



# **Quality Assurance in PLAR A Guide for Institutions**

## **Quality Assurance in PLAR Volume II**

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# **QUALITY ASSURANCE IN PLAR**

## **A Guide for Institutions**

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## Section One - Introduction

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) has slowly expanded across post-secondary institutions in Canada over the past several years. There is growing awareness of the important role quality assurance plays in this field. Research suggests that improvements to existing quality assurance measures and the introduction of new measures increases stakeholder confidence in PLAR.

### **Purpose**

This Guide offers practical ideas to post-secondary institutions and individual faculty members on how they can improve PLAR quality assurance measures. Each institution has its own way of ensuring quality – its own set of structures and procedures, its own approach to assessment and professional development. This Guide is not intended to be prescriptive, but rather it provides a range of measures from which administrators and faculty can select the most appropriate PLAR quality assurance strategies.

### **Strategies**

The strategies in this Guide have been developed after an extensive review of theoretical literature and Canadian and international practice in PLAR quality assurance and higher education. More information on the literature and on the ways other countries have managed similar quality assurance challenges can be found in the companion report, *Quality Assurance in PLAR: Issues and Strategies for Post-secondary Institutions* (2007).

### **Key Finding**

A main report finding is that overall the attention paid to Canadian PLAR quality assurance has been inadequate. Colleges and universities rely heavily on individual administrators, advisors, and faculty to provide clear, transparent expert procedures and valid and reliable decisions. Overall, postsecondary institutional PLAR documentation demonstrates a mindfulness of the importance of quality as evidenced by the adoption of principles, policies and procedures that imbed many elements of quality assurance. In many cases, however, this neither has been extended to explicit PLAR quality assurance policy statements nor has it migrated into institutional mainstream quality assurance mechanisms. This Guide has been prepared in the spirit of promoting targeted quality assurance.

## Organization

This Guide has eight short sections:

- **Section One** sets out the purpose.
- **Section Two** presents institution-wide strategies for ensuring PLAR quality assurance based on foundational policies and criteria for assessment.
- **Section Three** provides basic assessor criteria for use in judging prior learning and selecting assessment methods and tools. This section also describes the strengths and weaknesses of various assessment methods.
- **Section Four** outlines elements of a well-developed PLAR process using a flowchart as well as a self-checklist for assessors, advisors and administrators.
- **Section Five** presents innovative ideas on how monitoring and evaluation can be used to strengthen the PLAR process.
- **Section Six** emphasizes the important elements of PLAR professional development, and refers to relevant information in the main report.
- **Section Seven** contains a glossary of common terms used in the Guide.
- **Section Eight** provides information on resources and references.

We begin our suggested strategies with our proposed definition of quality assurance in PLAR in the context of post-secondary education. Quality Assurance is:

**The establishment of and adherence to policies, processes, and assessment practices ensuring that the knowledge and skills of individual learners are recognized so that they can successfully engage in the subjects and levels of learning that contribute meaningfully to their educational and employment goals.**

This definition focuses on the learner as the most important PLAR stakeholder and indicates the direction that quality assurance strategies should take. It also provides the flexibility necessary to interpret the context of recognition as both personal and public.

We sincerely hope that you will find this Guide helpful in your professional practice.

## Section Two - Institution-wide Policies

### I. Introduction

PLAR quality assurance relies on having appropriate institutional policies and procedures in place. This section of the Guide makes recommendations regarding institution-wide considerations. More detailed strategies relating to particular areas of responsibility are covered in Section Three.

From an institution-wide perspective, the primary PLAR considerations are Foundational Policies and Criteria for Managing the assessment process.

### II. Foundational Policies

There are a number of cross-cutting considerations, from an institutional perspective, that ensure a high quality PLAR service. The bullets below present specific actions that institutions can take to establish or improve the quality of existing PLAR services.

