

Administrative Guidelines for the Use of the Start-up / Maintenance / Retainer / Annual Maintenance Grants to Recognition of Prior Learning Assessment Agencies

1. Start-up Grant

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Assessment Agencies (AAs) appointed by the Secretary for Education (SED) may deploy the one-off start-up grant, subject to the ceiling, to develop the assessment mechanism and set up the necessary facilities for each phase¹ of RPL implementation to facilitate the smooth implementation of the RPL assessments. The scope of the Start-up Grant is as follows –

A. Development of the Assessment Mechanism

- (i) to develop question banks/test papers for conducting assessment;
- (ii) to prepare and/or refine guidelines, manuals and procedures in relation to RPL assessment;
- (iii) to develop information and technology system for conducting assessment, if appropriate; and
- (iv) to publicise and promote the RPL assessment mechanism by –
 - (a) producing/printing materials such as application forms, booklets and leaflets, etc.;
 - (b) launching a thematic RPL website; and
 - (c) issuing advertisement through the press and/or media.

B. Setting up Facilities

- (i) to procure necessary equipment required for conducting assessments (Note: please specify the type and function of the equipment in the application form and maintain an Assets Register (see sample form at **Appendix**) for the equipment with unit cost exceeding \$1,000 for audit purpose);
- (ii) to procure furniture and equipment (F&E) for the RPL office if additional staff members have been recruited/deployed for the purpose of implementing the RPL mechanism, such as desks, chairs, cabinets, office machinery and computer hardware and software, etc. (Note: the quantity of the F&E for the RPL office should be proportionate to the number of staff recruited/deployed for the purpose. Please specify the number of staff members recruited/deployed for the purpose and the period of appointment in the application form for reimbursement of the grant. Moreover, please maintain an Assets Register for the F&E with unit cost exceeding \$1,000 for audit purpose); and
- (iii) wherever operationally required, to carry out minor office alteration works such as internal partition of rooms and change of room use. Large-scale renovation and external fitting-out works should not be covered.

¹ A new phase refers to implementation of the RPL mechanism in one or more new branches of an industry as initiated by the respective Industry Training Advisory Committees on or after 13 February 2015.

C. Hiring Staff

- (i) to develop operational guidelines and manuals (including assessment principles, procedures, criteria, etc.) for RPL assessment;
- (ii) to prepare accounting systems/guidelines for recording respective incomes and expenditures in implementation of RPL under government and non-government funds accounts separately;
- (iii) to set up assets register for recording and differentiating the furniture, equipment and computer hardware/software, etc. purchased by government and non-government funds;
- (iv) to launch the RPL website;
- (v) to arrange for publicity and promotion work for the launch of the RPL mechanism in the respective industries; and
- (vi) to carry out the duties mentioned in parts (A) and (B) above.

2. **Maintenance Grant**

RPL AAs appointed by SED may also apply for the Maintenance Grant, subject to the ceiling, to cover costs directly incurred from the revision and/or addition of RPL clusters initiated by the Industrial Training Advisory Committees (ITAC) concerned. The scope of the Maintenance Grant is as follows -

- (i) additional direct costs arising from the adjustment of assessment mechanism arising from the revision and/or addition of RPL clusters;
- (ii) additional facilities arising from the revision and/or addition of RPL clusters (Note: please specify the type and function of the equipment required for conducting assessments in the application form for reimbursement of the grant and maintain an Assets Register for the equipment with unit cost exceeding \$1,000 for audit purpose); and
- (iii) additional manpower arising from the revision and/or addition of RPL clusters (Note: please specify the number of additional manpower hired and the period of appointment in the application form for reimbursement.)

3. **Retainer Grant**

RPL AAs for industries having lapsed the five-year transitional period may apply for the Retainer Grant, subject to the ceiling, for maintaining their basic functions. The grant should be used to subsidise the operational cost of the RPL assessment mechanism. The scope of the Retainer Grant is as follows -

- (i) routine maintenance of the question banks for RPL assessment (Note: RPL AAs may still apply for the Maintenance Grant to cover costs arising from the refinement of the assessment mechanism arising from the revision and/or addition of RPL clusters);
- (ii) preparatory work for re-accreditation exercise for RPL AAs;
- (iii) publicity and promotion of the RPL mechanism;
- (iv) related staff cost incurred for operation of the RPL office (Note: please specify the number of manpower involved and the period of appointment in the application form for reimbursement of the grant).

