

Recognition of prior learning

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NCVER

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Executive summary

Project

The Australian Competency Research Centre (ACRC) was selected to undertake this research project to investigate the practice of recognition of prior learning (RPL) in vocational education and training. The project is a component of a major investigation into competency-based assessment funded by the National Centre for Vocational Education (NCVER).

The aim of the research was to explore current practice, implementation experiences and policy issues.

Issues

In undertaking this study several key issues emerged as major considerations for VET sector policy-makers and practitioners. These issues include:

- the need for clarification of the term RPL
- understanding competency as it relates to RPL
- defining the audience to benefit from RPL
- charges for RPL services.

Considerable confusion exists regarding the meaning and use of the term RPL. Much of this confusion stems from a lack of clarity and consistency of the approaches and criteria for assessment in the RPL process. In some instances the learning outcomes that relate to accredited courses provide the criteria for RPL decision making; yet in other instances endorsed competency standards are used. These two reference points for assessment also reflect the different purposes and outcomes of the RPL process. Such differences also carry with them varied perceptions and expectations. These different approaches to RPL are often distinguished by using the terms RPL or recognition of current competency (RCC), respectively.

To gain a greater understanding of policy and the current implementation arrangements, it is necessary to clarify the meaning and purpose of the various forms of RPL. At the heart of such clarification is the meaning of competency. Without a common understanding of the meaning of competency, it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to gain a widely understood and applied meaning for RPL. The meaning of competency may be interpreted narrowly, focussing on only demonstrated workplace performance. Or, more broadly, competency may be interpreted to include the notion of

transferability and the importance of underpinning knowledge and skills.

A definitive understanding of competency also requires clarification of the benchmark for assessment. Endorsed competency standards provide the criterion for levels of competency: but do learning outcomes deliver the same ends?

Insights into RPL and RCC and current practice lead to the suggestion that *recognition* is a more encompassing term. Recognition allows for the acknowledgement of different but defined outcomes and different purposes for undertaking assessment. Recognition may then be seen as an integral component of the assessment process that takes place in the range of VET providers.

The benefits of RPL have been widely proclaimed to individuals who seek RPL, to providers offering RPL assessments and to the VET State and Territory systems. Individuals have been seen to benefit by attaining advanced course standing and an accelerated course completion schedule—whilst avoiding unnecessary and possibly demotivating duplication.

Providers are seen to benefit by being able to increase throughput and achievement of student-contact-hour funding targets by ‘freeing up’ student places through RPL. However, much of the discussion about benefits lacks depth of analysis, with many of the *promoted* benefits assumed to be *actual* benefits. Exploration of the benefits of RPL and recognition practices, including longitudinal analysis, would be of value. Such research would need to take into consideration the different client groups for RPL, as well as the needs and positions of policy makers and VET State and national systems. In other words, the supply and demand perspectives need to be considered in tandem. Until such research is undertaken, we can only rely on small studies, anecdotes and opinions.

The issue of costs and charges relating to provision of RPL services is contentious. Costs relate to system-wide funding models, and this umbrella includes the consideration of staff time, productivity, cost recovery or cost neutral outcomes and what activity is valued. Charges are what an individual must pay when seeking RPL. The policy and practice in relation to charges varies enormously. Variations are found between the different States, between institutions and between the different sectors that comprise the vocational education and training sector.

Organisations or workplaces also face costs and charges. When dealing with TAFE, provider workplaces are frequently confronted with fee-for-service charges based on full cost recovery. In addition to these costs, they are also confronted with their own organisational costs, such as time for assessments and interruptions to production time.

The issue of costs and charges is prominent in understanding the implementation of RPL. Divergent voices from a range of perspectives champion various positions in relation to costs and charges. These concerns need to be aired and examined so that anomalies that impede access and use of RPL can be corrected.

Despite concerns and difficulties expressed by key informants, case study participants and the literature, there is almost universal acceptance that RPL and recognition are important elements of the training reform agenda and have achieved many constructive outcomes.

1 Introduction

This publication reports on a research project that investigated various policy and implementation approaches to the recognition of prior learning (RPL) in the Australian vocational education and training (VET) sector. The understanding of the notion of RPL and issues of implementation in the contexts of industry, training and further education (TAFE) and State VET bureaucracies were investigated by means of consultation, review of the literature and case study methodology.

The concept of RPL has been around for a long time. It achieved greater prominence in Australia in 1990 and has continued to remain central to the training reform agenda. The National Framework for the Recognition of Training (NFROT) adopted RPL as one of the ten principles endorsed in 1991. A review of these principles in 1994 re-confirmed the ten principles, with RPL remaining a central feature of the open market training system. Over the same period, the concept of RPL and its application and implementation have continued to develop; each State training system has defined its own policy position and implementation process in line with the NFROT.

With the evolution and application of RPL there have been significant shifts in policy and practice. Notable amongst these is an increasing preference to utilise, in the assessment process and in RPL itself, endorsed competency standards as the assessment benchmark rather than learning outcomes of accredited courses. The application of RPL using endorsed competency standards is often referred to as recognition of current competence (RCC).

This report adopts this more recent interpretation of RPL which takes account of recognition practices that relate to both learning/module outcomes and endorsed competency standards.

2 Definitions

Included in the reform of VET in Australia in the 1980s was the notion of granting credit for skill acquired in contexts other than formal training. In 1991, this concept was formally adopted as a principle of NFROT by the Commonwealth, States and Territories Vocational Education Employment and Training Advisory Committee (VEETAC). The definition of RPL proposed by VEETAC was:

RPL refers to the acknowledgement of skills and knowledge held as a result of formal training, work experience and/or life experience.
(VEETAC 1991a, Attachment One)

Although the essential idea of recognising skill gained outside formal training is encapsulated in this definition, it lacks specificity. There is no reference to the form or structure of such acknowledgement, or if formal training includes credentialled training.

In practice, RPL is frequently interpreted by the VET sector to mean a process that allows an individual to formally apply for recognition of learning that was acquired prior to enrolment in a course which leads to a qualification. This has been done by using learning outcomes of accredited curricula as the assessment benchmarks.

A more recent definition of RPL that provides greater clarity has been proposed by Rumsey as follows.

Recognition of prior learning or experience is a form of assessment used to determine whether a person has achieved, through informal and formal learning and experience, the required competence for entry and/or credit in a recognised course or training program.

(Rumsey 1994, p.15)

In this definition a clear link is made between RPL and accredited training. The purpose of RPL to gain entry or advanced standing is also specified. However, the criteria upon which individuals seeking recognition are assessed is not referred to by either definition.

While not explicitly stated in a definition of RPL, a common understanding and practice has been that the assessment standard may either be the learning outcomes of an accredited curriculum or endorsed competency standards. To differentiate the two processes—particularly in the workplace, the notion of recognition of current competency (RCC) has gradually developed and which refers to assessment against competency standards. The most frequently used term used in the workplace to measure an employees current competencies is 'workplace assessment'. Currently, the term RPL is

associated with only accredited training, while the term RCC is used in the context of assessment against endorsed standards. Given the increasing frequency of work-based and on-the-job delivery this distinction is neither practical nor appropriate. Thus, the general term 'recognition' is becoming favoured to include both learning outcomes and current competence against defined benchmarks.

3 Project methodology

The methodology employed in this project involved an extensive literature search and review, national consultations/interviews and case studies.

Review of the literature

An extensive national and international literature review was conducted to examine conceptual and philosophical issues, policy formation, implementation and the evaluation of RPL and recognition.

Consultations/interviews

Consultations were held with key policy-makers and managers in national, State and Territory VET systems. The interview framework was intentionally loosely structured to facilitate detailed comment on policy, including the relevant supporting documentation such as government policy papers and research reports. Respondents were asked to nominate other key individuals or organisations who might have an interest or expertise in matters pertaining to, and assisting with, the identification of potential case study locations.

Case studies

Criteria were established for the identification and selection of case study sites in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia. The criteria included:

- non-metropolitan/metropolitan locations
- workplaces
- TAFE institutes
- registered private providers

Advice was sought from the various State teams on preferred locations in New South Wales and South Australia. Consequently case studies were conducted at the following sites:

- Holmesglen Institute of TAFE (Victoria)
- WINETAC (South Australia)
- Regency Institute of TAFE (South Australia)
- South-West Institute of TAFE (Victoria)
- MAINTRAIN (New South Wales)

- Granville College of TAFE (New South Wales)
- Ford (Victoria)
- Council of Adult Education (Victoria)

Synthesis

The findings of the case studies were analysed in conjunction with the information from the literature review as well as the consultations.

Experts' seminar

An invitational seminar was conducted as part of the data collection process of the research. Issues papers and questions for discussion in three different areas were presented:

- recognition of prior learning
- graded criterion-referenced assessment, and
- student selection.

The latter two topics were the research areas undertaken by the New South Wales and South Australian project teams. All three research teams participated in meetings, teleconferences and the selection of participants at the experts' seminar.

Final report

The final report brings together all the project components and findings.

4 Literature review

4.1 Introduction

This section comprises a selective review of the literature of RPL, supplemented by information obtained in interviews with people from a range of contexts in TAFE, industry and State training authorities who were informed about issues relating to RPL. The purpose of the review is to clarify the meaning of RPL and to review issues relevant to each of these contexts.

The review is structured around the concepts of 'clients' and 'contexts' for RPL which were identified by *Arrangements for the recognition of prior learning in Australia* (VEETAC 1993). The majority of the references are drawn from the Australian literature, but some United Kingdom, United States and New Zealand studies are also reported.

The origin of recognising learning from experience has been identified by Brown (1992) as from the United States in the years soon after World War II and the Vietnam War, when veterans sought to have their skills recognised for admission to higher education. The Educational Testing Service, New Jersey, along with ten colleges and universities, undertook the Co-operative Assessment of Experiential Learning project which found it was possible to equate non-college learning with that provided in traditional college curricula and that it was acceptable to use a wide variety of evidence in the process of conducting credible and reliable assessments.

The implementation of RPL has gradually been formalised in both the United States and the United Kingdom. In the early 1970s, the US Council for Adult and Experiential Learning reported a varied response to RPL between institutions and within institutions (Simosko and Associates 1988; Whitaker 1989). In the United Kingdom, only a small number of higher education institutions introduced RPL components to their courses.

During the 1980s (e.g. Evans 1984) literature indicated an increasing desire for more widespread adoption of recognition practices. At the same time, the Further Education Unit of Department of Education and Science published case studies illustrating recognition issues in relation to guidance, pre-access, access, and credit at degree level. Eventually, the concept of assessment of prior experiential learning (APEL) emerged from studies of workplace learning (Levy 1987; SCOTVEC 1990) conducted with workers who were performing skilled tasks which had been learned on-the-job but which were uncredentialed.

For example, a study involving five colleges of further education and one skill centre was undertaken by Jessup (1990). Evidence was collected to assess the competence of individuals against the standards prescribed for units of credits and qualification. The awarding bodies of the United Kingdom, City and Guilds, British Technical Education Council, Royal Society of Arts Examination Board, and the Hotel and Catering Training Board, undertook responsibility for monitoring and applying the normal standard of verification to local assessments. The study concluded that the evidence of competence collected from experiential learning was sufficient to meet, and sometimes exceeded, the quality control requirements (Jessup 1990).

In Australia, the Ford–Broadmeadows College of TAFE project (Brown 1990; Davis et al. 1990) had a significant impact on attitudes towards RPL, in particular, influencing the development and form of RPL in Australia. The model comprises interview-based assessment for RPL—involving a subject assessor and an RPL assessor who elicit and review evidence provided by an applicant in relation to known criteria. The model which has been widely disseminated through training courses and consultancy has evolved as a framework which permits selection of the assessment methods most appropriate to the RPL situation.

In 1991, RPL was adopted as a principle of NFROT by VEETAC. RPL assessment systems, as stated in the 1993 VEETAC assessment principles, should reflect underpinning principles such as access, fairness, support, competence and commitment. This framework is still considered to be appropriate for the conduct of competency-based assessment.

The 1991 VEETAC definition implicitly excluded credit transfer. Furthermore it neglected to indicate the contexts in which competency is to be assessed—such as, the standards to be achieved, or whether ‘formal’ training is the same as training leading to a recognised qualification within VET or higher education systems. The issues of credit transfer and its relationship to RPL has been explored in greater detail over recent years. Indeed, some VET State systems have linked RPL and credit transfer. Evidence of this can be seen in New South Wales (New South Wales TAFE 1995) where the broader term *recognition* is used, which embraces a range of practices, including credit transfer, exemptions (standard and non-standard) and RPL. The Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee Credit Transfer Project released *Credit transfer guidelines for RPL credit*. These guidelines provide a frame of reference for granting RPL in the higher education sector for equivalent learning from accredited programs. The focus is on formal assessment, more so than experiential learning in other contexts.

Both *Assessment of performance under competency-based training* (VEETAC 1992a) and *Administration of Competency Based Training* (VEETAC 1991b) incorporated agreements to principles of national

consistency in the recognition of accredited courses, training programs, training providers, and competencies held by individuals. These reports also defined specific principles and processes for RPL.

4.2 The meaning of competence

NFROT views competency as a principle of RPL. However, because the term *competency* is often interpreted and used ambiguously, it is necessary, in order to explore the inter-relationships between RPL, recognition and competency, to clarify the meaning of 'competence'.

The National Training Board (NTB) in *National competency standards: policy and guidelines* (2nd Edition 1992) defined competency as follows.

The concept of competency focusses on what is expected of an employee in the workplace rather than on the learning process; it embodies the ability to transfer and apply skills and knowledge to new situations and environments.

(NTB 1992, p. 29)

In 1993, the NTB stated that industry standards should lead training. That is, education and training providers should:

base their courses and training programs on enabling or assisting individuals to achieve these standards, knowing that it is what industry actually does, and wants people trained for.

(NTB 1993, p. 6)

Much of the contention in the debate relating to the conceptualisation of competency is promoted by the dichotomous relationship between 'actual' and 'potential' competence. Perceptions and expectations of RPL are significantly influenced by whether or not competency is viewed as actual or potential. An examination of the nature of this relationship involves understanding the construct and purpose of the two prevalent assessment standards.

One of these assessment standards uses criteria that relate to learning and/or module outcomes. The assessment of learning outcomes has traditionally occurred within a training environment, usually a VET provider. The individual, in this situation, has attained modules in relation to an accredited curriculum which comprise part and, occasionally, the entire qualification. Assessment in this way cannot be assumed to be equivalent to demonstrated competency in the workplace. Assessment based on criteria derived from learning outcomes has been the most common form of RPL.

The second type of assessment uses endorsed competency standards. Competency standards may be assessed against an element of competency or may involve an holistic assessment of a unit or several units of competency, as they meaningfully occur in the workplace.

Assessments of the demonstration of workplace competency usually take place in the workplace in a real work situation.

Traditionally, such assessments have not been awarded a qualification, although under the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) pathways for this are possible. Pay increments or skill re-classification may have been an employment-related outcome. Assessment consistent with this has become increasingly sought, particularly by employers, with the claim being made that it is assessment of actual competence. This form of assessment is frequently referred to as workplace assessment or recognition of current competence (RCC).

Workplace assessment does not necessarily have any relationship to accredited training providers. This is particularly so when the purpose for the assessment is related to skill classifications, pay levels or skills auditing. Qualifications are not an integral component in this approach, the relevant contextual framework having been the Australian Standards Framework (ASF) rather than the AQF.