- Establish a principles-based approach to PLAR and quality assurance and issue a clear statement of institutional commitment to both. The Quality Assurance Agency in the United Kingdom recommends sixteen principles upon which to base APEL procedures. The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) Standards provide a second good example of a principles-based foundation for quality assurance in PLAR. The CAEL standards are presented in the Appendix.
- Incorporate PLAR into existing institutional quality assurance mechanisms including periodic program reviews, external peer reviews and student feedback.
- Prepare robust, explicit, quality-assurance-specific policies and procedures governing both the PLAR process and the selection and development of appropriate assessment methods and tools (i.e. a quality management system). The following link provides access to a sample of the *SIAST Guide to Recognition of Prior Learning and Assessment* that outlines quality assurance specific policies and procedures.  
<http://programs.siastr.ca/plar/forms&pdf/PLAR%20Guide%20October%202006.pdf>
- Establish educational planning for learners as a core PLAR component.

- Establish appropriate learner support services (e.g., individually-based advising services) particularly in activities related to interpretation of learning outcomes, presenting evidence of prior learning and post-assessment follow-up.
- Establish appropriate assessor support services (e.g., professional development, clear administrative guidelines).
- Establish assessment procedures that take into account the fact that most PLAR candidates are adult learners.
- Establish clear definitions for PLAR and quality assurance to ensure transparency and promote a common understanding among stakeholders.
- Establish clear communication mechanisms with PLAR applicants as well as records management systems that allow for review and analyses.
- Communicate all PLAR quality assurance measures to adult learners and other internal and external stakeholders through explicit descriptions of quality assurance in institutional publications and online mechanisms.

### **III. Criteria for Managing the Assessment Processes**

Setting criteria for managing the assessment process is critical to maintaining quality in PLAR. The following actions contribute to establishing sound criteria for quality management.

- Establish clear learning standards against which assessors will judge prior learning (e.g., learning outcomes) and communicate these clearly to learners.
- Establish criteria upon which faculty are expected to select assessment tools (e.g., “fitness for purpose”). Define and explain each criterion to assist assessors to make appropriate tool selections. For more information, see section 3, III.
- Establish criteria upon which assessors will judge prior learning, for example, its relevance, breadth, depth, currency, sufficiency, and authenticity.

Anchor the quality of individual assessments in a robust concept of validity and reliability that takes into account assessment procedures and post-assessment outcomes.



## Section Three - Criteria for Assessment Procedures

### I. Introduction

Assessment of learning is a complex process. Quality assured procedures support the credibility of the PLAR process and its results. These procedures can also be used to evaluate practice and create a basis for applied research.

This section of the Guide presents three set of criteria that can help assessors make sound judgments on prior learning presented by candidates.

- **Table One** – Describes what to look for in a candidate’s prior learning.
- **Table Two** – Outlines what to look for in a PLAR assessment tool.
- **Table Three** – Outlines a range of assessment methods that can be considered by assessors when asked to conduct an assessment. The strengths and weaknesses of each method are also presented.

### II. What to Look for in a Candidate’s Prior Learning

For credit to be granted, prior learning must meet the learning requirements (e.g. learning outcomes) of particular courses or programs. One way to analyze prior learning is to consider a candidate’s evidence with respect to breadth, depth, currency, sufficiency and authenticity.

**Table 1 - What to Look for in a Candidate’s Prior Learning**

Criteria	Definition
<b>Breadth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How broad are the knowledge and skills in the subject?</li><li>• How do these compare in breadth to what is expected from the course or program?</li></ul>
<b>Depth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does the candidate’s evidence indicate the required level of learning?</li><li>• Taxonomies, such as Bloom’s Taxonomy, is helpful in making this determination.</li></ul>
<b>Currency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Outdated Knowledge and skills will not meet current standards.</li><li>• If learning outcomes are used in the assessment, currency is automatically addressed.</li></ul>
<b>Sufficiency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is there sufficient information for an assessor to reasonably identify the candidate’s learning?</li></ul>

Criteria	Definition
Authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence submitted for PLAR assessment must be the work of the learner seeking credit. Assessors may rely on validation letters from experts in the field or conduct interviews to help authentic the evidence.</li> <li>When assessors are in doubt, further assessment may be necessary.</li> </ul>

### III. What to Look for in an Assessment Tool

Validity and reliability are difficult concepts to apply to many types of student evaluation. Internally developed classroom-based assessment tools that are not formally tested for validity and reliability are common. Our research concluded that the quality of assessment policies and procedures contributes to the quality of assessment decisions. To this end, many suggestions are presented in this Guide and in the companion report, *Quality Assurance in PLAR: Issues and Strategies for Post-secondary Institutions*. The following table highlights a number of considerations to take into account when selecting an appropriate PLAR assessment tool.

