

Advancing PLAR in Alberta— an Action Plan

Report on Institution Visits

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PLAR Action Plan—Report on Institution Visits

Introduction

In response to a need identified by post-secondary education stakeholders for structure, guidance, and standardized processes for prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR), Alberta Advanced Education and Technology (AET) released *Advancing PLAR in Alberta: an Action Plan* in October 2008 (hereafter referred to as the *PLAR Action Plan*). With the intention of initiating and setting the stage for the implementation of the action plan, the PLAR manager met with key stakeholders in Alberta's publicly funded post-secondary institutions to conduct an informal environmental scan. The discussions centered on the following topics:

- The current state of PLAR in the province (the courses and programs where PLAR assessments are available, the types of assessments being used, and the institutional PLAR policies that exist)
- Issues and barriers related to implementing PLAR, as well as ideas for addressing and mitigating the issues and barriers
- Ideas for PLAR website development
- Advice for AET as it begins its implementation of the *PLAR Action Plan*

This report is a summary of the discussions that took place during 19 institution visits in the spring and fall of 2009. The following institutions took part in the meetings:

Comprehensive Academic and Research Institutions

- Athabasca University
- University of Alberta
- University of Calgary
- University of Lethbridge

Baccalaureate and Applied Studies Institutions

- Grant MacEwan University
- Mount Royal University

Comprehensive Community Institutions

- Bow Valley College
- Grande Prairie Regional College
- Keyano College
- Lakeland College
- Lethbridge College
- Medicine Hat College
- NorQuest College
- Northern Lakes College
- Olds College
- Portage College
- Red Deer College

Polytechnical Institutions

- Northern Alberta Institute of Technology
- Southern Alberta Institute of Technology

Prior to each meeting, the institutions were sent an agenda which included questions to guide the discussion. This report is structured around the seven questions:

1. In which programs and/or courses does your institution have PLAR assessments available?
2. What types of PLAR assessments are offered in these programs/courses? Who administers the assessments?
3. If your institution has a PLAR policy, please provide a summary of key points in the policy. If your institution does not have a PLAR policy, are you interested in developing one in the future?
4. What issues or barriers exist that limit the implementation or use of PLAR assessments at your institution?
5. How do you think each issue/barrier could be addressed, and potentially lead to an increase in the use of PLAR assessments in your programs?
6. What information and functionality would you like to see on an Alberta PLAR website?
7. What advice or suggestions do you have for AET in implementing the PLAR Action Plan?

The meetings were conducted as informal discussions rather than structured interviews—the intent was to begin open and frank conversations with institution stakeholders about existing PLAR practices and issues. The fluid discussions have resulted in some inconsistencies in the collection of information because a topic discussed at length at some institutions may not have arisen at all at other institutions. Nevertheless, this report quantifies and describes the content discussed in the meetings, and provides a starting point for the implementation of the ten action items identified in the *PLAR Action Plan*.

Existing PLAR Assessments

In nine of the 19 institutions, PLAR assessments—portfolio development and/or a challenge process, which may include a written or oral exam, skills demonstration, product assessment, and educational credential assessment—are available in most courses within most programs. Four of the institutions have PLAR assessments available for some courses within some programs. In the remaining six institutions, PLAR assessments are completed in an ad hoc manner; that is, PLAR is done in pockets within the institutions on an as-needed basis.

Written challenge exams are used in numerous courses at the 13 institutions which reported that PLAR assessments are available in some to most program areas. Other types of assessment (such as portfolio development, oral interview/exam, and skills demonstration) tend to be used in career-oriented programs. There is an exception—one

institution uses portfolio development as its primary source of PLAR in most program areas. There was general consensus at all institutions that courses within skills-based career programs lend themselves more easily to PLAR assessments than theory-based courses do. The program areas where PLAR assessments appear to be most prevalent are health programs (such as Health Care Aide and Practical Nurse), business programs (especially computer courses in Office Administration and Information Technology programs), and some human service programs (such as Early Learning and Childcare). In some programs, only the practicum is available for PLAR credit through an assessment of a candidate's skills and knowledge acquired through work experience.