With the redefinition and re-evaluation of VET policy at a national level, the divide between RPL and RCC and the practices implied by them are gradually being reduced; the necessity for these two forms of assessment is being questioned. In particular, the recently released *Competency standards for assessment 1995–2000* (ANTA 1995b) and the ANTA Report (ANTA 1995a) have provided a policy platform for continued reform. These reforms are essential to the current status and directions relevant to RPL.

The issue of competence has been further complicated with the introduction of the ASF and the AQF. The ASF (NTB 1991b) comprises eight levels of workplace competence, ranging from supervised operative to autonomous manager. The NTB also stated that the ASF provided '... a basis for the recognition of prior learning.' (NTB 1992, p. 16).

The AQF aims to link competency requirements of workplaces and work-related performance to a qualification system. The AQF, which was introduced in 1995, defines levels of qualifications from secondary school certificates, through to VET and university. The AQF relates to the ASF, with levels of qualification normally based on the packaging of units of competency at particular skill levels.

The implementation of the ASF several years prior to the development and implementation of the AQF has led to a number of anomalies relating to the pathways towards qualifications. Individuals may have achieved workplace-endorsed competency standards via work experience, but not be eligible for a formal accredited qualification. This is because the qualification must be achieved via the attainment of the learning outcomes of an accredited curriculum document. Hence, it is possible for an individual to have

vocational competence but not a vocational qualification and vice versa.

The implementation of RPL has altered this relationship; a worker can apply for RPL to seek credit for full or part vocational qualification. Since TAFE colleges are usually the credentialling agency for the training program, RPL assessments have tended to be made against the learning /module outcomes of the specified accredited curriculum.

The AQF has the potential to open up pathways towards a full qualification by recognising both accredited programs and workplace competency standards as valid and related assessment benchmarks. This direction is contentious, promoting much debate on its application and desirability. It has prompted questions such as—can a qualification be awarded solely on the basis of workplace performance assessed in the workplace? This question raises further issues about the assessment process to be followed, the assessors, costs and who should bear them, and who issues the qualifications.

The Automotive Industry Assessment, Recording and Recognition Project (Predl 1995) enters this debate by noting that the AQF recognises course completion rather than competency standards is the most important means for measuring competency

By focussing upon credentials on the completion of training rather than the attainment of competencies, the AQF disadvantages existing workers who want to have their competencies formally recognised. In some cases these workers will gain, or will already have gained, competency through means other than training, such as experience on the job. The opportunity should be available for them to have their competencies assessed and automatically recognised in the form of a credential or credit transfer towards a credential.

(Predl 1995, p.18)

The 1995 report from the ANTA Board to the Ministerial Council, *The national agenda for vocational education and training*, included a section entitled 'Arrangements for Assessment for National Recognition of Competencies' (ANTA 1995a). The document includes additional arrangements to underpin assessment which lead to national recognition of competencies and the issuing of a qualification under the AQF. They build on the NFROT principles for assessment and provide information to inform decisions about the assessment processes. The directions in this report reinforce the policy shift towards endorsed competency standards as being the preferred assessment benchmark. The principle specifically dealing with RPL and recognition states:

Recognition of prior learning processes and partnership arrangements between enterprises and registered providers should be developed to assist

individuals gain national recognition of their competencies under the AQF.

(ANTA 1995a)

This has the potential of developing an alternative pathway to AQF qualifications based on workplace assessment rather than off-the-job study.

Such developments will reposition RPL within the training reform agenda. This diminishes the current distinction between assessment against competency standards as opposed to learning/module outcomes, and actual and potential competence.

The recently endorsed *Competency standards for workplace assessment September 1995 to August 2000* (1995b) provides an important set of standards in the definition of assessment and recognition. Significantly, the recently released standards apply to assessment rather than being designed for assessors, stating that:

the purpose of the Competency Standards for Assessment is to underpin the conduct of assessment against competency standards or learning outcomes of education and training programs derived from these Standards.

(ANTA 1995b, p. i)

The revised assessment standards implicitly include RPL and RCC assessments under the assessment umbrella. Hence, the potential exists to overcome many of the divisions, both real and arbitrary, that relate to differences between RPL, RCC and end of training assessments. The endorsed competency standards will provide quality controls within assessment processes.

4.3 Implementation of RPL

This section of the report reviews RPL as it is practised in various contexts, exploring policy positions, implementation issues and the funding of evaluations.

4.3.1 State vocational education and training systems

Different State training systems have developed various policies and administrative practices relating to RPL. South Australia operates a centrally managed model, whereas in Victoria individual providers have more autonomy. In New South Wales each institute implements common stated policy according to its own needs and clients. The Assessment Centre for Vocational Education in New South Wales has provided workshops and training packages for all TAFE staff (that is, teachers, counsellors, course information officers, managers) to support the implementation of RPL. In 1992 in Victoria, the State Training Board assisted the then Broadmeadows College of TAFE, now Kangan Institute of TAFE, with the establishment of the Recognition and Assessment Centre. DETAFE in South Australia

supports an RPL focus network that assists and encourages each institute with RPL implementation. Western Australia is similarly encouraging and supporting institutes in implementing RPL.

New South Wales and South Australian TAFE systems have set up RPL implementation groups and appointed recognition co-ordinators in all institutes. RPL is regarded as core work of South Australian TAFE teaching staff and as one aspect of assessment. Clear, well-documented processes have been established alongside training packages for teachers, administrators, assessors and course information officers.

In New South Wales, a computer-managed administration process has been introduced and attempts are being made to make a system to 'credit' for experience, as well as for previous formal qualifications, thus reducing the time and costs involved in processing applications.

The Australian Capital Territory has established a policy whereby no more than 70 per cent of a course may be recognised for RPL. In New South Wales the maximum RPL credit given on the basis of prior learning, work or life experiences, including training at other institutions or overseas is 75 per cent. One hundred per cent of a course may be granted in exceptional circumstances and is granted at the discretion of a State manager. However, to secure a NSW TAFE award, 25 per cent must be completed in TAFE NSW. In Western Australia, RPL assessors are able to grant up to 100 per cent credit/RPL. In other States this rule does not apply, but in South Australia the rigour of assessment increases with the amount of credit claimed. In South Australian DETAFE (1994) RPL links firmly to competency-based assessment.

... where curricula is not in competency-based format or competency standards do not exist, recognition of prior learning services will not be expected to be delivered, as in these cases the necessary assessment criteria will not be documented, from which assessment of prior learning and experiences can be reliably determined.

(SA DETAFE 1994, para 6.1:3)

As referred to previously, Victoria adopted the model of RPL developed jointly by Ford Australia and Kangan (formerly Broadmeadows) Institute of TAFE and supported the Recognition and Assessment Centre at this TAFE. The 'Broadmeadows model' has influenced the development of RPL in Australia. It comprises interview-based assessment for RPL—involving a subject specialist assessor and an RPL specialist assessor who elicit and review evidence provided by an applicant for RPL. This process may involve a panel of specialists with the applicant's having an advocate present or it may occur on a one-to-one basis. The model has been widely disseminated through training courses and consultancy advice. The model is now viewed as a framework which permits selection of the assessment methods appropriate to the RPL situation.

As a consequence of the devolved management model within Victoria, there are provider differences in policy on RPL. This may reflect the extent to which policy-making is devolved to departmental or course level, prominence is given to RPL by management and staff, and structures are created to promote take-up.

4.3.2 TAFE

Several studies have been conducted to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of RPL in TAFE institutes. Evaluation studies that have been undertaken in relation to RPL over the last five years have yielded valuable and sometimes surprising insights into the benefits and beneficiaries of RPL.

Mackenzie (1994) in a study of RPL at Holmesglen College of TAFE, challenges the assumed social justice function of RPL and suggests that those who most often benefit by RPL are not necessarily from disadvantaged client groups. Mackenzie questioned whether the term RPL and the claims made on its behalf, had facilitated effective students use of the service. He reported low take-up and concluded that RPL did not benefit young people, tended to be primarily used for academic rather than 'applied studies', was having a very minor influence in relation to the number and type of students attending college (a student base of 23 000 and 13 000 in recurrent programs).

Furthermore NESB students (52% of the total in the college), tended not to be beneficiaries but, surprisingly men and women benefitted equally. Those from university backgrounds were benefitting more than those from non-university backgrounds. All in all however, the numbers obtaining RPL were 'too small to be worthy of detailed studies to demonstrate clear financial gains' (Mackenzie 1994, p. 3) and no data existed to demonstrate that RPL was intrinsically motivating for successful applicants. Mackenzie also made the point that RPL was simply one of a number of forms of recognition available at Holmesglen College of TAFE in Victoria. These observations from a large metropolitan TAFE college cannot be overlooked. Perhaps further study exploring who benefits in relation to the five VEETAC client groups would be of value.

The Ballantine (1995) pilot study, in contrast to Mackenzie's paper, revealed a highly successful pilot with all eventual applicants attaining some RPL. The counselling process in this pilot may of course have acted as an effective filter, with not all potential applicants ultimately making RPL claims. Ballantine reported on a project in Western Australia where 22 courses across 19 TAFE campuses were included in an RPL pilot. The project documented the processes and outcomes of the implementation of RPL. For a range of courses, benchmarks or learning outcomes were developed which identified entry level skills and suggestions relating to how the applicant might demonstrate competence. These learning outcomes enabled applicants to self-assess. RPL processes for entry application forms were also developed and these provided applicants with opportunities to identify additional skills, knowledge or attitudes

relevant for the course. Wide advertising of the availability of RPL was supplemented by support from TAFE counselling staff. All applicants who proceeded with their application were successful in having their prior learning recognised for entry to TAFE. Of all successful applicants 70 per cent were women.

Arrowsmith (1994) also clearly documents perceived benefits, although the size of his sample is not significant. A detailed evaluation of RPL in a pilot project in child care in Western Australia undertaken in 1993 identified numerous benefits for participants, TAFE and employers. The small sample comprised six out of seven students enrolled in the 40 module Associate Diploma of Social Science (Child Care). This course had been revised as a competency-based curriculum, based on endorsed industry competency standards developed over 12 months of consultation between a TAFE curriculum development officer and the Education and Children's Services Industry Employment and Training Council. Interviews were conducted with students, project manager and employers.

The perceived benefits of RPL for participants:

- formal recognition of work and life skills
- elimination of redundant learning
- reduction in time spent in college
- boosted self-esteem
- more rapid access to higher paid and higher status jobs

The perceived benefits for TAFE:

- avoid wasting resources on retraining students who already possess relevant skills and experience
- maximising places for those people who need training
- in the longer term, closer liaison with industry

The perceived benefits for employers:

- speedier training of employees
- continuity of staff
- children more at ease with familiar carers
- more effective and efficient use of skills in the industry resulting in a balance between labour supply and demand
- employees' study leave requirements and time away from the workplace being kept to a minimum

With regard to costs, the project manager reported that the estimated cost to teach the module was \$30, the cost for RPL \$23. The report stressed that these figures were only very broad indicators. If this figure is confirmed in other projects, then RPL would be expected to become cheaper as experience with the RPL process grows.

McDonald's studies (1995) in NSW TAFE and Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) revealed difficulties relating to awareness of RPL, the training of staff involved in RPL assessments, the impact upon

existing teaching arrangements and the imposition of changes. McDonald reported a trial of RPL involving seven TAFE NSW institutes and 21 students who were enrolling in three national communication modules in 1994. The trial examined the extent to which RPL was used and effectiveness of the RPL processes. McDonald found that students were not familiar with the term RPL, that students preferred portfolio assessment to challenge tests, that staff felt the need for more guidance on the standard of work expected of RPL applicants (some expected higher standards than from students undertaking the course) and that the \$30 application fee for RPL, while too low to cover costs, was also too expensive for many students.

McDonald also reported an evaluation of RPL in fashion courses—the Advanced Certificate in Fashion and the Certificate in Garment Production—at Canberra Institute of Technology. These courses are modularised in a competency-based format. Applicants were encouraged to present samples of their work as evidence of meeting the benchmarks. Interviews were held, according to the Broadmeadows’ model, by two trained assessors. Additional information for RPL assessment was collected by telephone from ten of the 21 RPL applicants. Most applications were lodged subsequent to enrolment, but prior to the start of teaching, which placed pressure on staff. All but three applicants received the full recognition requested, some received more and a few received the maximum possible 70 per cent credit of the course. Issues emerging were the impact on desirable homogeneous classes as a result of RPL, training of staff to assess, authenticity of student work samples and the justification of charges for RPL when there is no charge for non-standard exemptions.

The case studies undertaken as part of this project reinforced many of Macdonald’s findings with strong concerns expressed about the training of RPL staff, the impact on teaching arrangements and time involved. Furthermore, concern was expressed at all case study sites where fees for RPL were charged.

4.3.3 Higher education and universities

D’Souza (1990) reported on the development in 1989 and 1990 of RPL within the Associate Diploma in Training and Development at Hawthorn Institute of Education, Victoria. The system established here involved awarding credit of up to 50 per cent of the course (one year of study); partial credit was also available. Applicants who secured partial credit were required to participate in a bridging course. More than 40 per cent of students enrolling in the associate diploma received some form of RPL; about one third receiving close to the maximum. The study confirmed that RPL was consistent with principles of adult learning, that assessor training was important, that students found matching objectives with course content difficult in some cases and that policies on costs needed to be developed.

The AVCC commissioned reports (Cohen et al.1993; Topley et al. 1993) to guide development of national policy on RPL in higher education. VEETAC (1993) reported case studies at the University of Southern Queensland's Further Education and Training Program, Monash University's Department of Policy Studies, the University of Technology Sydney's Telecom Training Sydney and Deakin University's Technology Management Centre.

In 1993 the AVCC released a document on credit transfer principles and guidelines on recognition of prior learning in order to improve '... national consistency in the treatment of applications by students entering undergraduate university courses and applying for credit for previous study and/or experience' (AVCC 1993, p. 2). However, higher education institutions have generally been reluctant to get involved in RPL and have expressed concerns about lack of consistency in promotion and up-take of RPL services.

A major issue for universities implementing RPL is defining benchmarks to demonstrate prior knowledge. Within the vocational education training sector, applicants for RPL have to be able to demonstrate that they can meet the learning outcomes whereas courses in higher education rarely define learning outcomes.

Wilson (1993) developed an RPL system in 1991 and 1992 to give credit in a new graduate program at Victoria University of Technology to experienced teachers who supervise student teachers. Audley (1994) has reported on the implementation of RPL policy in University of Western Sydney. Milne and Challis (1994) evaluated the draft RPL policy at Manawatu Polytechnic, New Zealand, by undertaking case studies in two Faculties: Science and Industrial Technology and Business. RPL was seen as a recruitment tool for students, rather than an educational strategy in itself. It challenged traditional educational practices and required an analysis of the components and structures of programs and therefore was rarely undertaken systematically. Universities are more autonomous than TAFE institutes, hence a system-wide approach has not been implemented. In this case, the AVCC Guidelines (1993) are purely advisory.

4.3.4 Industry and workplaces

Industry sectors have developed, or are developing, competency standards for the workplace. National and State level industry training advisory boards (ITABs) comprise employers, employer bodies and unions. The concern to improve the amount and quality of workplace training and assessment for credentials led to the development in 1992 of Workplace Trainer Competency Standards and revised Assessment Standards in 1995. Different industries are at various points in the development of competency standards: some have well-developed standards, others standards in need of revision; others have no competency standards at all.

