VÕTA VÕIMALUS

Recognition
of Prior Learning (**RPL**).
**ASSESSOR'S GUIDE**

Inga Vau

Primus is a programme funded by the European Union Structural Funds for the period 2008–2013 and implemented by the Archimedes Foundation. The aim of the programme is to support the quality of study in higher education institutions and raise the level of competitiveness of their graduates. Improving the quality of RPL is one of the fields of activity of the Primus programme.

**Author** Inga Vau
**Editor** Siret Rutiku
**Proofreader** Ene Voolaid

# Contents

**VÕTA VÕIMALUS**

# Preface

This guide is a supplement to the 2008 RPL guide for assessors. RPL has developed so rapidly in the Estonian education system in the past four years that several aspects that needed explication then have become routine and taken for granted, and several questions have found answers as a result of discussions and learning. However, knowing the answers often raises other questions and the answers to these need to be shared to a wider audience from time to time.

This RPL Assessor's Guide pays less attention to RPL objectives and theoretical background, and a separate guide has been compiled regarding the RPL process and principles[1]. Therefore, this guide discusses in detail only topics that pertain to assessors' practical work; for example, how to ensure the quality of RPL assessment, how to find the most suitable solutions for the parties in the assessment process and how to provide feedback that, irrespective of the decision, would be valuable to the applicant and promote his/her development. The questions for reflection at the end of each chapter should support the analysis of assessors' competencies as well.

The data in the examples here are sometimes taken from real life; however, none of the examples is an exact copy of a real-life situation.

---

[1] Manual for the Recognition of Prior Learning, compiled by Siret Rutiku, Inga Vau and Raul Ranne. Archimedes Foundation. Tartu, 2011.

# 1. Nature of and prerequisites for RPL assessment

In the most general terms, 'assessment' means that somebody assesses something. In the context of learning, assessment is that part of the learning process during which certain assessment criteria and methods are used to assess the extent of knowledge and skills a learner has acquired. Learning can take place in various ways, and it considerably depends on the knowledge, experience and motivation of the learner. This means that **assessment focuses not on the learning process but the competencies acquired by the learner.** Assessment should place a learner to a certain position in a certain setting (learning outcomes of a study programme or a part of it, or competency requirements of a professional standard), and it should be possible to compare the position with that of others.

This makes it possible **to recognise prior learning (RPL) in acquisition of formal education and granting a profession.**

Assessment of prior learning is also an assessment process.

1. <u>In the first case</u>, through the use of comparative assessment to determine whether the learning outcomes (incl. content) of the earlier studies match the competencies the applicant wants to be recognised.

example  *Students studied 'Fundamentals of Law' in a school when there were no outcome-based studies yet. The content of the subject/course was as follows: The phenomenon of law: various points of view. Normative approach to law. Development of law. Legal systems around the world. The system of law. Legal order in Estonia: structure and overview of domains. Legal facts and legal relationship. Sources of law: formal and material. Legislative acts and practical finding thereof. Logical structure of rules of law. Application of law. Background and technique of legal choices. Law in society. Legitimacy and efficacy of law. Estonia's judicial system.*

*A student went to another school and chose a different field of study. The new study programme contains a subject called 'Law Studies'. Its learning outcomes are defined as follows: The student who has completed this course:*

*• has an overview of law and jurisprudence;*

- *is familiar with the main concepts of law and is able to differentiate these;*
- *knows main branches of law and their object of legal regulation as well as the main legislative acts;*
- *understands legal texts and rules and their application in a legal system;*
- *is familiar with the process of application of law and is able to use the techniques used to apply law;*
- *is able to analyse and use main concepts of law in legal assessment of a common situation and application of a rule of law;*
- *values knowledge on law and, based on his/her interests, is able to make choices regarding his/her studies in this field.*

*To decide whether prior learning can be recognised as learning overlapping with a specific study programme, it must be determined whether completion of 'Fundamentals of Law' can result in learning outcomes of 'Law Studies'.*

2. In the second case, assessing whether the learning gained from work experience or independent studies complies with the learning outcomes or competency requirements regarding which RPL is applied for.

example *A person applying for a profession of a diploma landscape architect (level 7 in the qualifications framework) complies with all requirements of the professional standard, except the fact that s/he does not have a master's degree in this field nor an equivalent qualification. In this case, application of RPL means that in addition to the person's professional competencies, it should be assessed whether they comply with the level required, by annex 1 of the Higher Education Standard[2], from a person who has completed master's studies.*

To sum up, it can be said that **RPL assessment is** a compliance check of applicant's competencies in the context of learning outcomes or competency requirements (study programme, module, subject/course or professional standard).

---

[2] https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/13255227?leiaKehtiv (in Estonian).