Eight institutions indicated approximate numbers of PLAR assessments that are completed each year. At two institutions, approximately 100 PLAR assessments are completed yearly. At three institutions, the number of assessments ranges from 20–60 per year, and at two other institutions, there are fewer than 20 assessments completed each year. One institution indicated that it completes approximately 200 assessments per year, but this number includes transfer credit (the majority) and advanced credit assessments; therefore, the actual number of PLAR assessments is unclear.

A program chair or dean typically sets a limit for the maximum number of credits that are available to be awarded through the PLAR process in a particular program. At the institution level, there is a range of acceptable maximum credits that can be awarded through PLAR. At one institution the maximum is 30 credits. At two institutions the maximum credits that can be awarded through a combination of PLAR and transfer credit is 50% of a program, and at a two others the maximum is 75% of a program.

Currently, there is little consistency within the public post-secondary system regarding how credits awarded through PLAR appear on a transcript. The credits may appear on the transcript the same way transfer and advanced credits appear (CR), or they may appear as PLAR assessments (PL), credit by special assessment, or a grade (when the assessment is a challenge exam). At some institutions, nothing appears on a transcript if a candidate fails a PLAR assessment. At three institutions, a fail remains on the candidate's permanent academic record as no credit (NC) or a failed grade.

During 10 institution meetings, PLAR assessment fees were discussed. At six institutions, a candidate is charged 50% of the course fee (tuition fee plus associated costs) for a PLAR assessment. At one institution, a one-time \$500 fee is charged for portfolio assessment that could result in up to 30 credits being awarded. Two institutions charge \$100–125 per assessment, and one institution completes PLAR assessments for free. At most institutions, additional compensation is not paid to the faculty member (assessor) for evaluating a PLAR assessment—this task is part of their “other duties as assigned.” Two institutions do compensate assessors, one pays \$40 and the other \$60 per assessment.

Types of PLAR Assessments

The following definition of PLAR was shared at the institution visits:

Prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) is a systematic process that involves the identification, assessment, and recognition of learning (skills and knowledge). This learning may be acquired formally and informally.

To further clarify the types of assessment that fall within the scope of the *PLAR Action Plan*, the ***Recognition of Prior Learning*** (RPL) concept was discussed at the meetings. According to the report *Achieving our Potential: an Action Plan for PLAR in Canada* (PLA Centre, 2008, page 18–19), the Saskatchewan government’s policy framework indicates that RPL is a broad umbrella concept that includes all learning that people have acquired in their lives, either ***formally*** (credit courses and programs), ***non-formally*** (non-credit courses, job training, or workshops), or ***informally*** (life experience). RPL consists of three processes for assessing and recognizing these forms of learning:

- ***Transfer credit***—receiving credit at one institution for courses completed at another institution. While transfer credit falls under the mandate of the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT), it is outside of the scope of the *PLAR Action Plan*.
- ***Credential recognition***—seeking recognition for a completed out-of-province or international certificate, diploma, or degree. International credentials may be evaluated by the International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS) office in Alberta Employment and Immigration; however, institutions may also conduct their own assessments, which may include comparing and evaluating curriculum and learning outcomes.
- ***Prior learning assessment and recognition***—assessing a person’s knowledge and skills, no matter how acquired, in relation to a certain goal.

Assessment of prior learning, especially credential recognition, may result in advanced placement or advanced standing/credit. While these terms are used differently and sometimes interchangeably at the institutions, the following definitions are used in this document:

- ***Advanced placement***—a student is placed in an advanced-level course within a program, but has to replace the credits of the entry-level course by taking another course. (For example, International Baccalaureate graduates receive advanced placement in some university programs, but they still have to complete the total credit requirement of the program into which they are admitted.)
- ***Advanced standing/credit***—a student who is awarded advanced standing is awarded the credits for a course within a program. The credits do not have to be replaced. In this sense, advanced standing/credit is similar to transfer credit.

