

IAL ACADEMIC POLICY PAPER

Title: Strategic Approaches to the Formalisation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Underpinning the Training and Adult Educator Professional Pathway (TAEPP)

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1. Executive Summary

This paper presents a strategic policy framework for the formalisation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) at the Institute for Adult Learning (IAL). The primary impetus for this policy is the launch of the **Training and Adult Educator Professional Pathway (TAEPP)**, which seeks to professionalise and establish credentials for the Training and Adult Education (TAE) sector. IAL's current credit exemption model, which recognises equivalent formal qualifications, serves as a strong foundation. This paper proposes a strategic approach to formalise a robust pathway for assessing and recognising *prior experiential learning*. This dual-track framework is benchmarked against global best practices (illustrated in Appendix A Table A2) and is designed to position IAL as a world-class institution that values the diverse competencies of practicing Adult Educators (AEs), accelerates their professional development, and ensures the successful implementation of the TAEPP.

2. Introduction: The Strategic Case for RPL

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a cornerstone of a mature, learner-centric, and flexible lifelong learning system. It is an academic and assessment process that evaluates the relevant prior learning (including formal, informal, and non-formal learning) of an individual to determine the outcomes of a credit application (AQFC, 2013).

For IAL, RPL is not merely an administrative function but a strategic enabler. As Singapore's institute for Adult Education, IAL has a unique opportunity to lead the sector in valuing and credentialing the vast, often uncodified, expertise of its practitioners.

The current IAL Credit Exemption model, as detailed on the institute's website, provides an excellent mechanism for **RPL (Type 1): Credit Transfer**. This pathway effectively grants exemption for modules within the WSQ ACLP and DDDLDP programmes to applicants who possess "a comparable TAE qualification" with "sufficient equivalence in content and learning outcomes."

This paper argues for the formal establishment of **RPL (Type 2): Skills Credentialing**. This pathway is designed for experienced practitioners who lack equivalent *formal* qualifications but can demonstrate *equivalent* competencies acquired through professional practice, non-formal learning, and extensive work experience. The strategic imperative for this formalisation is the TAEPP. The concept and process of skills credentialing are derived from the current Skills Badging conducted by IAL. To enhance clarity and streamline processes, we propose to replace Skills Badging with Skills Credentialing under RPL (Type 2). Successful applicants through this pathway are recognised for their experiential learning equivalent to the competencies and skills articulated by the learning outcomes of formal IAL programmes, granted credit exemptions for the relevant modules, and given the corresponding skills credentials through digital badges. In other words, successful Skills Credentialing leads to both credit exemption and skills badges.

3. The TAEPP Imperative: The Core Strategic Driver

The Training and Adult Educator Professional Pathway (TAEPP) is the underpinning strategic push for this expanded RPL policy. The success of the TAEPP rests on its ability to be inclusive, aspirational, and rigorous.

A significant cohort of experienced practitioners exists within Singapore's Training and Adult Education (TAE) landscape. These individuals possess deep tacit knowledge and high-level competencies but may not hold the recent formal qualifications (e.g., ACLP 2.0) that serve as gateways to the TAEPP.

A comprehensive RPL framework is the *key* to engaging this vital cohort. It provides a respectful, rigorous, and efficient mechanism to:

1. **Validate Professional Expertise:** Formally recognise the skills of experienced AEs against the competencies defined in the TAEPP.
2. **Enable Professional Standing:** Grant advanced standing in IAL programmes (such as DDDL 2.0) and pathways, moving practitioners efficiently towards higher credentials.
3. **Identify Specific Gaps:** By assessing what a practitioner *knows and can do*, RPL pinpoints the precise modules they *need*, enabling targeted, high-impact professional development rather than redundant training.

4. **Accelerate Professionalisation:** It makes the TAEPP accessible and attractive, demonstrating that IAL values professional experience as much as it values formal learning.

Without a robust experiential RPL pathway, the TAEPP risks excluding a core group of experienced professionals, thereby slowing its adoption and perceived relevance.

4. Benchmarking Best Practices in RPL

World-class institutions, particularly those focused on adult and professional education, have moved beyond simple credit transfer to embrace comprehensive RPL frameworks.