## RPL process flow diagram[3]

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ 1. An applicant has received information │
│ about the options of RPL and the         │
│ application process (from informational  │
│ materials, the Internet, etc.).          │
└─────────────────────────────────────────┘
                    ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ 2. The applicant examines the learning   │
│ outcomes of a study programme or the     │
│ competency requirements of a             │
│ professional standard and analyses       │
│ whether his/her existing knowledge and   │
│ skills are suitable for recognition.     │
└─────────────────────────────────────────┘
                    ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│ 3. The applicant contacts an RPL    │   │ 4. An RPL adviser explains the  │
│ adviser of the competent authority  │←→ │ RPL application criteria to the │
│ in order to receive more specific   │   │ applicant.                       │
│ information on his/her options when │   └─────────────────────────────────┘
│ applying for RPL.                   │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                    ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│ 5a. The prior learning and/or work  │   │ 5b. Prior learning does not     │
│ experience are suitable for         │   │ meet the RPL application        │
│ application and the applicant fills │   │ criteria and the process is not │
│ in/compiles relevant documentation  │   │ continued.                       │
│ and submits it in the required form.│   └─────────────────────────────────┘
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                    ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│ 6a. If errors or omissions are found│   │ 6. The member of staff of the   │
│ in the application, a member of     │   │ competent authority who has     │
│ staff of the competent authority    │   │ received the documents checks   │
│ points them out and agrees on a     │   │ their compliance with the        │
│ timescale for rectifying them.      │   │ requirements.                    │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘   └─────────────────────────────────┘
                                                            ↓
                                           ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                                           │ 6b. If the application meets the│
                                           │ requirements, it is forwarded to│
                                           │ an RPL assessor/assessment       │
                                           │ committee.                       │
                                           └─────────────────────────────────┘
                                                            ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│ 8a. The assessment decision is      │   │ 7. The assessment committee     │
│ positive (including partly positive)│   │ reviews the application          │
│ – the applicant is informed of the  │ ← │ (involving experts, requesting   │
│ decision and the learning/work      │   │ supplementary material, using    │
│ experience recognised is recorded   │   │ additional assessment methods,   │
│ as part of completing the study     │   │ if necessary) and makes a        │
│ programme / professional examination.│  │ decision on recognition of what  │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘   │ has been applied for.            │
                                           └─────────────────────────────────┘
                                                            ↓
                                           ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
                                           │ 8b. The assessment decision is  │
                                           │ negative – the applicant is      │
                                           │ informed of the decision and may│
                                           │ contest it.                      │
                                           └─────────────────────────────────┘
```

[3] Manual for the Recognition of Prior Learning, compiled by Siret Rutiku, Inga Vau and Raul Ranne. Archimedes Foundation. Tartu, 2011; p. 19.

## 1.1 RPL assessment quality

**Prerequisites for high-quality RPL assessment:**

- a motivated RPL applicant who submits a compliant application and evidence[4];
- unambiguous learning outcomes or competency requirements and their assessment criteria that are all previously known to the parties[5];
- relevant assessment methods (see chapter 4 below) and competent (both as regards the field of study and the assessment methodology) assessor(s) (see p. 17 below).

From the point of view of assessment quality, **accessibility of advice** is important to RPL applicants. In addition to application and assessment, provision of advice is one of the three key activities in the RPL process, and its objective is to help applicants understand and provide proof of what they know and can and how this fits into the specific study programme or professional standard. The duty of an RPL adviser is to support applicants in filling in their application, starting with mapping the required activities and ending with submitting accurate and complete documentation. Depending on the RPL system of the competent authority, the duties of an adviser may also include exchange of information between assessors and applicants, including informing applicants of the need to submit further documents and/or to use an additional assessment method as well as the assessment decision and the respective feedback.

**Feedback is required in the event of positive as well as negative assessment decisions** because it allows for the applicant to learn from the process of filling in the application, especially regarding the analysis of prior learning as well as selection and submission of evidence. Furthermore, the applicant may use the feedback to plan his/her next steps if the application is rejected. For example, in a situation where the applicant lacked just one competency or a tiny partial skill, it could be possible to adjust his/her work duties in a way that s/he can learn the missing part at workplace.

---

[4] More information can be found in RPL – *Recognition of Prior Learning. A Guide for Applicants*, compiled by Anna-liisa Pääsukene et al. Archimedes Foundation. Tartu, 2010.

[5] A more detailed discussion on identification of learning outcomes in *Õppekava arendamise juhendmaterjal* (Guidelines for study programme development), compiled by Siret Rutiku, Aune Valk, Einike Pilli and Kätlin Vanari. – Archimedes Foundation, Tartu 2009 (http://primus. archimedes.ee/system/files/oppekava/juhend_veeb.pdf, in Estonian). More detailed information on identification of learning outcomes can be found in *Väljundipõhine hindamine kõrgkoolis* (outcome-based assessment in higher education institutions), compiled by Einike Pilli. Archimedes Foundation, Tartu 2009 (http://primus.archimedes.ee/sites/default/files/ oppejoud/Hindamisraamat.pdf, in Estonian).

*An applicant has been a private entrepreneur for years and wants his/her work experience to be recognised for an entrepreneurship course. People who have completed this course:*

- *understand the issues concerning foundation and management of an enterprise;*
- *are able to analyse the operations of an enterprise;*
- *are aware of the risks involved in business and how these can be mitigated;*
- *are familiar with the fundamentals of compiling a business plan.*

*The applicant has learned all the required competencies, except assessment and mitigation of risks, from his/her work experience and independent learning. In this case, the RPL assessment decision is negative; however, if the assessor's feedback mentions the exact missing competency, the applicant would be able to acquire that during his/her studies, for example, by conducting a risk assessment and planning the required mitigation options in his/her enterprise.*

**RPL covers** formal education (what has been learned in ordinary school), non-formal education (in-service training) and informal education (work experience and independent learning).

## 1.2 Recognition of formal learning

If we look at the situation where an application pertains to recognition of formal education (as a rule, to complete a study programme), the competencies of the applicant have already been assessed by teachers. In this case, RPL assessment is limited to comparing the learning outcomes (and content in the case of subjects completed prior to outcome-based studies). Such assessment should definitely consider the depth and extent of such earlier studies. The word 'depth' refers to how detailed the knowledge and skills is/are and the word 'extent' refers to whether the topics have been adequately covered. The depth and extent of studies can be united under one notional indicator – complexity of thinking. As regards higher education, annex 1 to the Higher Education Standard is a certain framework for this. It specifies the learning outcomes of cycles of higher education and their relationship with the qualifications framework. Study programmes of vocational education have professional standards as the framework.

The depth and extent of studies should definitely be thoroughly examined if recognition pertains to two different levels (e.g., recognition of in-depth studies of an elective in an ordinary (i.e. general education) school for the purpose of completion of a higher education study programme or recognition of vocational education courses in master's studies). Recognition of subjects or courses of one level or cycle of education in another is completely justified and the depth and extent of studies overlapping if recognition of specialised courses completed within one study programme is applied for for the purpose of completion of another study programme.

example

*An RPL applicant who has acquired technical higher education and completed an accounting programme in a vocational education institution begins master's studies in environmental protection. Among other subjects, the study programme includes fundamentals of accounting, bookkeeping and financial analysis. Recognition of prior learning is requested with respect of these three courses.*

*In this case, the extent and depth of the competencies are adequate irrespective of the fact that the competencies were acquired at a lower level of education. If the learning outcomes of the master's course have been worded in close connection to the field of study, thus, creating a certain distinction from the competencies acquired, the completeness of the study programme completed should compensate for it, i.e. a qualified accountant is able to draw the required connections independently to cope with the bookkeeping of a narrower field.*

Unambiguous learning outcomes for both subjects/courses or modules are a prerequisite for a high-quality comparative assessment. Learning objectives probably never overlap completely, but the level of understanding described in these should overlap (a level of understanding can be identified on the basis of the outcome verbs of, for example, the SOLO taxonomy (Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes) or Bloom's taxonomy). For example, if the depth of the competency acquired from the completed course is described with the word 'describe' and the course or module for which it is requested to be recognised describes the competency with the word 'compare' or 'analyse', the prior learning is of inadequate depth. Furthermore, the depth of a competency is also characterised by the adverbs used in the learning outcomes; for example, independently, under supervision, in a routine work situation, covering the whole field of study). The con-

text of a competency (in a multicultural environment, in the public sector, in vehicle construction, in fire work, from the ballet repertoire, etc.) can be used as an indicator of the extent of the competency.

example **Learning outcome 1.** *Students draw connections between and assess critically the theories, approaches and positions of lifelong learning and adult development and learning at the group and individual level.*

*The verbs and the adverb (critically) next to the second verb describe the depth of the competency, and the objects (theories, approaches and positions) and the context (at the group and individual level, not at the level of society) describe the extent.*

**Learning outcome 2.** *Students are able to plan embroidery for traditional items of Estonian localities and to compile a pattern by achieving a modern creative outcome.*

*The extent of the competency of planning a pattern is described by the 'for traditional items of Estonian localities' phrase and the reference to the ability to achieve 'a modern creative outcome' describes the depth of the competency.*

Assessment criteria (including in RPL) may not establish a greater (or lesser) extent or depth of a competency than was established by the verbs and adverbs of the learning outcomes.

example **EXAMPLE 1** *Threshold criteria require better competency than required by the learning outcome.*

*Outcome: Students can calculate the required size of a fireplace opening depending on the cross-section of the chimney, choose suitable tools and materials and calculate the material consumption for the work.*

*Threshold criterion: The dimensions and type of the fireplace designed by the student take into account the conditions where it will be standing and the dimensions of the fire box take into account the volume and purpose of the room. The material for the fireplace and the tools have been chosen depending on the planned structure. Material consumption calculations are accurate.*

*'Calculate the required size of a fireplace opening' vs. 'the dimensions /.../ of the fireplace designed' – the criterion*

*example* *describes the extent of the competency as being bigger than that described by the outcome.*

*'Calculate the required size of a fireplace opening depending on the cross-section of the chimney' vs. 'the dimensions of the fire box take into account the volume and purpose of the room' – the required depth of knowledge is different: instead of one specific indicator, there are two and one of these requires a considerably more in-depth understanding of the topic than worded in the outcome.*