The following is a summary of the types of PLAR assessments that the institutions are currently using:

- **Challenge exams**—most institutions (18 of 19) use challenge exams. These exams may be developed specifically for PLAR assessments, or they may be composed of the final exam and/or a combination of exams used in the course.
- **Lab exams**—two institutions use lab exams as part of the assessment process, primarily in health programs.
- **Oral exams/interviews**—seven institutions use some type of oral exam as part of the assessment process. This may include a personal interview, oral discussion, and oral exam.
- **Skills demonstrations**—seven institutions use skills demonstrations or performance tests as part of the assessment process.
- **Employer letters**—nine institutions review employer letters as part of the assessment process. This may include letters of recommendation or attestation, as well as other information/communication from employers (such as performance evaluations).
- **Samples of work**—four institutions evaluate samples of work as part of the assessment process.
- **Portfolio assessments**—eight institutions evaluate PLAR portfolios. One of these institutions uses this method as its primary form of PLAR. Three additional institutions indicated that they do portfolio assessments, but on artistic portfolios, not PLAR portfolios. (It is interesting to note that one institution indicated that it would never request that candidates submit a PLAR portfolio because it requires too much work to develop.)
- **Credential assessments**—two institutions complete credential assessments, one on military credentials and the other on out-of-province and international credentials.
- **Admission placement tests**—three institutions use standardized placement tests to assess a candidate's level in Academic Upgrading. The tests include the *Canadian Adult Achievement Test* which measures the ability to communicate in English (vocabulary, spelling, and grammar), and the *Wide Range Achievement Test 3* which measures reading, spelling, and arithmetic levels. Placement testing allows mature students to meet admission requirements or be placed at the appropriate level in the program (credits are not awarded, nor do they have to be replaced).

In four of the institutions, PLAR processes are well-established. In two of these institutions, a PLAR office exists with four staff—a manager or director, two advisors or mentors, and an administrative assistant. Nine of the institutions have PLAR processes somewhat established: PLAR is managed by a staff member in the registrar's office or student services office, and is a subset of the person's responsibilities. In other words, as mentioned in a couple of the meetings, PLAR is “done off of the corner of someone's desk when they have time.” In six of the institutions, established PLAR processes are not in place; rather, PLAR assessments are completed on an as-needed basis.

Most institutions provided a description of their PLAR process. Whether administered through a PLAR office or not, in general, the PLAR processes include some or all of the following steps:

- The candidate identifies a course or courses within a program to challenge.
- At most institutions the candidate must be registered and accepted into a program before a PLAR assessment process can be started.
- The candidate submits an application for the PLAR assessment and pays the fee. (At some institutions, the fee is paid after the assessment is completed.)
- Some institutions have a learning contract (which includes a timeline for completion) that candidates must sign.
- The PLAR manager/coordinator works with a faculty member—a subject matter expert (SME)—to determine what the candidate will need to produce to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are identified in the learning outcomes of the course being challenged.
- With the assistance of institution staff/faculty, the candidate completes the PLAR assessment (takes an exam or set of exams, attends an interview, and/or submits a portfolio with supporting documents, work samples, etc).
- The SME evaluates the portfolio, exam, etc, and informs the registrar of the outcome.
- If successful, the result may appear on the transcript as a grade or as credit. If unsuccessful, the result may or may not appear on the transcript.
- The PLAR credit awarded may or may not be subject to appeal.

PLAR Policies

Eleven institutions have a PLAR policy in place. One additional institution has a PLAR guideline/procedure, which is similar in nature to the other PLAR policies. Of the seven institutions that do not have policies in place, four are interested in or are in the process of developing a PLAR policy.

The existing PLAR policies have the following sections in common:

- Policy statement
- Definition of PLAR and related terms
- Processes, procedures, and/or guidelines (this may include procedures for all types of RPL: transfer credit, advanced placement, advanced standing/credit, challenge process, work or life experience, credit by special assessment, and educational credential assessment)
- Methods of assessment
- PLAR conditions, rules/regulations, or limitations
- Application process
- Eligibility

- Residency requirement
- Timelines
- Assessment fees
- Transcription
- Appeal procedures

The following sections were found in one or two of the policy documents:

- Purpose of the policy
- ACAT's principles and standards for recognition of prior learning
- PLAR team member descriptions
- PLAR advisory committee and PLAR council at the institution

Issues and Barriers

A number of issues and barriers arose repeatedly during the institution visits. They are described here in the order of greatest to least frequency.

