

## **PRINCIPLES FOR PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION (PLAR) FOR ACADEMIC CREDIT OR OTHER FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS**

### **Definition of PLAR**

PLAR is based on a belief/value system that supports opportunities for individuals to have all relevant learning recognized and counted towards a qualification. It is consistent with other strategies that support diverse and inclusive pathways to lifelong learning.

Prior learning may be acquired through academic study, work, or other formal and informal learning activities. When used to earn formal qualifications, PLAR is a process that identifies, verifies, and recognizes learning (knowledge and skills) that cannot be fully recognized through the traditional mechanisms of credential assessment, credit transfer, articulation, or accreditation.

### **PLAR Principles**

Principles are concepts that can guide policy and practice. The following PLAR principles were developed by the Canadian Institute for Recognizing Learning (CIRL) following extensive examination and synthesis of PLAR principles and processes used by educational institutions, regulatory bodies, and governments across Canada and in other countries. These principles can be used to develop criteria for valid PLAR processes for academic credit or other formal qualifications.

#### **Accessibility**

PLAR is a tool for facilitating access – access to education, employment, promotion, and occupational licensing/certification. The purpose of PLAR is to provide alternative mechanisms to identify, verify, and recognize knowledge and skills acquired through non-sponsored learning (e.g. work).

#### **Accountability**

Many organizations are accountable to the public and to government for their operations. This accountability requires formal policies and practices that frame PLAR activities and ensure evaluation of the process and its outcomes.

#### **Criterion-referencing**

Prior learning assessment and recognition is criterion-referenced. That is, candidate knowledge and skills must be identified and measured against pre-set standards. Standards ensure consistent results even if assessment methods and tools vary.

#### **Efficiency**

Pressures created by uncertainties in applicant volume and the high cost of assessment require efficient PLAR processes to ensure affordability for candidates and assessing agencies.

#### **Equity**

PLAR is intended to treat candidates equally without discrimination based on the source of their learning. To be equitable, the PLAR process should hold candidates to the same standard of competency or qualification as individuals who have not undertaken PLAR. PLAR should not involve assessment processes that are more rigorous than assessment of knowledge and skills through more traditional means.

#### **Legality**

Many organizations engaged in PLAR are responsible for ensuring compliance with legislation. PLAR should fit within the legal frameworks that guide organizational operations.

**Quality**

The quality of the PLAR process is related to the quality of a candidate's subsequent performance. PLAR should assess the relevance, currency, and sufficiency of candidates' prior learning. The qualifications of prior learning assessors should reflect an expertise in PLAR and the subject area of the assessment.

**Right of Appeal**

Candidates should have the right to appeal unsuccessful assessments of their prior learning through a formal process.

**Transparency**

In democratic societies, the public has a right to be informed about processes and decisions that have an impact on their lives. Details on the PLAR process, its purpose, criteria and steps, and the factors upon which PLAR decisions are made, should be made available to candidates.

**Validity and Reliability**

Measurement experts agree that assessment tool validity is tied to the purposes for which an assessment is used. Thus, a test might be valid for one purpose but inappropriate for other purposes. The reliability and validity of PLAR methods and tools are critical to its credibility and should be evaluated.