**EXAMPLE 2** *A learning outcome promises more than a student can while complying with the threshold criteria.*

**Outcome:** *Students can compile an incentive scheme, using a motivation theory suitable to the circumstances.*

**Threshold criterion:** *The motivation theory has been described in detail, pointing out its strengths and weaknesses.*

*Strengths and weaknesses can be pointed out in the case of a smaller depth of the competency than required by choosing a theory suitable to the circumstances. The extent of the competency to describe a motivation theory is not the same as that to compile an incentive scheme.*

## 1.3 Recognition of informal learning

Assessment of informal learning, i.e. work experience and/or independent studies is primary assessment of an RPL applicant's competencies within the context of the study programme or professional standard, the main emphasis being not on comparing what has been learned and applied for but on verifying that the applicant has the actual required competencies. The key issue in acquiring various competencies from experience is that in addition to the experience, learning from it has taken place.

*example* *An RPL applicant who has been working as a gardener for 10 years has considerable experience in the duties of a gardener. However, this does not mean that this work has given him/her the competencies required for being a gardener in the best possible way and being successful at that. Learning from experience can take place if the RPL applicant analyses his/her activities and their results, identifies connections between these and makes conclusions regarding corrections required for future activities.*

Usually, more than one assessment method is used for assessing informal learning, and in the case of more extensive applications, an interview could be one of the methods used. Also the quality of the evidence of prior learning that the RPL applicants submit is of critical importance for assessing learning from experience.

The general assessment criteria for the evidence are:

- proof of the existence of competencies and their required extent and depth;
- clear connections with the learning outcomes of the subject/course or module referred to in the application;
- appropriate scope, reference to the development and wholeness;
- compiled by the applicant and pertaining to the applicant.

## 1.4 Recognition of non-formal learning

Recognition of in-service training is applied for less than recognition of the abovementioned types of learning, but nevertheless, rather much. In the case of in-service training, the main attention should be on verification whether the depth and extent of the acquired competencies match the learning outcomes or competence requirements and on whether and how the results of the training have been assessed. This decides whether the assessment in the application of RPL is similar to assessing suitability of formal learning or the assessor has to verify the applicant's competencies for the first time. In-service training sessions are usually short courses focussing on some narrow aspects of the field. Thus, it is difficult to fully match these with the learning outcomes of subjects or modules. The information on the learning outcomes and contents of in-service training sessions are usually of a very varying quality. The training certificate has to refer to the name of the training session (informative reference to the content), when it took place and how many credit points it was worth, what were the learning outcomes and the results of assessing the extent to which the learning outcomes were achieved, if these were assessed.

In-service training can be especially good for recognition within prior formal learning if it is necessary to prove some required depth of some narrower subject. Furthermore, in-service training could compensate for the fact that some topics have become outdated if a long time has passed from the studies and the knowledge and skills may have become outdated (e.g. in the fields of information technology, law and accounting).

## 1.5 Comprehensive assessment of combined applications

Comprehensive assessment covers the extent of each individual competency and all competencies as a whole. The content of what has been learned (also at the level of the study programme) prevails over the format. Also the duration (scope) or time (e.g. three or ten years ago) of the prior learning is not the only or main criterion for making the assessment decision. This means that all competencies of an RPL applicant are viewed together as being connected with each other. In this way, there will no cases where an applicant receives a negative decision due to the fact that his/her formal studies are deemed to be outdated as a lot of time has passed since, that the scope of in-service training that would compensate for the outdatedness is inadequate and work experience has provided the practical skills required for the competencies assessed but there is no understanding of the theoretical whole. In this case, rejection of the RPL application would be unjustified because, actually, the depth of the competency (formal studies and work experience), its extent (formal studies) and up-to-dateness (in-service training) have been ensured. When assessing the whole, definitely the role of the competencies applied for should be assessed with respect of the study programme or professional standard, i.e. whether these are general competencies or transferable skills (e.g. teamwork skills, communication skills and independent study skills) or specialised knowledge and skills that are critical to a specific profession.

If an application is extensive from the point of view of the study programme or professional standard, the transferable skills should receive special attention within the RPL assessment because a situation may occur where an RPL applicant does not need to attend any of the courses or modules that develop a certain transferable skill. To verify that the relevant transferable skills have been acquired, RPL assessors should have an overview of which courses or modules develop which transferable skills.

Comprehensive assessment takes into account the fact that the learning outcomes of the unit applied for (a course or a module) may have different weight, i.e. there is a distinction between the most important knowledge and skills and those that support these.

Comprehensive assessment is the only possible approach to combined RPL applications that cover various types of prior learning.

example *An applicant applies for RPL regarding a marketing communication course. In his/her formal studies, s/he has completed 'Fundamentals of Marketing' and has been working*

*as a marketing manager for the last four years, during which s/he also has completed an in-service training session on compiling marketing materials. This example of a combined application covers three types of prior learning that individually would not be adequate for recognition: the formal-education course did not focus on communication but provided the theoretic base and understanding of the nature of marketing. Learning from the work experience is more or less specific to the specific institution or enterprise and may not support the knowledgeable justification for the choices made (i.e. the person has acted the way it has always been done). The extent of the in-service training is inadequate for the subject (advertising is an important part of marketing communication but not the only one). However, if you look at the prior learning as a whole, there should be no problems with granting the application because these types of learning, if viewed together, in principle, allow for the learning outcomes of the respective course to be achieved.*

## 1.6 Assessment criteria

In a study process, certain criteria are used to assess whether the knowledge and skills of a learner match the described learning outcomes. The assessment criteria have to be connected to the learning outcomes assessed and the assessment methods and fixed at the threshold level.

example **Learning outcome:** *Students can lay concrete-tile pavement on the most common landscape types of Estonia, in compliance with the design.*

**Threshold criterion:** *In the conditions of the landscape type stipulated in the design, all the required preliminary work for laying the pavement has been completed. The type of tile and the laying pattern used match those specified in the design and the laying methods used have ensured the required looks and stability of the pavement.*

Preference should be given to a situation where the assessment criteria are not linked to a certain assessment method and are the same as in formal education. If the criteria are linked to an assessment method, the assessment criteria may be slightly changed depending on the specificity of the

assessment method used in applying RPL. However, this may not result in recognition of a higher or lower level of competency assessed, compared to formal education.

Assessment criteria may also be specified for applications, analysis of what has been learnt from experience (see p. 41 below) and the evidence (see pp. 12 above). These are helpful for applicants and a prerequisite for RPL quality.

For example, the assessment criteria for RPL applications could be:

- the application has been filled in correctly, i.e. the data provided are accurate and complete;
- the supplementary documentation (evidence) has been submitted and all the required documents have been submitted on time.

The assessment criteria for the content of RPL applications could be:

- (in the case of prior formal or non-formal learning) the competencies acquired are adequately similar, i.e. their level of understanding, depth and extent are suitable for recognition;
- (in the case of learning from experience) the experience matches the competencies applied for, i.e.:
  - the applicant has fulfilled the tasks/duties important from the point of view of the learning outcome;
  - the competencies relevant to the subject, module or requirement applied for have been acquired;
  - learning from experience has taken place.

All the assessment criteria used in the assessment process have to be understandable, established in a format that can be reproduced in writing and known to the applicants beforehand.

Do you, the assessor, know the threshold criteria of the learning outcomes to be assessed? Have these been formulated for the subject or module you teach?

Based on your experience, what other main differences between assessing, within RPL, prior formal learning and other types of learning have you noticed?

What would be the 'ideal' evidence for assessing the learning outcomes of your subject or module in the case of informal or combined learning?

What is RPL quality for you as an assessor?

# 2. Assessors' role and responsibility

Various parties and distribution of their roles are important in the RPL process. In compliance with the principle of voluntariness of RPL, an applicant is the initiator of the whole process. Applicants have to compare their competencies with the learning outcomes of the subject, module or study programme or competence requirements of a professional standard applied for, determine the areas that are adequately overlapping, fill in an application containing accurate and complete data and submit the evidence the assessment could be based on. In this process, applicants can be supervised and instructed by advisers whose main role is to explain the applicable requirements and rules, to answer applicants' questions and, depending on the procedure, to review applications before assessment. In compliance with the work arrangements of each specific competent authority, RPL advisers can be either persons working as RPL advisers or persons who work in other positions but are abreast of RPL topics and provision of advice to RPL applicants is one of their agreed duties.

Also assessors can act as advisers for filling in RPL applications. This does not violate the role-separation requirement included in RPL principles, because one person can fill different roles at different times and if the person who later assesses an application makes a recommendation, for example, regarding addition of evidence, s/he has no (moral) duty to make a positive assessment decision. Furthermore, according to the established good practice, an application should be assessed by more than one RPL assessor (e.g. an assessment committee consisting of several members). This would make the fact that one of the assessors (being a specialist in the field of the competencies applied for, e.g. head of the study programme or head teacher) has given advice to the applicant even less relevant from the point of view of objectivity of the final decision. To sum up, it might be said that considering the time resource of assessors, it is definitely not practicable to use them as advisers in ordinary situations. However, neither is it justified to avoid the relevant consultation, just for the principle, if the assessor would be able to successfully resolve the issue. It could be very helpful for applicants and advisers if RPL assessors compiled methodical materials that specify the assessment method(s) for the units (subject/module/competency) to be assessed and the possible evidence of what has been learned as well as the threshold criteria for the latter if considered necessary. Such public information would minimise the need for using assessors in the role of advisers.

## 2.1 RPL assessors' competence

In general, RPL assessment is conducted by the same person who assesses formal learning or when giving a profession: a teacher, a head of the study programme, a specialist in the field. The main **duties** of an **RPL assessor** are objective **assessment** that is based on relevant assessment methods, learning outcomes and respective assessment criteria and **provision of** constructive **feedback** that is understandable to applicants. Assessment includes review of applications, analysis of submitted materials in the context of the competencies applied for, comparison of these with the learning outcomes of the subject, module or study programme or competency requirements of the professional standard and making assessment decisions. To fulfil these duties, it is inevitable for the assessor to be knowledgeable in the documents on the RPL procedure of the competent authority and content-related principles of and requirements for assessment and, preferably, to have completed the respective training course(s).

