



NEW ZEALAND QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY
MANA TOHU MĀTAURANGA O AOTEAROA

**QUALIFY FOR THE FUTURE WORLD
KIA NOHO TAKATŪ KI TŌ ĀMUA AO!**

Recognising learning for credit: Guidelines for the recognition and award of credit for learning

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1. Introduction

These guidelines have been created for tertiary education organisations (TEOs) to develop and implement regulations, policies and processes that assist learners to have their relevant learning recognised and credited.

As the future of work changes with the impact of digital and other technologies, individuals will need to develop new skills and knowledge throughout their lives to demonstrate and maintain their currency in the workforce.

This concept of lifelong learning requires that the education system shift away from a paradigm of teaching and training to a paradigm of learning,

“from knowledge-conveying instruction to learning for personal development and from the acquisition of special skills to broader discovery and the releasing and harnessing of creative potential. This shift is needed at all levels of education and types of provision...”
(UNESCO Education Strategy, 2014 – 2021)

As a result, there will be an increasing focus on the recognition of formal, informal, non-formal, experiential and workplace learning. Credit recognition and transfer (CRT) and recognition of prior learning (RPL) enable people throughout their lives, and no matter how they have learned, to have their learning recognised and credentialed.

Effective CRT and RPL assists learners to move readily between education organisations, and progress in work and education without having to repeat learning or experiences or take additional credit.

1.1 Defining CRT and RPL

There are a wide range of ways in which learning can be recognised, credited and credentialed. This document uses CRT and RPL.

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) describes credit recognition and transfer as a process where credit for outcomes already achieved by a student in relation to a qualification is recognised as credit for comparable outcomes in another qualification.

Recognition of prior learning is a process that involves formal assessment of a learner’s relevant and current knowledge and skills (gained through prior learning) to determine achievement of learning outcomes of a qualification.

Recognition of prior learning leads to credit being awarded for current and relevant skills, knowledge, and attributes achieved, without regard for the length, place or method of learning (e.g. workplace, life experience, hobbies, self-directed study).

The following are other commonly used terms:

Credit Transfer (CT): credit awarded for having successfully completed an identical programme or standard at the same tertiary education organisation or another accredited tertiary education organisation.

Cross Credit (CC): credit awarded for having successfully completed an equivalent course or standard at the same tertiary education organisation or another accredited tertiary education organisation.

Assessment of Prior Learning (APL): similar to RPL with an assessment of learning carried out by challenge test, professional conversation or panel presentation, along with a portfolio of evidence.

Assessment of Current Competency: an assessment of a learner’s existing skills and knowledge to ensure they remain up to date and valid against the relevant learning areas.

Advanced Standing: As a result of being awarded credit recognition, an applicant may be eligible to enter a programme or qualification at an advanced level following an assessment of prior learning, qualification equivalence or current competency.

Advanced standing is a feature of articulation arrangements between TEOs, whereby learning achieved by learners at one TEO is recognised automatically at another TEO.

2. CRT and RPL: TEO's responsibilities

Tertiary education organisations have a range of opportunities to support and promote CRT and RPL through their overall systems and regulations; and the information, advice, and support provided to learners.

Learners can face real and opportunity costs where their existing relevant learning is not recognised or credited. As such, while making information about CRT and RPL processes available to learners is important, TEOs are also expected to be proactive about engaging with learners at the point of enrolment to determine whether they are likely to have existing learning that can contribute to the graduate outcomes of the qualification.

Effective assessment for recognising learning and award of credit is strengthened when CRT and RPL policies and practices are integrated into a TEO's quality management and academic systems.

TEOs seeking programme and training scheme approval are required to have clear, relevant, and appropriate regulations that specify requirements for credit recognition and transfer and the recognition of prior learning (*NZQA approval and accreditation rules 2013, rule 4, criterion 5*).

TEOs must balance the opportunities for learners to progress without repeating learning with maintaining confidence in the integrity of qualifications and other learning.

Key features of effective CRT and RPL policies and practices place the learner at the centre of consideration, and focus on the learning they have obtained.

