

NEWS RELEASE

TORONTO: January 3, 2006

The Canadian Institute for Recognizes Learning (CIRL) announced today, the release of ***Principles for Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)***.

These Principles can be used by employers, professional bodies, and educators. “Canada is not making the best possible use of its labour force because we are not good at identifying people’s knowledge and skills” reported Joy Van Kleef, CEO of the Institute. Not only do we need to find more ways to identify the potential of Canadian job seekers and applicants for professional licensing, we also need to improve how we assess the skills of our immigrants. “Canada receives the brightest and the best from all over the world, and we are not using their talents as well as we should be. These principles will help organizations to set up fair, high quality skills and knowledge recognition programs”.

CIRL is an organization dedicated to improving the ways in which Canada recognizes the knowledge and skills of its people. It works with educators, workplaces, governments, and occupational groups to implement recognizing learning strategies like Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), develop standards and processes for quality assurance, and facilitate the integration of immigrants. For more information, visit the CIRL website at www.cirl.org.

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

Definition of PLAR

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

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

PLAR Principles

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

Accessibility

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

Accountability

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

Criterion-referencing

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

Efficiency

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

Equity

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

Fairness

In order to maximize candidates' opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and judgment, the PLAR process should reflect sensitivity to relevant adult learning theory. This principle is also the foundation for other principles such as access, equity, transparency, and right of appeal.

Legality

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

Quality

The quality of the PLAR process relates to the relevance, level, currency, and sufficiency of candidates' prior learning. The qualifications of prior learning assessors should reflect an expertise in PLAR and the subject area of the assessment.

Right of Appeal

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

Transparency

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

Validity and Reliability

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