## 2.2 RPL assessors' competency profile[6]

| Understands the principles and process of RPL and is familiar with the relevant regulations. | • Can name the main principles of RPL.<br>• Can explain the importance of those principles.<br>• Can name the main components of the process.<br>• Can describe the RPL process in their organisation.<br>• Can name regulations concerning RPL.<br>• Can explain which regulation(s) their work is based on. |
|---|---|
| Is familiar with the main components of an outcome-based study programme and/or professional standard. | • Can describe the structural logic of a study programme or a professional standard.<br>• Can name components of the study programme at the educational level assessed or of the relevant professional standard. |

---

[6] Manual for the Recognition of Prior Learning, compiled by Siret Rutiku, Inga Vau and Raul Ranne. Archimedes Foundation. Tartu, 2011, pp. 40–41.

| | |
|---|---|
| Knows and follows the principles of RPL assessment. | • Is independent and impartial in the assessment.<br>• Applies comprehensive assessment, including consideration of general (transferable) competences.<br>• Uses relevant methods of assessment.<br>• Compiles assessment criteria that are consistent with learning outcomes or competency requirements.<br>• In the assessment, relies on suitable evidence and asks for additional evidence, if necessary.<br>• Uses threshold criteria in the assessment.<br>• Gives feedback that will support applicants' further studies. |
| Knows the field assessed at least at the level compliance to which is assessed on the basis of the RPL application. | • Complies with the qualification requirements of the competent authority where s/he acts as an assessor. |
| Co-operates with different parties of the RPL process. | • Communicates with applicants, advisers and, if necessary, with external parties.<br>• Cooperates with other assessors to reach a common assessment decision. |
| Expresses themself clearly and produces accurate documentation. | • Presents information in a way that is comprehensible to all parties.<br>• Fills in documentation related to assessment according to the regulations of the competent authority. |
| Identifies and mitigates risks that might affect the quality of assessment. | • Can name the risks to the quality of assessment.<br>• Can identify those risks in the assessment process.<br>• Can mitigate the risks whenever feasible. |

The competence of assessors can be divided into professional competencies and competencies related to methods of assessment. The existence of both areas of competence helps ensure that the analysis of learning and evidence submitted by applicants are assessed objectively and with appropriate professional care and criticism. The adequate professional competence of assessors allows them to identify whether applicants have acquired the competencies applied for to a required extent. The methodical competence of assessors allows them to choose the most suitable assessment methods for assessing various competencies. Competence regarding assessment methods ensures the choice of valid assessment methods on the principle that these are applied purposefully and to an appropriate extent. For example, verification of the existence of one competency with several methods is usually not justified; however, preference is given to the opposite: one method is used to identify the existence of several competencies under review. Methodical competence includes the ability to provide understandable and constructive feedback in oral and written form.

RPL assessors have to keep abreast of the developments in their field of work in order to understand what competencies can be acquired in what (work) situations and to assess whether it was possible in situations and ways described by applicants.

In the case of combined applications and recognition of learning from extensive work experience, involvement of external experts in the work of the RPL assessment committee is quite justified. Specialists from the respective fields should be involved. For example, in the case of competencies related to cyber security, a specialist of that field should be involved or in the case of competencies related to database administration, a representative of that area should be involved. If possible, external experts that already are a bit familiar with RPL should be chosen or a short training event could be recommended or provided to them, so they can better understand the context and what has to be taken into account in the assessment. Otherwise, their assessment may be more subjective and other members of the committee cannot get more assurance, either.

However, the assessment may definitely not be limited to an opinion of an external expert only: their involvement only secures the confidence of others that the alleged learning from experience fits into the experience from the point of view of employers as well.

In the case of an application that covers many subjects (one or several work experience(s) should be used to recognise several subjects and the main approach to analysing the learning from the experience(s) is based on

competencies not subjects/courses) or the assessors are specialists in the assessed field but may lack the ability to see the 'big picture' (e.g. the assessors are visiting lecturers or representatives of employers), the head of the 'profile' chair, head of the study programme, the content coordinator of the study programme, head teacher, etc., should be involved.

example *An RPL applicant wants several different subjects/courses to be recognised on the basis of his/her work experience. S/he has submitted an analysis of his/her learning from the experience. In the analysis, s/he does not compare the competencies acquired to the learning outcomes of 'Databases', 'Computer networks' and 'Programming'; instead, s/he describes the whole competence of 'assurance of security' that covers all these subjects.*

This means that the panel of assessors should always include a person who has a full overview of the whole study programme.

In addition to professional competence, the assessor has to be aware of the learning outcomes of different educational levels and cycles and to be able to fit the skills and knowledge assessed into the study programme or professional standard. To assess the adequacy of learning with respect to learning outcomes, one option is to use the required level of understanding as the basis. For example, knowledge of various periods in history may mean that the person can name the periods, describe them, analyse them comparatively or point out some new aspects on the basis of finding causal links between the periods. These refer to history knowledge of completely different levels, especially as regards the depth of the competence.

A 'big picture' is also formed on the basis of comparative links between the scope of the RPL application and the conviction that the general competencies have been acquired.

For assessors to be aware of formal (procedural) aspects, there are various materials they can use, e.g. the RPL procedure of the relevant authority, the process flow diagram with the participants and tasks, etc. It would be good if the RPL assessors of one organisation discuss and agree on the bases for assessment, harmonise the principles for the choice of assessment methods, criteria applicable to the evidence to be submitted (or this may be established in the RPL procedure), how detailed the feedback should be, etc., so the general requirements are as uniform as possible in the case of all assessors.

If the work procedure of the competent authority stipulates that RPL applications are assessed by a committee at assessment meetings, it is practical to use a person who documents the meetings, so the essential work can be more efficient. This person could be one that is quite familiar with the RPL procedure and s/he should document the meetings of all committees, so their work can be consistent.

Apart from professional and methodical competence, the attitudes and value judgements of RPL assessors may also influence the quality of assessment because these ensure independent and impartial assessment.

## 2.3 Independence and impartiality of assessors

Independence and impartiality of assessors means that

- they have no direct conflict of interests with respect to applicants (e.g. if an assessor who is an applicant's employer wants the applicant to complete the studies as quickly as possible or if an assessor who is an applicant's competition wants to obstruct accessibility to recognition of his/her competencies);

- if an assessor has background information on an applicant's competencies, the information not coming from the documentation submitted by the RPL applicant, the assessor disregards this information in making a decision regarding that applicant;

- **NB** However, this background information definitely may be used when choosing the most suitable assessment methods and planning their content.

- they are not influenced by their personal attitudes to applicants' activities (e.g. if an applicant is a representative of a different school of thought, different type of art or a discipline that is unacceptable to his/her assessor).

If applications are assessed by an RPL committee, impartiality is important, so the opinion of one eminent (due to his/her speciality or position) member does not influence that of others. If necessary, voting could be carried out in secret or such an individual could be asked to express their opinion last.

Also the work arrangements of the competent authority have to support independent assessment. For example, if the assessment is calculated into the work load of the teaching staff, the assessment results may not affect these calculations in any way (negative results are not taken into account, etc.).

Apart from that, assessors may not feel any pressure to reject applications due to the fact that if too much of the study load is covered by RPL, income from tuition fees decreases or there may be a situation where some courses may have significantly less students at some point in time and this may influence the organisation of the course or the teaching methods chosen. 7

Due to the above, it is very important that RPL assessors try to maintain and develop their assessment competencies, be aware of the need for self-improvement and attend the respective in-service training courses. Any restrictions caused by limited time can be eased if overlapping of the competencies needing development and the learning outcomes of courses are monitored and only those courses are attended that provide optimum benefits.

If possible, internal training courses should be used and more important knowledge gained from these should be given to colleagues as well, either in oral or written form. One efficient way to learn is for the assessors to participate in an assessment meeting of another RPL committee (that of another institution as well), followed by an informal meeting where they share their experiences. Assessors who have not participated in RPL assessment before could participate in RPL assessment as observers. Mentoring, too, is very practicable in RPL.

Taking the responsibility for their self-improvement, periodic self-analyses should be a natural part of the work process of RPL assessors. This activity provides an opportunity to think through their activities as an assessor and to formulate for others what is done, how and why in this way. Self-assessment allows for clear and deliberated formulation of the problems that have occurred and/or the best practice they have noticed. Such information can be used to draw conclusions and to provide the knowledge gained from learning from experience to other interested parties (other assessors, advisers, applicants and persons responsible for the functioning of RPL).

Also RPL advisers can take part in assessment training events and discussions because, in principle, they need to have the same information as assessors. This way, advisers can provide the most relevant and constructive information to applicants.

---

7 A more detailed discussion of independence and impartiality of assessors in the *Manual for the Recognition of Prior Learning*, compiled by Siret Rutiku, Inga Vau and Raul Ranne. Archimedes Foundation. Tartu, 2011, pp. 43–45.

What is your understanding of your role as an RPL assessor? What is your sphere of responsibility?

To what extent your knowledge and skills comply with the competency profile of RPL assessors? What are your strengths? Which of your competencies would need further development?

Are your professional and methodical competencies equal?

How have you improved yourself as an RPL assessor (training)? Which training courses do you need in the future? On what topics could you supervise or train your colleagues?

How do you ensure that your activities as an assessor are independent and impartial?

# 3. Choice and application of assessment methods

When choosing an assessment method, i.e. the way to assess whether certain competencies have been acquired, the following three criteria are the most important:

1. The assessment method chosen should be suitable for the purpose – it is suitable for assessing the competency it is used to assess.

example *If the learning outcomes are formulated using the word 'applies', it is not possible to assess the competency with a method that requires description of the activity either in oral or written form.*

2. The assessment methods chosen should allow for assessment of all competencies. This does not mean that separate assessment methods are required for each competency. The different weight of the competencies may be considered as well.

3. Application of the chosen assessment method should require a reasonable amount of time. This entails the existence of the required resources (technology, environment, available time of the parties, etc.) and organisational aspects of the assessment (e.g. the possibilities for overcoming the temporal and spatial separation of assessors and applicants).

example *The central competency of a project management course is planning of the activities and budget of the project and their implementation. In addition, the learning outcomes include the competencies of inclusive leadership and result analysis. The most important factor for the choice of assessment methods is the ability of the methods to identify whether the applicant has acquired the most important competency at the required level. In ideal cases, all competencies of an applicant are assessed using the same method(s); however, if necessary, some competencies, e.g. inclusive leadership, could only be assessed using an additional method, e.g. an interview, if no proof has been provided regarding the competency. It is probably not necessary to choose, for example, a case solution that would require a lot of time as an assessment method to verify the acquisition of this particular competency.*