In the consultations leading up to this report it was stated that some industries were more receptive to RPL than others. Receptive industries were characterised as being well-organised and predisposed to valuing and assessing life-experience. Examples can be found in manufacturing and hospitality sectors. However, the view was expressed that many employers preferred that employees undertake training instead of RPL because they could be more confident that employees had covered what they needed to learn and had acquired some of the company philosophy through their participation in the training culture despite any efficiency losses this may have involved.

Responsiveness to RPL also reflected the quality of the assessment and recognition process. Even within the same industry, it was said that RPL might work well for one group of workers and less well for another. There was a perceived need to develop assessment models for particular groups of workers. Employers appeared to be more receptive to the adoption of RPL if risks to the quality management of the process were minimal.

Miller (1992) reported that employer bodies advocated a flexible approach to RPL whereby each industry sector adopts the model which best suits its needs. He also reported that RPL was seen by employer bodies as potentially involving a risk to industrial competitiveness if workplace competencies were not recognised and used as the criteria for assessment, rather than learning outcomes.

The Australian Council of Trades Unions (ACTU) Assessment Framework, released in 1995, proposes a range of minimum standards to ensure that workplace assessment meets the VEETAC principles of being reliable, valid, flexible and fair. The framework recognises that assessment in the workplace occurs for numerous purposes including classification, recognition and assessment of competency against standards and the gaining of a qualification or statement of attainment.

Industries have used RPL as a tool in work restructuring to improve competitive advantage through multiple skilling. The Ford Australia–Broadmeadows project (Brown 1990; Davis 1990; Miller 1992) is one of the best known examples. Ford Australia sought to have its workforce classified within the new Vehicle Industry Certificate. The workforce was highly experienced and workplace competent, but few had formal qualifications.

[The Vehicle Industry Certificate is a] qualification devised by the five major vehicle manufacturing companies and the [former] Vehicle Builders Employees Federation, in conjunction with TAFE, [to] provide a national benchmark for valuing the skills of production employees in the vehicle industry.

(Brown 1990, p. 14)

RPL was the means used to assess the current competencies of workers and to place them at the appropriate skill levels of the Vehicle Industry Certificate, which in turn was tied to classifications.

Miller (1992) has described the process of the development of an RPL experiential table used to determine experience and skills levels in order to convert employees from the old industrial award to a new classification. Random auditing of the skills and knowledge of employees was conducted at the Ford plants at Broadmeadows and Geelong. The data collected formed the basis for the experiential table in which employees then received identified levels of recognition and subsequent reclassification. This process was endorsed by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission.

VEETAC (1993) reported that initially RPL was offered to Ford's non-trade workforce of 8,500. In 1991 and 1992, 2500 employees sought RPL for 40 skills and knowledge units of the Vehicle Industry Certificate. No costs or fees for RPL were charged. Workers had to complete a detailed application form outlining why they believed they should get recognition for particular units. Evidence was considered by a review panel of three people—supervisor, training officer and union representative—who interviewed the applicant and might also observe workplace performance. Unsuccessful applicants were reviewed by a four-person assessment panel and advised of further training opportunities. An appeals process also existed.

Significantly, the Industrial Relations Commissioner recommended that Ford also test their employees for competence. A case study on Ford included in this project shows that Ford has adjusted their RPL model in accordance to existing and future needs of its workforce and undertaken extensive competency assessments of its employees.

VEETAC (1993) studied skills recognition within the Trade Recognition Service (TRRA), Commonwealth Department of Industrial Relations, ACT Skills Recognition Service, Tile Industry Training Committee and TAFECOM Tile Laying Project and ACCESS—Tourism Hospitality and Training. Applicants for skill recognition may include persons who possess outmoded qualifications, as well as those with no qualifications.

Trades certification is available through State/Territory and federal bodies. As an example, TRRA covers a significant number of Australia's tradespeople. Central Trades Committees determine policy issues; Local Trades Committees determine individual applications and issue Trade Certificates to persons who meet the requirements. In 1991 and 1992, 5249 applications were made nationally. Of these, 46 per cent were from migrants who were pre-assessed before arrival in Australia and 34 per cent were from migrants who had not been assessed prior to migration; 20 per cent were from Australian applicants.

In 1990 and 1991, nearly 9000 people from overseas applied through TRRA to have their trade skills assessed. The service can provide 100 per cent skills recognition. Applicants are given advice on how to prepare for the assessment and lodge an application with supporting documents. This information is reviewed by the technical advisor who may seek additional evidence (e.g. from an employer or through a site visit) and then recommend to a Local Trades Committee that recognition be granted, refused or a trade test be required. Trade tests would be held at a skills centre, a private provider or a TAFE college. The applicant is informed in writing and may discuss the outcome, including the nature of the trade test, or appeal against it. All outcomes are recorded on a data base. This process has been evaluated and reviewed by the University of Technology, Sydney, and appropriate adjustments have been made.

Bloch and Thomson (1994) provided a detailed case study of the operation of the Building Industry Skills Centre (BISC) which has functioned as an independent unit within the Western Sydney Institute of TAFE since 1992. The system was reported by Bloch and Thomson as conforming to VEETAC assessment principles of validity, reliability, flexibility and fairness and to support participants likely to have language and/or literacy difficulties or to be under stress.

The report of BISC in McDonald (1995) does not concur in all respects with the findings of Bloch and Thomson. It reports shifts in practice such as assessment by only one assessor and the costs of assessment (or reassessment) as \$250.

Some of the concerns expressed related to industrial matters. Some assessors feared that availability of RPL would reduce attendance at formal training and the status of the trade license and its professionalism. Some criticisms were expressed of some aspects of the RPL process, especially the use of only one assessor, but all but one of the assessors expressed the view that industry supports RPL and regards trade qualifications obtained in this way as having equal status to qualifications obtained through an apprenticeship or other traditional means.

(McDonald 1995, p. 19).

This is an example of how assessment in a simulated or actual workplace can provide valid evidence that an applicant is competent. The assessment process has the advantages of being managed by industry, requiring demonstration of the full range of relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes and having the confidence of the assessors. It is, however, expensive and the costs are borne by the applicant.

VEETAC (1993) also reported industry case studies of RPL in the Rural Water Corporation Victoria, in the Concrete Constructions Group in New South Wales, and in QANTAS and in all instances identified issues requiring consideration. RPL was used by Rural Water Corporation Victoria to merge two previously separate

workforces under a new award system. Concrete Constructions in New South Wales encouraged its workforce (up to supervisor level) to seek recognition for core and basic skills such as safety, generic oxy-cutting, scaffolding, cleaning and so on. No costs or fees were involved. RPL was available without charge to QANTAS flight catering staff—for providers of catering service, chefs, pastry chef and stores staff. Standards were enterprise competency standards endorsed by NTB.

McDonald (1995) reported industry case studies of RPL in Panasonic, Matsushita Electric Company and BHP Steel. At Panasonic RPL was piloted on a key production line skill (soldering) with 12 volunteers, few of whom had taken, or wished to take, a TAFE course. The assessment process involved a one and a half hour challenge test requiring demonstration of practical skills, followed by a post-assessment interview and counselling exercise (30 minutes).

There was consensus on the appropriateness of the assessment method, some candidates feared they might lose pay if they did not achieve competency; others felt uneasy that their jobs might change as a result of the assessments. Assessors felt they needed more training in assessment and were concerned that their current jobs did not require them to practise soldering skills. Some unsuccessful candidates did not have the opportunity to practise required skills in their job.

Costs of the initial set-up of the system were high: advertising the RPL process, devising assessment tasks, implementing assessment, provision of materials, release of workers and provision of counselling. Against these were savings in provision of training.

At BHP's Port Kembla Slab and Plate Products Division, applicants were seeking recognition of:

... prior qualifications and experience in relation to the criteria for Graded Trades levels in areas such as hydraulics, fluid power, welding and pneumatics. They hoped to use this RPL to determine which TAFE NSW courses they would need to take.

(McDonald 1995, p.22).

The ten applicants were required to provide verification of courses completed, as well as information on relevant work experience. This evidence was considered by a panel. No fee was charged. Applicants were pleased with recognition granted but criticised delays in notification which meant they did not hear the outcome of their RPL application until after they had enrolled in TAFE classes. Costs to BHP were considerable and suggestions for improvement included a longer time scale and a two-tier process whereby applicants with similar backgrounds would be treated as a group rather than individually.

These studies highlight in the administration of RPL the inter-relationship existing between industry and the VET sector. This in turn begs the question of the standard of competencies being assessed. The Ford–Broadmeadows study is an example of workplace and RPL assessment which raises wider issues for other contexts such as assuring the quality of assessment and workplace assessors and the skills and competencies being recognised. These studies indicate that when industry applies RCC or workplace assessment as a form of RPL that costs are normally borne by industry. When RPL for a qualification is sought, costs are mainly borne by the individuals who seek credit. Thus, different systems and approaches have arisen to meet the different needs of each context and client group.

4.4 Statistics on RPL

Statistics on RPL are available but caution must be exercised in their interpretation. Current statistics provide an insight into the volume of RPL being granted. The 1995 *Graduate Outcomes Technical and Further Education, Australia* reports that Australia-wide 17 422 graduates from 1994 received some form of recognition. Recognition includes previous study at TAFE, university, for assessed skills and experience or study elsewhere (ABS 1995 p.57). The largest form of recognition granted was from 'previous study at TAFE' (10 263), with 5223 individuals receiving recognition for 'assessed skills and experiences'. Notably, 46 919 graduates received no recognition at all. The highest aggregate of graduates receiving recognition was in New South Wales, followed by Victoria, then Queensland. The field of study that had the largest proportion of graduates receiving recognition (32%) was the health and community services field, the largest proportion of recognition being for previous study in TAFE.

The graduate outcome statistics do not, however, reveal the volume of RPL granted to students who did not complete their courses, nor does it provide data on recognition practices that do not equate to a qualification. Furthermore, these statistics do not reflect the level of embedded RPL, that is, the level of practical or informal RPL assessment decisions that are not recorded on student record systems.

Other available RPL statistics are complicated by similar factors, one of which is the definition of RPL used. For instance, New South Wales includes credit transfer within their overall position on recognition, yet in Victoria it is a separate issue. New South Wales and South Australia has strong central monitoring and auditing features that enable RPL data to be accessed. Indeed, South Australia, in their quarterly RPL publication, *RPL Matters*, document RPL statistics per institute. Conversely, in Victoria, such data is less helpful, as the devolved management system produces vast institutional differences in regard to defining and recording RPL. Consequently, statistics on RPL are helpful in that they indicate levels of activity and trends, but they need to be regarded with caution.

4.5 The mechanics of RPL

4.5.1 Clients for RPL

A wide range of people are potential clients for RPL. In the United Kingdom, Tudor (1991) identified four categories:

- adult basic education students
- unemployed persons seeking to have work skills recognised towards future employment
- persons in employment seeking academic recognition for work skills
- persons in work seeking to transfer work and life skills into qualifications which can be used to further enhance their status or occupational mobility.

Whyte and Crombie (1995) report that 25 per cent of the Australian adult population have received no further education or training since high school. Disadvantaged groups include older adults, women (Davis et al. 1992), Aboriginal people and lower socio-economic groups. They argue for a national RPL system, with an appropriate national guidance and referral service, to recognise all learning. Materials to support clients from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) have been developed at Broadmeadows College of TAFE (Dyson 1994a, 1994b). Recognising the difficulties that many disadvantaged adults face in articulating their life experience, Whyte (1995), at the Council for Adult Education (CAE), developed a 30-hour, ten-week support course called *Building on experience*.

VEETAC commissioned *Arrangements for the recognition of prior learning in Australia* (VEETAC 1993) which identified four categories of client for RPL. These included:

- persons seeking RPL for placement within a course or program.
- persons with current skills and competencies for a particular workplace role who seek to have these skills credited with a formal Australian qualification (e.g. a trade certificate).
- persons with a formal qualification gained outside Australia, with or without workplace experience in their home country, who seek to have that qualification and experience recognised so as to enable them to work in Australia.
- those wishing to be recognised for an industry/enterprise endorsed skill classification.

The factor common to these four categories is that RPL assessment relates to a formal qualification or recognition of a classification level sought or held by an individual. VEETAC (1993), however, introduced a fifth category of RPL client: persons being assessed for staff recruitment, promotion purposes, or as part of skills audits and training needs analysis within an organisation. This fifth category widens the scope of RPL to any situation where human resource needs of an organisation are being reviewed. Unfortunately the

addition of this category further contributes to confusion about the meaning and scope of RPL.

4.5.2 The process of RPL

Regardless of context, RPL comprises a process for the purpose of assessing skills and competencies towards a formal qualification or classification and/or competency standard. The process from the view point of the applicant can be described in stages as follows:

- identification of the level
- advertising availability through RPL
- securing and assisting applications
- eliciting valid evidence relevant to the assessment (whole or in part)
- examining the evidence
- communicating the result and providing support
- providing an appeal mechanism
- recording the result

Criteria of quality apply at each of these stages. The quality of RPL assessment processes may reflect the extent to which assessment systems incorporate documented procedures, qualified assessors and clear criteria for assessment.

The Competency Standards for Assessment state that:

In addition to the assessment competencies, persons conducting assessment are expected to:

- *satisfy the requirements established by the industry/enterprise/training provider for assessing in a particular area and level of competency;*
- *know the competency standards or learning outcomes to be demonstrated;*
- *know current industry practices for the job or role against which performance is being assessed;*
- *practise the necessary interpersonal skills required in the assessment process.*

In a team assessment situation, the subject and/or assessment process knowledge may be contributed by different members of the team. The only restriction on who conducts assessment is the question of whether they have the above competencies.

(ANTA 1995b, p. 1)

The competencies and attributes for all assessors have been established. RPL and recognition are implicitly included within these competencies.

