement to give a standard level of credit or formal recognition to individuals who have previously achieved competence in a training or educational environment. Some credit transfer arrangements are also called Advanced Standing, Exemptions or (Comparable) Overseas Equivalence.

Credit transfer assesses a course or subject to determine the extent to which it is equivalent to the 'destination course'. Review criteria may include learning outcomes, competency outcomes or standards in a qualification. Credit transfer may be assessed as a continuum from 1 to 100% of the skills and knowledge required.

Recognition of Current Competency involves reassessment of a previously acquired competency to ensure that the competence is being maintained. For general purposes the term is synonymous with RPL.

In the context of the functions with which this document is seeking to assist, RPL can be seen to encompass elements of all three of the above.

Specialist medical education – the role of RPL and Credit Transfer in Australia and New Zealand

RPL removes the problem of an unnecessary duplication of learning, potentially decreasing the total time spent in training, allowing any remaining training to be more focussed and relevant to the individual's knowledge and skills development. It may also encourage communication, collaboration and standardisation between specialist medical training providers. The recognition of RPL enhances the development of pathways between qualifications based on potential mutual recognition of assessment and credit for programs that may have been accumulated by individuals prior to the entry to a specialist training program..

RPL may apply in the following situations -

- trainees wishing to receive credit for training from an experience achieved in medical school or pre-vocational training in preparation for entering a specialist training program;
- trainees wishing to transfer from one training program to another, either part-way through that training or on its completion as an additional qualification; or
- doctors who have received training in a discipline in a foreign country and now wish to practice that discipline in Australia and/or New Zealand. (This is often covered in formal recognition processes. In this case, it may or will only be considered where a doctor is seeking to enter a training program or has gained a place on a training program but is yet to commence in that program.)

Individuals wanting to enter specialist medical training or to transfer between specialist training providers may provide evidence of completion of courses or qualifications achieved locally or overseas. It is the task of the 'destination' training provider to ascertain the relevance / equivalence of an applicant's skills and knowledge to the provider's own training requirements. This may entail assessing the individual's experiences (RPL) and/or scrutinising the individual's listed qualifications against predetermined 'equivalent' or 'substantially comparable' courses and qualifications.

Australian Medical Council requirements for accreditation of specialist medical education and training and professional development programs – June 2008

The AMC *Accreditation of Specialist Medical Education and Training and Professional Development Programs - Standards and Procedures* (see <http://www.amc.org.au/images/Accreditation/Standards-to-Council.pdf>) acknowledge the expectation of the existence of mechanisms underpinned by clear policy to deal with RPL in Standard 3.4.2: relating to 'Flexible Training' -

'There are opportunities for trainees to pursue studies of choice, consistent with training program outcomes, which are underpinned by policies on the recognition of prior learning. These policies recognise demonstrated competencies achieved in other relevant training programs both here and overseas, and give trainees appropriate credit towards the requirements of the training program.'

The associated notes state -

‘Training organisations must be able to demonstrate that they have in place clear criteria and processes for assessing trainees’ prior learning.’

The expectation of such policy is further outlined in the notes accompanying Standard 7.3, which deals with ‘Communication with Trainees’.

According to the standard Communication with Trainees (p 15),

‘Training organisations are expected to deal with their trainees in an open and transparent way. To ensure this occurs, they should have in place mechanisms to inform prospective and enrolled trainees of training policies and processes, including but not limited to -

- selection to the training program
- the design, requirements and costs of the training program
- proposed changes to the design, requirements and costs of the training program
- the available support systems and career guidance
- recognition of prior learning and flexible training options.’

This is consistent with the broader Australian post-secondary education environment and the *National Principles and Operational Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)*, (2004) which present national cross-sectoral guidelines to support implementation of RPL as an important element of Australian education and training. The *National Principles and Guidelines* acknowledge diversity of RPL policy and practice and seek to encourage national consistency through sharing and facilitating good practice across sectors and jurisdictions.

Principles for RPL policies and processes

Any RPL policies and processes should follow the over-arching principles that apply to all of a College’s policies and procedures, such as procedural fairness and specifically include the following principles -

- there should be clear, documented criteria which are easy to understand by those to whom they may apply;
- there should be a clear connection to and support of current training standards and processes, including a mapping or blueprinting process to the training curriculum to allow appropriate comparisons;
- they should be publicly available and open to scrutiny, review and appeal;
- they should be flexible enough to allow for variation in prior learning that may have met learning objectives;
- RPL policies should maintain training standards and protect patient safety in their dealings with trainees; and
- RPL policy should make clear any time limits that apply to the currency of prior learning.

Additionally, it is desirable that -

- RPL processes seek to identify common elements between different training programs to allow for suitable comparisons to be made;

- there should be a mechanism that allows feedback from stakeholders, including trainee representation and input; and
- there should be an attempt to define areas where consistency of standards between colleges could be developed.

Elements of training to which RPL may apply include -

- generic competencies (such as those described in CanMEDS and other such frameworks) supported by relevant curricula, and including cultural competence;
- Basic Science knowledge and assessment;
- supervised training experience;
- qualifications – professional, post-tertiary;
- clinical knowledge and type and extent of assessment; and
- other verifiable experience relevant to the discipline such as quality assurance.

Considerations in the design of RPL processes

Issues to be considered in designing an RPL process include -

1. Evidence of prior learning
 - a. The nature of evidence required (such as assessment, ratings, completion of course, etc.).
 - b. Who should provide it? (the applicant or the supervisor/assessor)
 - c. The form it needs to be in (e.g., letter of support, formal documentation certificate/diploma).
2. Retrospective versus prospective recognition
 - a. When the evidence is recorded – prospectively as part of the training process, or retrospectively in response to the application.
 - b. The currency of knowledge and/or skills to be accepted.
3. Assessment and measurement of competence – ‘competency-based’ versus ‘time-based’ training systems – Is appropriate allowance for both components able to be made?
4. Comparability of competencies attained in different jurisdictions for the specific application.
5. Differences between procedural and non-procedural aspects of a discipline, particularly with respect to the assessment of competence.
6. Experience that is gained outside of an accredited training program –
 - a. Acceptable levels of supervision
 - b. Elements of training that are disallowed in this context, as they must be part of a formalised training program.

7. Allowing for variances between training programs. (different ways of achieving a competency)
8. Is there a time-limit for prior learning to be considered current? Can it be revoked or superseded?
9. Governance, both of the prior learning and of the RPL process.
10. Costs of the process – both for the College and the applicant – what is reasonable?
11. The relationship (if any) that RPL should have to workforce issues.
12. The timeframe over which applications for RPL may be made – must all applications and allowances be prospectively approved?

Summary

There is no doubt of the expectation by stakeholders of the need for organisations such as the specialist Colleges to possess robust, transparent and fair policies and procedures relating to RPL. While the specific detail of those policies may differ, there are principles to guide the development of policies and processes and for making decisions regarding applications for RPL in the specialist Colleges.

Endorsed 26 November 2009