Irrespective of RPL applications, methods supporting comprehensive assessment (see p. 13 above) are recommended.

Different assessment methods can be used for assessing different competencies. As the learning covered by RPL is often different from formal learning, the assessment methods used should be different as well.

**NB According to the best practice, assessment methods used in the case of formal education (e.g. an exam) are not used in the case of RPL applicants.**

## 3.1 Various assessment methods

Assessment methods (those of formal education as well as RPL) can be divided into 'verification' type and 'portfolio' type methods. The first type is more assessor-centred, often including prepared questions, exercises, etc., and being especially suitable for assessing specific skills and a specific set of knowledge on a subject. Examples of **'verification' type** assessment methods are demonstration (incl. a written quiz with open-ended questions, a multiple-choice test, exercises, etc.), simulation (incl. solution of a problem, a practical task, etc.) and observation (incl. conducting a class). In certain cases, the latter may exceed its common limits (thus, the typology as well) and become assessment of the applicable competencies as a whole (incl. transferable competencies and attitudes). **'Portfolio' type** assessment methods (e.g. a study portfolio and a practical-training log) are definitely more applicant-centred, include the evidence of applicants' achievements, their analysis of their learning from experience, and other material the applicant links to the competencies acquired.

## 3.2 Study portfolio

The commonest 'portfolio' type assessment method used in RPL is a study portfolio containing various evidence compiled by the applicant. This method suits well for assessing the more complex and interrelated knowledge and skills, which is characteristic to RPL.

The format and content of the portfolio, however, often creates confusion in RPL. More precisely, people do not know when the set of evidence provided with an application can be called a study portfolio. Apart from the evidence therein, a study portfolio should also include an analysis by the applicant (their analysis of learning from experience, a self-analysis). Without the analysis, the sets of evidence regarding prior formal education and, in certain cases, also regarding non-formal education cannot be study portfolios.

Considering the fact that for the purpose of RPL, self-analysis is more proof of learning, the set of evidence submitted by an applicant and a study portfolio may be considered to be one and the same in the interests of simplicity. However, it should be taken into account that within RPL, study portfolios may have different scopes, being directly dependent on the content of the applications.

Study portfolios as the most important evidence of informal education should be, apart from expressing the depth and extent of the learning, (a) compiled to be relevant, i.e. support recognition of the competencies and (b) be coherent, so that the primary and secondary evidence support the analysis the applicant has written regarding learning from experience.

> example *An applicant submits a national costume s/he has made herself/himself (direct evidence) as proof of the competency given by the national handiwork module in the study programme of textile work. In the analysis of learning from the experience, s/he explains what s/he has done and what s/he has learned, referring to the evidence as specifically as possible. To support the assessment of the work on the basis of the analysis, applicants may refer to indirect evidence (e.g. recognition at an exhibition).*

Two additional criteria that are sometimes applicable to study portfolios as well, namely 'expresses the applicant's development' and 'has been filled in correctly and is of adequate scope', require some further explanation.

On the one hand, **expression of the applicant's development** is good because the development confirms that learning has taken place. A study portfolio compiled in this way makes it possible to link the process of learning from experience to specific examples of learning outcomes, in the 'before and after' style. It is understandable and relatively easy for applicants. It also provides the assessor a good overview of alleged learning and demonstrates the respective results. However, it has to be remembered that applicants cannot always provide direct evidence of 'before and after' because during the time they learned from experience, they did not have a chance to apply the learning yet. Thus, it is acceptable if applicants express their development only in the analysis of learning from experience, formulating the content and result of the experience and clearly pointing out the learning, i.e. what s/he would do differently in the case of such a task and why. In the case of a very successful performance, those critical success factors that contributed to the expected result should be pointed out.

Considering the fact that in RPL assessment (in the case of learning from work experience, independent learning and combined learning), the aim of a study portfolio is to provide as good a picture of the applicant's competencies as possible, the use of a sample portfolio is quite justified. If the competent authority has established such a restriction for study portfolios, applicants have to be informed of this in advance.

Irrespective of the fact whether the portfolio is a sample one or expressing the development of an applicant, from the structural and readability aspects it is good if the applicants are recommended to use the **STARR method**[8] for compiling the study portfolio and analysing learning from experience.

> example
>
> *Learning outcome: Students can demonstrate the results of their research.*
>
> **S (*situation*):** *description of the experience(s) and provision of background data*
>
> *At the end of last year, I conducted an employee survey on satisfaction with the work environment at my workplace. This was necessary because the company was planning to move and changes could be implemented in the work environment when moving to new rooms. Our company employs 19 people, more than half of them working in the sales department. The company has specialised in wholesale and project-based sale of construction materials.*
>
> **T (*task*) – role, position, responsibility:** *What was the applicant's task? What was his/her responsibility in this experience?*
>
> *My task was to conduct the survey and make the results known to the management and employees. I did not participate in compilation of the survey, the company had the survey questions already from the time of the previous similar survey. I was free to choose the time and method of conducting the survey but I had to take into account the fact that the results were needed not later than within two months of the day the need for the survey appeared.*
>
> **A (*action*):** *What did the applicant do and why in this way?*

---

[8] More detailed information can be found in *STARR tehnika kasutamine varasemate õpingute ja töökogemuse hindamisel* (The STARR method in recognition of prior learning), compiled by Einike Pilli and Inga Vau, pp. 6–11. http://primus.archimedes.ee/sites/default/files/vota/STARR%20juhend_loplik.pdf, in Estonian.

*I conducted the survey using electronic means of communication as this made it possible for me to process the responses most conveniently and display important responses to open-ended questions separately in the presentation regarding the results. I scheduled the presentation to take place at a weekly work meeting and distributed the respective information earlier. When compiling the presentation, I decided to illustrate it with visual tools (I used the company logo on the slides, so that the audience could link the results to our company) as people receive information through different senses. I scheduled the presentation to last 20–30 minutes. As regards the structure of the presentation, I made sure it had an introduction reminding the audience that the survey had taken place and what its purpose was, an overview of the results, pointing out some practical responses to open-ended questions, so people could have a more personal relationship with the results and understand that what they said was important. During the presentation, I made sure to face the audience (not reading my slides from the screen, my side facing the audience), talk clearly and not to hurry. Apart from that, I observed the reaction of the audience and clarified or explained if necessary. At the end of my presentation, I allowed the audience to ask questions.*

**R (*result*):** *Was it a success? What was the feedback?*

*People listened to my presentation quietly, looking interested. They asked several essential questions and made some proposals how to use the results to improve the work environment. There were practically no questions that would have inferred that people did not understand what I had been talking about. Some colleagues later said that it was a good and clear presentation.*

**R (*reflection*) – analysis:** *What did I learn? What was the critical success factor? What would I have done differently?*

*In my opinion, my presentation was a success because I had thought it through earlier, prepared the slides and stayed within the time limits. Next time, I would send the results to my colleagues beforehand. Then, they could be better informed and the questions after the presentation would be even more to the point.*

**The correctness or accuracy of a study portfolio** means that the materials submitted are systematised and, in an ideal case, the analysis of learning from experience refers to the relevant direct and/or indirect evidence. **Adequate scope** is relative. The use of a quantitative value as a criterion should be avoided because applicants have to submit the evidence to an optimum extent, but this is different for each application and applicant. Applicants often want to know how long the analysis of learning from experience has to be. However, it is not practical to establish a requirement for the number of pages because if an applicant is able to say everything required with fewer words than 'required' s/he would add too much irrelevant information and the focus on the learning would be lost. This, in turn, makes the work of assessors more difficult. If there is a desire to set a certain limit, then it could be worded 'usually, not more than … pages'. However, the resultant positive and negative sides should be analysed before doing that.

## Risks related to study portfolios

The weaknesses of using a study portfolio as a method of assessment are the facts that it is considerably time consuming, both to compile and to assess, and, to a certain point in time, it is affected by applicants' poor ability to analyse themselves and their learning and the fact that there are no good examples and earlier experience (it depends on the availability and extent of advice and, in the case of assessors, the number of assessment cases). These aspects may influence the quality of the assessment decision made on the basis of a study portfolio. Therefore, if this assessment method is used, it is very important that the assessment criteria regarding the competencies to be proven and the study portfolio be agreed in advance and known to all parties.

Questionable authorship of study portfolios is also stated as one of the risks. In principle, it is possible that the evidence provided has not been created by the applicant or may not even pertain to the applicant and that the analysis of learning from experience has been written by somebody else as well or on the basis of somebody else's experience. However, assessors should not presume that applicants submit inaccurate material because then all independent homework or group work that is done in formal education should be questionable as well. It is always possible to use an additional assessment method to receive evidence that the applicant has these competencies.

## 3.3 Interview

From the point of view of authenticity and validity, the second more common method that is suitable to be applied in RPL in addition to a study portfolio is an interview. This is a method that cannot be easily classified under either assessor-centred or applicant-centred methods of RPL assessment. In its nature, this assessment method is that of the 'verification' type (an oral exam, a case study and a presentation are its equivalents in formal education). As the RPL assessment is based on the evidence submitted by the applicant, the interview questions depend not only on the assessor but also the materials the applicant has provided, including the analysis of learning from experience. This means that additional information needs to be received during the interview, especially regarding these competencies that have inadequate proof in the study portfolio. And responses to questions raised during analysis of the study portfolio need to be received. Thus, in an interview as an assessor-centred assessment method, the applicant also is strongly represented. Apart from the high authenticity and validity, an interview allows for integration of theory and practice and it can be combined with a case study.

## Risks related to interviews

When interviews are planned and conducted, it should be born in mind that this is not just a conversation but it should result in an understanding whether the applicant's competencies are adequate. Interviews are always subjective to a certain extent, and they are directly influenced by how the participants cope in the process. The main risk factors are that the interview should be limited to the questions raised earlier because an applicant who has a good overview of the respective field and good communication skills may direct the interview to those topics s/he prefers; for example, skipping some details that s/he has not enough knowledge about. An interview where there is more than one assessor may lose their focus or be out of balance with respect to the time used by each of the assessors (e.g. the person who started continues with his/her questions, including those raised during the interview, and disregards the time limit set for the interview, thus robbing the other assessor the opportunity to ask his/her questions or receive a satisfactory answer to these). Furthermore, the fact that RPL applicants' oral self-expression skills vary should be taken into account. The latter is definitely one of the reasons why assessors should be cautious of using interviews as the sole method of assessment and do that only if this is extremely well justified.

