The RPL Candidate - A neglected stakeholder

A study of the lived experience of the RPL candidate
Australia’s negative RPL story…
The changing world of work

- Higher-level skills demands
- Jobs are changing
- Skills have an increasingly short shelf-life
- Australians on average change professions 5 times
- Globalisation is increasing labour competition
The Global Observatory of Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of Non-formal and Informal Learning

Labour Market RPL National Drivers

- Education Participation
- Employability
- Human Capital
- Labour Mobility
- Skills Matching
- Skills Shortage
- Global competitiveness
- Skilled Migration

Social Justice

- Decent work
- Education Participation
- Employability
- Lifelong Learning
- Social inclusion

Across 28 countries

Making skills transparent

RECOGNISING VOCATIONAL SKILLS ACQUIRED THROUGH WORKBASED LEARNING

Viktoria Kis, Hendrickje, Cathriona Windisch

OECD Education Working Papers
No. 160

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)
Learning Package
Highly-educated migrants are almost 50% more likely than similarly educated natives to be over-qualified for the job

How fast refugees find jobs that are reflective of their skills can make a difference of a 400 billion euros lost to a 20 billion euros surplus for the German government purse!
What we don’t know?

- Type of learning
- Behavioural data
- Return on investment
- Pedagogical knowledge

What we know?

2009 data - students have difficulty with

- Complexity of written instructions
- Lack of support from RTO and workplace
- Tardy turnaround time
- Excessive evidence requirements
Definitions

**RPL means** recognition of informal learning in the Australian VET sector

**Difficulties mean** things that make RPL hard to accomplish, deal with or understand

- Not necessarily insurmountable
- Doesn’t necessarily cause candidates to ‘quit’ RPL
How was information gathered and interpreted?
STAGE 1 - interview assessors

From your experience what difficulties do candidates experience?

- 21 Assessors
- 21 x 1-2 hour interviews
- Recorded and transcribed
- Summarised and themed
- Summary verified
- Analysed
- Quantified

STAGE 2 - interview candidates throughout RPL process

Tell me about ...  
- the difficulties are you experiencing?  
- your confidence in being successful at this RPL?  
- how much control you feel in the process?  
- how you are coping with these difficulties?

- 11 candidates
- 27 x 30min-2 hour phone interviews
- Recorded and transcribed
- Summarised and themed
- Summary verified
- Analysed and re-themed
- Quantified
- Stress test at NCVER conference
Candiates expressions extracted from semi-structured interviews

Word cloud production
I'm not confident I can do this. Employers are under no obligation. I'm going to have to re-establish work relationships. I really don't want to hassle her. That RTO has shut down. They've gone on maternity leave. I was just a contractor. I really don't want her in my life again!

I am competent but I don't have proof! We do it differently at my work! I really think this process assesses my competence to DO RPL not my workplace competence! So the gaps I found are NOT in knowledge, they're just gaps in evidence!!

This is such a DRAG! Work, Budget, Family, Promotion, Health, RPL, Divorce. Perhaps I don't know everything that I think I know… And what about more than 2 years ago? And what about non-NRT experience? This evidence partly addresses this element but also addresses a different element in another unit, I’ve got 6-7 pieces of evidence for this particular element but only 1 for this other part, how do I put emails with screen dumps and recordings?

My evidence is more than 2 years old but I think I’m still competent!! This is so much harder than I expected!! FOCUS!!!

I can’t find that stuff! I’m an assessor and I still am not sure what they want! What is the quality needed? What is sufficient? I’m not confident I can do this. My ex-employer must agree to share private and confidential information! I can’t find that stuff!
These are the main difficulties

- Time
- Employer dynamics
- Producing documentary evidence
- Mindset
DIFFICULTY themes

- Mindset: 41%
- Employer dynamics: 21%
- Producing documentary evidence: 27%
- Time: 8%
- Other: 3%
Connections with Stage 1 findings

DIFFICULTY THEMES

- Mindset: 30%
- Understanding RPL: 25%
- Employer dynamics: 11%
- Time: 6%
- Producing evidence: 10%
- Connecting evidence: 7%
- Assessor relationship dynamics: 6%
- Isolation: 5%
Mindset

41% of all difficulties

Sub-themes

1. Loss of confidence to do RPL
2. Resisting the RPL process as valid
3. Demotivated
4. Difficulty with feeling professionally questioned
5. Expectations - easier or quicker
Connection with Stage 1

Sub-themes

1. Loss of confidence to do RPL
2. Difficulty with feeling professionally judged or questioned
3. Expectations - easier or quicker
4. Can’t be bothered → demotivated
5. Motivation dynamics
6. Negative learning biography
7. Resist validity of standard or assessment
8. Expectations → hard
Mindset sub-themes

- Loss of confidence: 100%
- Feeling professionally questioned: 64%
- Expectations of being easier/quicker: 55%
- Demotivated: 73%
- Resisting the RPL process as valid: 91%
Loss of confidence

I’m not confident I can do this
Resisting the RPL process as valid or possible!