**Table 2 - What to look for in an Assessment Tool**

Criteria	Definition
Content Validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Content validity refers to the extent to which an assessment tool measures what it is intended to measure.</li> </ul>
Reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reliability refers to the extent to which similar results are achieved every time a candidate is assessed under similar conditions.</li> <li>Consistent results must be obtained despite a change in assessors.</li> </ul>
Fairness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fairness refers to the extent to which an assessment decision is protected from bias.</li> <li>Assessment tools that minimize broad cultural and individual assessor bias contribute to the quality of the result.</li> </ul>

Criteria	Definition
<b>Cognitive Complexity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessors should look for appropriate breadth and depth of a candidate’s learning.</li> <li>• Tools that assess these qualities are required.</li> </ul>
<b>Fitness for Purpose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There should be a good fit between the purpose of an assessment and the use of the results.</li> <li>• Appropriate assessment tools help to make this connection.</li> </ul>

#### **IV. Assessment Methods**

The list provided below outlines the most common assessment methods used in post-secondary education, with brief notes on respective advantages and disadvantages. These methods can also be used in PLAR

**Table 3 - Advantages and Disadvantages of Various Assessment Methods**

ASSESSMENT METHOD	DESCRIPTION	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<b>I. WRITTEN EXAMINATIONS</b>			
Multiple choice	Candidates select the appropriate answer from several possible responses.	Efficient and reliable. Allow a wide content sampling.	Question construction can be difficult and time consuming.
True – False	Candidates state whether statements are true or false.	Many items can be administered during a limited time period.	May encourage guessing.
Matching	Candidates select a second statement that best complements with each presented statement.	Easy to administer and score. Scoring is objective.	Multiple choice requires recognition of a pre-constructed response. True or false has a chance score of 50% unless adjusted and facts may not be categorically true or false.
Fill-in-the-blank	Candidates complete phrases or sentences by filling in the blanks.	Measure knowledge keyed to specific learning outcomes and competencies. Can be written to test all levels of the cognitive taxonomy.	Not appropriate for higher level thinking, performance or attitudinal outcomes.
Short answer	Candidates provide short answers to questions or complete sentences.	Require recollection of correct answer. Relatively easy to construct. Guessing is minimized. Allow wide sampling of content. Test candidate ability to organize, compose and write rather than merely recognize or recall.	Difficult to score. Tend to emphasize factual knowledge, rather than higher thinking skills, performance or attitudes.

ASSESSMENT METHOD	DESCRIPTION	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Essay	Candidates respond to questions or directions by organizing and writing an answer.	<p>Easy to prepare.</p> <p>Candidates use their own words.</p> <p>Measure complex cognitive learning.</p> <p>Eliminate guessing.</p>	<p>Testing is limited to a narrow sampling of content.</p> <p>May encourage "padding".</p> <p>Difficult to evaluate objectively or achieve reliability in scoring and requires good scoring guides, model answers and clear criteria.</p> <p>Favours candidates with high language skills.</p>
Situation-based problem solving	Candidates organize and write responses to problems usually presented in a real-life context.	<p>Able to measure complex, cognitive learning.</p> <p>Candidates use their own words.</p> <p>Relate learning to real world situations.</p> <p>May test several competencies at once.</p>	<p>Time-consuming and difficult to construct.</p> <p>Difficult to score reliably in scoring and requires good scoring guides.</p> <p>May reduce the range of content that can be sampled.</p>
Standardized exam	<p>Exam designed for large scale application.</p> <p>Often multiple-choice and true or false format.</p> <p>Many are norm-referenced.</p>	<p>Can often be graded by computer.</p> <p>Can compare performance across organizations and jurisdictions.</p> <p>Are considered more objective than other methods</p>	<p>Are culturally bound, limiting objectivity.</p> <p>Can be confusing if sequencing of questions is not clear.</p> <p>Ratio of correct to incorrect answer design limits quality of assessment tool.</p>