Stages of an interview
- preparing the interview;
- conducting the interview;
- making the assessment decision;
- giving feedback.

## Preparations

When preparing an interview linked to a study portfolio, the assessors, first, individually review the evidence submitted by the applicant, take notes and record some aspects (both positive and negative) that need to be discussed during the interview and questions they want to ask the RPL applicant. It is important to remember the STARR method (see p. 27 above and p. 33-37 below) when preparing the questions and to pay special attention to what the applicant has learned from the experience.

Next, the observations and opinions are shared with other assessors and the interview questions that would provide a complete picture of the applicant's competencies and their level need to be worded and agreed upon. It is also recommended to agree upon the overall structure of the interview and the role of each assessor (how notes are taken, who leads the process, what the procedure for the questions raised during the interview is).

## Conduction of interviews

It is recommended to start interviews with an introduction of the participants and the procedural arrangements. Applicants should be explained the aim of the interview, what the plans for the interview are, how long it takes and how and in what way the applicant will be informed of the assessment decision. The fact of when and how the decision will be notified to the applicant depends on the assessment process and the respective work arrangements. An interview may be structured on the basis of learning outcomes or evidence. There are several different ways for conducting an interview. The important part is that applicants should be aware of its structure at the beginning of the interview.

An interview may begin on more general topics; for example, on the applicant's experiences in compiling the study portfolio or analysing what they have learned. A more general conversation on a topic that is familiar to the applicant is a good way to release the tension and create a calm working atmosphere. Apart from that, some concrete individual questions that

require a short answer and will not be touched upon later are also a good way to start an interview. Another option would be to leave these questions for the end.

The main and the longest part of the interview is meant for gathering the information required for obtaining an objective and complete picture of the competencies the recognition of which the applicant has applied for and their level. As the questions (both prepared ones and raised during the interview) and answers are rather detailed and specific, it is recommended to record these to make the later work (making the assessment decision, provision of feedback with examples and resolution of disputes) easier. The minutes of an interview have to include competencies to be recognised and the interview topics and questions related to these. The annex (see p. 51) contains a sample of interview minutes. The minutes should also include positive and negative comments regarding the applicant's responses.

## Assessment decision

To make sure that the assessment is of high quality, it is important for the assessors to carefully listen to the applicant during the interview as well as observe whether his/her verbal and nonverbal messages match. It is also important for the assessors to take notes on the questions and answers. This ensures that they can make a decision that is based on more than just their memory and avoids a situation where assessors hear only what they want to hear.

It is practicable to make an assessment decision by competencies and with references to the assessment criteria and examples where these have been met or not. When making assessment decisions, the following problems should definitely be avoided:

- the first impression is determining – it is subjective and is based on the assessor's own values and interests;
- the assessment is too lenient or too strict – it is not based on the assessment criteria, creates inequalities between the applicants, is subjective and unjustified;
- avoiding extreme opinions – an assessor tries to keep his/her opinions and assessments 'somewhere in the middle' even if the applicant deserves a very good or very poor opinion;
- comparative assessment – an assessment decision is made comparing the applicants; this does not comply with the outcome-based assessment or principle of equal treatment;

- 'halo effect' – compliance or noncompliance of one competency of the applicant with the assessment criteria is extended to other competencies as well.

## Feedback

The 'how' and 'when' of giving feedback depend much on the structure of the assessment process. However, if possible, this should reach the applicant as quickly as possible after the interview.

The feedback based on the criteria should be clear and specific, detailed enough and supported and illustrated by examples taken from the evidence and/or interview, so the applicant can relate to that. When pointing out some strengths and weaknesses of the applicant with respect to the competencies, the feedback could focus on some of the most important ones in both of these categories. This ensures that the feedback is not too vague and incomprehensible for the applicant.

The feedback has to focus on the competencies assessed, not the applicant as a person. It should be based on the interview. The wording should refer to the assessor's understanding, not 'label' the applicant.

Positive and negative opinions should be clearly distinguishable. Furthermore, the applicant should agree with the decision, i.e. when giving feedback, the applicant should be asked whether s/he understood everything and whether s/he would like to add or correct something. Confusing presentation of assessment results allows the applicant to misinterpret the feedback; thus, s/he cannot learn from the RPL process. Furthermore, misinterpretation of feedback may lead to an appeal that could have been avoided with feedback that has been better thought through.

## Various methods for structuring and conducting interviews

There are several ways for conducting an assessment interview: it could be planned and conducted in compliance with the STARR(T) method, and the LSC (listen – summarise – continue) method could also be helpful. In certain situations, closed questions are also justified, or 'turbo' questions that partially exceed the assessment framework (learning outcome – evidence – threshold criterion).

**The STARR(T) method**[9] could be used to view the applicant's wider activities or to focus on his/her behaviour in a specific situation that required one or several competencies that are asked to be recognised. This method focuses on questions on situations, actions plans, models and concepts as well as results and strengths and weaknesses of the applicant's performance.

This method requires asking open questions that start with 'what?', 'who?', 'how?', 'why?', etc., and cannot be answered with just 'yes' or 'no'.

The usual structure of **an interview based on the STARR(T) method** is as follows:

**S** – **Situation** Based on the materials in the study portfolio, the applicant is asked to describe one prior experience (a situation or case) where they have had to prove their competence.

*Examples*

- *Please describe the experience during which or based on which this evidence has been created.*
- *Please give an example of a situation when you had to prove you have this competency.*
- *When was it?*
- *Who was your client? Who were the stakeholders? Who else was involved in this case and in which roles?*

**T** – **Task (or role)** The applicant's role, position, duties and responsibility with respect to the case described are specified.

*Examples*

- *What was your role?*
- *What was your position?*
- *What was your responsibility?*
- *What exactly was your duty and why?*
- *What were the objectives set (for you, for the team)?*

**A** – **Activities** The aim is to obtain an overview of what the applicant did in the situation described and whether it complied with what s/he was expected of. Here, the analysis could be included as well and the applicant could be asked to justify the choice of his/her approach and discuss the possible alternatives.

---

[9] More detailed information can be found in *STARR tehnika kasutamine varasemate õpingute ja töökogemuse hindamisel* (The STARR method in recognition of prior learning), compiled by Einike Pilli and Inga Vau, pp. 12–19. http://primus.archimedes.ee/sites/default/files/vota/STARR%20juhend_loplik.pdf, in Estonian.

*Examples*

- *What activities took place within this case?*
- *What did you do? At what level (on your own, under supervision, supervising others)?*
- *Which approach did you choose? Why? What could have been an alternative?*

**R – Result** The applicant points out what was the result of the activities implemented within this case, what was the outcome. The applicant is asked what s/he achieved as a result of his/her activities.

*Examples*

- *What was the result achieved?*
- *What was the outcome of your conduct?*
- *Was the objective reached?*
- *To what extent was the result dependent on your activities and approach chosen?*

Apart from that, questions on reasons may be asked:

- *Why was it a success? What was the critical success factor?*
- *Why did it fail? What could have been done differently?*
- *How was the result received by the organisation and/or clients?*

**R – Reflection (or analysis)** The applicant is asked to assess his/her achievement, to compare this against the feedback received from other parties (clients, colleagues and managers) and to give reasons for the differences. The applicant looks back on his/her experience and what was learned from it.

*Examples*

- *Did you reach a result that you wanted and was expected of you?*
- *Did you reach the objective set?*
- *Would you act similarly in a similar case? What would you (definitely) do differently?*
- *Have you been in a similar situation later? Did you do anything differently? Was the result different?*
- *Give an example of a similar situation where the result was poorer or better. What did you do differently in that situation?*
- *Was the task easy, hard or did it match your skills?*
- *What was the feedback to your activities and the result? What is your own opinion? Why does your opinion sometimes differ from that of others?*

**T** – **Transfer** An assessor creates a new situation (case or role) and asks the applicant to choose a suitable plan of action and approach. In this way,

the assessor can verify whether the applicant's competencies are deep enough and whether s/he can apply these to come to relevant solutions in situations that are similar to what s/he has experienced but still differing a bit.

*Examples*

- *How would you resolve a similar situation with just a half of the resources?*
- *What would you have done if your colleagues, managers or clients had rejected your approach?*

When using the STARR(T) method in an interview, the assessor has to make sure to follow the structure of the interview and bring the applicant back to the topic in question should s/he wander away from that (e.g. the role, if the applicant already proceeds to the activities but it is not known what was expected of him/her).

example  **The competency to be proven:** *the ability to resolve conflicts*

**Situation.** *An attendee of an in-service training session is not happy with the grade s/he had been given, considering it unfair and submitting the respective written complaint.*

**Role.** *The task of the training manager was to respond to the complaint, and his/her responsibility is to ensure the overall satisfaction of clients.*

**Activity.** *The training manager read the complaint, analysed the arguments provided therein, formulated the central problem and devised the possible solutions. As regards the solutions for which s/he was not competent to make a decision, s/he asked approval from the head of the department. Apart from that, some details had to be coordinated with the coordinators of the training programmes. Then, the training manager agreed on a meeting with the upset client. During the meeting, s/he listened to the complaints of the client once more, said that s/he understood the problem, presented the arguments of the training company and offered a possible solution.*

**Result.** *The client who submitted the complaint received an exhaustive response and accepted the offered solution: s/he could submit a new final paper. The head of the department had thought that this solution was the best for the company because it did not incur significant extra costs. Thanks to the good communication skills of the training*

*manager, the client ended up with a positive impression of the training company.*

**Analysis** *(also* **feedback***). Regarding learning from the experience, the training manager mentioned that the first key to success in the case of unsatisfied clients is hearing them out and expressing understanding of their problem, irrespective of the fact whether the complaint was justified or not. The feedback from the company management was positive: the client's satisfaction could be guaranteed with no significant extra costs and the good reputation of the company was restored in the eyes of the client.*

**Creation of a new situation** *(if required). The new case described by the assessors included a new condition: the client was not willing to accept the offer (to submit a new final paper), and the applicant was asked to find a new solution.*

Another way to steer an interview in a required direction and make sure that all participants have understood the questions and answers in the same way is the use of the **LSC (listen – summarise – continue)** method. Using this method, the assessor summarises each topic (learning outcome, competency) after discussing it. Thereby s/he states what his/her understanding of it is, and s/he asks the applicant to confirm it or to make additions or corrections to it. If necessary, more questions are asked about this topic in order to reach to a situation where the assessor has received all the information necessary for making a high-quality assessment decision. The next topic (competency, learning outcome) will be discussed only after the previous one has been exhausted and nobody has anything to add. The LSC method prevents situations where an applicant misinterprets the assessment decision or feedback or appeals the decision because s/he was not able to confirm that s/he was understood correctly or that s/he had nothing else to add when discussing the topic.