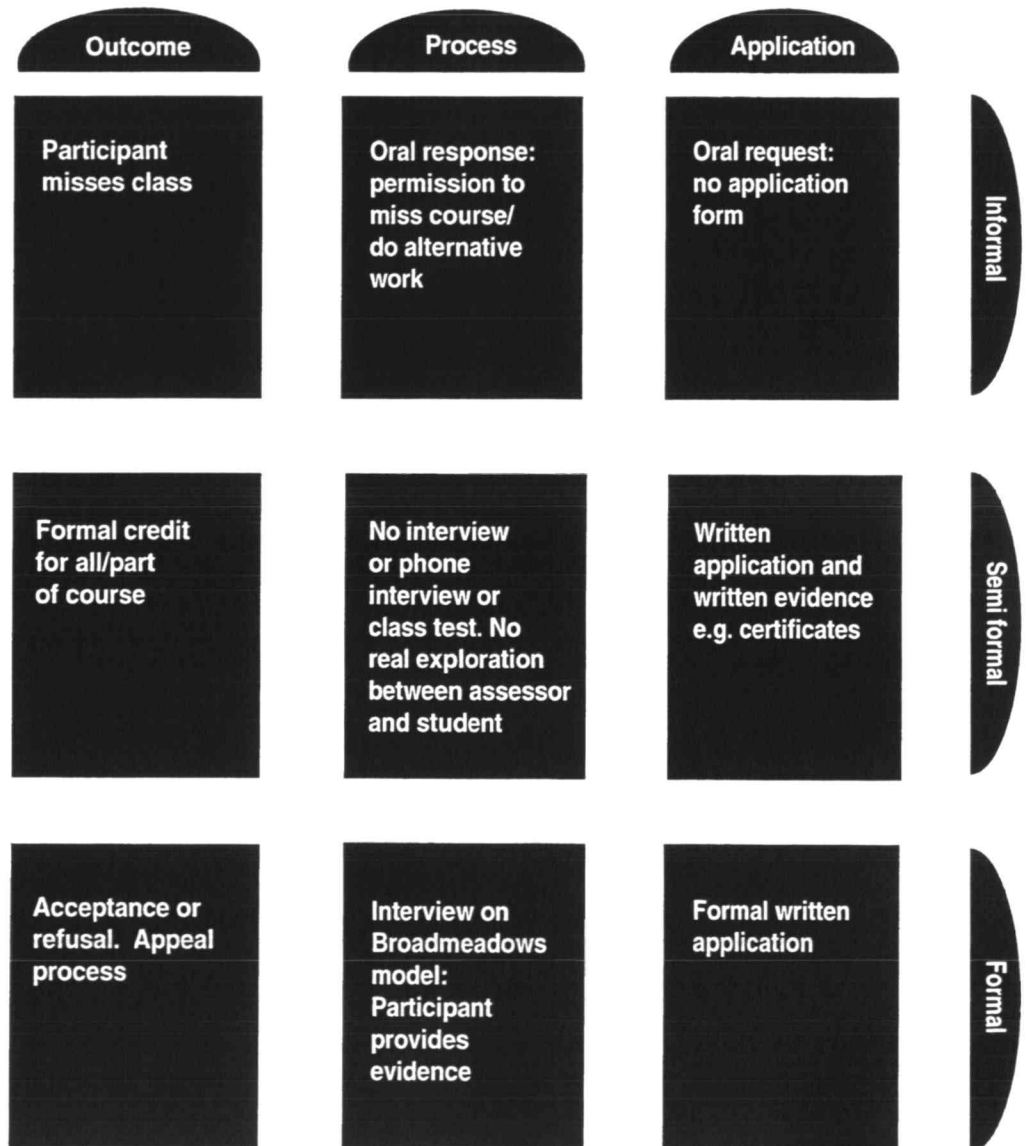
Wilson et al. (1989) and Gonczi and Hager (1992) contend that assessment systems that have the features described above are likely to be rigorous whereas those without the above features are likely to be weak. Several people who were consulted for this project

suggested that an assessment culture in Australia is underdeveloped and that it would be beneficial if the term 'assessment' was given more prominence as an essential aspect of RPL.

4.5.3 Models of RPL

Working within an Adult Education/Community Education context, White (1995) identified three models for granting RPL: informal, semi-formal and formal. These models are outlined in figure 1. Three broad stages are identified—Application, Process and Outcome.

Figure 1: Three models of recognition of prior learning



Source: Donna White, CAE

The informal system involves an oral request to the class teacher for RPL (no application form to be completed), an oral rather than written response which might be granting of permission to miss all, or part, of the course or to do alternative work (no benchmarking

against learning outcomes), and an outcome in which the participant is able to get credit while pursuing studies of their own choosing.

The formal system is highly regulated and requires formal written application, an interview or some other strategy for collecting evidence. The applicant must provide evidence of the competencies to be recognised, such as benchmarks, then a decision to accept or refuse the request for RPL can be made; an appeals process for cases where the outcome is challenged may be instituted.

4.5.4 Costs and charges

The issue of costs and charges is contentious. Costs that are incurred from the provision of services for RPL and recognition practices may encompass management involvement, system-wide funding issues, teacher or RPL assessor time considerations and implications for student contact hours.

More specifically, there may be charges that are levied against an individual or organisation to cover the costs of RPL. Some charges are calculated on the basis of full cost recovery. An analysis of most current RPL practices presents a complex scenario of known costs, funding formulas and charges, as evidenced in the case studies and discussions with key informants. No fully costed analysis of RPL has yet been conducted, which is not surprising given the rapidly changing nature of both RPL and the broader training reform agenda.

In Victoria, where the determination of RPL charges is an institute decision, there is enormous variety in both the charge applied and the client groups who apply; some institutes charge a flat RPL fee, regardless of the volume of RPL sought for existing or potential students, other institutes charge on a modular basis and others charge only a nominal fee. However, some aspects of RPL charges are common across institutes. In the case of RPL being granted, a deduction is made from general course fees. If the client is an enterprise or a group of individuals, institutes generally charge RPL assessment services on a fee-for-service basis, or a cost recovery basis.

Each State in Australia has established a different charging schedule for RPL services. These differences are reflected in the following list:

- Victoria—each institute determined its own RPL charge; these vary from no charge to the maximum charge (several hundred dollars), that does not exceed TAFE fees.
- New South Wales—no charge is levied for enrolled TAFE students.
- South Australia—\$10 per module for which RPL has been applied, provided that the student is enrolled in the course.
- Western Australia—determined by each institute.
- Queensland—no fee is charged for enrolled students, provided course fees have been paid.

- Tasmania—charge for RPL is dependent upon what is required in the assessment situation; if assessment can be done via forms, no fee is charged, if interview or challenge tests are required an hourly fee applies.
- Australian Capital Territory—\$45 per module, not exceeding \$250.

Charging for RPL services is a contentious issue. A number of individuals and groups within the VET sector hold firmly to the belief that charges are an impediment and disincentive to equitable access to training and qualifications. The Adult, Community and Further Education sector (ACFE) expresses serious concerns relating to anomalies in fees, charges and costs. Many ACFE courses, such as literacy, bridging or pre-vocational programs, do not require the payment of fees. However, to allow community providers to provide RPL assessment services, a fee must be charged to fund the service. This charge, often nominal, is being charged to a client group that often does not have employment or other financial means. Furthermore, many of the ACFE and community-based courses do not require the payment of a student fee.

In TAFE institutes, the RPL charge is offset by a fee reduction. A fee is paid for RPL and if RPL is granted the student's fees are adjusted accordingly. When fees are not charged, as is the case in the community sector, RPL becomes an over-and-above cost, with no chance for reimbursement. The situation poses serious questions relating to access and equity in relation to all client groups seeking RPL.

RPL, on a systemic level, has the potential to facilitate considerable cost savings in the provision of vocational education and training. These savings or productivity improvements advantage both institutes and the State systems on the basis of increased throughput. Throughput savings can be explained as follows. TAFE institutes are funded according to a Student Contact Hour funding model. This means that institutes receive a specified amount of money for the SCHs of training delivered. SCHs are monitored through college enrolments. If a student applies for and receives RPL it is still counted as institute-enrolled student contact hours and funded accordingly. Thus, institutes are able to receive funding for student contact hours that they do not have to deliver. The places these students would have taken are then back-filled with further enrolments. This system results in increasing the throughput in TAFE institutes in particular, and the broader system in general. It enables institutes to make productivity gains and to meet their enrolment targets within a given funding period and consequently makes RPL appealing to the management of institutes.

5 Summary of case study findings

5.1 Introduction

Case studies were conducted in New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria with the organisations listed below.

- Ford Australia (Broadmeadows, Victoria): Vehicle Industry Certificate and RPL for new employees
- Wine industry (South Australia): workplace assessment of assessor and trainee
- MAINTRAIN, New South Wales: Engineering Production Certificate
- South West Institute of TAFE (Victoria): Business Studies and Office Administration, Administrative Training Company - Assessment Kit and Workplace Recognition and Training Company
- Holmesglen College of TAFE (Victoria): Secretarial Studies and Trade Accreditation Program
- Regency Institute of TAFE (South Australia): Advanced Certificate in Electrical Engineering and Graduate Management Program
- Granville College of TAFE (New South Wales): Manufacturing Studies Division
- Council for Adult Education (Victoria): Certificate IV in Professional Writing and Editing.

The case studies do not necessarily provide a basis for making generalisations about RPL across Australia. Rather, they constitute 'snapshot' descriptions of how, in the various sectors, States and institutions, policies on RPL are evolving and being implemented.

5.2 Description

Ford Australia, a company of 6660 employees with a longstanding commitment to RPL through the Vehicle Industry Certificate, has developed policies to make RPL available to new employees. In a three-month probationary period employees may request RPL which is assessed by an assessment panel comprising a union representative, training department manager and subject expert.

Trained assessors may also undertake on-the-job assessment for employees who have completed a Job Certification Sheet for non-trade courses, or a Training Application Certification Sheet for post-trade training. Trained assessors and a policy of less than 100 per cent recognition are aspects of the Company's Risk Management strategy.

MAINTRAIN is a relatively new New South Wales company specialising in train maintenance. Its 250 staff work in teams which are self-sufficient in terms of multi-skilling. Three models of RPL have been used at various times by the company. In model 1 RPL comprised an interview-based skills audit to identify existing and required skills of the workforce; model 2 provides for on-going RPL to recognise evidence of gains in skill and is entirely paper-based; model 3 involves employees seeking RPL through TAFE colleges. Use of the third model has raised the issue of comparability of standards between institutions and assessors.

Granville illustrates how the New South Wales policy of recognition, standard exemptions and non-standard exemptions works within the Manufacturing Studies Division. Standard exemptions most frequently occur at enrolment and, though largely a paper-based exercise, with perhaps an interview, can be highly pressurised. Non-standard exemptions (i.e. for experiential learning) involve a further interview and check on authenticity of claims, sometimes resulting in challenge tests or the offer of 'early exit tests'. Assessors are middle managers rather than teaching staff. RPL exemptions reduce the volume of training rather than accelerate course completion. No charge is involved.

Regency Institute of TAFE illustrates the implementation of South Australian policies relating to RPL and management development. RPL assessment in the Advanced Certificate in Electrical Engineering is conducted according to the Broadmeadows interview model, supplemented with performance evidence where appropriate. Conferring of full RPL is a cost for departments and institutions in lost enrolments. This may constitute an incentive to give partial credit.

Both Holmesglen Institute of TAFE and South West Institute of TAFE demonstrate the flexibility available to Victorian institutions in developing RPL policies. Courses were studied in both institutions—in secretarial studies at the former and business studies and office administration at the latter. Both RPL systems incorporate self-assessment against learning outcomes for a course and were followed by interview.

In South West Institute of TAFE the NETTFORCE Administrative Training Assessment Kit was used. This kit involves workplace self- and peer-assessment on real work activities, with assessment verification by a supervisor. The assessment data generated from the RPL process is sent to TAFE and, if appropriate, converted into a

Certificate III qualification. Applicants 'not yet competent' are encouraged to enrol in self-paced workshop based modules.

Holmesglen's wide range of course delivery strategies may be one of the factors which encourage staff to offer partial rather than full RPL. Partial RPL is time- and cost-saving for students and staff alike, but partial RPL is not formally recorded within the institutional database. Some categories of student, such as apprentices, are not eligible for RPL.

The Council of Adult Education in Victoria, a registered private provider, allows RPL for all but one compulsory module in Certificate IV in Professional Writing and Editing. The RPL process is interview-based and focusses on attainment of learning outcomes, though applicants with a significant track record who can produce 'pyramid evidence' of their work, may be credited with an entire module. RPL is perceived to decrease the study load rather than to reduce the time of study. A fee of \$150 will be introduced in 1996.

5.3 Analysis

The case studies indicate that a range of practices relating to RPL operate in various areas in the VET sector. It would appear that VET systems have invested an enormous amount of energy in devising policies and procedures, disseminating these to staff and creating structures for implementation. Some of the case studies illustrate the problems associated with RPL terminology and definition as discussed in the previous section. This issue is one of more than semantics; it carries with it a range of different expectations.

The case studies highlight the different assessment standards being used to gain credit in TAFE and industry contexts. The NETTFORCE-South West Institute study shows how workplace competence may be converted to a Certificate III qualification, thus creating a pathway from ASF to AQF standards. This practice is of particular interest as not many formalised systems or packages exist to deliver the same outcomes.

The case studies also raise numerous management issues such as: when and for whom is RPL available or not available? Which client groups are best served by RPL and which are not? The ceiling on the amount of credit available invites examination on the parity of RPL assessments compared to end-of-training assessments, that is, are they equally regarded and valued?

The development of risk management strategies, which include training of assessors, is an important issue for all case study sites. Perhaps not surprisingly, the higher the ASF or AQF level being assessed, the more rigorous the risk management strategy was expected to be. RPL and workplace assessors stressed a keen desire to ensure their assessments were rigorous and valid.

Risk management strategies and commitment to RPL were affected by the pressure on staff and students because of the short time-frame for assessing RPL applications between enrolments and the commencement of classes, and the extent of unrecorded partial credit as opposed to full credit. The awarding of partial credit meant that the amount of RPL being earned is underestimated. Perhaps the pressure on staff is also underestimated. In many instances with partial RPL students load is lightened. Although courses are not necessarily shortened, the number of competencies or modules to be completed is reduced. The issue of partial RPL needs further investigation in order to gain a greater understanding of the volume and extent of the practice. It must be acknowledged, however, that efforts to measure informal RPL may not always succeed and the effort itself could alter practice.

The discussion of costs and benefits also highlights many issues. Charging of RPL fees is often a major disincentive to students considering applying for RPL. Determining who should bear these charges and the benefits accruing to the payer are significant issues.

A typical institute of TAFE response to charges appears to constitute an alliance of staff with students to explore partial credit on an informal basis, thus saving time and expense all round. Given the lack of data on take-up of RPL, especially partial credit, it is perhaps not surprising that some of those interviewed asked whether the productivity gains of RPL were acknowledged.

Charges and who pays the charges are emotive issues in all contexts of RPL, but if the individual seeking credit has no chance of recompense, charges are viewed with greater equanimity. It appears that, if entry to the system on a formal basis without incurring a charge for RPL services is possible, then it is exploited.

If systemic and organisational productivity gains are to be made as a result of RPL then its implementation is favoured and encouraged by management. Workplaces reorganising and restructuring have used RPL as a tool in skills auditing and classification according to existing levels of competence. In such cases employers are happy to bear the cost as in the case of Ford. TAFE institutes have also been active in promoting RPL for a variety of reasons, including maintaining or increasing the volume of student contact hours within their organisation.

These case studies illuminate some of the issues concerning the nature of RPL, including uncertainty over terminology, the standards being credited, management and costs and benefits. The studies indicate that RPL is an important feature of VET reform in Australia and an aspect of policy that is developing in response to the debate about how workplace skills are to be recognised in terms of formal qualifications.

6 Discussion of issues

The four central issues for RPL identified in this report are terminology, standards, administration and costs and benefits. Issues for further research are also identified.

VEETAC (1993) has provided the most comprehensive account of recognition practices in Australia, using the NFROT definition and quoting examples of assessment practices that went beyond this definition. The literature review and case studies in this research have indicated the varied use of terms internationally as well as in Australia. There has been significant change both since 1992 when the concept of RPL was enshrined in NFROT. The existing definition does not help to clarify the essential nature of RPL as part of assessment and indeed may be said to be so ambiguous that it might be better replaced.

