

## **RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) POLICY**

### **Document data:**

**Document type:** Rule/**Policy**/Plan/Guidelines/Operating Procedures

**Administering entity:** Academic Board

**Date approved:** 13 February 2015

**Latest amendment date:** 13 February 2015

**Approved by:** Academic Board/Principal

**Indicative time for review:** Annual

**Responsibility for review:** Academic Board

### **1. PRINCIPLE**

Top Education Institute (TOP) agrees with the principle that learning takes place both inside and outside the classroom and there is merit in explicitly recognising a student's completed prior learning. This is known in higher education as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). There are significant advantages in acknowledging prior learning including a more tailored and relevant course of study, elimination of duplication of learning, validation of learning gained through work and life experience and facilitating credit transfers between educational institutions.

TOP's RPL Policy complies with the requirements of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) including the following documents:

- AQF Recognition of Prior Learning: An Explanation (November 2012)
- AQF Credit Transfer: An Explanation (November 2012)
- AQF Articulation: An Explanation (November 2012)
- TEQSA Guidance Note: Nested Courses

TOP's RPL Policy strives to be equitable, evidence driven and provide a transparent process for determining an appropriate amount of RPL credit for each student.

### **2. SCOPE**

This Policy applies to all undergraduate and postgraduate courses offered by TOP and governs all articulation arrangements. It focuses on the credit that can potentially be given for RPL and procedures used to evidence prior learning.

### **3. DEFINITIONS**

#### **3.1 Learning Related Definitions**

*Learning Outcomes* – are the expression of the set of knowledge, skills and the application of the knowledge and skills a person has acquired and is able to demonstrate as a result of learning.

*Prior Learning* – is relevant learning that has taken place prior to admission into a course.

*Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)* - is a process that involves assessment of an individual's relevant prior learning (including formal, informal and non-formal learning) to determine the credit outcomes of an individual application for credit.

*Formal Learning* – takes place through a structured program of learning that leads to the full or partial achievement of an officially accredited qualification (e.g. course of study undertaken with a TEQSA registered education provider).

*Informal Learning* – is not a formally organised or structured activity but relevant learning still takes place (e.g. work, social, family, hobby or leisure activities and experiences).

*Non-formal Learning* – takes place through a structured program of learning but does not lead to an officially accredited qualification (e.g. workplace or community-based training activities).

### **3.2 Credit Related Definitions**

*Credit* – is the value assigned for the recognition of equivalence in content and learning outcomes between different types of learning and/or qualification. Credit reduces the amount of learning required to achieve a qualification and may be recognised through credit transfer, articulation, recognition of prior learning or advanced standing.

*Specified credit* - is granted for one or more specific units exempting students from those units and awarding the appropriate credit points in their place. It may be granted where the student has met the learning outcomes, attained the knowledge and/or developed the skills related to the specific units.

*Unspecified credit* - is granted in the form of credit points which take the place of elective units in a course. Unspecified credit may be granted where prior learning is judged to be relevant to the learning outcomes of a course as a whole but cannot be specifically related to an individual unit.

*Block Credit* - is granted towards whole stages or components of a course. For example, when a sequence of units undertaken at another institution is deemed sufficiently equivalent to the content and learning outcomes of a sequence of units at TOP, block credit may be granted.

*Credit transfer* - is a process that provides students with agreed and consistent credit outcomes for components of a qualification based on identified equivalence in content and learning outcomes between matched qualifications.

*Articulation* - enables students to progress from a completed qualification to another with admission and/or credit in a defined qualification pathway.

*Articulation agreement* - is an agreement between TOP and another institution to document and publicise a specifically approved pathway for progression between a course at the other institution and a TOP course, involving specific credit arrangements.

*Advanced standing* - is the granting of block credit of a semester or more. Advanced standing indicates that the student is deemed to have satisfied all the course requirements that are embedded in the semester(s) for which block credit has been awarded. Advanced standing reduces the number of units the student must undertake to successfully complete the whole course.

*Nested Course* – is a course of study leading to a higher education award that includes articulation arrangements from a lower level education award into a higher level education award to enable multiple entry and exit points. The articulation may relate to previous studies at TOP or at other recognised educational institutions. A nested course may also include a shorter course within a longer course within the same discipline, both at the same AQF level.

#### 4. PRINCIPLES FOR GRANTING CREDIT

- 4.1 TOP has an equitable, evidence driven and transparent process for determining an appropriate amount of RPL credit for each student. Consistent with the process, RPL will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis on the merits of the case put forward by the student. Educational judgments concerning equivalence of learning outcomes are based on the discipline context, content, standards and assessment in the program or course the applicant has undertaken.
- 4.2 Specified credit for RPL may be granted on successful completion of the prior learning in relevant disciplines to achieve learning outcomes that are substantially equivalent to TOP's relevant unit(s) or nested course(s).
- 4.3 Unspecified credit or block credit may be granted where prior learning is regarded as consistent with the broad learning outcomes of units or the course being undertaken. The unspecified credit will be restricted to non-core components of a course.
- 4.4 The maximum credit granted in recognition of prior learning achieved in an **incomplete course** is 50 per cent of the total credit points of a TOP course.
- 4.5 The maximum credit granted in recognition of prior learning achieved in a **completed course**, which does not substantially match any TOP nested course, is 50 per cent of the total credit points of the TOP course.
- 4.6 Where a completed course substantially matches a TOP course that is a **nested course** within a higher level or longer course within the same

discipline, credit granted in recognition of prior learning achieved shall be the full credit point value of the nested course.