The STARR(T) and LSC methods can also be combined if required: one part of an interview being a case analysis on the basis of the STARR(T) method, followed by a summary and then, proceeding to the next case.

Closed questions and multiple-choice questions are less often necessary in an interview. Closed questions are justified for specifying something.

*Examples*
- *Have you been in this kind of situation earlier?*
- *Is the case in the example your only similar experience / best example / last similar task?*

Applicants give 'yes' or 'no' answers to these questions and the assessors can proceed on the base of the answer.

Multiple-choice questions are justified for cases where an overview of the applicant's competencies needs to be obtained as quickly as possible and it is not possible to ask questions regarding each competency. In this case, the assessor submits a list of the competencies s/he wants to ask questions about and the applicant chooses an agreed number of these questions that they will be discussing in more detail. At first, the applicant gives his/her self-assessment of the relevant competency, using the agreed scale. This provides the assessors a preliminary overview. Then, they ask questions on topics they still do not have enough information about. Such points of interest may be, for example, very low or high self-esteem regarding some of the competencies, discrepancies in assessments (a competence that should be assessed more highly than the actual assessment) or if the self-assessment of the applicant does not overlap with the assessor's opinion of the applicant's competencies, based on the evidence.

During the interview, assessors may also use **'turbo' questions** the aim of which is to learn about the depth and extent of the applicant's competencies and the integrity of his/her understanding. Such questions can guide the applicant to thinking and reasoning more widely than application of the specific competency would require. For example, the applicant is asked to compare himself/herself to his/her colleagues, specific results with those of a specific period or the team as well as alternative actions, approaches and decisions. Another option is to ask the applicant's opinion of, for example, his/her activities, the contribution of his/her colleagues, behaviour of various parties.

*Examples*

- *Did the clients have a positive opinion of the innovations and changes; did they understand them? Why?*

Also, the reasons for the success or problems could be asked or an analysis of the side effects of the activities.

*Examples*

- *The applicant helped increase the market share but the production cannot keep up. Was something done wrong or left unnoticed? What was it?*

Questions asking an opinion of the applicant or other parties and hypothetical questions beginning with 'Let us assume...' are also turbo questions.

*Examples*

- *What do you think the problem the sales department would have wanted to be resolved first was?*
- *Which incidental service is the most valuable for clients?*
- *How do you think the other departments received information about the project you managed?*
- *What is your opinion of the information exchange in your organisation?*
- *Let us assume that you are the general manager and have to make a decision in this case. Would the decision be the same you already made?*

Assessors use hypothetical questions to describe a situation the characteristics of which do not necessarily have to be possible in real life but the applicant's description of the hypothetic activities in the case of such a situation and his/her reasons for these activities provide the assessor with proof of understanding the details of the competency. Hypothetical questions could include an unlimited or extremely limited budget or human resources, opportunity to change the work arrangements (incl. that of other institutions or departments), employees or geographical boundaries.

Turbo questions can be easily integrated into interviews conducted in compliance with the STARR(T) method, starting from the part of activities.

## 3.4 Combining different assessment methods

It is recommended to use the two methods described above – study portfolios and interviews – always when assessing whether the competencies have actually been acquired. As an exception in cases where the extent and depth of the applicant's competencies considerably exceed the learning outcomes of the subject or module the application pertains to, the only assessment method used could be the study portfolio (e.g. in the case of fundamentals of accounting if the applicant has been working as chief accountant for years). In other cases, an interview should be used as an additional assessment method. If required, a written exchange of questions and answers between the applicant and the assessor(s) could be an alternative to the interview. Interviews can also be conducted with the help of various ICT means.

Presuming that a study portfolio (as a set of evidence) is an inevitable assessment method in RPL, all further methods should be directly connected to the evidence in the study portfolio.

## Evidence

RPL evidence can be divided into three categories:

- **Direct evidence** is material that has been created by applicants and that can be used as proof of the relevant competencies. All physical items, including documents and texts, are direct evidence. Video and audio recordings of activities requiring the competency can be deemed to be a combination of direct evidence and observation.

Direct evidence is the most preferred one in a study portfolio because it allows for assessors' immediate assessment of application of the competence.

### Alternatives to direct evidence

If there is no or not enough direct evidence, an additional assessment method should be used to compensate for that. The best alternatives are an interview if competencies requiring theoretical knowledge or an overview are to be recognised and a demonstration, simulation or an observation if the level of a specific skill needs to be verified. If demonstration is used and there is more than one applicant, a peer assessment can be used as an additional method. According to this method, the applicants assess each other's performance. This shows the assessor whether the applicants have adequate theoretical knowledge and whether they understand the links between the activities and the results.

- **Indirect evidence** is information a third party has supplied on the applicant's competencies. This category of evidence includes all documents proving the existence of competencies acquired through formal and non-formal learning (report cards, academic transcripts / diploma supplements, diplomas, professional certificates, course descriptions and learning outcomes, certificates, training programmes, etc.) as well as assessments and opinions regarding the applicant's competencies (e.g. feedback from various parties, assessment of the direct supervisor, rewards received, certificates, etc.). Employer's certificate on the time the applicant has been employed with the company and on his/her duties is also indirect evidence.

### How trustworthy and informative are the documents?

Documents regarding formal learning are usually trustworthy. Originals or certified copies are preferred; however, copies can also be made by the person who receives RPL applications. Documents regarding formal stud-

ies abroad need to be recognised by a competent authority in Estonia. The teacher, name of the school, school ownership or, for example, whether the educational institution still exists does not affect recognition of prior learning. Also the fact that the courses completed were a part of an unaccredited study programme is not a restriction. In the latter case, an additional assessment method may be used regarding the competencies that are critical from the point of view of the study programme as a whole if this is justified, but this may not become a new assessment of the whole course.

The situation with the documents on non-formal learning or in-service training is often more complex because these do not contain enough information on the nature or level of the competencies acquired. Furthermore, it is not always possible to be completely sure that a document that has been issued a long time ago is accurate. Aside from that, such training often cannot be used in RPL, or if it can, it is usually treated as supporting learning in the case of a combined application. Should there be a situation where recognition of competencies acquired from in-service training only is applied for and a document that is not informative enough is submitted, the applicant might be asked for an additional overview of what had been studied and where it has been applied later or an additional assessment method could be used. Apart from in-service training sessions granting a certificate or professional certificate, it may be said that, as a rule, in-service training on its own is an inadequate basis for recognition.

- **An analysis of learning from experience** (formerly 'narrative evidence') is an analysis of what has been learned, written by the applicant.

The analysis has to describe how the relevant competencies were acquired. It should indicate what was done in what setting, what the applicant's role in that was and whether the result achieved was expected or rather not (see the STARR method on p. 27 above). The description provides the assessor with an overview of the possible depth and extent of the competency (for example, if the activity took place during a very short period of time or included just the simplest procedures or methods but the learning outcomes include the terms 'repeatedly', 'complex' and 'complete solutions', etc., it might be inferred that learning from the experience was probably inadequate).

The following part is an analytic one where the applicant draws connections between what has been done and what has been achieved and provides his/her motivated opinion on that, i.e. points out why the result was as expected or not and, in the latter case, adds an alternative action plan for achieving the expected result. It is good if the applicant has had an

adequate amount of similar experiences, so s/he can give an example of an adjusted action plan that has already been implemented and its results. However, this is often not the case, but if other criteria have been met, this should not be an obstacle to a positive decision.

***The criteria for analysing learning from experience*** may include the following:

- the activity described supports acquisition of the learning outcomes of the subject or module regarding which the application has been submitted;
- the tasks/duties important from the point of view of the learning outcome have been described;
- the analysis contains a clear and unambiguous understanding of what has been learned from the experience and how it is connected to the learning outcomes of the course or module;
- the successes and weaker performances of activities requiring the relevant competencies have been analysed and what the most important thing the applicant learned from these situations was has been pointed out. If the examples include only performances with expected results, these have to be accompanied by an explanation of the reasons for the success (what the critical success factor was).

When writing an analysis, it is easier for an applicant to show what has been learned, using weaker performances as an example; however, pointing to learning from an activity with the expected result is more common to formal studies (theories are usually formulated in affirmative sentences, i.e. what should be done and how in order to reach the expected result).

## Evidence labelling

In the case of extensive applications, it is recommended to label direct and indirect evidence and, if possible, to sort these on the basis of **competencies to be recognised**, not the type of experience. This means that no difference is made between documents on the work experience, in-service training certificates, professional certificates, transcripts of prior learning results, etc.; instead, the documents are grouped on the basis of whether these are proof of programming, masonry or article writing competencies. An analysis of learning from experience should refer to the material(s) proving that the learning described and analysed has occurred (one reference may be used several times). Applicants should decide themselves how to

label the evidence, but the referencing method should be understandable without additional explications (most probably a simple numbering is the easiest way).

## Use of additional assessment methods

After reviewing the evidence, assessors have gained a basic understanding of the competencies the RPL applicant has acquired and to what extent there is proof of that. Also the questions to ask the applicant have been formulated. On the basis of this information a decision has to be made regarding additional assessment methods.

Such assessment methods should be planned on the 'as much as needed and as little as possible' principle. This helps to optimise the time of both applicants and assessors. Detailed additional verification of competencies that already have adequate evidence is not justified. If an interview is chosen, it is possible to get proof that the most important competencies have been acquired, the applicant can see the 'big picture' and connections and the evidence has been created by the applicant and pertains to the applicant.

Demonstration or observation can be used to verify that the applicant has a skill that cannot be easily evidenced by documents or what the exact level of learning from experience is.

