

**CLFDB**

# Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition



Canadian  
Labour Force  
Development Board

*Learning has no boundaries ...*



## What is the Canadian Labour Force Development Board?

The Canadian Labour Force Development Board (CLFDB) is a national advisory body made up of:

- labour market partner organizations—employers, workers and unions;
- groups seeking equality—women, aboriginal people, people from visible minority groups and people with disabilities;
- training and education services—schools, universities, training institutions, educators.

These partners work together to improve training and access to employment for all members of the Canadian labour force. The goal of the CLFDB is to achieve a system for education, training and employment that is effective, efficient and equitable.

The CLFDB provides advice on a wide range of education and training issues. Groups that have worked with the CLFDB include: national and provincial governments, employers, unions, professional organizations and other groups that are interested in how Canada's labour market works.

Over the past two years, a CLFDB Working Group has studied how Canada can improve its labour force development system. Partner organizations were asked for ideas that would:

- make the most of the resources and skills available in Canada;
- make it easier for individuals to get into education and training programs at any school or training centre in Canada;
- make it easier to find a job in all parts of the country;
- help individuals move easily from education or training programs to work.

From its consultations and research, the CLFDB has concluded that the increased use of PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION (PLAR) could benefit all Canadians. A system with national standards would help recognize what a person knows and can do. It can make better use of education and training resources, by targetting the right training to people who need it. It can help people find out what skills they may need for specific jobs. PLAR can also encourage labour market partners to find new ways of working together.

*The CLFDB recognizes that there is much work yet to be done on PLAR by all the labour market partners.*

*Its use is currently limited and not all Canadians have access to a PLAR process.*

*This brochure is one way to encourage the expanded and effective use of PLAR in the future.*



# What is PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION (PLAR)?

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION is a process of identifying, assessing, and recognizing what a person knows and can do. The process can take various forms and the outcomes can be used for a large number of purposes relevant to the goals of individuals, the labour market partners, and society at large.

PLAR—PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION—is a process which can be used to look at what a person knows and can do. It may allow an individual to get some form of recognition for the skills and knowledge he or she has. PLAR should give equal value to learning and skills whether these skills come from school, community work, on-the-job training or other life experiences.

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION (PLAR) may mean receiving credit for a certain level of education or vocational training. It could also mean that education or training from another country will be recognized for jobs in Canada. It may mean that credits earned at one school can be transferred to another

place so courses don't have to be repeated. Or, it may mean recognizing that a person has all the skills needed to do a job, but not the required education.

PLAR can be a practical, flexible way to solve the challenges of identifying and assessing skills. Persons trained in PLAR would work with an individual to identify and assess the person's skills and knowledge. These skills and knowledge would then be compared to standards for different levels of education, vocational training or job skills. PLAR can make it easier for individuals to find out where they stand and what they need to do to get a job or reach a career goal. It can help schools and training institutions place students in

the right courses. It can help employers improve their workplace by making the best use of a person's skills.

The Canadian Labour Force Development Board's proposal for PLAR builds on the approach now used in many Canadian educational institutions for prior learning assessment. It also reflects lessons learned from international experience. The CLFDB proposes that:

- (1) national PLAR standards should be developed to ensure that PLAR processes are fair and consistent, wherever they are used;
- (2) a strategy should be set up to get PLAR working in schools, training programs and in the workplace and in career planning.





# Why is PLAR important?

A national approach to PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION would promote:

## Efficient use of resources:

- less repetition of learning;
- better use of time and resources for individuals and institutions;
- increased ability to identify and focus on skills and areas of knowledge;
- better matching of available jobs and potential employees.

## Development of a lifelong learning culture:

- formal recognition that learning takes place in a variety of settings;
- encouragement for individuals to continue learning in new areas;
- more opportunities to bring learning and work together.

## Greater social justice:

- fair access to education and training opportunities for all Canadians;
- bias-free judgement of education and non-formal learning;
- greater equality for individuals and groups who are most disadvantaged.
- improved access to work and better accommodation of special needs.

