

Recognising your prior learning and experience

Have you been actively involved in Arboriculture and are seeking formal qualifications of your skills or have a superseded qualification you wish to upgrade to current standards? The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process may be your pathway to successfully achieving these goals.

To have skills formally recognised in the national education system, a certified assessor from a registered training organisation (RTO) must make sure you have the skills and knowledge that meet critical elements of arboriculture industry standards. This means you will be involved in a careful and comprehensive process that covers the content of all unit/s or qualification/s you can be recognised for.

Your assessor will be seeking evidence that you have skills and knowledge in a range of what is called 'Units of competency', of which a number of units will make up your particular qualification. Each unit will contain elements of particular skill set and knowledge required to demonstrate your competency in a particular field. For each unit you will need to provide information about your prior experience. These will generally be required in the following format:

- Formal evidence: Prior (related) certifications and qualifications (in part or in full)
- Tangible evidence: Documents, images that are of your own work
- Personal validation: Evidence of work history, industry involvement and personal references
- Third party validation: Persons, clients, supervisors that consent to being contacted by your assessor to further validate your activities within industry.
- Challenge questioning: Your assessor will challenge your knowledge to specific elements of units of competencies.

Tips and hints to prepare yourself for RPL

Being prepared can save you valuable time and make the recognition process stress-free for you. The following check list will help prepare for your first interview with your assessor.

Tips	Ready check Y/N
1. Be prepared before you talk to your assessor about your job roles and your work history. Update your CV, resume or jot down a few points about where you have worked, either paid or unpaid, and what you did.	
2. Bring your position description and any performance appraisals you have from any related areas you have worked in.	
3. Think about who can confirm your skill level. Think about current or recent supervisors who have seen your work in the past 18 months and can confirm your skills. You may also have contacts with past clients who can vouch for your skills level. Make contact with these persons and seek their support should your assessor need to contact them seeking their third party validation of your past and/or present activities	
4. Collect certificates from any training you have done in the past. Your assessor will be looking for industry currency and even certificates of attendance help validate your continuing education	
5. Speak with the assessor about other ways you can show your skills. These could be letters from employers, records of your trade qualifications, employers or clients in related industries, acknowledgements, workplace forms (as long as they don't show client details) or other relevant documents.	

Steps in the RPL process

Your assessor or institute can advise what 'core units' must be completed and a range of other supporting units that will be required to complete the qualification. Take the time to read and understand each unit of competency and what they are about.

Step 1 - Provide information of your skills and experience

Provide as much relevant evidence as you can of your previous experience. This is your first opportunity (and not the last) to provide proof of your variety of experience in the industry. Examples of your work history could include a range of:

- Certificates/Results of Assessment
- Diaries/job sheets/log books
- Certificates - workshops, seminars etc
- Membership of relevant associations
- Documentation that may demonstrate industry experience
- Brief CV or Work History
- Results/Statement of Attendance
- Industry awards
- Site Training Records
- References/letters from previous employers/supervisors

You will also need contact details of two (2) work referees who can confirm your skills in the industry. This evidence should be as comprehensive as possible to make your variety of experience very clear to the assessor.

Step 2 - Conversation with Assessor

An assessor will review the information you provide to match up your skills to the units/subjects in the qualification. At this point, you will have the opportunity to discuss and identify your previous experience with an assessor who will understand your industry experience and conduct a competency conversation with you. You will be required to answer trade related challenge questions to help identify your current skills.

Step 3 - Practical demonstration of your skills

The assessor may conduct a practical skills test at your workplace (if appropriate) or at another suitable venue. This is an opportunity to demonstrate your level of competence. This assessment will focus on skills required in the qualification. Your assessor will identify the skills that he/she will want you to demonstrate.

Further steps

After the assessment, your assessor will give you information about the skills that have been recognised and if you have gained the full qualification. If you do have skill gaps, these may be addressed through flexible training. Your assessor may also prescribe a range of assignments to help you gather further evidence.