I really think this process assesses my competence to DO RPL not my workplace competence!

So the gaps I found are NOT in knowledge, they’re just gaps in evidence!!
Demotivated

This is such a DRAG!
Difficulty with feeling professionally questioned

Perhaps I don’t know everything that I think I know...

And what about more than 2 years ago?

And what about non-NRT experience?
Expectations of it being easier

This is so much harder than I expected!!
Producing documentary evidence

27% of all difficulties

1. I have experience but not the right documentary evidence
2. I understand RPL but unsure what the assessor wants
3. Sorting and organizing evidence
4. My evidence is too old
5. I cannot locate the evidence
6. Other
Sorting and organising evidence

I cannot locate the evidence

I have experience but not the right evidence

I have experience but am unsure what this RTO wants

I have experience but my evidence is too old

Other

% of Candidates

Producing documentary evidence sub-themes

64%

27%

100%

82%

55%

27%
I have experience but not the right evidence

I am competent but I don’t have proof!

We do it differently at my work!
I have experience but am unsure what the assessor wants.

I’m an assessor and I’m still unsure what they want!

What is the quality needed?

What is sufficient?
Sorting and organising evidence

This evidence partly addresses this element but also addresses a different element in another unit. I’ve got 6-7 pieces of evidence for this particular element but only 1 for this other part. How do I put emails with screen dumps and recordings?
My evidence is too old

My evidence is more than 2 years old but I think I’m still competent!!
I cannot locate the evidence

I can’t find that stuff!
Employer dynamics

21% of all difficulties

1. Eliciting employer buy-in
2. Privacy and confidentiality
3. Other
Employer Dynamics sub-themes

- Employer buy-in: 73%
- Privacy and confidentiality: 45%
- Other: 36%

% of candidates
Eliciting employer buy-in for verification

I’m going to have to re-establish these relationships.
I really don’t want to hassle her.
That RTO has shut down.
They’ve gone on maternity leave, long service leave...
I was just a contractor.
I really don’t want her in my life again!
There just isn’t any vested interest for ex-employers!
Privacy and confidentiality
Time!

8% of all difficulties

1. Time
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Difficulty Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currency of documentary evidence</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand RPL but unsure of what RTO wants</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have experience but not documentary evidence</td>
<td>539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can't find documentary evidence</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorting and organising evidence</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy and confidentiality</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliciting employer buy-in</td>
<td>528</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resisting the RPL process as valid</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demotivated</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations of being easier/quicker</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling professionally questioned</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of confidence</td>
<td>693</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What do candidates think of RPL?

- Ask me when I’m done!
- Great idea but ...
  - shame about the execution 😞

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES 😊</th>
<th>NO ☹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Empowering</td>
<td>✗ So difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Learnt lots</td>
<td>✗ Doing the course is easier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Good for the time poor</td>
<td>✗ There will always be gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Flexible times!</td>
<td>✗ Ticking boxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Apply your learning</td>
<td>✗ Not the easy way out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Employers access to competent people</td>
<td>✗ Too much rigor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Proud</td>
<td>✗ Launching into the unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Verifying my experience</td>
<td>✗ Surprisingly challenging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Learn underpinning knowledge</td>
<td>✗ NOT student focused!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Positive approach</td>
<td>✗ Cumbersome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Saves going over &amp; over the same thing</td>
<td>✗ Training packages don’t always translate to job roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Don’t have to start again</td>
<td>✗ Feel like I’m actually doing the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Shame to ignore all that work experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Good if you keep documents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Good when you work full time</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Evolving conclusion

This is NOT a confidence-building exercise

- The assumed potential benefit of RPL as a confidence building exercise is simply not so.
  - IF candidates get through to completion
  - IF candidates believe the RTO was comprehensive in assessing
  - IF candidates believe the activity was a valid assessment of the workplace competency
- Then YES! RPL can be a confidence building exercise
Evolving recommendation

Remove ‘performance evidence’ for RPL assessment

- RPL is an assessment of current competence
  - We believe competency can come about equally by informal learning
  - Why then do we mandate proof being a specific past performance?
  - When do we mandate a particular way a person came to being competent as prescribed in the Performance Evidence?
  - The elements and performance criteria give a picture of competence to assess against.
    - With trust in the assessor and industry validation can we not use this picture to assess current competency?