TEOs should:

- integrate CRT/RPL into their overall systems, regulations, policies and practice. Examples include each of programme development, approval and review, assessment and moderation, organisational self-assessment and external review
- approve appropriate quality assurance and academic regulations, policies and procedures that apply across all learning areas of the organisation
- promote, through all relevant means, information about the requirements for CRT/RPL
- provide accessible academic advice and support to assist learners apply for credit recognised through CRT/RPL
- ensure decisions about CRT/RPL are timely, transparent, robust, consistent and defensible and for the maximum benefit of learners.

3. Recognising learning and awarding credit

To achieve a qualification listed on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF), a learner needs to complete a programme that enables them to achieve the requirements of the qualification, particularly the graduate profile. Outcomes are described in terms of knowledge, skills and attributes, and their application, or what the learner can “*do, be and know*”.

Programmes are made up of components of learning and/or assessment standards which specify the learning outcomes that together build towards achievement of the graduate profile. Some examples of components are individual courses, modules, papers or projects that a learner undertakes to complete a programme.

Recognising learning and awarding credit is undertaken by evaluating learners’ skills and knowledge in relation to the graduate or other learning outcomes of a qualification, programme, component of learning, or assessment standard that have been quality assured.

3.1 Information for learners

Key, consistent information for learners regarding CRT/RPL should be made readily available for the learner on the TEO website, and in recruitment, admission and enrolment materials.

Information assists learners understand that their relevant skills and knowledge can be recognised and awarded appropriate credits for outcomes achieved (including qualifications where this is appropriate).

It needs to be clear to learners that CRT and RPL can be requested at any stage.

Information on applying for the award of credit through CRT and RPL includes:

- clear description of how credit can be awarded
- an outline of the organisation’s processes
- indicative timeframes to complete the application and assessment
- fee structure
- an outline of the documentation, evidence and assessment requirements
- an outline of how credit awarded through CRT/RPL may be integrated into the learners programme (while understanding that awarding credit is a separate process from entry into a specific programme).

3.2 Preparing for assessment

It is expected TEOs will provide academic and administrative advice and guidance to learners throughout the processes for recognising credit. The nature of the advice and guidance required will vary depending on the learner, the type and extent of evidence they have available and credit being sought.

The TEO’s first step should be to determine if the learner is able to obtain credit by assisting the learner to reflect on their previous study, other prior learning, work and life experiences.

The academic advisor and learner work together to:

- identify suitable qualifications, programmes and/or components for which the learner may be able to obtain credit
- understand the evidence the learner has available to them through their life, study and work experiences that would support their application
- identify gaps in their learning or experience and provide advice on how to fill the gaps
- support the learner in preparing for assessment.

The time taken to gather and build evidence for assessment varies depending on the learner and the learning outcomes or qualification for which they are seeking credit.

Geoff: a case study for RPL

Geoff comes to a TEO seeking a degree qualification in culinary arts. Geoff has a long career in the industry and is a chef in charge of his own kitchen and restaurant. Geoff has a trade-based cooking qualification obtained many years ago.

The TEO:

- undertakes a preliminary evaluation of the learner and identifies that the learner is likely to have knowledge, skills and attributes that can contribute to the graduate outcomes of the qualification
- works with the learner to self-assess their experience and to recognise their learning. For example, through asking the learner to consider statements and questions that prompt them to reflect on and record their experience and learning
- assists the learner to co-discover their skills, knowledge and attributes. For example, through drawing out from the learner learning they may not have known they had, such as theoretical knowledge likely to be needed to meet outcomes for credit toward higher level qualifications
- works with the learner to identify the evidence available and the evidence that needs to be gathered for the assessment of the learner's skills, knowledge and attributes
- assists the learner to map what the learner can know, do, be and show to the graduate outcomes of the qualification
- ascertains what the learner is missing and works with the learner to fill the gap(s). For example, a specific course or module may be needed to fully meet the graduate outcomes of the qualification
- assists the learner in preparing for assessment.

3.3 Assessing learning

Assessment is to evaluate if the learner has the skills and knowledge to meet the outcome of the qualification, programme, components and assessment standards for which they are seeking credit.