- **Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF):** Australia's VET system (e.g., TAFEs) and universities (e.g., Deakin University) are global leaders in the field of RPL. They mandate that RPL be offered for all qualifications. The primary assessment method is a **portfolio of evidence**, where learners map their experience against unit learning outcomes, supported by work samples, third-party reports, and reflective statements.
- **The UK Open University (OU):** The OU is a pioneer in valuing non-formal learning. They use "credit for prior learning" to assess both certificated learning (credit transfer) and "experiential learning," which is assessed via written portfolios that demonstrate how a learner's experience meets specific module learning outcomes.
- **European Digital Credentials (EDC):** The European Commission provides an end-to-end infrastructure for creation, issuance, storage, access, sharing, and verification of EDC for learning. An EDC can be awarded in the context of formal education, training, online courses, volunteering experiences, non-formal learning, and other similar settings, and can take the form of diplomas, micro-credentials, certificates of participation, or any other type of learning record.
- **Canadian & US Models (CAEL):** The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) in the United States promotes the **Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)** portfolio as a standard. Many universities also utilise **Challenge Examinations**, allowing learners to directly attempt the final assessment for a course to prove mastery.

The common principles across these best-practice models are:

- **Equivalence, Not Identity:** The assessment does not look for an identical learning *experience* but for equivalent learning *outcomes*.

- **Trained Assessors:** Assessment is conducted by subject-matter experts who are also trained specialists in RPL assessment methodology.
 - **Clear Guidance:** Learners are supported by dedicated advisors and clear guidelines on portfolio development.
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5. Proposed IAL Policy Framework: A Dual-Track Approach

This paper proposes that IAL's current "Credit Exemption" policy be formalised and expanded into a comprehensive "Recognition of Prior Learning Framework." This framework will operate on two distinct, parallel tracks. Annex A provides the details for the RPL criteria and guidelines, following best practices synthesised from globally established frameworks and institutions.

Policy Principles

All RPL decisions at IAL shall be governed by the principles of:

- **Validity:** Assessment methods shall be appropriate and measure the relevant learning outcomes.
- **Reliability:** Assessments shall be consistent and reproducible.
- **Fairness & Transparency:** The process, criteria, fees, and appeal mechanisms shall be transparent, equitable, and publicly accessible.
- **Learner-Centricity:** The process shall be supportive and constructive, aimed at facilitating professional progression.

Track 1: Credit Transfer (Based on Formal Learning)

This track formalises IAL's current, successful model.

- **Purpose:** To grant credit for *equivalent formal qualifications* from recognised institutions.
- **Scope:** WSQ ACLP, DDDL, and other designated TAEPP-aligned programmes.
- **Mechanism:** Submission of application, academic transcripts, and qualification certificates. Assessment is conducted by IAL administration and programme teams in accordance with the established Credit Transfer Table.
- **Process:** The current process (application before enrolment, 14-day processing time, non-refundable administrative fee) is efficient and should be retained.

- **Fees:** Individual applicants seeking RPL through Credit Transfer from programmes already endorsed by IAL would pay a non-refundable administrative fee. Credit Transfer applications for programmes currently not on IAL's endorsed list must be submitted by institutions offering the programmes, where the individual institution would pay a non-refundable administrative and additional evaluation fee calculated based on IAL's established education consultancy rates.

Track 2: Skills Credentialing (Based on Experiential Learning)

This is another pathway designed to support the TAEPP.

- **Purpose:** To assess and grant credit for *experiential and non-formal learning* demonstrated to be equivalent to module learning outcomes.
- **Target Cohort:** Experienced Adult Educators and practitioners lacking direct equivalent qualifications.
- **Scope:** Initially, key modules within ACLP and DDDLDP that are competency-based.
- **Mechanism:** A formal **Portfolio Assessment**.
 1. **RPL Advisory:** The applicant is informed on Skills Credentialing via the introductory resources available on IAL's corporate website, supported by an advisory session to comment on the sufficiency of the Portfolio. The RPL Advisory first looks at the portfolio to determine whether it meets the rubrics for the Skills Badges applied for, without concern for the authenticity of the applicant's proof-of-practice.
 2. **Portfolio Development:** The applicant, guided by a portfolio kit, compiles a structured portfolio of evidence. This may include:
 - Reflective accounts mapped to module learning outcomes.
 - Workplace evidence (e.g., training plans, assessment tools developed, project reports, other proofs of facilitation).
 - Third-party verification where applicable (e.g., testimonials from employers, client feedback).
 3. **Portfolio Assessment:** The portfolio is assessed by an experienced IAL RPL Assessor (a subject-matter expert), supported by a skills badging AI system where applicable.