- **Portability of PLAR credits**—15 of the 19 institutions indicated that portability of PLAR credits is the one issue that causes the most concern. As a matter of fact, at a number of institutions, this topic was brought up before getting to the first agenda item. Basically, the issue involves one institution awarding PLAR credits, and when a student then transfers to a similar program at another institution or applies to a higher level program after graduating, the second institution may not recognize the PLAR credits. The concern exists predominantly in the rift between program levels—a diploma graduate applying to a baccalaureate program, a baccalaureate graduate applying to a master's program. If left unaddressed, increasing PLAR practices may well lower a barrier at one educational level, while raising a barrier at the next. One institution indicated that an institution may not accept PLAR credits because it is bound by the education requirements as determined by a professional regulatory organization. A number of institutions indicated that “if the portability issue is not resolved, PLAR is pointless.”
- **Resourcing issues**—institutional funding for both human resources and operations was the second most-mentioned issue: 13 institutions expressed concern about being required to implement or increase their PLAR practices without additional government funding to support it (especially during these lean times). Most institutions currently do not have a dedicated manager to coordinate PLAR assessments. Human resources are also required to advise candidates about the PLAR process, and to develop and evaluate the PLAR assessments. It was noted that front-end resourcing may be required to implement PLAR practices at institutions where little activity is currently occurring.
- **Workload issues**—12 institutions noted that workload (and recognition) issues can be a problem for the faculty tasked with developing and evaluating PLAR assessments, as well as for the manager responsible for coordinating PLAR

assessments within the institution. It was noted that PLAR is resource intensive and requires different types of assessments created for different types of programs, which can be expensive and complicated.

- ***Time-consuming process***—11 institutions noted that the time required to move through the PLAR process from initial advising and application to awarding credit is work intensive for PLAR candidates and institutions. Candidates may expect immediate results, but depending on the course being challenged and whether or not PLAR assessment tools already exist for it, the process may require considerable development. For example, a subject matter expert may need to be identified, an assessment tool may need to be developed, and a portfolio may need to be developed by the candidate. Once submitted, the assessment tool needs to be evaluated and the result communicated to the registrar. It was noted that it can take up to a year for all of these elements to be completed for one course.
- ***Marketing/communications for students and faculty/staff***—nine institutions indicated that marketing directed to students, faculty, and institution staff needs to be increased. Some students may not be aware that PLAR exists; others may think PLAR is an easy way to get credits and don't understand the rigor, cost, and expectations involved. In addition, faculty and other institution staff members may also be unclear about what PLAR really is and how to implement it (PLAR was referred to as “nebulous” in more than one meeting). It was suggested that without effective and accurate information about PLAR, faculty buy-in will be difficult. For example, it needs to be made clear that PLAR is different for different courses, programs, and institutions—it is not one size fits all. There may be some courses which do not lend themselves easily to PLAR. Without faculty awareness about these differences, resistance may be strong.
- ***Quality assurance***—seven institutions expressed the need for quality assurance practices for PLAR to assure confidence in the outcomes of PLAR assessments. It was noted that if there are issues with quality assurance, there will be issues with the portability of PLAR credits.
- ***Training for staff and faculty***—six institutions noted a need for training for all staff and faculty involved in PLAR practices. Managers require training on the PLAR coordination process, advisors need training on how to adequately assist candidates, and faculty need training on how to develop and evaluate PLAR assessments efficiently and effectively.
- ***Funding for students***—six institutions indicated concern about funding availability for candidates applying for PLAR assessments. In addition, there was concern about grant and loan funding eligibility if PLAR credits are awarded and then the student is not registered in a full-time program.
- ***Full load equivalent (FLE) implications***—five institutions indicated that it is a disincentive to require an increase in PLAR activity if that, in turn, decreases the institution's yearly FLE totals. Program areas that are struggling for enrolments may not want to increase PLAR activity because this will decrease the total FLEs in the program.