ASSESSMENT METHOD	DESCRIPTION	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<b>II. ORAL EXAMINATIONS</b>			
Structured oral test	Candidates respond to pre-set questions (and answers). Notes are kept on responses.	Tends to be more reliable than an unstructured oral test. Provides direct assessment of specific knowledge and skills.	Less personal Require training in interviewing skills and rating scales. Can cause candidate anxiety. May advantage candidates with strong verbal skills and comfort with speaking.
One to one interview	A face to face interview during which questions may flow from candidate responses.	Allows for a more complete assessment than pre-set questions. Useful in combination with portfolio assessment.	Requires training in interviewing skills and rating scales.
Panel interview	Candidates are interviewed by several examiners.	Moderate subjectivity.	Costly to conduct. Group process must be planned.

ASSESSMENT METHOD	DESCRIPTION	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<b>III. PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENTS</b>			
Simulation (OSCE)	Candidate performs in a simulated real life situation	Provides "controlled" sample of real life and work activity.  Allows for testing of complex integrated skills.	Requires clear criteria and standardized test conditions.  May be costly.
Presentation	Candidate verbally presents learning.	Provides candidate control over demonstration.	Depends on candidate confidence.
Skills demonstration	Candidate physically presents learning.	Clear demonstration of skill level and problem-solving ability in relevant contexts.  Excellent for measuring application and synthesis levels of the taxonomy.	Can be costly and time consuming.
Role play	Actors or peers take on roles to simulate a problem.	Practical – replicating "real world" skills as much as possible.	Group work may not be a fair assessment of individual ability.  Can create performance pressure unrelated to skills being assessed.
Observation	Observer assesses behavior in a natural setting. Assessment criteria is set in advance.	Opportunity to observe the real practice context  Often more comfortable for candidates than simulation.  Allow for collaboration with employees.	Complicated to set up.  Can be time consuming and costly.  A rating sheet is critical to prevent unfair test conditions.  Can involve unplanned, uncontrolled events.

ASSESSMENT METHOD	DESCRIPTION	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<b>IV. PRODUCT ASSESSMENTS</b>			
Work sample	Work sample is provided by the candidate.	Provides a real life context. Direct, practical and learner-centered. Useful when knowledge and skills are difficult to observe during product creation.	A rating sheet is critical to prevent unfair test conditions. Does not allow for process observation.
Portfolio or evidence collection	An organized collection of materials that present and verify skills and knowledge acquired experientially.	Enable reflection on learning. May demonstrate cross-cutting knowledge and skills.	May require supplementary interviews. Require advising services. May favour candidates with strong writing skills. Requires assessor training.
Self-evaluation	Learners respond in writing to criteria set for evaluating their learning	Uses critical reflection. Can be used in conjunction with other methods. Congruent with adult education philosophy.	May not be appropriate for use as the only assessment method. May favour candidates with strong writing skills.
External training program review	Assessment of workplace and occupational training programs for academic equivalency and credit.	Eliminates assessment of individual achievements based on successful program completion. Essentially credit transfer.	Can be costly. Training programs often do not have sufficient structure to justify academic credit.



