



## **Recognition of Prior Learning**

### **Australian Centre for Advanced Studies**

Ver 1.0

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# 1

## Credit for your experience

If you have learnt a lot through experience since you last studied, why don't you simply apply for the assessment? Under Government policy, ACAS can recognize your current abilities regardless of how they were acquired, and you can earn a recognized qualification or a Statement of Attainment.

You can be assessed for what you have learned through:

- experience on the job
- in-service training and professional development
- your own reading
- involvement in charity, church or other community organizations
- any other informal way of learning
- unaccredited schools, or,
- foreign schools.

ACAS does not refuse assessment because you didn't sit the classes. And if you pass the assessment, you are not differentiated in any way from those who sat through classes, and the credentials are exactly the same.

This is called Recognition of Prior learning (RPL), and all units offered may be assessed this way. You must be able to show that your skills are current, and that you have the necessary knowledge and understanding. You are assessed according to the same criteria as students taking classes, and this will sometimes require written work.

Its advantages are:

- It might save you time and money
- It gives maximum recognition for what you have learned in an recognized credential or statement of attainment.
- It uses recognized standards that might stretch you at times.
- In some cases, you may simply choose to take assessments as examinations.

### How much credit will you get?

This will depend greatly on what you have done and whether it fits an existing qualification. It will also depend on the fields of study included with the ACAS's accredited scope and expertise. There is no limit to the amount of experience-based credit you can use for a qualification; it can be the whole qualification. If you do not meet all requirements, you will still receive a nationally recognized Statement of Attainment for all units in which you have been successful.

### Ask and talk

Although the admitting officer should ask you about RPL, you should also take responsibility to ask for it. Tell us what you might have learnt so far, where you feel your career is going, and how you might get there.

## Different ways of doing RPL

It is normal to have more than one way of assessing students for RPL, and the ACAS assessor will guide you. In every case, the mode of assessment must suit the skills being assessed.

Some ways are faster, less paper driven, and require little preparation. Others are quite the opposite. In any case, you should have a current job description, Curriculum Vitae, and references.

Consider these examples:

- The *workplace walkaround*. Show your assessor around your workplace and explain what you do. The assessor can ask questions and get you to show how to do things.
- The *workplace demonstration*. Show your assessor how you do a task in your workplace and explain what you do. The assessor can ask questions.
- A *challenge test* is best for knowledge components. It is a comprehensive interview on what you have done, and is usually given by a panel of at least two people. It is best done at your workplace where you can orient your panel to what you actually do and use any workplace documents that may be helpful.
- A *practicum placement* gives an opportunity for the student to show what he/she can do in a workplace over an extended period. However, the student must already have access to a suitable workplace.
- A *verified CV*. A self-employed person with very little documentary evidence might write a CV with a list of recent jobs, and assemble them to address all unit outcomes. The tasks, and the standard at which they were done, can then be independently verified by an associate or client.
- A *portfolio* is a collection of documents that show that you have met the current standards. ACAS then verifies the portfolio and assesses you. (See chapter 4.)

## Steps in RPL

### **Step 1. Reflect on your experience**

What have you already learnt through your life and work experience? What have you done? At a more personal level, some people (especially those who have been out of the workforce for a while) might need to look at their self-esteem, confidence, and fears.

### **Step 2. Discuss the requirements with an admission officer**

At this stage, you should discuss what you have done with an admissions officer. As there are many options, you might need advice to select the qualification or statement of attainment that is right for you, and the units that suit what you have learnt. Please be aware that your ACAS assessor can assess only a limited range of units.

As you go, discuss the requirements and relate them to your particular situation, identify any skill gaps, and decide out if or how you might fill them.

### **Step 3. Apply to ACAS**

Get an enrollment number for your admission officer, fill in the online application form, and pay fees. When you have been accepted, your ACAS admissions officer further guide you.

### **Step 4. Describe what you have learnt**

Describe what you have learnt verbally, and write it in your CV form and/or self-assessment form. You might benefit from discussion with an ACAS assessor.

Then revise and polish this document so it is more useful for the assessment process. For example, you may want to expand on important topics and give less space to those that cannot be verified.

### **Step 4. Take the assessment**

Take the assessment in the form set by the assessor.

### **Step 5. ACAS processes your assessment**

ACAS will inform you of any other assessment requirements. This will normally include an interview and/or a reference directly from your organization. It will not be an ordinary reference but will refer specifically to unit requirements.

