

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) *A Candid Conversation*

with Paul Pellier and Deb
Carr

Accellier



Unlocking Australia's Skills Potential: A Comprehensive Analysis of RPL

Purpose of the Research: Research insights to better use RPL for the Victorian labour market.

Macro-level global drivers: RPL is being driven by rapid technological advancements, shifting demographics, pressing environmental concerns, globalisation and increased migration flow.

Nations' RPL goal: Give individuals who possess uncredentialed competencies with formal documents that make their skills and knowledge visible and give them **currency** in society in 3 different markets.



Chapter 1
Origin and Purpose of RPL
Chapter 2
RPL in Australia
Chapter 3
VET Data Analysis

Chapter 4
Opportunities to optimise RPL
Case Studies
RPL Done Well



The Genesis of RPL: From lifelong learning to global recognition

RPL's Foundation in Lifelong Learning. Concept originated from the 1960s and 70s lifelong learning movement, propelled by UNESCO's 1972 Faure Report, emphasising that skills and knowledge acquired through life and work hold equal value to formal education.

Global Shaping by International Bodies. UNESCO, the ILO and the OECD influenced RPL's promotion and definition globally, reflecting distinct mandates in education, labour market and economic development.

Three Broad Global Use Cases. Make learning gained outside formal systems visible and valued with currency in:

1. Education & Training market: access to qualifications
2. Labour market: enhanced employability
3. Community/not-for-profit sector: social inclusion & poverty reduction

Importance of a Formative Phase: International studies highlight the significance of a formative phase prior to summative assessment that allows candidates to reflect on ALL experiences, articulate skills, and understand RPL, enhancing confidence and outcomes.

Context-Specific Implementation. Some jurisdictions link RPL to educational policy, others primarily tie RPL to economic and labour market policies. ALL link RPL to lifelong learning.

2. RPL in Australia

RPL in Australia: Current dynamics, demand-supply & future considerations

Policy Shifts & Oversight After 2005, the dissolution of ANTA and the merging of AQF RPL guidelines weakened national coordination and diluted strategic oversight of RPL.

Evidence of Strong Demand Current RPL demand is significant, expressed by Jobs and Skills Councils (JSCs) and government policy to address skills shortages, enhance labour mobility, and facilitate career transitions.

Supply-Side Challenges Persist Despite demand, the provision of RPL faces persistent institutional inhibitors, with little systemic improvement in RTO practice beyond isolated good examples.

Fragmented Victorian Provision RPL in Victorian RTOs is inconsistently promoted and accessed, often requiring enrolment before full information is available.

Sector Reform Opportunities & Threats Sector reforms present opportunities (e.g., less prescriptive units, micro-credentials, articulation) but also threats (e.g., qualifications too abstract, insufficient RPL assessor training) to RPL's effectiveness.

Technology's Dual Impact Technologies offer opportunities to enhance RPL efficiency and access, but also pose risks to digital equity, data privacy, and assessment integrity.

Under-optimised Formative Phase Once central to early RPL models, the formative phase is now largely absent in Australian practice, affecting candidate confidence, engagement and outcomes.

3. VET Data Analysis Part 1

VET Data Analysis: Current RPL landscape and trends

Overall Low & Declining Rate In 2023, 5.20% of successful VET subject results were granted through RPL, part of a downward trend from 6.45% in 2015.

Provider Type Variation Private Training Providers and Enterprise RTOs show higher RPL rates compared to TAFE institutes.

Occupational Concentration RPL is more prevalent in occupations facing skills shortages, particularly for Managers, Technicians and Trades Workers, and Machinery Operators and Drivers.

Higher Uptake in Specific Cohorts RPL rates are higher for older age groups (30-59 years), for individuals born outside Australia, and generally increase with remoteness.

Demographic Disparities RPL rates are lower among women, Indigenous Australians, people with disabilities, those with less education, and the unemployed.

Funding Dominance of Fee-for-Service The majority (63%) of RPL-granted outcomes are funded through domestic fee-for-service, with government funding contributing 29%.

3. VET Data Analysis Part 2

VET Data Analysis: Blind spots & data needs for effective RPL

Critical Data Blind Spots: VET data collections suffer from significant blind spots in understanding RPL activity, demand, funding, and outcomes.