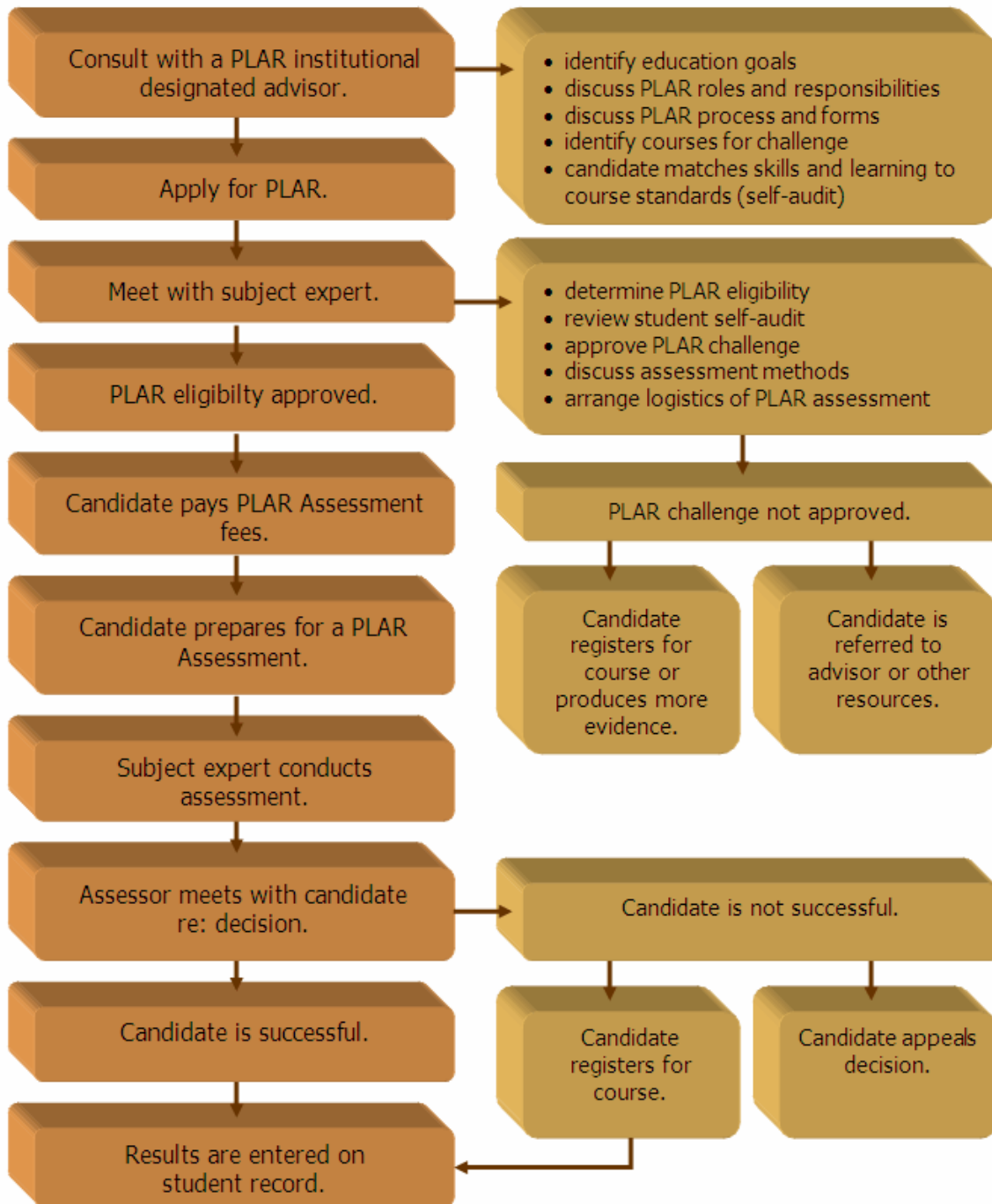
## Section Four - PLAR Process, Roles and Responsibilities

### I. Introduction

The following flowchart illustrates a sample PLAR process beginning with an initial learner-advisor consultation and ending with the recording of assessment results in student records. Each post-secondary institution will need to adjust this process to accommodate its unique infrastructure, faculty and learners. Establishing a flowchart fosters quality assurance as this becomes a resource that provides transparency and promotes equity.

Following the flowchart, a series of strategies are offered for assessors and advisors to use in promoting quality assurance in their professional practice. The assessor and advisor strategies are formatted into a checklist to assist in identifying areas for professional development.

