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Introducing..... the PLA / PLAR Quality Audit

This Quality Audit is a tool for comparing *PLA or PLAR services* against recommended national standards for Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition. These services might be the PLAR service you provide as a training institution or the PLAR service provided by others.

This PLA / PLAR Quality Audit will walk you through **a three-step process**. The result will be **information** that **you can use** to improve and promote your PLA / PLAR services and, hence, your training services. Or it can be information that you use to **choose from among** the many and varied training and PLAR service providers.

What are these *recommended national standards for PLAR?*

Recommended national *PLAR Standards* that describe the minimum requirements for adequacy in Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition services were developed by the Canadian Labour Force Development Board in 1996. The CLFDB, which has ceased to operate, was made up of representatives from business, organized labour, the four designated equity groups (women, visible minorities, aboriginal peoples, and persons with disabilities), the education and training community, and provincial and federal governments (ex officio). The labour market partners, at the CLFDB table, held the view that national standards are an important step in creating a training system in Canada that is equitable, effective and efficient. The CLFDB believed that the application of national standards to PLAR processes would ensure that individuals receive a fair assessment of their skills and knowledge. Human Resources Development Canada, and others, continue to advocate for Recognition of Prior Learning.

This Quality Audit is based on and similar to the FuturEd Training Quality Audit (FuturEd, 1997) -- a tool to assess learning services against the recommended national Training Standards (CLFDB, 1995).

What is the purpose of the PLA / PLAR Quality Audit?

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This Quality Audit assesses PLAR services from the point of view of the *consumers or users of training services.* The PLAR Standards taken together describe the type of PLA / PLAR service that students and their sponsors should expect for their investment in PLA / PLAR.

As consumers, we all expect choice, quality, and service. Consumers of training have said very clearly that they want training and PLAR services that are accessible, relevant, efficient and productive. This Quality Audit tells you how well a PLAR service meets consumer expectations.

If you provide PLAR services...

For purposes of this Guide, *PLA / PLAR services* include all those processes and practices that can lead either to advanced standing at an institution for education / training or more appropriate placement in the workplace.

You should know that potential students are being encouraged and assisted to use the PLAR Standards as their guide when engaging in the PLAR process. A consumer's guide to PLAR, based on the PLAR Standards, is available to individuals who are about to make training choices. *Are you ready when they ask questions?*

This Guide asks the same questions consumers will ask. When you've finished the Quality Audit, you will have...
- answers to the questions consumers will be asking
- a good idea of the PLA / PLAR elements you could promote through public relations
- a list of the PLA / PLAR elements that you should plan to improve
- an idea of your comparative advantage in the training industry

The PLAR Quality Audit can be used, as an example, for...
- program/service evaluation
- policy design and implementation
- strategic planning and organizational development
- comparative advantage and marketing plans

Getting started...

This Quality Audit is an assessment of *PLA / PLAR services* against minimum standards for adequacy. Taken together, these are the minimum requirements for a quality PLAR service.

Step 1: Determine and briefly describe the PLA / PLAR service(s) you plan to assess with the Quality Audit: *who, what, where, when, why and how.*

Quality Audit Instructions...

A Quality Audit is about gathering evidence -- hard evidence like documents and facts, not opinions or plans in progress. So... for each standard, we ask the question: *What evidence is there that this standard is met?* and what we gather up is evidence to support a variety of indicators.

Actual evidence is, again, an accumulation of papers and factual information. You might get 14 file folders, envelopes or boxes, number them for each standard, and use them to organize your indicator evidence.

Step 2: A Quality Audit involves 2 processes. *Start by gathering the evidence to support a standard. Then, use your judgement to rate the adequacy of that evidence on the scale of 5 to 0, with 0 being "non-existent" and 5 being "its all there."*

PLAR Quality Audit of _____
conducted by _____
date _____

Recommended National PLA / PLAR Standard	**Sample Indicators or Evidence of Quality for the Standard**	**(Circle) The Amount of Evidence to Support This Standard**
1. PLAR must be accessible and relevant to people as individuals. It must focus on the unique needs and abilities of the individual.	1.1 Stated policies and practices that: • put the PLAR needs of students / workers before those of the institution • emphasize what a person can do rather than what s/he cannot do • actively promote access • allow diversity and individualization	A lot Some None **5 4 3 2 1 0**
	1.2 Testimonials from PLAR completers that they were not treated like "just another number," i.e., that the practices reflect the policies	A lot Some None **5 4 3 2 1 0**
2. Assessment and recognition must be of learning - knowledge, skills, and judgement acquired through study or experience - not of experience.	2.1 Stated policies and practices that: • place value on all learning, regardless of where it was acquired • disregard the time, place or duration of the learning experience	A lot Some None **5 4 3 2 1 0**
	2.2 Actual assessment practices that objectively focus on acquired knowledge, skills and judgement	A lot Some None **5 4 3 2 1 0**