- 4.7 The maximum credit of 50% of a TOP course applies in all instances except where completed prior study is a nested course. The 50% maximum credit ensures that students undertake a study period at TOP sufficient to satisfy the specified learning outcomes for the course in which they are engaged and as prescribed by the AQF. For example, to meet the learning objectives of a Master's degree in a specified discipline at TOP this would normally require a minimum study period of two semesters.
- 4.8 Prior learning that has been completed within the last ten years will in general be considered to be current. Exceptions to the ten year time period may be approved in individual cases by the Head of the relevant School.

## **5 PROCEDURES FOR GRANTING CREDIT**

- 5.1 The assessment of prior learning is based on an evaluation of the evidence presented, using the following criteria:

*Validity* - the prior learning matches both the qualification type and the discipline learning outcomes for the relevant course. The applicant's standard of achievement in the prior learning is consistent with the qualification level and type specified for the course.

*Authenticity* – the prior learning has been undertaken by the applicant and the standard of achievement in the prior learning is based on the applicant's own work.

*Currency* – the prior learning has been achieved within the specified time limit for credit.

*Sufficiency* - the evidence of prior learning is sufficient to reliably verify the learning outcomes achieved are at the appropriate standard. In recognising prior learning consideration needs to be given to whether the volume of learning is sufficient in the context of the discipline for the AQF level and qualification type, as well as whether there is a sufficient portion of qualification components at the AQF level.

- 5.2 Prospective students who wish to apply for RPL must indicate this intent on the Student Application Form, and also complete the Exemption/RPL Form. These forms must then be submitted to the Admissions Office with the following supporting documents:

- A certified copy of academic transcript/completion letter or equivalence;
- A detailed, official unit outline for each unit in which credit is sought.

The outline must show the:

- unit details (institution details, unit name and number);

- semester/year of study;
- contact hours per week;
- coverage of the unit, topics discussed each week;
- assessment structure; and
- reference and reading materials including textbooks.

5.3 Where an applicant seeks credit for prior learning for a course or unit completed at TOP to meet the requirement of another TOP course, the Admissions Office may process the application without the supporting documents specified in 5.2.

5.4 Where a student applies for credit on the basis of prior work experience, the following need to be submitted as supporting documents:

- Certified supporting documents from the employer including:
  - job title;
  - organisation name, department and URL;
  - number of employees;
  - type and duration of employment (e.g. full time, part-time, casual);
  - a description of the tasks for which the applicant was responsible, and how they relate to the disciplinary area; and
  - at least one original employment reference which supports the CV of the applicant.

Other information which may be useful in determining RPL and which should be supplied if available include:

- Detailed resume/curriculum vitae setting out educational qualifications and work experience.
- Portfolio of work completed that relate to the relevant skills and knowledge of the course.
- Project reports.
- Third party assessments of the applicant's work skills.
- Evidence of other qualifications and professional development courses completed.
- Referees' reports.

5.5 Where a student applies for credit on the basis of prior work experience as a self-employed person, the supporting documents must also include:

- A copy of business certificate of registration.
- A letter from the student's accountant or solicitor stating:
  - how long the applicant has been continuously engaged in the business, and
  - the nature of the business.

- 5.6 Where considered necessary, an interview conducted by the relevant Head of School will be held with the student to clarify aspects of prior learning.
- 5.7 Supporting documents and evidence of studies taken overseas in a language other than English must be accompanied by a translation from a National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) qualified freelance or private agency. Such an agency must have been accredited as at least a 'translator'. All translated documents must display the official NAATI stamp which is provided to all qualified translators.
- 5.8 Students must submit original documents or certified copies. However, while students may submit electronic copies of supporting documents to facilitate enrolment, credit for RPL cannot be granted without sighting original documents or certified copies.
- 5.9 The Admissions Office shall preliminarily assess all RPL applications to determine if applications meet the stated requirements before submitting them to the Academic Assessor who is delegated by the Head of School to give final approval.
- 5.10 Prospective students shall be informed of the results of their RPL applications in the Offer Letter and where necessary fees adjusted accordingly. Any conditions of the RPL approval shall be stated in the Offer Letter. In the case of international students, a Confirmation of Enrolment shall be issued subject to the consideration and approval of any RPL application.
- 5.11 All RPL applications shall close by the census day of each teaching period with respect to any application for granting of credit in the same teaching period.
- 5.12 Any credit granted for RPL shall be recorded in the student data system as part of the applicant's study progression.
- 5.13 Where an error has been made in assessing an application, or where the documentation provided by the applicant is incomplete, misleading, false or invalid, TOP reserves the right to withdraw credit.

## **6 QUALITY ASSURANCE**

TOP will confirm that RPL credit remains valid and appropriate for the TOP units and courses by assuring the following occurs.

- Assessment of RPL is evidence based and occurs on a transparent basis.
- Assessment of RPL confirms that the learning outcomes have been met.

- Credit awarded by another institution on the basis of RPL is not transferable to TOP.
- Grades of “conceded pass” or “terminating pass” or equivalent from another educational institution will not be deemed to be successful completion of learning outcomes for the purposes of granting credit at TOP.
- Standards for the assessment of RPL are reviewed annually by TOP’s Teaching, Learning and Examinations Committee.
- Specific decisions relating to the awarding of RPL credit are periodically reviewed by the TOP’s Teaching, Learning and Examinations Committee.

## **7 APPEALS**

Where an application for RPL is refused in whole or in part, a student may appeal for a review of the application. The appeal must be lodged with the Administration Office within 10 working days of the dates of notification of the RPL credit decision. The documentation must set out the grounds for the appeal. The Head of the relevant School shall make the final decision regarding the appeal application after a careful review of the RPL application including all supporting documentation.

## **8 RELATED DOCUMENTS**

Guidelines for the Amount of Credit Awarded for the Completion of a Nested Course

Student Selection and Admissions Policy

Application for Academic Credit