**Figure 1 - Sample Flow Chart for a Candidate's PLAR Pathway**



## II. Strategies for Advisors

Advisors are important participants in the PLAR process. They help candidates view their prior learning assessments in the context of a broader educational, career or employment plan. In addition, the smoothness of the process and the success of the candidate are heavily dependent on the initial advising steps.

Candidates often arrive at the initial session with questions about PLAR. Many candidates have clear ideas about their experiential learning, but they do not know how this learning applies to their field of study. They are frequently hesitant and concerned that they will not be given the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes in a manner that is meaningful to them.

Candidates also want to know:

- The steps in the process.
- What documentation needs to be provided and completed
- Institutional expectations of the candidate.
- Costs.
- Recording of results.
- How the PLAR process will help them meet their career and education goals.

Advisors must, therefore, assist the learner with these inquiries by providing clear and accurate information in a warm, open and inviting setting for candidates.

The following checklist presents practices of exemplary advisors. It can be used by PLAR advisors to review their professional practice and to plan their professional development.

**Table 4 - Strategies for PLAR Advisors**

Strategies	Yes	No
<b>I. General Strategies for PLAR Advisors</b>		
• Advocate for PLAR.		
• Demonstrate an open attitude toward alternatives to traditional, behaviorist-based assessment.		
• Promote assessment options and PLAR requirements to program areas and faculty through collaboration.		
• Provide faculty with PLAR principles, practices and capacity to support adult learner needs.		
<b>II. Advising Strategies</b>		
• Ensure candidate assessment is part of an identified educational, career or employment plan.		
• Assist individuals requesting PLAR to identify education and career goals.		
• Ensure PLAR information is clear and accurate and process is transparent.		
• Communicate PLAR expectations clearly and provide a supportive environment.		
• Assist candidates to identify experiential knowledge and skills.		
• Provide candidates with clear, consistent, written guidelines on PLAR application and assessment procedures.		
• Interview, coach, and give feedback to individuals.		
• Promote individual independence throughout the PLAR process.		
• Link individuals to appropriate resources (e.g., portfolio development workshops).		
• Discuss student loan implications and other student financial options.		
• Explain post-assessment process for unsuccessful candidates.		
• Refer candidates to experienced PLAR.		

### III. Strategies for Assessors

Assessor qualifications are the essence of PLAR quality. Assessment quality outcomes rest heavily on ability to select and develop appropriate assessment tools and to make reasonable judgments on submitted evidence.

In addition, PLAR practitioners need to examine and understand their own theoretical perspectives and attitudes on adult learning, contemporary and traditional forms of assessment and PLAR. To implement PLAR, they must take into account contemporary arguments that learning involves active construction of meaning – meaning that is context influenced, socially mediated, and situated in the real world of the learner (Chappell, 2002). They must find ways to identify the breadth, currency, depth, sufficiency and authenticity of a candidate’s prior learning without firsthand knowledge of the context in which it was acquired.

The strategies presented in the following checklist reflect exemplary PLAR assessor knowledge and the practices. Faculty and other assessors can use it to plan and develop assessments and to identify areas for professional development.

**Table 5 - Strategies for PLAR Assessors**

<b>General Strategies for PLAR Assessors</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>I. Assessor Knowledge and Attitudes</b>		
• Be knowledgeable about adult learning principles and PLAR.		
• Have sufficient knowledge in the subject that is being assessed.		
• Demonstrate an open attitude toward alternatives to traditional, behaviorist-based assessment.		
• Ensure no personal interest in the assessment outcome and no conflict of interest.		
<b>II. Prior to an Assessment</b>		
• Base assessment and learning recognition based on knowledge and skills, not experience.		
• Ensure clearly stated learning standards against which prior learning will be assessed (e.g. learning outcomes, competency statements).		
• Use existing institutional or colleague experience and expertise to assess prior learning.		
• Assessment tools selected are “fit for purpose”.		
• Establish procedures for assessing team-based prior learning.		