4. **Competency Interview:** The Assessor conducts a professional interview to probe the evidence and confirm authenticity of proof-of-practice by the applicant. The assessment is encapsulated in an Assessment Report.
 5. **Review and Approval of Assessment Report:** The Assessor submits the Assessment Report and recommendation for the award of the Skills Badge(s) to IAL, which is further reviewed by an IAL Skills Credentialing reviewer before submission to the Director, LPDD, for final approval for issuance of the Skills Badges.
- **Fees:** Skills Credentialing is a high-touch assessment process requiring specialist expertise. The fee structure for Track 2 must reflect the academic rigour and time involved for skills assessment. Applicants would pay a non-refundable administrative and additional evaluation fee, calculated based on IAL's established education consultancy rates.
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6. Strategic Implications and Recommendations

Adopting this expanded RPL framework will yield significant benefits:

- **Positions IAL as a Leader:** Aligns IAL with global best practices in adult education.
- **Drives TAEPP Success:** Provides the essential mechanism to onboard experienced practitioners, giving the TAEPP immediate traction and credibility.
- **Enhances Learner Experience:** Offers a flexible, respectful pathway for professionals, reinforcing IAL's learner-centric mission.

Key Recommendations for Implementation:

1. **Establish an RPL Unit:** Create a dedicated team within IAL to manage both RPL tracks, provide learner advisory services, and ensure quality.
2. **Develop an RPL Assessor Cadre:** Identify and train a pool of IAL subject-matter experts in the methodologies of Skills Credentialing and portfolio assessment.
3. **Create RPL Portfolio Kits:** Develop clear, comprehensive guides and templates for applicants targeting specific modules (e.g., "Skills Credentialing Portfolio for ACLP Module 2").
4. **Update Policy Documents:** Revise the IAL website and all relevant academic policies to reflect this comprehensive two-track framework.

7. Conclusion

The strategic formalisation of Recognition of Prior Learning is a critical and timely initiative. It moves beyond a simple administrative process to become a core academic function that directly underpins the success of the Training and Adult Educator Professional Pathway. By implementing this robust, dual-track framework, IAL will not only champion the principles of lifelong learning but also strategically build and accelerate the professionalisation of Singapore's Training and Adult Education sector. Hence, the IAL LPDD team seeks the support and endorsement of AQC members for the proposed dual-track RPL framework.

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Annex A: RPL Criteria and Guidelines

This annex provides an overview of the general criteria and guidelines for RPL at IAL Singapore, benchmarked against best practices for RPL based on prior certified learning and experiential learning. Table A1 is a summary of the criteria and guidelines for applicants applying to IAL for RPL:

Table A1: Overview of RPL Criteria and Guidelines

The dual-track RPL approach at IAL will observe the following criteria and guidelines for the purpose of seeking credit exemption from IAL programmes:

RPL Track	Maximum Credit Exemptible	Time Limit for Currency	Criteria for RPL	Skills Badging
Credit Transfer	50%	10 years	Credits awarded by a recognised institution or programme endorsed by IAL with minimum 75% comparable learning outcomes and rigorous assessment	No
Skills Credentialing		5 years	Assessment through a portfolio equivalent to the required learning outcomes	Yes
<p>Note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To attain the full WSQ qualification or programme with an RPL, the applicant will need to enrol and successfully complete the remaining non-exempted module(s) of the respective TAE WSQ programme. Attainment of the full WSQ qualification is a prerequisite for application to obtain the full list of skills badges tied to a programme via Skills Credentialing. A non-refundable administration fee and additional evaluation fee for every module for which an RPL is being applied are applicable for each RPL application submission. Statement of Attainments (SOAs) will not be awarded to candidates who receive RPL for the module(s) applied. 				