The generic term 'recognition' is gaining favour and New South Wales TAFE has now adopted this term, with standard and non-standard credit being used to indicate the nature of the prior learning which is being credited. In industry, it is current competencies, not prior learning, that employers and employees wish to have recognised through assessment.

This report would argue in favour of use of the term recognition and, in the light of our review, we would suggest defining recognition as follows.

Recognition is essentially an assessment of an individual's competency towards either a formal award from a course, or an industry or enterprise standard. The process begins with the applicant taking advantage of the opportunity to be formally assessed. It then continues with a formal assessment of the evidence provided by the applicant in support of their claims. A professional judgement is made by persons who are accredited to the endorsed assessor standards in conjunction with relevant subject competency as to whether or not to recognise these claims as valid and to award the credit in full or in part.

Standards issues are linked to the contexts in which recognition is offered and the meaning of the ambiguous term 'competency'. As discussed earlier, 'competency' in the workplace means performance of an employee in relation to a package of units of competency. The outcomes delivered by many VET courses are not based on endorsed competency standards.

Training reform, however, aims to bridge this gap. While this may yet be some way off, the reverse process whereby the competent employee should be credited with the entry-level qualification has a compelling logic, though it challenges control of the route to credentialling.

Administration of recognition raises the question of whether it is desirable or possible to develop a national approach to recognition. Whilst national principles exist to guide RPL, this is not the same as national policy. In the absence of national policy, each State system has felt free to develop its own approach. The literature and case studies illustrate the diversity which prevails. Consistency, equity and access appear to be major issues—along with considerations relating to costs and charges, risk management approaches, quality assurance and ceilings on credit available. In the interests of simplification and ease of communication, there are strong arguments for a national system although it is unlikely to be supported due to different State policy positions and implementation practices. The revised Competency Standards for Assessment may provide for some of the cohesion required, helping to establish widely recognised and used standards and practice and at the same time engender a much-needed assessment culture.

Costs and benefits are intrinsic to the implementation of recognition. Costs issues are most frequently discussed in terms of system development costs, which include documentation and procedures, training of assessors, implementation, record-keeping and monitoring. Costs are currently considered in terms of whether and how much applicants should be charged. There are significant time costs for all parties. These issues deserve detailed analysis.

The benefits of recognition in terms of enhanced motivation of learners, and smooth transition between employment structures have also been raised. The lack of industry or enterprise data makes it difficult to know the extent to which recognition actually is a significant feature in the course or industry context. The TAFE case studies suggest that, in the course context, unrecorded and partial recognition is embedded in good teaching and assessment practice for specific outcomes.

Within industry, recognition often refers to existing competencies. If all competencies for a particular role are demonstrated, the employee may be able to claim the appropriate recognition. Partial recognition means 'all requirements for competency have not yet been demonstrated'. This results in the identification of individual training needs and identifies the pathway to upgrade competency.

Further research into RPL would assist in gaining a deeper understanding of how the potential of RPL and recognition practices can be realised, with the possibility of attempting to quantify these gains. If more enterprises are to exploit the potential of RPL, some of the suspicions and uncertainties surrounding it need to be removed and its benefits clarified. Furthermore, the VET training systems should review policy and data collection systems to give a comprehensive picture of the extent to which recognition actually occurs.

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Case studies

- Council for Adult Education (Victoria)
- Workplace assessment in the wine industry
- Holmesglen Institute of TAFE (Victoria)
- Regency Institute of TAFE (South Australia)
- South West Institute of TAFE (Victoria)
- Ford Australia–Broadmeadows (Victoria)
- MAINTRAIN (New South Wales)
- Granville College of TAFE (New South Wales)

Council for Adult Education (Victoria)

Overview

The Council for Adult Education has discussed institutional RPL policy although no policy has as yet been adopted. RPL is offered in certain courses, and it is also taught as a subject—Building on Experience—within the Certificates of General Education for Adults. Detailed advice on RPL is offered to students in the course studied: Certificate IV in Professional Writing and Editing. In 1996 a standard fee (\$150) will be introduced. RPL is available for all but one module. It is estimated that up to 80 per cent of the course may be credited. For most modules RPL claims are assessed by interview on the Broadmeadows model, but in certain performance areas a challenge test is set.

RPL is favoured as advantaging students, but costs staff time, and complicates the enrolment process for full-time (one year) students. This is because RPL applications must be submitted prior to the commencement of the course (around one month after being offered a place).

Introduction

The Council for Adult Education (CAE) is a major provider of adult and community education in Victoria. CAE has no formal policy for recognition of prior learning (RPL) although proposals for the introduction of such a policy have been discussed in the past. However, RPL is offered within some courses (for example Certificate IV in professional writing and editing), and one member of staff offers a subject within the general curriculum options of the Certificates of General Education for Adults (CGEAs) on RPL. This course is documented in *Building on experience* (White 1995), published in 1995 by the Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board for Victoria.

Analysis of process

The Certificate IV in professional writing and editing is an accredited course recognised by the State Training Board in Victoria and designed to develop skills for employment in the writing and publishing industry or for work as a creative writer. It may be studied

full-time over one year, or part-time over a number of years. There are core and elective subjects.

The course attracts a wide range of applicants aged between 18 and retirement. Participants range from those who are looking for a change in career to those who are exploring career options for the first time. Some applicants have significant writing experience and have published extensively.

RPL is advertised as available in the flyer for the course, the application form and in a one page information leaflet. An RPL application form has to be completed in respect of each RPL application. RPL is available for all modules except the core module—industry overview—since this provides a state-of-the-art review of developments in the industry.

Full-time students are required to apply for RPL prior to commencement of the course. Part-time students may apply for RPL during their first year of study before choosing subjects for the following year. Students are advised to consult the learning outcomes for the modules which are, in some cases, summarised on a sheet by the co-ordinator, or available for consultation in the CAE library. RPL applicants must indicate the modules for which RPL is sought and provide detailed information about relevant education and training experience. In addition they are required to provide such documentation as certificates and results from previous studies, outlines of courses completed, and materials they have written or published. Although assessment focusses in the main on the extent to which learning outcomes of the course have been met, applicants with a significant track record (for example, those who have published a book of poems) would be regarded as having provided 'pyramid evidence' and be exempted from a subject on a holistic basis. The leaflet does not indicate how much RPL is available within the course, but staff interviewed estimated that the credit maximum was eight per cent.

An RPL application is processed as follows. Prospective RPL applicants may seek a preliminary consultation to assist them to prepare their application. For most modules the application is assessed subsequently by interview, on the Broadmeadows model, where a subject expert and an RPL assessor interview the applicant and decide whether RPL may be granted. However, for certain subjects (for example, Construction of English A, Editing 1A and Word Processing) a two hour practical test is required. An applicant must obtain 85 per cent accuracy for RPL in these subjects. There is no RPL interview for word processing.

Some RPL assessors have been trained on the Broadmeadows model; others have been trained on the job by sitting in on interviews conducted by trained staff. Partial RPL (within a module) is not available. However, an exemption from the work requirements for individual competencies within a module may be granted by the

subject tutor. In this case there is no interview or RPL fee, and normal tuition fees apply.

In 1995, no fee for RPL was charged, but in 1996 it is proposed to charge a fee of \$150, regardless of the number of modules for which RPL is sought. This fee must be paid in full when lodging the application and is non-refundable. The fee for RPL for word processing is \$85. Tuition fees for full-time students may be reduced because of a successful RPL application.

A second RPL interview may be offered if required, and there is provision for written appeal to a panel in the event of RPL being denied. RPL allows the student to retain full-time status while decreasing the study load. RPL results are shown as PU (Pass Ungraded), a symbol used also for subjects for which no higher grade than pass is awarded.

It was estimated that around 30 RPL applications for the course had been handled in 1995. The process was time-consuming and no allowance was made for the time involved. However, RPL was regarded favourably as saving students the need to learn what they already knew. One issue was whether RPL should be seen as part of the selection and enrolment process or as subsequent to it. The application form for the course asks the applicant to indicate subjects for which an RPL application may be made in considering applicants relevant prior experience is relevant to the decision on offering a place. Full-time students are always interviewed; part-time students may be interviewed. Full-time students are required to apply for RPL prior to the commencement of the course. Interviews are held mid-January to mid-February, and the course commences mid-February so that there is little time to manage RPL between enrolment and the course starting.

Conclusions

CAE staff interviewed recognise the importance of RPL and the need to offer students support in preparing applications for credit. Within the course studied partial credit was not available. Questions which emerge from current RPL practice would appear to be fairly typical of those in the training context in general: Is assessment for RPL different from assessment as part of selection? How can time pressures (for full-time students) between enrolment and the commencement of the course be overcome? How much RPL should be allowed? How much should students be charged for RPL? And what recompense should busy staff receive for the time they devote to RPL assessment?

Workplace assessment in the wine industry

Overview

Identification of six work streams with levels of performance linked to the Australian Standards Framework (ASF) were identified, resulting in a new emphasis on workplace assessment and training in the wine industry. WINETAC Inc promoted training through the Certificate in Food Processing, a nationally accredited course under the NFROT. WINETAC also provided training in workplace assessments, in accordance to the endorsed assessor competency standards for over 100 experienced workers. Observation of assessment of an assessor and trainees in the workplace confirmed a face valid and positive process which has been used as an RPL system to place experienced workers at particular skill bands with related pay and conditions.

Introduction

WINETAC Inc (Wine Industry National Education and Training Advisory Council Incorporated) is the national body promoting quality standards for training in an Australian wine industry which comprises a few large organisations and many smaller family businesses.

In 1991, as part of award restructuring, six streams of work, were recognised for the industry: cellaring, packaging, warehouse distribution, cellar door sales, laboratory and viticulture. These six streams extend across the first four levels of the Australian Standards Framework.

WINETAC secured national accreditation for entry-level training via the Certificate of Food Processing (Wine). The Certificate of Food Processing is nationally accredited through the NFROT agreement, multi-streamed and recognised as a foundation qualification for the food industry. It may be studied through TAFE, private providers or, in South Australia, by means of distance learning and comprises core and practical modules. The study guides, developed for the wine industry, involve self-assessment and trainer assessment activities. Each module within the Certificate of Food Processing involves a variable amount of off-the-job study over a one month period.

In response to the identification of the six streams of work, the industry conducted skill audits. Employees were asked to rate their

own competence on each skill on a check list. At a subsequent interview a supervisor confirmed these competencies. An employee able to demonstrate 100 per cent of competencies for a particular ASF level was credited with that level. Where not all competencies for a particular level were attained, employees were classified accordingly. Such classifications also reflected the level of remuneration an individual received. Disputes were resolved by a workplace assessor.

In some large enterprises each employee's progress may be checked annually by means of a training interview. Employees who have acquired new skills on the job may seek to have them assessed. Classification is linked to pay and conditions through an enterprise agreement. Employees thus have an incentive to improve their skill levels. They do not pay for assessment. The cost of this workplace assessment is high, and how it should be financed is an issue.

WINETAC has trained 100 experienced workers in the wine industry workplace assessment program which meets the endorsed Workplace Assessor competency Standards. Training has involved successful completion of a three- day workshop on assessment skills organised by WINETAC, development by the assessor of an assessment plan, and satisfactory demonstration of assessment practice with a trainee in the workplace.

Analysis of process

Observation was made of assessment of (1) a trainee assessor for certification, and (2) of a ASF Level 1 trainee.

- 1 Assessment of the assessor was undertaken by a WINETAC representative. Theory was assessed by questions on, for example, the training reform agenda and how training led to better quality of work. The WINETAC representative then observed the assessor assessing a trainee to ASF 1. On the conclusion of the assessment of the trainee, the WINETAC representative assessed the assessors as competent.
- 2 The trainee assessor asked the trainee questions relating to theoretical knowledge and observed him in practical situations. Questions included the types of grapes grown in the vineyard, three methods for irrigating the vineyard etc. Observations were conducted in the workplace. The assessor observed the trainee prepare and use a tractor/slasher, and prune vines. The assessor certificated the trainee for ASF Level 1.

Analysis

While RPL does occur in the wine industry the assessment situations reported above were examples of workplace assessment. The assessments related to learning as an outcome of formal training, that

is, the course for assessors, and the Certificate in food processing modules studied by the trainee. In both, the assessment was of relevant theoretical knowledge and performance skills to workplace competency standards. The assessment process had been carefully thought out, was comprehensive in scope, had obvious face validity and was managed with assurance. The quality of the process might be further confirmed by researching such issues as:

- the selection of theory questions to sample the extent of knowledge. (Since standard questions were asked it may be presumed that their importance had been established through the course accreditation process.)
- the nature of a competent performance
- the reliability of assessment based on one person assessing;
- the extent to which the trainee being assessed reflected a 'typical' trainee, and hence a typical assessment situation;
- the extent to which competencies demonstrated in one situation can be generalised to all situations.

In both assessments assessors reflected the encouraging, supportive and helpful approach to assessment recommended in the Workplace Assessor Competency Standards.

Costs

From this case study the costs of RPL assessment in the Wine Industry are:

- *training and certifying assessors*
3-day training of assessors viz accommodation, resources, time of trainers; time assessing trainers in the workplace (round trip from Adelaide of 2 hours plus 2.5 hours spent in the assessment itself).
- *assessing the skills developed in the workplace*
time of trainee being assessed (and possible disruption of work); assessor time, that is, travel, assessment and discussion (\$100 cost per assessment); time of employer in discussing progress of trainee with assessor/trainee.

Conclusions

This case study has focussed on the wine industry in South Australia. From it emerge issues of access to training and certification, and who should bear the costs of assessment.

Larger enterprises in the wine industry have used RPL to align employees' skills to skill bands. They have promoted a training and assessment culture. Employee skill levels are continually developed through funding of an annual training review with assessment and credentialling of on-the-job learning. The outcomes of this process

may result in reclassification and improved pay and conditions as well as progress towards an accredited vocational qualification. The issue is whether enterprises alone should continue to bear these costs. The fact that many employees within the wine industry work for small businesses has led to the development and utilisation of distance learning approaches.

Distance learning predominantly within South Australia and Victoria, has brought nationally accredited training through the Certificate in Food Processing within the reach of both existing and new employees at their workplace. The case for extending distance delivery to employees in all wine- producing areas would appear to be strong.

Assessments in the wine industry include both theoretical and underpinning knowledge, and the application of skills performed to endorsed workplace competency standards.

Holmesglen Institute of TAFE (Victoria)

Overview

Holmesglen College (now Institute) of TAFE is a major institution in Victoria offering a variety of routes to formal qualifications. Recognition of prior learning is distinguished from other forms of credit. RPL is defined as credit available within academic courses for life, work experience or other formal studies. Interviews with senior management, staff and students who had obtained RPL, identified administrative, cost and pedagogical issues related to implementation of RPL. An interesting feature was the use of partial credit as a compromise between granting full and no RPL for modules.

Introduction

Holmesglen Institute of TAFE is located in the inner eastern suburbs of Melbourne. It was one of the case studies in VEETAC (1993). The case study described how RPL had been used to give experienced secretarial employees the advanced standing towards a secretarial qualification and also mature experienced workers who can gain trade equivalence through the Trade Accreditation Program.