## Coordinated and consistent labour force development:

- improved assessment of education and training from other countries;
- consistent standards for skills needed in specific occupations;
- better information for career and employment counselling, apprenticeship and training programs;
- more opportunity to change jobs or find work in all parts of Canada.

## Reform of education and training systems:

- better working relationships between educators and training programs;
- recognition of credits in all provinces and education/training systems;
- clear definition of the results (skills and knowledge) expected from all training and educational programs;
- more flexibility for individual learning goals and styles, and to meet labour market needs.

## Effective management of change:

- opportunities for government, institutions and organizations across Canada to work towards a common goal;
- potential to use resources better by developing new approaches.





# Who could benefit from PLAR?

## Individuals

- fair, bias-free processes for assessing each person's learning and abilities;
- better use of time and resources—no repeating courses;
- increased job mobility;
- equal access for members of groups who are currently at a disadvantage.

## Employers

- reliable means of assessing and matching skills to workplace needs;
- framework for setting career goals and training needs;
- in-house training designed for the needs of each workforce or for specific workers;
- access to a more diverse workforce;
- potential savings on training costs.

## Educational/ Training Institutions & Professionals

- better use of limited resources;
- assurance that students can transfer from one place to another;
- working with employers to develop courses that meet workplace needs;
- access to a wider range of potential learners.







# What should a good PLAR system look like?

The first step towards an effective national approach to PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION is to agree on standards. National standards for PLAR will provide a framework to make sure PLAR is developed in a manner that serves users well.

Based on consultations with its partner organizations and people experienced in PLAR assessment, the CLFDB recommends the following minimum standards for PLAR:

- 1** PLAR must be accessible and relevant to people as individuals. It must focus on the unique needs and abilities of the individual.
- 2** Assessment and recognition must be of learning (knowledge, skills, and judgement acquired through study or experience) not of experience.
- 3** The PLAR process must be fair and equitable. It must be barrier-free and bias-free.
- 4** The PLAR process must be efficient. It must make the best use of resources for the individual.

**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.

**6** The PLAR process must be transparent. The individual must know the criteria and standards used to assess his or her skills and knowledge.

**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.

**8** The assessment tools and their PLAR application must be valid. They must be recognized and accepted by all the labour market partners.

**9** Individuals assessing prior learning must be trained to perform this task.

**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.

**11** Recognition awarded through PLAR should be considered equal to recognition awarded in the traditional manner.

**12** Recognition awarded through PLAR should be transferable between organizations, provinces and territories.

**13** PLAR must be an option or opportunity, not a mandatory process.

**14** If a person is not satisfied with the PLAR assessment, an appeal procedure must be available.

The CLFDB believes that the application of national standards to PLAR processes will ensure that individuals receive a fair assessment of their skills and knowledge from organizations that are recognized and accountable for their work. As an organization, the CLFDB will continue to advocate for, and work on, their development.





**Announcing:**

*the 2nd National Forum on  
Prior Learning Assessment  
and Recognition*

**PLAR<sup>97</sup>**

*Learning has no boundaries:*  
Bringing PLAR into the workplace  
Montreal, Canada • October 6, 7 and 8, 1997



Canadian Labour Force Development Board





# Want more information?

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OR

■ **Your Provincial Ministry  
or Department of Education**

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## **How Can Your Workplace Benefit from Combining Training and PLAR? Find Out at the National Forum!**

In 1994/95, the Canadian Auto Workers Union, Locals 1530 and 1839 at Northern Telecom, Belleville, partnered with company management to develop the Nortel /CAW "Return to Learning" Program (RTL), a joint employability initiative.

The initiative was developed by third party consultant, Sharon Rose in co-operation with a joint steering committee comprised of union and non-union employees, responsible for overseeing the program. Following completion of a survey among employees to determine their levels of interest, a process was designed to assist employees to pursue education and training opportunities that enhanced their employability inside or outside Nortel. This included information and support for personal development courses, technical and occupational training, professional development, college and university level learning and prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR).