Recommended National PLA / PLAR Standard	Sample Indicators or Evidence of Quality for the Standard	(Circle) The Amount of Evidence to Support This Standard
3. The PLAR process must be fair and equitable. It must be barrier-free and bias-free.	3.1 Stated policies and practices that: • provide flexibility and accommodation for all individuals regardless of gender, ethnicity, or disability • remove such barriers as exorbitant costs and unnecessary credentials	A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0
	3.2 Testimonials from PLAR completers that there was no evidence of discrimination or inequity, i.e., that practice reflects the policies	A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0
4. The PLAR process must be efficient. It must make the best use of resources for the individual.	4.1 Stated policies and practices that: • give maximum advantage to the student / worker • keep the time and the cost required to conduct PLAR to a minimum	A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0
	4.2 Testimonials from PLAR completers that the investment was worthwhile, i.e., that the practices reflect the policies	A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0
5. The PLAR process must be effective. It must provide the opportunity for recognition of prior learning, but it must not hold out false promises.	5.1 Stated policies and practices that: • ensure that the process does indeed result in recognition of valued learning • objectively determine the degree to which the learning has application and makes this explicit to the PLAR completer	A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0
	5.2 Clear information for PLAR applicants that there are no guarantees of the recognition the applicant hopes for advance credit or employment	A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0
6. The PLAR process must be transparent. The individual must know the criteria and standards used to assess his or her skills and knowledge.	6.1 Clearly stated policies, provided in writing, that are generally and widely accessible	A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0
	6.2 Clearly stated criteria – employment requirements or learning objectives -- against which the applicant will be assessed that are generally and widely accessible	A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0

Recommended National PLA / PLAR Standard	Sample Indicators or Evidence of Quality for the Standard	(Circle) The Amount of Evidence to Support This Standard
7. The assessment must be reliable. The criteria and standards must be recognized and respected by all the labour market partners. This principle applies to occupational and skill standards, the learning outcomes stated for a specific course or training program, and the credentials required for a specific job or occupational group.	7.1 Assessment processes and tools that in fact measure the individuals learning against the set criteria 7.2 Criteria and standards that have been set with the involvement and approval of business, labour, educators, equity-seeking groups, and governments	A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0 A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0
8. The assessment tools and their PLAR application must be valid. They must be recognized and accepted by all the labour market partners.	8.1 Assessment tools and processes that have been tested and found to be consistent over a period of time 8.2 Assessment tools and processes that have been developed with the involvement and approval of the relevant industries, accreditation bodies, and student / worker advocates	A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0 A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0
9. Individuals assessing prior learning must be trained to perform this task.	9.1 Evidence that assessors have received training in PLAR 9.2 Involvement in the professional organizations that are developing PLAR locally, provincially and nationally for continuous upgrading and insight	A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0 A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0
10. The assessing organization must provide a number of ways to carry out an assessment. Individuals should have the opportunity to choose how their assessment will be done. If necessary, they should get help to make their choice.	10.1 Variety in the means of assessing learning, e.g., demonstration, written test, artifacts 10.2 Stated policies and practices that: • involve the applicant in making decisions • provide information about assessment choices	A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0 A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0

Recommended National PLAR Standard	Sample Indicators or Evidence of Quality for the Standard	(Circle) The Amount of Evidence to Support This Standard
11. Recognition awarded through PLAR should be considered equal to recognition awarded in the traditional manner.	11.1 A stated policy that the recognition awarded -- e.g., course credits or occupational skill acquisition -- is not differentiated on a transcript or employment record	A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0
	11.2 Testimonials from PLAR completers that their prior learning has not been recognized to be inferior in any way	A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0
12. Recognition awarded through PLAR should be transferable between organizations, provinces and territories.	12.1 Articulation agreements between education institutions intraprovincially and interprovincially	A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0
	12.2 National education and/or industry standards that form the basis for assessment criteria and make portability possible	A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0
13. PLAR must be an option or opportunity, not a mandatory process.	13.1 A stated policy that makes PLAR an optional approach to either getting a job or entering an education / training program	A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0
	13.2 Testimonials from PLAR completers that the process worked to their benefit	A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0
14. If a person is not satisfied with the PLAR assessment, an appeal procedure must be available.	14.1 Appeal procedures clearly stated to all PLAR applicants	A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0
	14.2 Stated policies and practices to conduct an appeal according to the same PLAR standards as the original PLAR assessment	A lot Some None 5 4 3 2 1 0

Total: _____

Step 3: Again, two processes. **First,** to see how well each standard is met, add together the two indicators for each for a total out of 10. A high score is a good score. **Then**, to see how well the PLA / PLAR service meets the recommended standards, total the amount for all the indicators. When you've finished a PLAR Quality Audit, you'll have a better sense of the quality of the PLA / PLAR service you're offering or considering.