When choosing between additional assessment methods, their optimum application should be considered as well, if possible. For example, there is no reason to ask an applicant to demonstrate activities that the assessor can observe during the actual everyday work process. There is no need for the whole assessment committee to observe the process, one specialist competent in the competency in question is enough; s/he will pass the information on to others. **(NB** Here the term 'information' refers to an adequate and relevant overview of what evidence was received during the observation; it should not be just a personal opinion of the assessor.)

A simulation can be chosen if the required technical solutions are at hand and the competencies to be verified are those that cannot be demonstrated in 'real life'; for example, if this would be too dangerous or expensive.

The same examination or pass/fail evaluation used in formal education is not an accepted assessment method in RPL. Such a method would place RPL applicants into an unjustifiably unfavourable situation, compared to ordinary students, because the exam questions usually are based on the

study process (the exercises practiced, work practiced together, individual work, compulsory and recommended literature, etc.) and often reflect what the teacher has considered to be the most important. This means that an RPL applicant whose competencies may exceed those of ordinary students, both with respect to the depth and extent of the competencies, cannot express his/her knowledge and skills in the best way because s/he does not have the insignificant details ordinary students have.

example *One or several exam questions are based on an article that the students had to read as an individual work. This is quite justified in formal education. However, an RPL applicant may have read many articles on the same topic and they may have been even higher-level articles but it is still possible that s/he cannot able to provide 100% correct answers to the questions on that particular article.*

Although RPL assessment does not include grading (except in recognising the original performance) and this applicant can exceed the threshold by answering the exam questions, creating such a situation is not appropriate. That is why applicants have to supply their study portfolios, so assessors can have a basis for assessment.

What kind of evidence of informal or combined learning do you prefer as a basis for assessment? Why?

What have been the most commonly used assessment methods during your experience as an assessor?

What have you based your choice on between the different assessment methods? Has the choice allowed you to reach the required results?

Based on your experience, what are the strengths and weaknesses of an interview as an assessment method?

Based on your experience, what are the strengths and weaknesses of a study portfolio as an assessment method?

# 4. Formulation of assessment decisions. Documentation

From the point of view of the quality of RPL assessment, the choice of appropriate assessment methods and a motivated assessment decision are of critical importance. The adequacy, accuracy and legibility of the documentation produced during the assessment process are equally important.

The first part of the documentation of the RPL process are **instructions, regulations,** etc., that are guiding material for applicants, advisers and assessors. The second part is an **RPL application and the related evidence.** For those, the competent authority often has prepared the respective forms and requirements for these (some possible criteria on page 11 above).

The following document that is created during the RPL process is an **assessment decision** based on which the result is entered into the information system and, in the case of an educational institution, also in the graduation documents. Recording RPL decisions in graduation documents of higher education study programmes has been regulated by government regulation on the statue and forms of diplomas and diploma supplements / academic transcripts (https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/988084?leiaKehtiv, in Estonian). This regulation stipulates the rules for recording the results of formal studies and learning from work experience, independent studies and in-service training in graduation documents. This regulation does not regulate how to record combined applications in study results; however, if the application does not pertain to just formal learning, it would be quite sensible to record the 'many-to-many' links in the same way as non-formal and informal learning are recorded.

The documentation that describes how an assessment decision is formed and how it is **explained to the applicant** has received the least attention in the RPL process. However, this content-related documentation is as important as that pertaining to the format.

**An RPL assessment decision** is often formed on the basis of more than one assessment method. Thus, after the assessors have reviewed the evidence, they have questions and arguments regarding one or another assessment. It is practical for the assessors to write these down, even if just for themselves, and keep them at least until the term for appealing the assessment decision has passed. First, these are helpful in discussions between the assessors on

the possible assessment decision and in choosing an additional assessment method (for example, if the assessor had more questions regarding verification of a practical skill, certain assessment methods are more suitable than in the case of verification whether the applicant understands the 'big picture').

Taking notes is definitely recommended if an interview is used as an assessment method. For that purpose the sample form of interview minutes in the annex to this manual (see p. 51) may be used. Each competent authority may adjust it depending on their specific needs. Taking notes during an interview may take place in various ways:

- each assessor takes notes regarding the responses to their own questions;
- somebody takes minutes of the whole conversation;
- assessors take each other's notes, i.e. the person who is engaged in conversation does not take notes when s/he is actively participating in the conversation, that is done by others; in this way, that person can focus on listening and following the thoughts of the applicant.

To assess the results of an observation, adequate notes are required. In order to use resources in an optimum way, often just one assessor conducts an observation; this is another reason why notes on what has been seen are necessary. Otherwise, other assessors cannot base their assessment on the description of the situation but have to make do with the opinion of the assessor who conducted the observation.

Upon agreement of the parties, the assessment may be recorded as well.

Apart from the above, such assessment notes make it considerably easier to write **feedback** for the RPL applicant. The latter is an inseparable and very important part of the assessment process. An applicant has to receive essential feedback on his/her application, irrespective of whether it was granted either fully or partially or not at all.

The most common method of giving feedback is adding it to the assessment decision (it has to be in a format that can be reproduced in writing). The main aim of feedback is to explain to the applicant why the assessment decision is what it is.

The feedback given to applicants could notionally be broken down into two parts:

- **feedback on the format of the material submitted** (i.e. whether it was relevant, adequate, linked, etc.) – an applicant should understand what was good about his/her material, what could be done better and how, and what material did not support the application;

- **feedback on the existence and adequacy of competencies evidenced by the application** – it should answer the main question of the assessment: which of the competencies referred to in the application are as required and can be recognised for the purpose of completing a study programme or granting a profession.

For both types of feedback, the language of learning outcomes and assessment criteria are recommended.

- In the first case, the criteria for the application, evidence and analysis of what has been learned can be used as a basis. If the material that has been submitted does not comply with the requirements, the assessor can make a decision that the applicant has to provide more material in order for it to be as required. Assessment of the competencies the applicant claims to have can be conducted only after that.

- In the second case, the threshold criteria for each specific learning outcome are used as the basis for providing feedback. Aside from that, in the case of a negative decision, the feedback has to point out what exactly is meant under inadequacy of the extent and/or depth of the learning outcomes.

Thus, a negative decision can be the result of the lack or inadequacy of competencies described in the learning outcomes or noncompliance with the threshold criteria of the material submitted as evidence of the competencies.

In the case of a positive decision, the feedback has to refer to the information on the basis of which the application was granted and it has to point out the applicant's competencies the level of which is higher than required and those the focus (approaches, technologies, etc.) of which is significantly different than that of the formal education.

If recognition pertains to prior learning and enough time has passed from the studies to presume that the knowledge and skills (that are not outdated) have been forgotten, the applicant's attention has to be drawn to this fact and topics (subtopics) that are an important preliminary knowledge to some of the following subjects or modules need to be pointed out. In the event of such feedback, the choice of their further actions is up to the RPL applicant. S/he may take the course anew, recall the important topics on his/her own or hope that s/he has not forgotten the prior learning or, if required, s/he can learn the forgotten part again during the studies.

The quality criteria for the feedback definitely include **constructiveness and clarity.** Constructive feedback means that in addition to the guidelines for what should be improved in the specific application, the applicant also receives information on possible next steps. If the decision is positive, it should be mentioned when the results are visible in the information system. If the decision is negative, the applicant has to receive information on possible next steps; for example, whether to take the course or module or acquire the missing competencies during the future work and apply for their recognition once again later.

When assessors ask an applicant to make additions to the application, the feedback has to be **specific** enough to be used to eliminate the shortcomings.

Feedback has to be **impartial, balanced** and definitely **support applicants' motivation to learn.** Everybody's learning has strengths to be pointed out and each application has some positive aspect to be emphasised. Similarly, it is almost always possible to refer to some options for further development. Feedback is ideal if the applicant agrees with it and is satisfied with it even if the assessment decision was not what s/he expected. Such feedback makes the applicant understand that the decision is in his/her interests, supports his/her learning and later coping with the profession.

What have your assessment decisions been based on?

Have there been any questions or appeals submitted regarding your decisions? What have the most common causes of these been?

Have you given constructive (content-related) feedback in positive as well as negative assessment decisions?

Have you given feedback on the evidence and on how the application was filled in?

# Conclusion

Understanding that learning is not the same as teaching and that acquisition of different competencies does not depend on time or place has taken root in the field of education in Estonia, in one way or another. The need for and importance of lifelong learning is acknowledged as a prerequisite of sustainable functioning of society. The position that each experience is valuable sounded like a slogan just a few years ago, but by today, it has been accepted, people realise their value and try to apply this to serve their personal interests and needs. One example of the latter is the increase in the number of RPL applicants and the volume of the applications in recent years. This is definitely the result of nationwide awareness raising, expansion of RPL from higher education and profession-granting bodies to vocational education institutions, more extensive use of outcome-based assessment as well as applicants' trust in such assessment. RPL applicants, after having analysed their prior learning and having received feedback from competent assessors, usually are convinced that their assessment decision is objective, protects their interests and ensures equal treatment for them. RPL assessors must increase this confidence with their everyday actions, decisions and feedback; they have to act in compliance with RPL principles and quality criteria and guide applicants to developing and applying their competencies in the best way possible.

Good luck in this interesting and challenging process!

# References

- Standard of Higher Education (https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/13255227?leiaKehtiv, in Estonian).

- **Pilli, Einike,** *Väljundipõhine hindamine kõrgkoolis*. Archimedes Foundation, Tartu 2009 (http://primus.archimedes.ee/sites/default/files/oppejoud/Hindamisraamat.pdf).

- **Pilli, Einike, Vau, Inga,** *STARR tehnika kasutamine varasemate õpingute ja töökogemuse hindamisel*.
http://primus.archimedes.ee/sites/default/files/vota/STARR%20juhend_loplik.pdf

- **Pääsukene, Anna-Liisa and others,** *RPL – Recognition of Prior Learning. A guide for Applicants*. Archimedes Foundation, Tartu 2010.

- **Rutiku, Siret, Valk, Aune, Pilli, Einike, Vanari, Kätlin,** *Õppekava arendamise juhendmaterjal*. Archimedes Foundation, Tartu 2009 .
(http://primus.archimedes.ee/system/files/oppekava/juhend_veeb.pdf)

- **Rutiku, Siret, Vau, Inga, Ranne, Raul,** *Manual for the recognition of prior learning*. Archimedes Foundation, Tartu 2011.

# Annex

## SAMPLE

### Interview minutes

Applicant _____

Application registration number _____

Assessor(s) _____

Interview date _____

| Competencies assessed during the interview<br>(filled in in advance by the assessor) | |
| --- | --- |
| **Issues discussed**<br>(filled in by the assessor in advance) | **Comments** |
| | |
| **Decision and feedback** | |

Signature(s) of assessor(s) _____

## http://vota.archimedes.ee