Table A2 compares recognition of prior learning (RPL) policies across various renowned universities worldwide, examining how prior learning is mapped to formal learning outcomes. The universities examined, spanning institutions in Australia, Singapore, Europe, the United Kingdom, and North America, demonstrate significant variation in policy frameworks, maximum credit limits, currency requirements, and mapping methodologies. Notably, while traditional credit transfer and exemption policies remain the standard approach across all reviewed institutions, emerging digital credentials frameworks are reshaping how micro-credentials and skills badges align with institutional learning outcomes. Table A1 shows the analysis results:

Table A2: Established RPL Practices Worldwide

Institution	Maximum Credit Allowed	Time Limit for Prior Learning	Specific Assessment Criteria	Skills Credentialing Status
NTU Singapore	Credential-specific, 42.5% (undergrad)	5 years	Approximately 75% match in content, comparable contact or workload hours, and examinable with a letter-grade	FlexiMasters micro-credentials for adult learners stackable to 50% of a master's degree
NUS	50% (non-NUS); unlimited (NUS courses)	10 years	Courses from recognised institutions, comparable content, sophistication level, relevance	Completing a stackable certificate series with micro-credentials may later count toward a graduate qualification, subject to the programme

Institution	Maximum Credit Allowed	Time Limit for Prior Learning	Specific Assessment Criteria	Skills Credentialing Status
University of Melbourne	50%	2-8 years (10 years with Dean's special approval)	Comparable learning outcomes, content, assessment, contact hours, and credit weighting; AQF compliant	Piloting competency-based assessment
University of New South Wales	50%	10 years	<p>RPCL: comparable credential, quality, level, and content; AQF compliant</p> <p>RPEL: demonstration of comparable outcomes</p>	Digital badges implemented for AGSM short courses and HR for all UNSW staff
King's College London	Programme-specific	Reasonable currency	<p>RPCL: comparable learning outcomes and evidence supporting the achievement of outcomes</p> <p>RPEL: assessment through personal statement and portfolio or otherwise equivalent to the</p>	Piloting digital badges at King's Business School

Institution	Maximum Credit Allowed	Time Limit for Prior Learning	Specific Assessment Criteria	Skills Credentialing Status
			<p>required learning outcomes;</p> <p>EDC adoption planned</p>	
University of London	33.3% (4 first-year courses)	5 years	<p>Level 4+ equivalent, comparable content and assessment standards; EDC adoption planned</p>	Not formally implemented
University of Oxford	Limited brought-in credit on some award-bearing programs	Program me-specific limits	<p>Level 4+ accredited courses mapped to program learning outcomes; discretionary</p>	No university-wide badges; some short courses issue certificates rather than badges
UK Open University	66.7% (fully RPCL or with a maximum 8.3% from RPEL, i.e., 1 course)	5-16 years	<p>RPCL: Comparable learning outcomes, syllabus, and content</p> <p>RPEL: Demonstrated learning outcomes, knowledge, skills, and behaviour</p>	<p>Implemented OpenLearn badges for short courses in workplace skills acquisition, potentially usable for RPCL</p>

Institution	Maximum Credit Allowed	Time Limit for Prior Learning	Specific Assessment Criteria	Skills Credentialing Status
			requirements, and passing self-assessment and online quiz	
ETH Zurich	3.3% (1-2 courses)	Program me-specific limits	Only ETH credits not used for other degrees can be considered and must be approved by a tutor; Potential adoption of EDC	Not formally implemented
University of Toronto	Credential-specific	Not stated	Comparable content from an accredited institution, and having obtained one grade higher than the passing grade	Not formally implemented
Harvard University	25% for credits abroad and 50% for transfer students	Department-specific guidelines	Comparable content, minimum C-grade, but varies by department	Mainly implemented by Harvard Business School with digital badges for AI applications

Institution	Maximum Credit Allowed	Time Limit for Prior Learning	Specific Assessment Criteria	Skills Credentialing Status
Stanford University	25% for undergrad and 50% for transfer students	Varies (typically recent study)	Comparable content, minimum C- or pass grade; Using one of the CAEL methods	Stanford Online issues digital badges of completion for courses and digital certificates of achievement for programmes. No badges specifically for skills.