The director, Bruce McKenzie, contributed a paper on RPL college practice at the national RPL conference in November 1994 (Mackenzie 1994) distinguishing between four kinds of RPL skills:

- Credit
- Fitness for purpose courses (courses specially designed for applicants based on their prior work experiences and able to be taken through Holmesglen's Weekend College, leading to a Trades Accreditation Program)
- Fitness for purpose tests (on-site tests which license individuals based on their experience to operate various pieces of plant operator training)
- RPL

RPL was the term applied to recognition for life experiences, work experiences or studies undertaken at other educational institutions. The cost of assessment differed for each system. In 1994, 24 412 students were enrolled in Holmesglen College of TAFE. Of these 21 121 were part-time. Holmesglen caters for a diverse student

population around 60 per cent of whom are NESB. Under Victoria's Office of Training and Further Education (OTFE) policy the college has devolved responsibility as to how it implements aspects of policy, including RPL. Holmesglen is distinctive in that it offers weekend classes as well as day and evening classes. It also offers flexible and distance learning as an alternative and supplement to face-to-face instruction. The Institute has a senior management team and operates through six largely autonomous centres: Technical and Industrial Skills, Building and Construction, Plumbing and Mechanical Services, Business and Computing, Communications and Applied Sciences, and Horticulture. In addition there is a Centre for Training Research and Development. Each centre has its own head and there are also heads of departments.

Description

Formal policy and procedures

While no single member of senior management has responsibility for overseeing RPL, Holmesglen has four senior RPL consultants and 43 RPL assessors covering all centres of the Institute. Information on RPL policy and procedures was collected from documentation and interviews with senior management, heads of centres, assessors, heads of departments, students who had received RPL, and teaching staff who are not RPL assessors.

Holmesglen's policy on credit and RPL is documented as an aspect of student enrolment and amendment procedures. Credit is available, free of charge, for successful completion of the same modules at another college, or in another course at Holmesglen. RPL may be granted for modules in a number of programs, whether these are for State Training Board-accredited or approved programs in accordance with the program documentation provided. RPL is not available for subjects taken for the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), nor within non-assessed programs. While it is possible in theory to claim RPL for 100 per cent of a course, in practice this is not always possible or encouraged.

RPL applications are discussed with RPL advisors or course co-ordinators. Completed applications, accompanied by appropriate documentary evidence, are lodged with relevant head of department who arranges for RPL interviews with RPL assessors and subject assessors. RPL assessors have normally been trained on the Broadmeadows model. After an interview, RPL module exemption notifications are completed and recommendations are made to the head of department and the student records office informed.

If students are granted a partial RPL, copies of the documents are retained in the teaching centre until students complete assignments, or undertake alternative study to gain full exemption for the complete module. Partial RPL module exemptions cannot be recorded on the student administration computer system. Administrative details are recorded and students are notified by student records office. Students

who are dissatisfied with the level of exemption obtained can write to the head of centre within seven days and request that the decision be reviewed. The decision of the head of centre is final. The head of centre completes an additional RPL module exemption notification advising the student of the results of the appeal. If students are not granted RPL the head of centre completes notices advising of reasons why RPL was not granted.

Applicants pay a standard RPL assessment fee of \$90.00 (irrespective of the amount of RPL claimed) at the time of lodging the form. RPL applicants enrol in the course and attend classes, including modules which are within the scope of the request for RPL. If RPL is granted for any complete module students will be refunded a portion of the enrolment fee. If applications have been assessed prior to enrolment, the enrolment fee will be calculated excluding any modules for which students have been granted total exemption under RPL.

Secretarial studies

In secretarial courses the 100+ learning outcomes of the basic qualification are set out in a detailed manual. Modules are of different lengths (e.g. 5, 10 and 15 hours). Students enrolling are asked to purchase the book of course competencies (\$120), to enable self-assessment and assist documentation of evidence for RPL. Depending upon the skills for which RPL is claimed, applicants are then interviewed, or take a challenge test. Securing RPL for an entire module is easier for students in courses where modules have only five or six learning outcomes. Students can rarely secure complete RPL for modules with many learning outcomes. This also indicates that assessments are summative with each learning outcome being separately rather than holistically assessed. This does allow for partial RPL. This may be granted informally rather than through the formal RPL system which involves much form-filling as well as being a cost for the applicant. The initial stage of the RPL assessment process may lead assessors to recommend that an applicant take advantage of flexible delivery or fast tracking rather than proceed with an RPL application.

Trade accreditation program

The Trade Accreditation Program is unique to Holmesglen Institute of TAFE. This program offered in a range of trade areas, is designed to enable mature and experienced workers gain accreditation for a specific trade without having to undertake a full apprenticeship program. Individuals must have at least three years industrial experience and not be under 23 years of age. The program runs for up to 20 weeks in Holmesglen's Weekend College.

Upon enrolment, students are diagnostically assessed to determine existing skills and skill deficiencies. From here, they receive appropriate training in order to reach trade qualified standard. The individual applies for final assessment when ready. This assessment occurs at any time within the 20 week block. Some individuals received trade accreditation largely via recognition and minimal training, other received more training. Teachers involved in assessments stressed the importance of the final assessment for trade equivalence, and their risk management strategy involved a considerable amount of communication between teachers and with the assessee. Decisions erred on the side of caution.

Holmesglen's ability to conduct a Weekend College enables the unique provision of the Trade Accreditation Program by providing access to training and qualifications in non-working hours. Teachers within the program could clearly see the benefits for the students, in particular, the ability to recognise adult learners' previous experiences and motivation.

Staff perspectives

Staff perspectives related to the administrative complexity and workload associated with RPL, cost and pedagogical issues. Comments were expressed about the number of forms to be filled in by those involved in handling RPL applications, the length of time involved in preparing applications and reaching the decision, and the consequent pressures on both students and staff, given the short time between being offered a place and commencement of classes. The work involved for staff and students was noted as significant. Awareness of the need to have fair assessment methods was strongly expressed, as was the concern that challenge tests could be off-putting for some applicants. For such persons it was seen to be better that they be re-introduced to study via classes.

RPL was seen to be separate from the selection process. RPL applications were in some cases lodged prior to enrolment; in others they were lodged subsequent to enrolment. Some RPL applicants attended classes pending the outcome of their application, others did not.

Concern was expressed by some staff about possible inequities relating to the charging for RPL. Others drew attention to the fine line which existed between getting credit and RPL for a particular learning experience. If a subject or module previously studied had the same name as one in the course being entered, credit transfer could be claimed, at no cost to the student; if the name was different, even though the content was practically the same, a student might have to apply for RPL and pay the costs. Also, when \$90 was paid there is an expectation they will get something for that. In some cases, RPL applicants received no recognition.

An RPL application could take from one to three hours to handle (i.e. read application, formulate questions, interview, complete forms). A lot of discussion was required between RPL and subject assessors and between RPL assessor and candidate. Some staff felt that lack of specific remuneration reflected a view that RPL was not seen as 'core' work. Co-ordination of handling of RPL applications for a particular course was a substantial workload over and above assessing, and merited special recognition. Attempts to make RPL more efficient, for example by dealing with applicants as a group, were not well received. RPL applicants want individual treatment. Staff had many observations on the pedagogical implications of RPL. Since only one or two students drop out from a class because of RPL, this is not a major factor in disruption of the class. Class compositions are often very diverse, especially with many NESB students. This makes teaching difficult and also raises the question of what kinds of experience should count for RPL. However there might be effects on a class when some students have or are seeking RPL and others are not. Sometimes those not seeking RPL have more experience than those who are seeking it. Sometimes a student will rejoin a group which she or he has temporarily left because of RPL. The maturity of the group is a factor in the response to the student who returns to classes.

Staff questioned some aspects of the RPL process. For example, how far do assessors check the validity of supporting evidence? Some staff found that course objectives did not match the competencies the person claimed. A person may have done computing, but lack the theoretical knowledge of the subject. Should people who can demonstrate skills, but do not have theory knowledge, get RPL? Also even when a student could rightly claim that they were familiar with a specific operation (e.g. EXCEL) they might still have difficulty with an ensuing module because they had learned EXCEL from a particular perspective. A subject is taught in a particular way with an eye on relevance to what is to be learned at the next stage of the course.

RPL applicants

Two mature students, both current members of staff, were interviewed together about their RPL applications. Both had extensive experience of secretarial work and were undertaking courses in office administration. Both spoke positively of the role of RPL in encouraging them to pursue formal qualifications, a point reinforced independently by academic staff.

The availability of RPL had been made known to them in 1991. They had to complete forms which set out the competencies they had to demonstrate and the evidence required. The RPL fee was waived for staff since enrolment was seen as a form of staff development. One applicant was given 80 per cent of first year of Associate Diploma in Office Administration; the other was given RPL for 75 per cent of the same course. Each had prepared RPL documentation which had been

presented in support of claims to competence in particular modules. One had taken a challenge test in shorthand. Each had attended short interviews with two to three people.

Recipients of RPL firmly believed that if an applicant could prove that they possessed all learning outcomes for a course they should get 100 per cent RPL, that is, a full qualification. The applicants also took the view that RPL promoted critical scrutiny of one's own competencies in relation to those of the course. It was a useful stepping stone which freed the student to do what they really wanted to do. One possible disadvantage was the loss of networking.

Analysis

Staff engaged in managing RPL or in teaching students who had received RPL, were able to raise a wide range of practical issues about implementation.

A possible factor influencing take-up of RPL at Holmesglen is the administrative complexity and costs surrounding it. Administrative complexity relates to the stages in the process and the short time-line between submitting an application, embarking on the subject and learning if the application is successful. There is much form-filling, consultation and data-collection which is time consuming for both staff and students, especially in the light of the time pressures which operate, normally at the start of session. Persons may apply for RPL either before enrolling or subsequent to enrolling in a course. They may attend classes pending a decision on their application or not. Thus, RPL adds to staff and student workload and creates ambiguity; for NESB students these pressures may be a significant disincentive to applying.

RPL applicants contribute to the costs of RPL via payment of a charge. This charge may seem expensive if no or few modules are granted RPL, and cheap if many are. The fixed fee has administrative simplicity but may deter applicants who have some experience worthy of credit. The requirement that students purchase the course competencies in secretarial studies as part of a self-assessment process is another financial consideration for applicants. Informal methods of assessment which result in partial credit were seen to be an important component of RPL. Flexible delivery options have made partial RPL viable.

Conclusion

The principle of giving credit for prior learning has long been accepted at Holmesglen, but has existed in several contexts with different terminology for each. The introduction of RPL has encouraged staff to look critically at the design of modules and also has encouraged students, especially older persons, to aspire to qualifications. A particularly successful initiative of Holmesglen is the

trade accreditation program. The combination of offering weekend training and accreditation through recognition for a specific trade without having to undertake a full apprenticeship program, provides greater access to working students and an opportunity to gain a full qualification.

Costs and procedures surrounding the lodging and processing of applications were not without criticism. Considerable time was involved for RPL assessors and applicants. Costs or fees for RPL also raised comments: some believing to be cost effective and other not. The availability of partial RPL provides an effective and expedient method of granting RPL where possible, and at the same time saving the expense for the student. This flexible approach is supported by the availability of distance learning resources, although the length of time for a course was not always shortened.

Granting of RPL raised a number of pedagogical issues for staff relating to the quality of the process of RPL assessment, the nature of the competencies credited through RPL, and the losses (as well as the gains) of not attending classes. The teaching staff expressed a keen interest and determination that RPL assessments be credible and reliable. If this was difficult, challenge testing was preferred.

Regency Institute of TAFE (South Australia)

Overview

South Australia's documented policies for recognition of prior learning locate RPL as an aspect of assessment. South Australia seeks to promote quality of approach to implementation across the State. RPL practice was studied in two contexts at Regency Institute of TAFE: within the Department of Electrical Engineering's Advanced Certificate in Engineering and within a new graduate management program for senior management staff. The interview-based process for RPL in electrical engineering is outlined and the issue of costs discussed with reference to institution, staff and students. The management course aims to promote competency-based learning in the workplace for a postgraduate academic qualification. RPL may be used to give staff joining the program advanced placement within it. On-course assessment is of concurrent workplace learning within a formal program of study rather than of learning prior to enrolment.

Introduction

RPL policy in South Australia is described by the Department for Employment, Training and Further Education in a policy booklet (DETAFE 1994a) and support publications viz *Recognition of Prior Learning: Focus on Assessment and A Guide to Providing the Service: Corporate Staff Development Initiatives* (DETAFE 1994b) specifically aimed at the 10 TAFE institutes. Curricula cover 14 program areas, each of which is managed by a State program manager. DETAFE (1994a) links RPL firmly to competency-based assessment:

where curricula is not in competency-based format or competency standards do not exist, recognition of prior learning services will not be expected to be delivered, as in these cases the necessary assessment criteria will not be documented, from which assessment of prior learning and experiences can be reliably determined.

(para 6.1:3).

While an entire qualification may be obtained through RPL, a risk management approach 'proposes an increasing degree of rigour as the risk of assessment processes increases. Rigour is determined on two levels—the amount and quality of evidence required, and the need for additional assessment strategies to review the evidence in

order to make the final assessment decision' (DETAFE 1994a, para 9.2:8).

Assessment is to be undertaken by staff 'who meet the requirements of the national competency standards for trainers and assessors' (DETAFE 1994a para 9.3:8) and this reflects the intention that assessment for RPL is seen as an aspect of assessment in general.

Strategies for implementing RPL include: information pamphlets; professional development; implementation project resources; a communication and professional development network of focus people across institutes and program groups; a training plan for each category of personnel involved; professional development of staff; definition of roles and responsibilities for RPL focus people, assessors/lecturers, course standards groups and support staff; a review of costs, charges, student fees and productivity measures; amendment of the academic record to show competency achieved for statistical and data collection; recording of RPL effort for counsellors, administrators and lecturers; the development of a plan by course standards groups for RPL implementation, including statewide processes and evidence guides and other measures.

Applicants must pay a general service fee of around \$58 unless specifically exempted, \$10 per module or subject plus \$10 per module for materials used. However RPL 'should not . . . cost applicants more than if they completed the module of learning and in fact it should be significantly less' (DETAFE 1994a, para 11.1: 9). Results of RPL assessments are recorded on the DETAFE data base, not within the institution where RPL has been earned.

DETAFE has also committed itself to a policy to introduce world best practice approaches in its institutes of TAFE and Central Office. Management development is a high priority and policy is that all new managers hold a management qualification at a minimum of Graduate Certificate level.

Description of process

Regency Institute of TAFE is nine kilometres west of Adelaide CBD and has 10 000 full-time equivalent students. Each of its eight member management team has portfolio as well as line management responsibilities. The line management areas constitute faculties (for example electrical engineering) and schools (e.g. Hotel School) each of which comes under the jurisdiction of a State program manager. A student services manager has a general role in regard to providing learning support, publicity about RPL, including flyers, guidance and advocacy on RPL applications. The institute implements South Australian RPL policy through faculties and schools. Two examples of RPL were nominated for this case study: in electrical engineering, and management development.

Advanced Certificate in Engineering

The Advanced Certificate in Engineering is a 15 module course in industrial electronics, programmable logic controllers and related instrumentation. Trades-background persons may enter directly; unemployed persons or school leavers enter via a bridging course. The certificate is awarded on successful completion of 15 appropriate modules. The course is competency-based and learning outcomes are defined. Award pay structures are linked to the advanced certificate. Introductory modules articulate to ensuing modules. Up to four modules may be offered each term; one module is delivered part time each term. Each module comprises 40 hours.