General Strategies for PLAR Assessors	Yes	No
• Identify methods that measure application of knowledge and critical thinking.		
• Review previously administered assessments for ideas.		
• Design tools that assess appropriate balance of applied and theoretical learning.		
• Sector specific jargon and textbook questions are not used when developing assessments.		
• Explicit criteria for third party evidence and the assigned weight established for portfolio assessment.		
• Grading instruments to guide decision-making (i.e. rubrics) established.		
• Institutional policies and standards for assessment practices followed.		
• Assessment tools are culturally inclusive and at appropriate language and literacy levels.		
• If possible, test new assessment tools prior to use.		
<b>III. Working with Candidates</b>		
• Employ adult learning concepts.		
• Assessment purpose (e.g., admission, academic credit, placement) clearly stated.		
• Clear, consistent, written guidelines for providing evidence given to candidates.		
• Liaise with the PLAR advisor, to support the process and troubleshoot problems.		
• Allow candidates to provide input on possible assessment methods.		
• Use multiple modes for assessment and performance tasks.		
• Use established assessment principles for judging prior learning, for example, relevance, breadth, depth, currency, sufficiency and authenticity.		
• Provide learners with assessment decisions criteria.		
• Assess and make judgments based on evidence of learning relevant to expected outcomes.		
<b>IV. Following Assessment</b>		
• Provide candidates with a written assessment results decision.		
• Provide candidates with opportunity to discuss assessment results and appeal opportunities.		

## Section Five - Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation processes are used to improve and strengthen the credibility of the PLAR process.

In our report, *Quality Assurance in PLAR: Issues and Strategies for Post-secondary Institutions*, we concluded that PLAR:

- Is not adequately integrated into existing institutional quality assurance mechanisms
- Quality assurance strategies that do exist are not adequate or sufficiently explicit.

The following strategies can be used to formalize institutional PLAR processes, such as monitoring and evaluation, and to make quality assurance more explicit. These strategies were identified in our research into PLAR administrative practices in Canada and other countries.

- **Establish an internal quality monitoring process** – For example, use a quality moderation process enabling assessors to meet on a regular basis to compare and evaluate their PLAR assessment tools and methods, procedures and outcomes. Moderation is an effective support mechanism for professional judgment and can be used with a sampling process (e.g. a sample of assessments from a range of candidates and a range of assessors).
- **Develop checklists** – To ensure assessment methods and tools are fit for the purpose of assessing prior learning (e.g. checklists to help assessors design assessment tools and strategies).
- **Establish reference resources** – Possible areas could include PLAR quality assurance, exemplars of pre-evaluated assessment tasks (to ensure accuracy of assessment related to performance criteria, unambiguous instructions to both candidate and assessor, accepted as benchmarks by assessors), instruments and learner responses that can be shared among assessors.
- **Establish an assessment tool selection and development protocol** – This should engage at least two experts: one in the field of study and one expert in PLAR.

- **Undertake regular quality checks** – Use existing institutional procedures and indicators including some combination from the following list:
  - Satisfaction surveys, as part of regular institutional monitoring and evaluation
  - Advisory committees
  - Individual interviews with PLAR learners
  - Focus groups
  - Formal evaluation studies
  - Transcript analysis
  - Information systems
  - External evaluators
  
- Audit activity by:
  - Conducting double assessments.
  - Expert attendance at assessments.
  - Reviewing past assessments.
  - Reviewing assessments with supervisory staff prior to final decision
  
- Track candidates' subsequent successes to identify the impact of PLAR.
  
- Monitor credit awards and transcript entries to avoid "double counting" credit for the same learning.
  
- Issue an annual publication that documents institutional PLAR quality assurance practices and processes, and assessment methods and tools based on the results of self-audits.
  
- Monitor applications of policies and procedures application using existing institutional committees and evaluate trends for systemic implications.
  
- Record all contacts related to PLAR, including purely information seeking contacts. Record candidates who start and who either finish, or do not finish, a PLAR process.
  
- Monitor and evaluate learner appeals for systemic implications.
  
- Conduct longitudinal studies of PLAR candidate academic success.
  
- Evaluate procedures for evidence of bias with respect to ethnicity, gender, age, disability, social class and race.