Missing Employer Perspective: Employer satisfaction surveys notably exclude any questions related to RPL, leaving a critical stakeholder's view unrecorded since their inception.

Obscured Funding & Outcomes: The primary funding source ("fee-for-service") lacks crucial detail, and student outcome surveys (SOS) have ceased collecting RPL-specific information, hindering financial transparency and impact assessment.

Under-Reported Activity & Uncaptured Demand: Much RPL activity is inaccurately recorded as "Competency Achieved" due to strict funding rules. Demand from individuals and employers remains largely uncaptured due to data limitations and low awareness.

Need for Impact-Focused Data: An effective RPL system requires systematic data on both outputs and long-term impacts (e.g., employment, wages, career progression, improved agency) to inform policy and justify investment

No idea about WHY, nor the IMPACT
No data on ENQUIRY RATE nor EMPLOYER
SATISFACTION

6-Stage RPL Process

Adapted from
VEETAC 1991
Model



01

Information & Access

Promote RPL opportunities, attract candidates, provide enough information to help them decide on seeking recognition. **Resource needs:** marketing plan, clear and simple written & verbal information, trained contact point for queries.



02

Initial Support & Counseling

Formative support that clarifies expectations and identifies suitable courses. **Resource needs:** subject matter expert, briefing sessions (individual or group), welcoming environment for questions.



03

Application and Preparation

Reiterative process to assist candidates in evidencing their claim and prepare an assessment strategy. **Resource needs:** Self-assessment mechanism, user-friendly evidence repositories, opportunity for gap-training.



04

Assessment (summative)

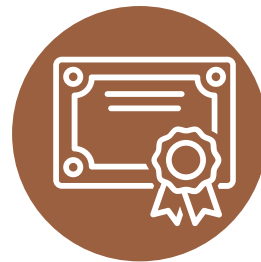
Systematic review of the evidence for sufficiency, authenticity, currency and validity. **Resource needs:** Expert RPL assessors, SMEs, cost effective validity tools



05

Post-assessment Guidance

Encourage individuals' reflections on RPL outcomes and provide guidance for setting further learning & development targets. Gain feedback on the RPL process to improve RPL services. **Resource needs:** Clear and prompt assessment feedback, development plan, appeals processes, feedback mechanisms



06

Certification

Formally award credits, statement of attainments, certificates. RPL results are equal to that of formal pathways. **Resource needs:** Prompt issuance processes





ForestWorks Worker Support Program (WSP)

- Victorian Forestry Transition Program, because Victoria is moving away from harvesting native timber.
- 1000 highly experienced forestry and timber workers are redundant
- RPL units of the Cert III in Pulp and Paper Operations
- Gap training for occupations in forest/fire management and civil construction in their local areas.

Program Enablers

Worker Assistance Coordinators (WACs)

In-industry mentors/coordinators were used to support displaced workers through the emotionally taxing and logistically unfamiliar process of gathering evidence. Peer to peer model.

Use of technology

Smart Pens are used to simultaneously capture written notes and audio recordings, aiding compliance for assessors working with candidates with low literacy.

Career Counselling/triage

Pre-redundancy discussions around career aspirations, next steps, mental wellbeing, regional employment opportunities and future industry needs

Tailored RPL processes

Flexible assessment methods that suited people with no formal tertiary qualification, literacy barriers and geographical remoteness.

Department of Energy,
Environment and Climate
Action (DEECA)



ForestWorks

Career Transitions for Returning to Pakistan Migrants

- Migrant workers returning from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)
- RPL existing skills and knowledge
- Gap training for occupations aligned with national needs and individual aspirations
- Telecom technician → Amazon Virtual Assistant
- Sales → eCommerce business owner

Program Enablers

🕒 Tailored RPL processes

RPL Centre applied 'project-based' assessment for candidates to demonstrate skills. These projects helped link candidates to job/business market places.

🕒 Career Counselling/triage

Pre-assessment counselling to address the financial and social uncertainties returnees face. Decide on career options. Identify transversal skills that can be used in occupational shortage areas.

🕒 Mentors post certification

Follow-up plan to enact the professional development plan supported by the mentors of the training centres. Linkages with job and business market places.