The RPL co-ordinator is an experienced and approachable lecturer who is familiar with the requirements of each module and of the combinations of modules relevant for different occupational contexts. The RPL process within the department is as follows.

The initial stage of RPL may occur prior to selection into a course, subsequent to selection but prior to enrolment, subsequent to enrolment but prior to the start of classes, or subsequent to the start of classes. At one of these points the prospective RPL applicant contacts the RPL co-ordinator by telephone or face-to-face, and requests an initial interview to explore prospects of obtaining RPL. If there is a basis for applications the student completes and lodges an RPL application form subsequent to enrolment into a course, along with supporting evidence. The evidence is considered against the learning outcomes for the modules/course by a subject expert who recommends either that RPL be granted, or that the applicant be invited for interview. This interview lasts up to one hour, and is conducted normally by the RPL co-ordinator, and one or more subject experts. Also present may be someone who can support the applicant's claims. The interview may result in RPL being granted or yet further evidence being required through practical demonstrations, oral tests, written tests, a project, or additional documentary evidence.

The method is subject to negotiation. The assessment may be undertaken in the institute, or in the applicant's workplace by a member of institute staff or a qualified worker. The decision to recommend RPL in whole or in part is made by the Department. When the relevant fee is paid the RPL result is entered as an SP code (to be changed in 1995 to Competency Achieved (CA)) on the DETAFE data base. The Director communicates the decision to the applicant. An unsuccessful applicant may appeal in writing to the Director who will arrange for the appeal to be heard by new interviewers drawn, as far as possible, from outside the institute. The appeal team will review the evidence and decide either that it is sufficient or insufficient. The outcome of the appeal is final.

At any one time the RPL co-ordinator may be at one of the above points with each of a dozen active applications while others await

processing. Correspondence and record keeping are involved, but staff accommodation and secretarial assistance are limited.

Management Development Program

A workplace trial of skill development of senior managerial staff for a postgraduate managerial qualification is being co-ordinated by a UK consultant familiar with the development of management standards under the UK Management Charter Initiative (MCI). MCI management standards are currently available at four levels: supervisory, first line, middle and senior management. The standards comprise units of competence which reflect the principal activities at each level. The units are grouped into four key roles—managing operations, finance, people and information. The consultant leads a team of staff who are both mentors and formative assessors, and is responsible for quality assurance, summative assessment and appeals.

Participating staff self-assess against the standards, identify and agree development objectives with their line manager, collect, in a portfolio, evidence of managerial tasks undertaken (agendas, minutes, letters, memos, plans, policies, reports) and write a report to clarify the context of each document and the relevant performance criteria or range. Witnesses corroborate the events documented. Formative assessors assist in formulating development and assessment plans, and provide feedback. Participants keep a diary or reflective journal, report to each other on their work, and seek advice on how they can use the competency standards to improve their performance.

Summative assessment is by staff from a different institution and costs \$120 per unit. Participants decide when to present evidence and whether all or only some competencies are to be assessed. The assessor makes a holistic judgment as to whether the participant is competent, not yet competent, or the portfolio contains insufficient evidence. Written feedback is accompanied by advice on additional evidence required. Assessment may also be done at a distance and this necessitates clear description of the work context and activities reported.

Senior staff in management course

A group interview with five participating staff revealed differential formal and actual commitment to the scheme reflected in different amounts of completed units. The scheme was perceived to be attractive as action learning on-the-job, built a round work being done with colleagues and thus improving management skills for real work and improving relationships across units and schools. Getting support from mentors, a management qualification, and also experience as mentor and as assessor were all perceived to be useful.

Perceived disadvantages were that learning came from experimenting on colleagues, with perhaps little external guidance. Staff saw a need for structured meetings to provide a goal for writing-up and experimentation. Meetings with mentors varied, some being on a weekly basis, others at longer intervals. No time allowance had been negotiated, and staff had to find time (and quiet) to write up their reflections of their management activities. Often this had to be done at home. One member of staff had signed up for a university course because it was seen to be a faster route to the goal of obtaining a management qualification.

Analysis

These studies illustrate how two aspects of State policy for TAFE are being managed within one institution. They also illustrate different concepts of RPL. In electrical engineering a version of the familiar Broadmeadows model operates; in management, RPL assessment is of on-the-job learning promoted within a structured postgraduate self-study course.

Cost issues are central to RPL in electrical engineering. The Regency institute (and the department) is credited only for students' hours of study, not for students who gain RPL for a module. The institutional database also cannot record applications for credit from those who wish to have their workplace skills credentialled but who do not wish to enrol in a course. Since RPL results are collected at State level, and the process of implementation is devolved, management may not be aware of the actual amount of full or partial RPL being undertaken and the work-load implications for staff. Staff feel well supported by State initiatives relating to RPL, but receive no tangible acknowledgement of the work involved in handling applications. Some questioned whether the productivity of RPL was really being acknowledged. There are traps for students in RPL: cases were cited of students who fell foul of AUSTUDY minimum contact hours requirements through their success in claiming RPL and who, consequently, were asked to repay their grant.

The competency-based management course involves staff in self-assessing their current levels of performance as managers against four levels of managerial skill. If validated by the consultant this would constitute an example of recognition of experiential learning subsequent to entry to the course. On-course assessments are of the extent to which each staff member has developed their workplace managerial practice to the competency standards of the MCI. Since staff are enrolled in a course leading to a formal qualification, and are supported by mentors, the learning context is a formal one where summative assessment provides confirmation that they have reached the required standard. Although the learning for which they are being assessed summatively is 'prior' learning, it is prior in the same way that learning in any course of study occurs 'prior' to its formal assessment. It is maintained, therefore, that, while an example of workplace assessment, the management course incorporates RPL

only in terms of initial self-assessment. Nevertheless the course does illustrate the trend to workplace delivery and competencies of formal academic qualifications being defined in terms of on-the-job competency.

Conclusion

South Australia is acting vigorously to develop a comprehensive and uniform RPL policy which includes recording of RPL effort for counsellors, administrators and lecturers. The issues raised in the electrical engineering example may therefore be resolved fairly speedily. The management example sits outside State RPL policy and illustrates the trend towards awarding qualifications on the basis of both enhanced workplace role competence and fulfilment of academic requirements. It also illustrates the confusion that exists about the meaning of RPL, especially the interpretation of the word 'prior'.

South West Institute of TAFE (Victoria)

Overview

South West Institute of TAFE has been actively involved in developing and conducting office administration courses using flexible delivery. The programs have been designed for workplace delivery and this provided substantial impetus to develop and implement an RPL system. This case study focusses on the provision of RPL in the business and office administration programs of the College.

Introduction

South West Institute of TAFE is located in Warrnambool, 300 kms south-west of Melbourne. This institute services a large, predominantly rural area, offering a range of courses at several different locations via different delivery methods, in particular distance and flexi-modes. This diverse range of offerings grew out of recognition of the needs of the institute's geographical client groups.

The adoption and implementation of recognition of prior learning (RPL) by the State Training Board (Victoria) in 1991, created the opportunity for South West Institute of TAFE to offer RPL to its clients.

Analysis of process

Over three years ago, South West Institute of TAFE, in particular the business studies and office administration teaching department, began offering recognition of prior learning as a service to its clients. The client group initially was the college's existing or commencing student population.

The RPL offered by these teaching areas tended to be primarily focused around entry-level skill recognition, with the benefit for the student being advanced standing in pre-vocational courses. Whilst this service was a major breakthrough in the recognition of experiential learning and other forms of exemption/credit, it became apparent to those within the college that the services provided relating to recognition could be significantly extended. A broader client group who may benefit from RPL were identified.

Concurrent to these RPL developments was the development of self-paced learning materials in office administration. This development project, costing approximately \$.25m, was funded by a grant from the Victorian Education Foundation. The self-paced learning materials developed, commonly known as the Open Learning Office Skills Project (OLOSP) are focused around Australian Standards Framework (ASF) levels 1 to 3, and were specifically designed for workplace delivery. South West Institute of TAFE worked extensively with the National Office Skills Formation Advisory Board (NOSFAB) during the development of this project, and consequently strong links between the two organisations were formed.

The convergence of these two factors enable a number of initiatives to be fostered:

- The provision of an RPL conversion for the Admin Training Company's Assessment Kit.
- The establishment of the Workplace Recognition and Training Company.

Admin Training Company's assessment kit

This assessment kit has been developed by the NETTFORCE organised Admin Training Company, a division of NOSFAB. This assessment kit is widely available for workplace application. The assessment kit uses the endorsed competency standards—Admin/Clerical Standards (private sector) as the assessment benchmark. Participants, over an undefined and unprescribed period of time, are assessed against these standards.

The assessee is an active participant in the assessment process. Firstly, it is the participant's choice of when to submit to assessment. Initially, the participant undertakes a self-assessment. This self-assessment can be for parts, or all of the competencies dealt with via the assessment kit. After self-assessment, the participant must then nominate a peer to undertake an assessment on them.

If the self-assessment and peer assessment processes are positive, the participant is able to seek assessment verification. This is usually conducted by a supervisor or a trained assessor. This may or may not be an internal employee. All three stages of assessment occur in the workplace on real work activities.

The assessment kit is an instance of workplace assessment against competency standards. This alone, however, does not convert to a qualification. In order for the competencies obtained to be recognised via the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF), the applicant is able to send their assessments to South West Institute of TAFE, where the RPL process is used as a conversion mechanism. The

competencies recognised up to ASF level 3 are translated through to a Certificate III qualification.

The link between NOSFAB and South West Institute grew out of the Open Learning Office Skills Project. In reality, there is nothing preventing other TAFE providers from offering RPL conversions from the Admin Training Company Assessment Kit. South West Institute, in providing this RPL service has clearly established itself as a leader in this field. They have supported the RPL service by being able to provide self-paced workplace based modules to applicants, when it is deemed they are 'not yet competent'. This service, whilst not specifically RPL, supports the diversity of pathways towards a qualification.

Workplace Recognition and Training Company

Growth in the volume of RPL services provided by the institute, in particular in the office administration and business studies areas has seen the establishment of the Workplace Recognition and Training Company. This company to fully commence operations in 1996, will initially focus upon RPL in accounting.

RPL in practice

The techniques used to make RPL assessments include checklists, portfolios and the previously discussed assessment kit. In some situations only one tool is required, in other situations a number of factors may necessitate a more complex decision-making process. The checklists used have been created by subject specialists within the Institute. Learning outcomes are the measured assessment benchmark, and applicants must fulfil all of the requirements on the checklist and this must be verified by a workplace supervisor. The portfolio approach includes RPL applicants submitting a portfolio to the institute containing information and evidence of achievement of learning outcomes or equivalence. These portfolios typically contain a resume, position description of current or relevant jobs held and details of courses and training undertaken since secondary school.

The NOSFAB assessment kit operates as previously described, and primarily serves the needs of those in employment at the entry or lower ASF levels. The checklists and portfolio approaches are used to assess skills at the higher levels, equating to advanced certificates and associate diplomas.

Process

The process of RPL decision-making at South West Institute of TAFE includes at least six stages, and can take at least two months. The stages are:

RPL assessment

- The applicant seeks RPL via the relevant teaching department within the college.
- A decision is made on the RPL application after review of evidence and possible interview.
- This RPL assessment is made by the nominated RPL assessors within each teaching area.

Assessment verification

- The RPL assessment decision is verified by the Head of Department.

Verification by RPL co-ordinator

- South West Institute has an RPL co-ordinator with Institute-wide responsibility for RPL decisions.
- All RPL assessment decisions are passed on to the co-ordinator.

Student records

- The associated paper work in relation to the RPL decision is then sent to student records, who undertake the recording of results, and monthly collation of RPL statistics.

Curriculum committee

- The institute's curriculum committee meet on a monthly basis, and all RPL recommendations are submitted for approval.

Student records

- All relevant paper work is returned to student records with final, endorsed decisions. From here results or statements are issued.

Costs

South West Institute of TAFE charges fees for RPL in direct relation to income received on a student contact hour basis. Up to the end of 1995, this meant that the institute was charging 33 cents per student contact hour or RPL which equated to approximately one third of the cost of enrolling. The RPL charge is not allowed to exceed the amount charged in fees.

1996 will see an increase in this charge, with applicants now being charged \$1 per SCH although concessions will apply. This charge applies to students within and outside the south west region.

In 1995 the institute granted approximately 34 266 course hours in RPL. Furthermore, a number of extensive case studies were documented and published describing options and advantages gained by RPL. Statistics will become more difficult to gain in the future, as RPL results will be recorded as 'pass' or 'competent'.

Conclusions

South West Institute of TAFE has carved a significant niche for itself in the 'RPL market'. This has been achieved by energetically pursuing RPL candidates initially in the local area, then extending this.

The institute also has strong links with NOSFAB and has the capacity to offer flexible and distance forms of training to individuals who do not meet the standards required in an RPL assessment.

Ford Australia– Broadmeadows (Victoria)

Overview

Ford Australia has used RPL extensively to target training of the existing workforce and recognise skills of staff with qualifications.

Ford's role in piloting and then implementing recognition of prior learning in Australia is unique. Ford commenced its role in 1988 when, in conjunction with the then Broadmeadows College of TAFE, it developed what has become known as the FORD–Broadmeadows RPL Model.

Ford became attracted to RPL as a process, seeing that it could potentially provide the company with a mechanism to convert employees from one classification system through to a new, preferred one, and at the same time, incorporate recognised accredited training as a systemised progression through classification.

Ford Australia provided very open access to personnel within their workplace. Personnel interviewed as part of this case study appeared, at all times, to freely volunteer information, perception and opinion.

Representatives from the following sections/divisions of the company provided advice:

- senior management
- work team leaders
- union reps/shop stewards
- education and training division
- assessors
- trainees/employees

Introduction

Ford Australia is part of the Ford Automotive Operations, a division of Ford Motor Company which has its head office in Detroit, USA.

Ford's Australian operations include 6660 employees around Australia, with the key locations being:

- Geelong (Vic)
- Broadmeadows (Vic)
- Brisbane (Qld)

This case study was undertaken at the Broadmeadows plant. The Broadmeadows plant includes the Australian head office, a new training centre, a high-technology research centre, national parts depot and the assembly line for the Falcon-Ford's biggest selling vehicle. In 1995, Ford Australia was market leaders with vehicle sales.

Broadmeadows is approximately 20 kms from the Melbourne CBD, and approximately an hour's drive from the Ford Geelong plant. The Geelong plant works three shifts per day, and manufactures important component parts that are delivered half hourly to Broadmeadows for assembly.

Ford Australia, like many other companies, has been undergoing a series of management and structural changes over the past five-ten years. The change agenda at Ford is currently focussed around the FORD 2000 vision, emanating from Detroit. This parent company initiative will see the globalisation of company reporting arrangements, based on a 'Matrix Management Structure'. This process aims to align operating functions with Fords strategic directions. This globalisation will see the disbandment of the traditional management structure. Consequently, many managers within Australia will report internationally, rather than necessarily through the most senior manager within Australia.

Ford Australia reports:

- 86 per cent customer satisfaction on Falcon (1995).
- In 1993:
 - research and development budget devoted to education and training was in excess of \$6 million;
 - education and training budget was in excess of 8 per cent of the company's salary and wages overall budget.
- Ford is actively engaged on an ongoing basis in the 'Teacher Return To Industry Program' (TRIP), expending approximately \$200K per annum.