The principles of good assessment practice are that assessment is fair, valid, reliable, consistent and authentic.

The assessment takes into account credit already gained, for example through previous study as well as recognition of prior learning.

The assessor is normally a different person from the academic advisor, who advises the learner preparing their application.

Credit recognition and transfer

Typically, an assessor reviews the learner's verified official academic record/transcript or their New Zealand Record of Achievement to identify qualifications, programmes, components and assessment standards achieved. The assessor uses this information to determine if the outcomes achieved by the learner are equivalent either wholly, or in part, to the outcomes for which they are seeking credit.

Further information may be requested from the learner to help with the evaluation of their knowledge and skills. For example, specific details of the learning outcomes, activities and assessments of the qualifications, programmes, components and assessment standards achieved.

Recognition of prior learning

This assessment follows a process of analysing learning and gathering evidence about a learner's skills and knowledge gained through their life experiences, which are then related to learning outcomes of quality assured qualifications, programmes and components.

A learner may produce a portfolio of evidence, in digital and/or physical format, that could include a wide range of evidence.

Depending on the credit sought and the nature of the learner's prior experiential and workplace learning, the assessment(s) may include one or more of:

- Challenge tests
- Practical assessment
- Professional conversation or interview with the assessor(s)
- Presentation of and a review of the portfolio of evidence with the assessor(s).

RPL assessment is a specialist skill, and the RPL assessor(s) commonly engages subject matter experts and/or a panel in the assessment process.

Typically, a learner's skills and knowledge gained through a wide range of experiential, workplace and formal learning are evaluated by suitable assessors. Assessors may require specific training in RPL.

CRT and RPL in degrees

Section 253B(3) of the Education Act requires that NZQA must not consent to the granting of degree awards unless satisfied that the award recognises the completion of a programme of advanced learning that:

- (a) is taught mainly by people engaged in research; and
- (b) emphasises general principles and basic knowledge as the basis for self-directed work and learning.

This means that an institute of technology and polytechnic, wānanga or private training establishment must make clear in its regulations how it manages, facilitates and assesses applications for CRT and RPL to meet this test.

3.4 Awarding credit

Credit arising from CRT and RPL is recorded on the learner's official academic transcript. If the credit is based on CRT, the grade achieved by the learner from their previous learning is recorded and transferred at the same value as part of the credit awarded.

In general, full or partial credit is awarded for:

- a learner's achievement of comparable outcomes
- recorded achievement, whether or not it forms part or all of a complete qualification
- achievement at the level consistent with the learner's demonstrated level of competence
- achievement that is at the same level as the credit being sought.

The TEO should ensure that learning credited through CRT/RPL and formal learning is of equal standing. This means there are no arbitrary barriers or limits on the learning that can be credited through CRT/RPL and that any restrictions on credit are based on specific, documented, and clear legal, academic or industry requirements e.g. registration body.

3.5 Appealing decisions

Where credit is not awarded, either in total or in part, clear reasons for the decision should be recorded. TEOs should make information available and have processes in place to enable learners to seek a review or appeal of the decision.

3.6 Records

Records of all applications for CRT/RPL and the outcomes including reviews should be maintained along with other learner records.

4. Quality Assurance

It is important to protect and maintain confidence in the quality of the delivery and assessment leading to the award of credit on the NZQF.

The TEOs systems, regulations, policies and processes for CRT and RPL are integrated into the academic and other quality management systems.

An equivalent level of scrutiny to all other learner achievement should be applied to decisions relating to the award of credit through CRT and RPL. This includes oversight of assessment, internal and external moderation, review of CRT and RPL.

4.1 Review of CRT/RPL policies

CRT and RPL policies should undergo regular internal review as part of organisational self-assessment processes, to ensure they remain fit for purpose and are administered fairly, consistently and rigorously.

CRT and RPL regulations are normally part of programme approval. They will be reviewed by TEOs every year, with a major review every 5 years.

Assessment through CRT/RPL may be a focus area within an external evaluation and review.