🕒 Gap training

Enrol in accelerated programs recognising skills already attained.



Tradesperson Maritime engineering and engine driver qualifications

- Those with listed certificates in automotive and electrical can bypass the prerequisite lower-level maritime certificates
- Future maritime requirements *may* require trade AND maritime qualification
- RPL experience and maritime qualification into trade qualification
- Dual certification improves individual employability and organisational workforce agility

Program Enablers

<p> Pre-mapping qualifications and sea-time experience</p> <p>Qualification mapping to see common units. Students maintain sea-time log books, which can be mapped to trade qual. Assess skills acquired after training.</p>	<p> Career Counselling/triage</p> <p>The National Maritime Skills Network was created by the JSC Industry Skills Australia, which can be a learner-facing career navigator for workforce pathways.</p>
	<p> Dual Certification</p> <p>Mapping common units can facilitate stream-lined dual certification, improving individual employability and organisational workforce agility.</p>





From on-the-tools to Workforce Development Leader

- Joe worked in heavy industry and mining environments in the automotive electrical and automation field.
- After many years of gradually taking on more responsibility in solving technical problems, supporting teams, and mentoring others in high-risk operational environments, he sought RPL towards the Diploma of Leadership and Management.
- Since completing his qualification, he's moved further into training and capability-building roles.

Practice Enablers

Assessor expertise in RPL & the qualification

The assessor understands both the qualification and how leadership evidence appears in real workplaces. This means we can recognise naturally occurring evidence rather than asking for unnecessary extra documents.

Evidence-based practice

Knowledge Access has been collecting candidate feedback for over a decade, getting to know candidates' needs and experiences. The RPL service puts customers first.

Guided Evidence Collection

Candidates are guided towards strong evidence artefacts, such as role documents, workplace communications, planning records, mentoring/training examples and problem-solving evidence. This makes the process more focused and less painful.

Structured Professional Conversation

The professional conversation helps test and contextualise the evidence, confirm authenticity, and draw out the leadership and management thinking behind the candidate's work.

Principles of Assessment & Rules of Evidence

applied to

RPL

Principles of Assessment

Rules of Evidence

01

Reliability

RPL assessment tools facilitate consistent competency judgements.

02

Validity

RPL assessment methods cover the unit across different contexts with knowledge integrated

03

Flexibility

RPL assessment draws on a range of assessment methods considering candidates' needs & preferences

04

Fairness

Candidates can appeal. Reasonable adjustment is applied

01

Validity

RPL assessments cover the unit and methods align with the **'verbs'** in the unit of competency.

02

Sufficiency

How much is enough!? Enough for a judgement.

03

Authenticity

What parts of the evidence is attributed to the candidate? Does this align with the unit, particularly the **'verbs'**

04

Currency

Evidence illustrates that a person has the skills NOW or in the very recent past.

COMPETENCE

POTENTIAL

ETHIC

BEST PRACTICE

KNOWLEDGE

PROFICIENCY

ATTITUDE

Design your RPL assessment tool

Mapping for RPL

01

Deconstruct – reconstruct

What is the unit saying? Align knowledge evidence to performance evidence.

02

Find work tasks

What does this look like in the workplace? Cluster where you can. What knowledge and foundation skills are being applied in this task?

03

Map likely evidence

Compile a list of likely evidence. Map the evidence to the PCs that have been aligned with knowledge evidence.

04

Map assessment methods

Map valid assessment methods to PCs that have been aligned with knowledge evidence. Consider real work tasks.

05

Plan the assessment

Design your RPL kit. Co-design with candidates considering their preferences for how they would like to evidence their competence.

