



# **Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) (2008)**



THE NEW SOUTH WALES GOVERNMENT

*A Training Publication  
for the reference of;*

*Local RFS Managers,  
Learning and Development Officers  
and other interested persons.*

*Recommended distribution:*

*Those listed above – one copy each.*

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# Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

## 1. Basic principles

These Guidelines relate to the recognition (assessment) of competency other than that assessed in direct association with a training course. The same principles apply to RPL as are used for all types of assessment.

RPL is on offer at all times to any member with the required prerequisites for a subject, and who has reason to believe they might already be competent in the subject. It should also be specifically offered to a person whenever they are advised their application to participate in any RFS training program has been successful.

The process for RPL for a subject is summarised in the relevant RFS Learning and Assessment Strategy. If course materials are developed for that subject, procedures for RPL are also detailed in the relevant Workbook or a separate booklet.

Any nationally recognised qualification issued by another Registered Training Organisation (RTO) must be recognised by the RFS. However, a briefing or training in relevant local procedures, equipment and topography may still be required.

## 2. Procedures – if you are an applicant for RPL

- Check to see if the RFS provides RPL in the subject. Some subjects may be outside the scope of registration or delivery of the RFS. (As a general rule, if the RFS provides training in a subject, it can provide RPL in that subject.)
- Get a copy of the RFS “How to Become Qualified in ...” booklet (if available) for the subject in which you are seeking RPL (these can be obtained via your local or Regional Learning and Development Officer) or use the equivalent “Are you Already Competent?” section of the relevant Workbook, where applicable
- If the above indicates you might already be competent, determine from it what evidence you will need to gather and present in order to be assessed.
- Fill in a copy of the RPL form (included with these Guidelines). Note that if “credit transfer” is applicable to your case, or “assessment on demand” is requested, you only need to fill in the first page of the RPL application form.
- If you would prefer for your RPL to be dealt with by an Assessor at “arm’s length” from you (as opposed to a local Assessor who knows you), you may request that on your RPL application.
- Send your application, along with suitable evidence of competency, to your local Learning and Development Officer (for RFS qualifications) or your Regional Learning and Development Manager (for nationally recognised qualifications). Be prepared to undergo a challenge test of your current competency. (i.e. Have someone observe you actually do the thing/s in which you are seeking RPL.)

- Be prepared to undergo an interview to consider your application. (Note that you can have an advisor/advocate with you when you are interviewed if you wish.)
- Read the other parts of these Guidelines for information about how your application should be processed, and the appeal procedures available if your application is not successful.

### **3. Procedures for Handling RPL – for the L&D Officer**

- Any RPL application received by any L&D Officer should be referred to an appropriate assessor within one month of receiving it.
- The RPL application should be referred to an Assessor qualified in the subject matter, or to an assessment team/panel with members sharing Assessor and relevant subject matter qualifications between them.
- If the applicant might object to the person likely to be assigned to process their RPL (e.g. due to an existing personal conflict), a suitable alternative Assessor should be assigned to them.
- If there is any problem with the application, the applicant should be referred to an Assessor or other knowledgeable advocate to advise them how to fix it up.
- If the application is unsuccessful, they are to be advised (in writing) of that result, the reason for it being unsuccessful, what they need to do to become certified in the subject and the appeal procedure given in this SOP.

### **4. Procedures for handling RPL – for the assessor**

- The primary Assessor should process any application for RPL within three months of it being lodged, and make a decision based on the evidence presented.
- The task of the primary Assessor is to ensure the RPL assessment process is conducted properly. If they are also qualified in the subject matter, they may undertake the entire assessment process by themselves.
- If the primary assessor is not qualified in the subject matter being assessed then they need to be assisted by a person who is qualified or has equivalent recognised competency.
- The task of any person qualified in the subject who is assisting the Assessor is to provide an objective opinion about whether the applicant is competent, beyond reasonable doubt, in the subject matter being assessed.
- If needed, the applicant should be interviewed to ensure the details in the application relate to the applicant, and clarify any points in the application that are unclear. If needed, a challenge test should be conducted to confirm the applicant's competency. Any suitable person may carry out the interview and/or the challenge test on behalf of the assessor, or conduct the interview by phone.