Other issues and barriers that may only have been mentioned in one or two meetings, but are worthy of note include:

- Consistency is required in transcription of PLAR credits (and this must align with the transcript guidelines established by the Association of Registrars of Universities and Colleges of Canada). It was noted that the quality assurance, portability, and transcription issues are all linked.
- Consistency is required in PLAR fees.
- Some institutions do not currently have learning outcomes developed for all courses in all programs—this may delay institution-wide implementation of PLAR.
- Faculty may not know how to evaluate portfolios—assessing non-formal learning may scare some.

Addressing Issues and Barriers

After discussing barriers that limit the implementation or use of PLAR practices, the meeting attendees brainstormed how each issue or barrier could be addressed, and potentially lead to an increase in the use of PLAR at their institution. Ideas captured here are directly from the meeting notes.

- ***Portability of PLAR credits***
 - The Campus Alberta Quality Council, Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer, and Campus Alberta Administration need to sort out the portability issue together before institutions will want to increase their activity in PLAR.
 - Pathways have to be clear for portability of PLAR credits—students need to understand the limitations of PLAR credits being recognized by other institutions and by professional regulatory organizations.
 - True PLAR would not be differentiated on a transcript.
 - PLAR activity should be included on Institutional Access Plans.
- ***Resourcing issues***
 - Be careful of expectations to increase PLAR involvement in lean times. It may be difficult to meet increased demand for PLAR in terms of human resources, workload, and funding.
 - Increase government funding—without funding, it will not be possible to increase PLAR activity.
 - Institutions need a PLAR office with the appointment of people to take PLAR institution-wide—funding needs to be attached.
 - Encourage sharing among institutions to encourage financial efficiencies.
- ***Workload issues***
 - PLAR assessment should be on faculty job descriptions so they understand that it's part of their job.

- ***Time-consuming process***
 - Ideas were not generated for this item.
- ***Marketing/communications for students and faculty/staff***
 - Provide as much information as possible on the PLAR website.
 - There needs to be communication, marketing, training, and buy-in on a continuous basis for all faculty/departments at the institutions (because of high turnover of staff and students).
 - A communications strategy will increase buy-in within institutions.
- ***Quality assurance***
 - Need to have a measure of consistency in PLAR.
 - Need to demystify the whole PLAR process.
 - Ideally, there would be no scrutiny of PLAR credits by a receiving institution, because quality assurance would have been ensured before awarding the credits.
 - Quality assurance and accountability are important, especially if PLAR assessments/credits are going to be included in FLE totals.
 - The PLAR process has to be rigorous and credible.
 - Developing program learning outcomes paves the way and allows people to have more confidence in PLAR assessments.
- ***Training for staff and faculty***
 - Faculty members need support to enable them to do PLAR assessments with appropriate ease (for work for which they are not going to be reimbursed).
 - Training and understanding the PLAR process is important.
 - Training would be good if it were not only for PLAR practitioners, but also for faculty (for example, how to develop PLAR assessment tools for a course).
 - A philosophical shift may be required by some—to believe that all learning is valuable and that it can take place outside of an institution.
 - Professional development (PD) will help, but people also need time to participate in the PD opportunities.
- ***Funding for students***
 - Students have to be eligible for funding even when not taking a full load.
 - Funding agencies need to support PLAR assessments.
- ***Full load equivalent (FLE) implications***
 - Being able to count FLEs would validate the PLAR process.
 - The potential of including PLAR credits in FLE totals is a good idea to mitigate barriers and increase interest at institutions.
 - Adding successful PLAR assessments/credits to an institution's FLE totals is the tipping point—many institutions would come on board if this is implemented.

- **Other**
 - Have a PLAR champion at each institution.
 - Develop a university-specific PLAR plan to increase faculty buy-in.
 - A PLAR center of excellence will be important (for example, to enable faculty to find and develop assessment tools).

PLAR Website Ideas

The following suggestions were made by meeting attendees regarding an Alberta PLAR website.