Item	Quantity	Rate	Rating	Cost	Units
agility development process	774	629	123,05	244	
agility development speed	222	173	128,32	76	
aging concept comparison	870	804	108,21	80	
agreement document separation agreement	1072	517	207,35	481	
agreement settlement property settlement	319	186	171,51	659	
agriculture farming lot	363	170	213,53	464	
agriculture fertilizer agriculture drone	895	647	138,33	223	
agriculture technology sensor	1143	478	239,12	464	
ahead concept victoriously flying	199	42	466,67	1051	
ai	26652	19059	139,84	1323	
agility development	270	42	642,86	1548	
aiming pov	173	116	146,61	57	
air car fresh air fresheners	345	201	171,64	802	
air car fresh smoke	99	88	112,5	1322	
air conditioner filter	43	36	113,16	1158	
air conditioner inverter	406	95	427,37	932	
air conditioner repair	75	28	267,86	50	
air conditioner repair hvac	2467	1700	145,12	1113	
air conditioning service ac repair	1935	1248	155,05	35	
air conditioning technician ac repair	1737	886	193,43	613	
air conditioning technician mechanic	649	644	100,78	223	
air conditioning technician open	2453	51	4809,8	175	
air conditioning technician open	7685	2371	324,29	397	
air conditioning technician open	7844	4849	161,77	171	
air conditioning technician open	1172	408	286,55	171	
air conditioning technician open	551	486	113,37	932	
air conditioning technician open	5094	462	1102,6	50	
air conditioning technician open	445	64	695,31	1113	
air conditioning technician open	2166	39	5553,65	743	
air conditioning technician open	6300	4755	132,49	35	
air conditioning technician open	382	69	510,14	223	
air conditioning technician open	1037	25	4148	175	
air conditioning technician open	269	28	957,14	397	



Unit components (PC)	Align knowledge to elements (RSK)	RPL EVIDENCE Best method? Examples of evidence?	Job tasks (remember foundation skills)
E1 Assist with barriers to job retention			
1.1 Support mentee in navigating barriers	1.1 Ways to identify need for LLN help (not to do this themselves) 1.2 Ways to identify need for help with learning skills such as FASD - keep within boundaries of skills and qualifications (ways to identify NOT identify) 1.3 Behavioral signs that suggest mentee could benefit from therapeutic supports 5 Barriers to employment for Aboriginal people living in remote and regional Australia - situational barriers etc	Prof conversation - how did you know mentee's needs, Why is support needed? What are the mentee's skill needs? Portfolio - de-identified plan, calendar of activities, mentor notes, referrals	Ensure attendance in early stage of employment and interviews - transport to and from, readiness, clean clothes, childcare Conduct individual mentee sessions on employability skills and employers' expectations such HR needs such as TFN, common workplace systems of communication, ways to receive employer feedback and review own performance on living skills such as Visit mentee's family to help them acknowledge new employment responsibilities - must be mindful checking..... Identify language, literacy, numeracy, learning skills concerns Knowledge - Ways to identify need for LLN help Knowledge - Ways to identify need for help with learning skills such as FASD - keep within boundaries of skills and qualifications Knowledge - Methods of gaining and providing feedback



Mapped assessment plan






Subject matter experts

- **Observations** – f2f on-the-job, live stream, challenge test, valid simulations, shadowing, wearables
- **Conversations** – interviews, integrated with observations, expand on self-assessment
- **Portfolio** – supports claim, third party verifications/conversations, work samples, non-formal learning (MCs), job description, work diaries/calendars, invoices, references, on-the-job blogging/reflections, formal reflective practice sessions

Judge evidence as it comes in

Use the Rules of Evidence

 <p>Observations</p>	 <p>Conversations</p>	 <p>Portfolio</p>
<p>Validity - does the observation align with the unit? Do simulations align with requirements of the unit and companion volume?</p>	<p>Validity - Did the candidate discuss practical application? Has the candidate noted how knowledge is applied in more than one situation? Do responses align with the unit?</p>	<p>Validity - do products align with the unit? Does candidates' role in producing the product align with the unit? Are policies and procedures annotated?</p>
<p>Authenticity - is this the candidate's own work? Is the candidate identified in videos?</p>	<p>Authenticity - has the candidate defined their role? Is the conversation consistent with the self-assessment and other evidence?</p>	<p>Authenticity - do products show evidence of candidates' own skills and knowledge? Has the candidate defined their role? Are non-formal credentials authentic?</p>
<p>Currency - are videos from the present or recent past?</p>	<p>Currency - are references to practical application from now or the recent past?</p>	<p>Currency - do artifacts reflect competency in current industry practice?</p>



Embrace RPL

“The most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach him accordingly”
Ausubel & Hanesian, 1968