ACAS verifies your portfolio, assesses you, and then issues you an assessment. This is the final assessment unless you have chosen to take extra units by later on. If deficiencies are minor, the assessor may permit adjustments but will not conduct a full second assessment. You can appeal if you think the assessment result is unfair.

### **Step 6. Graduate**

Receive your graduation diploma, transcript, advanced placement, or admission into a higher qualification.

## How to gather and assemble a portfolio

If your assessor will assess you through a portfolio, gather your documents that help show that you have met the requirements. Then assemble them in order so that the assessor can understand them easily.

Assessments of some practical skills might also require an onsite visit to your workplace.

### Gather existing documents

Gather your portfolio of documents that indicate that you have met the competencies. You will normally need two separate items for every skill in each unit you wish to take. However, this guideline can vary in some circumstances. Some units specify more and a few units may require only one. In some cases, the interview might count as one of the items, but you would be unwise to depend on it.

However, the assessor may ask for more evidence if he/she identifies risks in the assessment or if the portfolio is not yet conclusive.

It should include a comprehensive Curriculum Vitae that emphasizes factual details relating to the units that are being assessed. If you do not already have a CV, please use the form provided. (MSWord).

The list of examples below will guide you to consider what relevant documents you already have, although it would be very unusual for anybody to have all examples below. Don't worry if you don't have something, just submit what you have.

Documents will be photocopies or certified copies. Assessors may ask to see originals.

Examples:

1. Your current job description, if relevant.
2. Other job descriptions of recent positions you have held.
3. Written work:
  - a. subject descriptions of courses you have taken
  - b. notes of courses you have taught
  - c. manuals
  - d. reports you have written
  - e. essays
  - f. letters
  - g. data printouts
  - h. periodical articles you have written
  - i. contracts you have written
  - j. plans you have developed
  - k. policies and procedures you have written
  - l. etc.
4. Appraisal or assessment results from acceptable organizations. (E.g. professional associations, Overseas Qualifications Unit)

5. Records of other education. (You could get exemption or transfer credit for relevant units.) Records include transcripts, qualifications or statements of attainment. If records include codes, then you need to provide the legend to interpret codes. For example, does D mean Distinction or fail (lower than C)?

If records were not nationally recognized, then you should also provide unit descriptions, handbook statements and any assignments you have done. (The assessor will inform you if more detail is required.) Note: Nationally Recognised Training under the Australian training sector is automatically recognized at no fee.

Supporting documents that are relevant to the units you are applying for:

1. brochures for the organization you work in
2. professional licenses and memberships
3. instructor's certificates
4. achievement awards
5. employers references on letterhead
6. client references
7. references or reports of supervisors, instructors, or responsible authorities
8. auditor's or inspector's reports
9. advertising brochures for programs you have run
10. professional development courses
11. your performance management records
12. brochures for performances you have given
13. etc.

Standards used to benchmark your performance. These may be used in audits, quality management and/or performance appraisals:

1. policies and procedures
2. strategic plans
3. professional standards
4. quality frameworks
5. ISO standards

Note: In the case of music performance, recordings can only be used to indicate readiness for live assessment. The sound is normally processed by a technician and cannot be used to assess competence. A series of live performances is necessary.

### **Check**

Before you start assembling your portfolio, check that you have proved that you have adequately addressed all requirements. If you are in difficulty, check with your coordinator.

### **Assemble your portfolio**

You need to show the assessor clearly how your documents relate to the specific unit requirements.

1. Putting your CV first, sort all other documents into logical order, either chronologically, or by subject area or by kind of document.
2. Prepare an index listing all documents. This will be placed at the beginning of your portfolio.
3. Number each document. In the case of your CV, you will normally need to give each section its own number, as each might be relevant to different units.
4. Make a list of units.

5. Next to each unit, put a number of the document that shows you have that particular skill.
6. Then put it all in the following order:
  - a. A cover sheet with your name and date of submission
  - b. A list of all documents
  - c. A list of unit with reference to other documents
  - d. Your detailed CV
  - e. Then all other documents
7. Clip the portfolio together and submit it. Do not use plastic sleeves.
8. It is strongly suggested that you keep a copy of your own in case the submitted copy is lost in the mail.
9. The portfolio will be normally returned to you when the assessment is complete.