- Link the PLAR website to the ACAT, Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS), International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS), and Foreign Qualification Recognition (FQR) websites.
- Set the website up with an interface for different target audiences. For example, include something like the Campus Alberta Planning System (CAPS) SharePoint site for institutions to dialogue in a secure way on topics such as policies, processes, and procedures.
- Keep the website up-to-date and user-friendly.
- Ensure marketing complements and leads to the website.
- Consult with institutions on what gets rolled out when. Increased information about PLAR may increase student demand; therefore, the information needs to be staged so that institutions will be prepared to meet the demand.
- Include best practices for:
 - Quality assurance standards
 - Methodology
 - Templates
 - Systems and structures—including staffing to make PLAR work at an institution
- Provide links/navigation to PLAR policies and processes at each institution.
- Include video clips of students and faculty who have experienced the PLAR process, its complexities, and its pros and cons.
- Include portfolio development information and resources for students.
- Include sample assessment tools.
- Develop a “Frequently Asked Questions” section.
- List current research projects and put out a call to faculty to join research teams.
- Have self-directed, modularized training for assessors available on the website.
- Follow CAPLA’s format on its recognitionforlearning.ca website.

Advice for AET

The following ideas resulted from brainstorming advice or suggestions meeting attendees had for AET in implementing the *PLAR Action Plan*. A few themes emerged; therefore, the comments have been grouped accordingly.

Communication

- Keep the Senior Academic Officers and Senior Student Services Officers informed about progress on the *PLAR Action Plan* (for example, present updates at their meetings).
- Need to get buy-in from academic departments.
- Define “increased capacity” and when it is achieved (regarding action 1 in the *PLAR Action Plan*).
- Determine exactly what quality assurance in PLAR is and how it will be implemented at the system level.
- Communicate on a regular basis with institutions—share linked/grouped information to assist institutions in their work (such as developing PLAR policy documents).
- Release occasional one-pages to update all stakeholders. Be sure not to promise more than institutions can deliver.
- Provide support and coordination—institutions want and need better tools, resources, and information on PLAR.
- Develop a list serve of PLAR contacts.

Data Collection

- Data management should be done within institutions, rather than developing a new PLAR system (limit concerns raised during ATOMS and APAS development and implementation). Reporting PLAR data should be similar to reporting enrolments through LERS.
- Data collection should include fields for (1) PLAR credits awarded, (2) PLAR assessment completed but credits not awarded, (3) PLAR assessments not completed, and (4) the reason for the latter.
- With new database development, there has to be recognition that there are different types of institutions. One glitch can affect everybody.
- The data in information systems and transcripts needs to be consistent.

Community Adult Learning Centers (CALC)

- Clarify the expectations regarding the CALCs’ role in implementing the *PLAR Action Plan*.
- The CALC action item might work better in urban rather than rural areas.

- Conversations need to happen between the CALCs and Comprehensive Community Institutions (CCI) during the portfolio development courses. If a student is targeting a specific course or program at a CCI, the CALC facilitator needs to consult with the appropriate program area at the institution.

PLAR Stakeholder Committee

- The committee should be a group of like-minded people working together to implement the action plan.
- It is important to have institution representatives on the committee to build credibility.
- The committee needs to be led by institutions and supported by government—institutions identify what the challenges are and government operations need to follow (e.g.: counting PLAR FLEs).

Other

- Establish consistent terminology and definitions for PLAR-related terms.
- Programs that have industry standards should have PLAR protocols established for them.
- Institutions need to have advisors trained to counsel students in the PLAR process.
- Students need to understand the rigor involved in PLAR—they have to earn the credit.
- AET should fund a position at each institution to facilitate the PLAR process.
- The PLAR manager should attend the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) conference to get information from the university prospective.
- Have realistic timelines for all tasks related to increasing capacity in PLAR.

Summary

In nine of the 19 institutions, PLAR assessments are available in most courses within most programs. Four additional institutions have PLAR assessments available for some courses within some programs. At these 13 institutions, written challenge exams are used extensively to assess prior learning. Other types of assessment (such as portfolio development, oral interview/exam, and skills demonstration) tend to be used in career-oriented programs. There is an exception—one institution uses portfolio development as its primary source of PLAR in most program areas. There was general consensus at all institutions that courses within skills-based career programs lend themselves more easily to PLAR assessments than theory-based courses do.