- Persons qualified as ASAs, ASRs or RFI (2005) may gather evidence on behalf of the Assessor in order to contribute towards the assessment.
- Based on the evidence provided, the primary Assessor is to determine if the applicant is 'competent' or 'not yet competent'. The applicant should be advised of that decision as soon as possible.
- If the decision is not to grant RPL to an applicant, the primary Assessor must advise the applicant (in writing) of the reason/s why, what they need to do to gain competence and certification, and the available appeal procedure (including contact details for lodging an appeal to the validator).
- If the decision is that the applicant is competent, the primary Assessor should complete a standard Assessment Declaration Form to that effect, have the assessment validated, and ensure the appropriate certificate or statement of attainment is issued. The Declaration Form is to include a brief summary of the type of evidence presented for the assessment.
- All RPL assessments need to be validated before the person assessed is certified as competent. Validation is a check that the RPL assessment has been done properly. Validation can only be conducted by a qualified RTC or a person with ASR (2005) certification (but not earlier versions of ASR)

## **5. RPL Assessment Appeals**

- If the applicant believes they have not been assessed properly, they can appeal to the validator up to three months after the assessment was done. They have the right to appeal once. If not satisfied, they can then still resort to using grievance handling procedures under Service Standard 1.1.3.
- If a validator gets an appeal about an RPL assessment, they are to process it within three months and advise the Regional Learning and Development Manager of the situation. If they find the assessment was not properly done, unfair, invalid, inequitable or not appropriately flexible, they are required to have a second, properly conducted assessment carried out as soon as possible.
- If the person appealing, the validator or the Regional Learning and Development Manager believe the validator is "too close" to the issues involved in an appeal to give it independent consideration, the Regional Learning and Development Manager may appoint another RTC to handle it.
- For assessments conducted by a Regional Learning and Development Manager, a similar process applies, except that the Manager, Learning and Development Systems, nominates the validator.

## **6. Definitions**

### **Assessment on Demand**

"Assessment on demand" is when a person is given the standard assessment specified in the relevant Course Guide, even though they have not been formally trained through the associated course.

Assessment on demand is sometimes the easiest and quickest way to work out if someone is already competent. It saves them having to go through the processes normally associated with RPL.

### **Credit Transfer**

Credit transfer is used for converting RFS certification/s to their equivalent national (and some other) certification/s, and vice versa.

(Note: If you have internal qualifications from another fire service, you will need to get a letter from them indicating what your qualifications are equivalent to in the national system to allow conversion. Qualifications issued by any Registered Training Organisation (RTO) are automatically recognised by the RFS, but a briefing or training in relevant related local procedures, equipment and topography may often still be required.

### **Challenge Testing**

“Challenge testing” is when a person is given a sample part of the standard assessment. It is used when there is some evidence of competence, but more evidence is needed to be reasonably certain of that competence. The process of RPL often involves a challenge test being applied to confirm competency.

### **Lateral Entry**

“Lateral entry” is when experienced people commence training at a level higher than normal because of evidence they are already competent at the lower level/s. (However, note that in “lateral entry”, no qualification is granted for that lower level.)

### **Redlining**

“Redlining” is when it is assumed that people are already competent at the level at which they currently operate, because they have qualified under some older qualification system at an equivalent level. (For example, brigade officers with “old” Crew Leader certification retain it when “new format” Crew Leader training, assessment and certification is introduced in an area.)

### **RPL and RCC**

“RPL” (recognition of prior learning) is when you recognise competencies gained in the past, regardless of how they were gained. “RCC” (recognition of current competency) is when you recognise competencies currently held in the present, regardless of how they were gained. In the RFS, the same process is used for both RPL and RCC, and the term ‘RPL’ is used to refer to both.

The full RPL process only needs to be used if it is easier than using the “assessment on demand” approach, and when “short cuts” such as lateral entry, redlining or credit transfer are not applicable to the particular case.