## Section Six - Professional Development

It is important for assessors and advisors to undertake PLAR professional development. Post-secondary faculty are experts in their subject areas, but may not have teaching degrees or other formal qualifications to assess learning. Professional development is therefore a key element of PLAR quality. Advisors need to fully understand the PLAR process and the underlying concepts of adult learning. The following strategies are provided for institutions interested in improving assessor and advisor knowledge and skills.

- Provide funding for professional development activities that enhance institutional capacity to deliver PLAR services.
- Develop and provide training materials that include guidance on assessment methods and tool selection.
- Provide guides for assessors, advisors and other educational departments that are aligned with the institution-wide policies (please refer to Section One).
- Provide workshops on standards for selecting assessment methods, conditions for recognition, and administrative and evaluation procedures
- Require new faculty to undertake professional development in teaching and learning. Include PLAR as a component of this program.
- Incorporate PLAR process orientation into faculty and advisor orientations.
- Provide in-house training on such topics as:
  - PLAR policies and procedures.
  - The use of outcomes-based curriculum.
  - Delivery of portfolio development workshops.
  - Development and implementation of authentic assessment practices.
  - Learning taxonomies.
  - Constructivist theories of learning.
  - Post-assessment advising.

- Provide a comprehensive set of quality assurance-infused tools. These could include:
  - Up-to-date, written policies.
  - Detailed procedures and forms.
  - Guidelines on selecting assessment methods and tools.
  - Technical assessment standards.
  - Templates for candidate guides and authentic assessment procedures.
  - Resources for further reading.
  - Conducting assessments.
  - Grading and recording assessment tools.
  
- Create opportunities to develop good PLAR practice through activities such as coordination of research projects and conferences.

## Section Seven - Glossary

**Advisor** - Someone who advises students on the institutional PLAR policies and procedures, educational planning, and identifying prior learning

**Assessor** - A subject area expert in the area being assessed who is responsible for evaluating a candidate's prior learning.

**Authentic assessment** - The measurement of an individual's ability to use previously acquired learning to perform tasks or solve problems by demonstrating meaningful application of essential knowledge and skills to real life situations (Mueller, 2005).

**Experiential learning** - Knowledge and skills acquired through experience.

**Fitness for purpose** - The selection of assessment method is based on what an assessment is supposed to measure.

**Learning Outcome** - A statement that describes what a person should know and be able to do as a result of a learning experience.

**Moderation** - The process that monitors internal activities through group action.

**Post-secondary** - Formal education at public colleges, universities, university-colleges, and institutes.

**Quality assurance** - The establishment of and adherence to policies, processes, and assessment practices that ensure knowledge and skills of individual learners are recognized so that they can successfully engage in subjects and levels of learning that contribute meaningfully to their educational and employment goals.

**Reliability** - Consistency of results over time.

**Right of appeal** - The right to have a decision formally reviewed.

**Strategic plan** - A coordinated, integrated and long term plan to achieve organizational goals over the long-term.

**Transparency** - PLAR policies, procedures and practices are fully disclosed, open to scrutiny, and publicly available. Candidates have access to reasons for PLAR decisions.

## Section Eight - Key Resources and References

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## Appendix

### **The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning Ten Standards for Assessing Learning**

- I. Credit or its equivalent should be awarded only for learning and not for experience.
- II. Assessment should be based on standards and criteria for the level of acceptable learning that are both agreed upon and made public.
- III. Assessment should be treated as an integral part of learning, not separate from it and should be based on an understanding of learning processes.
- IV. The determination of credit awards and competence levels must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic or credentialing experts.
- V. Credit or other credentialing should be appropriate to the context in which it is awarded and accepted.
- VI. If awards are for credit, transcript entries should clearly describe what learning is being recognized and should be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.
- VII. Policies, procedures, and criteria applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be full disclosed and prominently available to all parties involved in the assessment process.
- VIII. Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.
- IX. All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should pursue and receive adequate training and continuing professional development for the functions they perform.
- X. Assessment programs should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served, the purposes being met, and the state of the assessment arts.

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