Under the leadership of the steering committee, the Return to Learning Program operates an on-site resource centre through which employees obtain up-to-date information on courses available from private and public education/training providers. The resource centre also houses a book-lending library, computer-based support programs on career planning and access to a private career planning service. As Program Liaison, Sharon Rose of Point of Convergence, assists employees to select courses and negotiates with training providers for the delivery of relevant, flexible training, held on-site wherever possible.

In the first year of the Program, Nortel partnered with Loyalist College in



Cotton Ginny Limited and Sheridan College have collaborated to provide strong human support for program participants including a 1-800 telephone line and an office at Sheridan dedicated to the project. Regular contact is maintained with participants to help resolve concerns, and provide encouragement. Students can also contact specific course advisors at the College for help. Cotton Ginny Limited fully funds the program including tuition, course materials, text books and company management time. It has invested over \$1 million in the initiative to date.

Although the Program only started in 1995/96, 95 portfolios have been completed and another 65 are in progress. Cotton Ginny Limited is already exploring new ways to recognize employees' educational achievements and has started to use the program and PLAR to attract new management recruits.

All the program's partners consider the training partnership to be a growing success. The project has helped Sheridan College to update its Business Management Program and has assisted Cotton Ginny Limited to improve their in-house training programs. Most of all, employees are better skilled to perform their current jobs and better equipped to meet career objectives when opportunities arise.

**For more information, please contact Debbie Fawcett at (519) 924-3662 or (416) 785-9686 ext. 188.**





## Find Out How PLAR Can Help Your Workplace Plan for the Future!

If you're not sure about how PLAR can help your organization, come to the National Forum and hear how companies like Cotton Ginny Limited build partnerships with education to promote learning among employees and plan for the future.

***"Cotton Ginny Limited's greatest asset is its employees.....if we, as a company, develop ways to help our employees obtain their personal goals while fulfilling the mission of the company, then we will build amore successful business."***

(Cotton Ginny Limited is the umbrella organization for Cotton Ginny, Cotton Ginny Plus, Plus Intimates and Tabi International)

This statement was recently made by Thomas Boyce, President of Cotton Ginny Limited, a national retailer of women's lifestyle casual clothing. With this goal in mind, Cotton Ginny Limited established a partnership with Sheridan College of Applied Arts and Technology in Oakville, Ontario to offer a Retail Management Diploma Program to Cotton Ginny Limited Head Office staff and Store Managers across Canada. Prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) is an integral part of the program's design.

Through distance delivery of 28 courses that have been customized by Sheridan, program participants draw on their workplace experiences to complete the College's Retail Management program. Sheridan faculty assess students' prior learning in areas where students feel they already have the required knowledge and skills. Cotton Ginny Limited estimates that PLAR portfolios will earn students 25 -50% of the program through PLAR credits.



Belleville, Ontario to deliver two portfolio development courses on-site. The courses were designed to help individuals plan their working future and to organize steps to achieve their goals. Assessments of some portfolios also resulted in academic credits toward college diplomas and certificates. Twenty employees enrolled and 15 course credits were awarded. Additional portfolios and applications for credits in various programs are still in progress. The participation rate in all RTL courses in 1995, was an impressive 41%.

Nortel assists employees to participate in the Program by covering the costs of tuition (pre-paid), course materials and books up to a maximum of \$2,000 per year. The company also contributes the space for course delivery and the RTL resource centre as well as absorbing the administrative costs of the program.

Through the use of newsletters, information postings, voice mail and video monitors, Sharon and the resource centre staff ensure that all Nortel employees are aware of the opportunities the PLAR component of the RTL program provides. *"We recognized early on that, in order to implement an adult education program, Prior Learning Assessment would be a key component....It is extremely important that the education community work closely with these adult learners to credential their workplace learning..."*

**For more information, please contact Sharon Rose at Point of Convergence (1-613-966-0100, ext. 3555).**