Four of the institutions have well-established PLAR processes in place. In two of these institutions, a PLAR office exists with four staff—a manager or director, two advisors or mentors, and an administrative assistant. Nine additional institutions have PLAR

processes somewhat established: PLAR is managed by a staff member in the registrar's office or student services office, and is a subset of the person's responsibilities. In six of the institutions, PLAR assessments are completed on an as-needed basis.

Eleven institutions have a PLAR policy in place. One additional institution has a PLAR guideline/procedure in place, which is similar in nature to the other PLAR policies. Of the seven institutions that do not have policies in place, four are interested in or are in the process of developing a PLAR policy.

The following barriers and issues related to implementing or increasing PLAR practices arose repeatedly during the institution visits:

- Portability of PLAR credits
- Resourcing issues
- Workload issues
- Time-consuming process
- Marketing/communications for students and faculty/staff
- Quality assurance
- Training for staff and faculty
- Funding for students
- Full load equivalent (FLE) implications

These barriers and issues will need to be addressed and mitigated in order to successfully implement the *PLAR Action Plan*. The ten action items in the plan will directly or indirectly deal with most of the identified barriers and issues. Briefly, the actions in the plan include:

1. **Communication**—develop a provincial communication strategy to increase awareness of the benefits of PLAR.
2. **Information**—develop a website to increase access to information on PLAR.
3. **Quality assurance**—develop quality assurance practices for PLAR, including identification, assessment, and recognition processes.
4. **Stakeholder committee**—establish a stakeholder committee to support the implementation of the *PLAR Action Plan*, and thereby, increase system capacity to engage in PLAR practices.
5. **Professional development**—support professional development opportunities in recognized PLAR practices for staff and faculty at the post-secondary institutions (PSI) and for instructors at the CALCs.
6. **Identifying barriers**—examine key funding issues and other barriers that may hinder the implementation of the *PLAR Action Plan*, as well as strategies to address and mitigate the issues and barriers.
7. **Data and indicators of success**—develop a database to count and track PLAR students, and to document the institutions' activity in awarding PLAR credits.

8. ***Center of excellence***—identify a PLAR center of excellence with a mandate to further PLAR in Alberta by assisting students with PLAR processes, providing institutions with information and advice, and conducting and sharing research.
9. ***Community capacity***—develop and implement pilot portfolio development courses at three Community Adult Learning Centers.
10. ***Provincial coordination***—in collaboration with other government departments, ensure alignment of government-supported PLAR policies and strategies.

Action 6 relates specifically to the examination and mitigation of barriers and issues. Examples of how barriers will be addressed, along with the related action items include:

- Developing and implementing quality assurance standards and best practices for PLAR will reduce issues with the portability of PLAR credits (actions 2, 3, 8).
- Providing professional development opportunities and regular communication with stakeholders and practitioners will assist in addressing training, workload, and marketing issues (actions 1, 5).
- Including PLAR credits in an institution’s yearly enrolment report submitted through the Learner and Enrolment Reporting System (LERS) will address the FLE issue (action 7).

With regard to advice for AET on implementing the *PLAR Action Plan*, the suggestions made are summarized below. The action item in the plan where the suggestion will be addressed is included in parentheses.

- Engage in regular communications with all stakeholders (actions 1, 4, 10).
- Develop a user-friendly, state-of-the-art website (action 2).
- Use existing systems for data collection (action 7).
- Clarify roles and expectations of the CALCs (action 9).
- Establish an effective PLAR stakeholder committee (action 4).

Based on the input provided during the institution visits, the next steps in implementing the *PLAR Action Plan* will be:

- Identify and offer professional development opportunities for targeted audiences involved in PLAR.
- Establish the PLAR stakeholder committee and begin regular meetings.
- Develop and implement a strategic communications plan (tailored to specific audiences).
- Research quality assurance standards and best practices for PLAR.
- Begin development of a PLAR website.
- Begin investigation into PLAR data collection and reporting.
- Continue research on existing PLAR barriers and issues, as well as strategies to address and mitigate them.