**NSW Rural Fire Service - Training S.O.P. 4 – Appendix A**

# **Recognition Application Form**

**For Assessment on Demand, Credit Transfer and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)**



## **1. Personal Details**

Mr/Ms \_\_\_\_\_ First Name/s \_\_\_\_\_

District \_\_\_\_\_ Brigade \_\_\_\_\_

Position Held \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_ Firezone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Tel/fax/email \_\_\_\_\_

Do you need to have your RPL processed by an Assessor at “arm’s length” (e.g. do you have a personal objection to it being done by a local assessor)? – Yes / No (Circle)

## **2. Units, subjects or modules for which recognition is sought**

\_\_\_\_\_

## **3. Type of recognition applied for (tick box applicable):**

- Assessment on Demand**
- Credit Transfer**
- Recognition of Prior Learning**

*You don't have to fill in the rest of this form for 'Assessment on Demand'.*

*If you are applying for 'Credit Transfer', write down the name of the certification you currently have below, and attach a copy of a certificate or statement of attainment as evidence of it. (Note: You don't have to fill in the rest of this form when applying for 'Credit Transfer'.)*

\_\_\_\_\_

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*If applying for 'Recognition of Prior Learning', you do need to fill in the rest of this form:*

#### 4. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

(For each of the elements/outcomes listed for the unit/module/subject for which you are seeking RPL, indicate how you meet each, and what evidence you have to prove that you are already competent.)

<b>Elements/Outcomes</b> - list all the elements or outcomes for which you are seeking RPL. (See <a href="http://www.ntis.gov.au">www.ntis.gov.au</a> for elements within a unit)	<b>Your Prior Learning</b> - describe how you already meet each of the elements or outcomes	<b>Your Evidence</b> - What have you got that shows you meet the element/outcome (e.g. a document or an ability to demonstrate your competency)

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## 5. Check that your supporting evidence can be used

Make sure your supporting evidence is **valid** (i.e. it relates to the subject being assessed), **sufficient** (there's enough of it), **current** (it's up to date) and **authentic** (it relates specifically to you, not someone else). The following table will assist you to identify quality evidence:

EVIDENCE	NOT EVIDENCE (although some of it could become evidence)
<p>An explanation of how to do it, or parts of it, and answers to specific questions.</p> <p>Specific, competency-related references, preferably on letter-head, signed and dated by person who is competent in the subject matter.</p> <p>Performance reviews/appraisals relevant to the competencies being assessed.</p> <p>Emails and minutes of meetings attended by the candidate which provide proof of work undertaken.</p> <p>Recently produced products (anything from a report to a cake or building) and proof they have been produced by the candidate.</p> <p>Authenticated and dated photographs or videos of work in progress or products.</p> <p>Documents that clearly demonstrate how an organisation's policies and procedures are implemented by the candidate.</p> <p>Evidence that provides a picture of consistent performance over time.</p> <p>Evidence that is at the same AQF level, includes critical aspects of evidence, incorporates underpinning knowledge, skills and attributes, and demonstrates task/job/role skills.</p>	<p>Assurances you can do it "I've been doing it for years".</p> <p>Personal references making general comments about character.</p> <p>Supervisor's testimonial.</p> <p>Job descriptions/position descriptions, especially if not signed off.</p> <p>Journals and diary entries not supported by a third party.</p> <p>Unauthenticated products which the candidate cannot prove are their work. Old products.</p> <p>Unauthenticated pictures, video or photographs of work or products.</p> <p>Copy of an organisation's policies &amp; procedures.</p> <p>A candidate's resume with no supporting documentation or no obvious links.</p> <p>Minutes of meetings that are not actioned and do not have the candidate's name in attendance or participating.</p> <p>Evidence from a <b>different</b> qualification level.</p> <p>Evidence by exception – I must be working safely – "I've still got all my fingers!" (That someone has not yet drowned does not prove they can swim!)</p>

## 6. Supporting Information – Relevant Work/Life Experience

(For example, relevant employment history, voluntary work, hobby activities community work, your own business, school committees, associations, etc.)

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## 7. Supporting Info. – Relevant Fire Qualifications & Experience

(For example, years of service, positions held, approximate number and type of fires attended, training courses completed, certifications gained, etc.)

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