4. Annual Maintenance Grant

The Maintenance Grant and the Retainer Grant are merged into an Annual Maintenance Grant with effect from 1 April 2019. RPL AAs for industries starting from the second year of the appointment may apply for the Annual Maintenance Grant, subject to the annual ceiling, for monitoring and maintaining the quality of the RPL mechanism. The grant should be used to (a) subsidise the operational cost of the RPL assessment mechanism, and (b) cover costs directly incurred from the revision and/or addition of RPL clusters initiated by the ITAC concerned. The scope of the Maintenance Grant is as follows -

- (i) costs arising from the adjustment of assessment mechanism arising from the revision and/or addition of RPL clusters;
- (ii) additional facilities arising from the revision and/or addition of RPL clusters (Note: please specify the type and function of the equipment required for conducting assessments in the application form for reimbursement of the grant and maintain an Assets Register for the equipment with unit cost exceeding \$1,000 for audit purpose);
- (iii) related staff cost incurred for operation of the RPL office and arising from the revision and/or addition of RPL clusters (Note: please specify the number of additional manpower hired and the period of appointment in the application form for reimbursement.);
- (iv) routine maintenance of the question banks for RPL assessment;
- (v) recruitment of additional assessors;
- (vi) preparatory work for re-accreditation exercise for RPL AAs; and
- (vii) publicity and promotion of the RPL mechanism by –
 - (a) organising regular promotion activities (including light refreshment provided during the activities) and;
 - (b) production of promotional materials;

Notes:

1. RPL AAs are accountable for their procurement/employment/competitive bidding arrangements as well as the proper and prudent use of public funds. In particular, the principle of fairness and transparency in its procurement of goods and services and in its recruitment of staff for the purpose of carrying out the specified tasks under the RPL mechanism should be observed. RPL AAs are obliged to ensure that the public monies disbursed to them are for the intended purposes in accordance with the provisions of the funding scheme. Wherever applicable, RPL AAs should observe and comply with the Best Practice Checklist “Strengthening Integrity and Accountability – Government Funding Schemes Grantee’s Guidebook” published by the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC). The Guidebook can be accessed through ICAC’s website via http://www.icac.org.hk/filemanager/en/Content_1031/GranteeBPC.pdf.
2. RPL AAs are required to keep a separate account to record the income and expenditure of the grants, with breakdown of the expenses. Such records and related original receipts/invoices/quotations record sheets should be made available to EDB/external auditor(s) for inspection when required.
3. For procurement of furniture and equipment with funding from the grants, RPL AAs are required to maintain an Assets Register (see sample form at **Appendix**) to record those items with unit cost exceeding \$1,000. Similar records should be kept when the items are disposed of in future.

4. For claiming the above grants, RPL AAs have to submit an audited account certified by an independent certified public accountant for the actual expenditure with breakdown of expenditure items (including the related staff costs) incurred and claimed on an industry basis. When claiming the Retainer / Annual Maintenance Grant, RPL AAs should also include in the audited account the breakdown of the income, including all assessment fees received from practitioners, subsidies received from EDB and any other government/public funding sources for the RPL AAs, interest earned and any other income for the corresponding period on an industry basis. **Any surplus funding for the period concerned should be deducted from the Retainer / Annual Maintenance Grant per industry.** The auditor should confirm in the audited statement that the actual expenditure claimed are correct and are incurred for the purpose of setting up (for Start-up Grant) / maintaining (for Maintenance / Annual Maintenance Grant) / retaining (for Retainer Grant) the RPL assessment mechanism according to the “Notes for Applicants” in the Application Form, the “Administrative Guidelines for the Use of the Start-up / Maintenance / Retainer / Annual Maintenance Grants to Recognition of Prior Learning Assessment Agencies” and/or any other guidelines issued or provided by EDB. The audit fee can be reimbursed under the respective grants.
5. Although the above examples of expenditure may not be exhaustive, they serve to illustrate the scope and nature of items claimable under the grants. Goods and services procured should be relevant and necessary for the development of assessment mechanism and operation of the RPL office wherever appropriate.
6. **Replenishment of consumable / disposable items, catering entertainment expenses and transportation costs** should **not** be charged to the grants. Except otherwise specified, the Government will not be responsible for the recurrent expenditure or other consequences of a recurrent nature, arising from and consequent to the undertaking of the specified tasks by the RPL AAs under the RPL mechanism.
7. The Retainer / Annual Maintenance Grant should not be used to cover ongoing overhead expenses such as rental, utility expenses, large-scale renovation and external fitting-out works.
8. The ownership, copyright and all other intellectual property rights in the RPL mechanism developed under the grants, in particular, the question banks, shall be vested in the Government. Upon expiry of the appointment period, outgoing RPL AAs shall facilitate transfer of the question banks to any newly appointed RPL AAs for smooth transition of the assessment mechanism.
9. The Maintenance Grant and the Retainer Grant are merged into the Annual Maintenance Grant with effect from 1 April 2019. RPL AA should submit separate application for the Maintenance / Retainer / Annual Maintenance Grant, with separate audited account certified by an independent certified public accountant for the actual expenditure incurred for **(a) the period up to 31 March 2019** and **(b) the period starting from 1 April 2019 and onward**. If the period under application is less than 12 months, the ceiling of the Retainer Grant and the Annual Maintenance Grant would be calculated on a **pro-rata basis**.

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