Analysis of process

Ford's role in initiating and piloting and then implementing recognition of prior learning (RPL) in Australia is unique. Ford commenced its role in 1988 when, in conjunction with the then Broadmeadows College of TAFE, it developed what has become known as the Ford-Broadmeadows RPL Model.

Ford became attracted to RPL as a process, seeing that it could potentially provide the company with a mechanism to translate its production non-trade employees from the old job classification system through to a new, preferred system based on individual performance requiring an acquisition and use of skills and knowledge. The new pay structure incorporates recognised

accredited training as a systemised progression through various pay levels.

This was achieved via an 'experiential table'. This table enabled the classification conversion process. Under this arrangement the company in partnership with the union, determined what was believed to be a valid number of points for years of service and previous jobs performed. These points were then aggregated for each individual. The number of points granted placed employees on the new classification pay scale, at the same time giving them 'credit' for the points equivalent in accredited training modules. Employees, after this RPL/Conversion Process, were then able to commence training at their allotted starting /entry point.

The training course that was used as the benchmark for this process was the then newly developed and accredited Vehicle Industry Certificate (VIC). It is worth noting, that many of the employees that commenced training within the VIC had never received formal accredited training before. In addition to this, successful progression through the VIC has resulted in pay increments for employees. Progression, however, is a detailed and usually time-consuming process. The company believed that RPL has worked very well for this group of non-trade personnel who comprise 85 per cent of the payroll workforce. It enabled people to get recognition for what they knew and could apply on the job. This enhanced morale and motivation.

The company firmly asserts one of the key benefits of this RPL model is that it allowed for the recognition of the existing skills of employees and provided a platform for the development of new skills.

The RPL process was also noted to be very labour intensive and time consuming. One difficulty that emerged was equating the skill levels of workers between those on moving or stationery production line. Anomalies appeared, but were quickly dealt with.

Ford, after its initial Vehicle Industry Certificate pilot, also developed an RPL model for its qualified employees. This RPL model also facilitated a conversion process from an old to new classification system with the assessment benchmarks being the assessment criteria of post-trade training modules, that is, Advanced Certificate in Engineering.

This RPL process, again proved time-consuming but yielded positive results, although some dissatisfaction was noted with the 'level recognised' within the process, with the feeling that it was often too low. RPL with this Trade group (15% of the payroll workforce) was developed from a profile of 'job skills'. Workers were required to demonstrate their level of knowledge and skill in relation to this profile. What tended to happen was that workers were able to demonstrate skill but were not always able to demonstrate that they understood the knowledge that underpinned their skills.

This experience was not positive for all participants, as a partial solution to this difficulty, Ford, in conjunction with the Gordon Institute of TAFE, has introduced a challenge test methodology. This gives these employees the opportunity to 'prove' their RPL claims.

Conversely, recipients of RPL are also quick to recognise the benefits of embarking upon post-trade training at an appropriate starting point without having to undertake 'repetition of training'. Pay increment benefits were also recognised in this context.

Ford's shared training agreement

An important plank in Ford's training and RPL process is what they have termed as the 'Shared Training Agreement'. Essentially, this is a formal agreement between the company, the union and its employees. It means that training occurs out of production time, but the company pays the employee for half of the time spent in training at standard pay rates, that is not overtime, and the employee volunteers the other half of their time.

This arrangement is seen by the company as a critical part of reinforcing the value and importance of training to employees and creating a training culture. This arrangement initially commenced with participants in the Vehicle Industry Certificate (in the non-trade areas). After a considerable period of time, this arrangement has been extended to other employees undergoing training including trades and salaried employees, particularly in the trades areas. This extension has helped ease some of the issues surrounding access and equity to training for all employees.

It is important to acknowledge that some employees, due to out-of-work commitments (for example, child-care), find it difficult to undertake training 'after work'. Typically this group comprises women and these employees tend to work in the 'non-moving' production areas (upholstery). The company has organised lunch-time training classes for these employees. Accompanying these classes is also access to RPL and assessments. The company also provides women-only classes after work and on Saturday mornings to accommodate the training needs of working parents.

On-the-job RPL or skill assessment is undertaken in the workplace by trained assessors. The claimants must lodge readiness for assessment via:

- a. Job Certification Sheet (JCS) for Vehicle Industry Certificate and Career Start Traineeships (that is, non-trade courses); or
- b. Training Application Certification Sheet (TACS) for post-trade training.

Risk management strategy

The risk management strategy used by the Ford Company to ensure the consistency and validity of their RPL assessments relies on two main factors:

- the assessors
- not granting 100% credit.

The Ford assessors have undergone assessor training and are widely recognised within the company as having a high level of both skills and knowledge in the areas that they are assessing. In fact, the level of rigour in assessment is high, with the most common complaint being that it is 'too rigorous/too hard'.

The assessment process is verified by the successful RPL claimants having to 'do the job'. It was felt that if they were really not up to the required level, it would become obvious very quickly. These factors ensure the integrity of the process.

Summary

Ford Australia has a mature RPL system. The system has been in existence for over five years, and within that period of time has undergone evolution and substantial refinement and change. The major change in direction of the process has resulted in the broadening the RPL process to include both existing and new employees.

The new approach to RPL encompasses both the recognition of previous training and relevant experience, as well as enabling an 'assessment-when-ready' application. The RPL process at Ford Australia covers all areas of the workforce.

MAINTRAIN (NSW)

Overview

MAINTRAIN is a new company which organises its workforce using team-based approaches. RPL is the mechanism used by the company to ensure that teams comprise an appropriate balance of recognised skills.

Introduction

MAINTRAIN is a company located at Auburn approximately 25 kms from the Sydney CBD. The company is only two years old. It was set up by its parent company Goninan. Goninan is a heavy engineering/manufacturing plant located in Newcastle, that builds trains. The most successful and recognised train product is the Tangara—used widely on the Sydney rail net.

MAINTRAIN is involved in the rail maintenance business. Maintenance is performed on both freight and passenger trains, although the majority of work is conducted on freight trains. MAINTRAIN has a ten-year contract with the State Rail Authority (SRA).

MAINTRAIN is a unique worksite in many respects. Being established for only two years meant that the company was able to build a 'greenfield' sites. Only one union is present on site, this being the Australian Metal Workers Union (AMWU).

Currently, MAINTRAIN has 250 employees, of which 180 are what may be traditionally described as 'blue collar' workers. Approximately sixty per cent of these employees have recognised trade qualifications, in particular fitting and machining, and welding, boiler making.

Analysis of process

Organisational structure

The organisational structure of MAINTRAIN is extremely flat. Many companies lay claim to 'flat management' structures, but MAINTRAIN's claim is clearly substantiated.

The three levels of management at MAINTRAIN are:

- general manager
- operations manager
- shop floor (including team leaders and team members)

It is interesting to speculate whether MAINTRAIN's flat management structure is related to the establishment of a greenfields organisation within the last two years. MAINTRAIN has not had to dismantle a traditional management structure.

The shop-floor is organised on a team basis, with 16 team leaders in total, and each team averaging a membership of ten. Each team is 'self-sufficient' in regard to multi-skilling. This means that the composition of skills held by the team enables the team to always undertake its work. For instance, the team is not rendered less functional or dysfunctional because of the absence of one or more team members. Alternately, other team members can competently cover 'the gap'. It is important to note the RPL is one of the critical mechanisms utilised by MAINTRAIN to ensure that teams are comprised of an appropriate balance of recognised skills.

Skill-based classification structure

MAINTRAIN uses a skill-based classification structure consistent with that generally used within the metals industries. This classification system pays individuals for a wide range of skills that they are 'recognised' to have and use in the conduct of their work. The skills an individual has are measured in relation to modules from the Engineering Production Certificate, advanced certificate and associate diploma, with individuals aligned to 'C level' ratings according to the metals industrial awards.

Employees gain an entry placement on the C level rating system.

For instance:

- non-trade—C12
- trade or equivalent (full EPC)—C10
- graduate—C5

These are only starting points. an employee is then able to seek advancement through the levels via two methods. Firstly, they are able to seek recognition of additional skills and knowledge that they have. This is the RPL process. Or they can gain new and additional skills by undertaking modules of training within the Engineering Production Certificate, advanced certificate or associate diploma depending on classification.

MAINTRAIN and training

MAINTRAIN actively encourage employees to advance their existing skill levels by undertaking further study. These courses of study are recurrently funded and is provided at a range of TAFE colleges, with most employees opting to attend the local TAFE college. Study is

voluntary and occurs in the evening in the employees' own time. Many employees are attending TAFE one or two evenings per week. 120 employees of MAINTRAIN are currently attending TAFE. Most attend Granville TAFE, which is located nearby.

Employees are able to select modules of their choice and convenience, in line with MAINTRAIN's official 'supported module list'. This list, that is up-dated on a six monthly basis, emphasises modules that develop skills that are required and valued within the MAINTRAIN maintenance environment.

MAINTRAIN's RPL experience

MAINTRAIN has reported the following evolution of the RPL process.

Model 1

In establishing the company the need to identify the skills of the new workforce was recognised. The company wished to ascertain the level of skills being employed, and the skills required. Assistance was sought from the Manufacturing Division of the NSW TAFE Commission. The Division organised for an experienced TAFE teacher to assist. Within a three month time-frame all employees had the option to apply for skill recognition. The steps in this process were:

- awareness raising of RPL:
 - benefits
 - process
- interview
 - all employees individually interviewed by TAFE on-site.
 - forms were filled in during this interview.
- RPL assessment conducted:
 - assessment made on a basis of forms completed and information and evidence obtained during the interview
- RPL results and feedback:
 - *all* employees received results of RPL process via a second interview with TAFE.

Company informed of results, enabling the appropriate classification and re-classification of employees.

It is worth noting that no employee appealed against RPL assessments. The right to an appeal process was made available at all times.

Model 2

After the initial RPL process, the company realised that it had an on-going need for RPL assessments, although by this stage the TAFE secondee was no longer on the premises in an official capacity. It was recognised that the need for RPL exists in an on-going manner.

This second RPL model was conducted through the Engineering Training Division of NSW TAFE. Maintrain reported that it involved the following steps:

- RPL claimant contacts training manager—for application form.
- RPL claimant completes form.
- Form, with documentation and other evidence, was sent by the company and/or individual to the Engineering Services Training Division.
- Engineering Services Training Division makes an RPL assessment based on paper evidence.
- RPL assessment results sent to the individuals. Initially the results were returned to the training manager, but then it was decided that it was preferable that they be directly returned to the claimant.

Model 3

MAINTRAIN, over time, again altered RPL process. The imperative this time, was because the Industry Training Divisions of the TAFE Commission were no longer able to sustain this service and Maintrain was directed to its local TAFE college. RPL decision-making was devolved to the colleges. An employee now has to seek RPL through a TAFE college of their choice in accordance with the procedures and processes of that TAFE college.

While the company still supports and provides assistance and guidance for this process, it is clearly further removed from the organisation. The distancing has the potential to ensure the neutrality of the RPL assessment process, although it must be stated that MAINTRAIN has not had difficulties in this regard, nor have any appeals been lodged.

The other side of TAFE colleges now assuming responsibility for RPL, is that the RPL applicant, in this case an employee from MAINTRAIN, has to demonstrate a higher level of initiative and motivation to seek RPL. The applicant has to interact with another organisational climate—one that many are unfamiliar and less comfortable with; whether this is a 'disincentive' is unclear, although some individuals expressed concern.

The distancing of the process also appeared to engender a lack of confidence into the process. Applicants frequently expressed concern about the perceived variability of RPL assessment decisions by

different individuals within one TAFE organisation or across different colleges. While this may only be a problem of perception, it is evident that either the risk management strategy is not operational or the message of its fact is not conveyed.

Difficulties of RPL

Considerable concern was expressed by both RPL claimants and management as to the consistency of the standards of RPL assessments made when they were conducted external to MAINTRAIN. Whilst the process in theory should yield results that have equivalence to the learning outcome statement of the TAFE modules, there was not always confidence in this being the case. It was felt that difference in RPL assessments could occur both between TAFE colleges and within the one college.

Advantages of RPL

The advantages of RPL are frequently discussed at MAINTRAIN by a range of individuals within the organisation. Management expresses advantages in regard to skill enhancement within the workplace, organisational commitment and team building. Employees and union representatives on-the-whole similarly praise RPL, speaking of the benefits in regard to access to pay increments, the facilitation of training and a subsequent career path and skill acquisition.

Granville College of TAFE

Overview

Granville College of TAFE was nominated as a potential case study site by a range of individuals, as a TAFE college in New South Wales that had made significant progress in its implementation of the statewide RPL policy, effective since the beginning of 1995.

The policy being implemented within the college is consistent with the documented NSW TAFE Commission policy on assessment and recognition, as was published as a supplement to the *TAFE Gazette* no. 1, 12 January 1995.

The focus areas of the case study was within the Manufacturing Studies Division of the college, although broader input was sought. The application of the policy was examined in relation to the differences and similarities between standard and non-standard exemptions, and the process that leads to the making of the RPL decision. In all instances, the assessment benchmarks were modules from accredited courses. Monitoring and risk management strategies were also investigated.

Introduction

Granville TAFE is part of the South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE and is located at Granville, approximately 25 kms from the Sydney CBD. Granville TAFE has been in existence for over 100 years, making it one of the oldest technical institutions in New South Wales. Granville TAFE enrolls approximately 15 000 students annually.

Granville TAFE, like all TAFE colleges in New South Wales, is now subject to officially endorsed state policy on the Recognition of Prior Learning since the beginning of 1995. This policy has its focus recognition, which is defined in the following manner:

Recognition is the umbrella term to be used for 'credit transfer', 'advanced standing', standard and non-standard exemptions' and 'recognition of prior learning' so that students can more easily understand that we can recognise previous study, work or life experience by providing credit.

(NSW TAFE 1995, p. 1)

Previous to this consistent statewide policy approach Granville TAFE did engage in some RPL practices, although were certainly not college wide, nor were they centrally driven. Instead, recognition was offered in some place so that students could gain advanced standing in courses. Such arrangements tended to be informal, with an agreement

of mutual benefit being negotiated between the relevant teacher and the individual student.

Analysis of process

The recognition process at Granville TAFE has two main strands. These strands are the possibilities of providing standard or non-standard exemptions. Standard exemptions are those exemptions, usually recognised by TAFE NSW and the relevant Industry Training divisions as acceptable course/modules equivalence, credits or other instances of prior training. Hence, these exemptions do not include experiential learning achieved outside of formal, structured training experiences. Standard exemption usually involves paper-based decision making that does not necessarily involve an interview. It is possible, however, that verification of qualifications may be sought in some instances, especially with overseas qualifications.

Standard exemptions are usually sought at the time of enrolment, with identified personnel, usually head teachers, taking responsibility for these decisions. Head teachers must seek approval of their decisions from their appropriate head of studies. This is usually given.

Slight variations appeared in the process of making the decisions relating the granting of standard exemptions. In some courses, usually those that do not carry a significant enrolment volume, decisions are made at the time of enrolment. The problem here is that, some potential RPL claimants only hear about RPL for the first time when they enrol, so these people generally have their claims attended to in the first teaching week of semester.

In courses where a large number of students are enrolling at the same time it is not possible to make larger number of decisions and process the appropriate paper work in such a short, contained period of time. In this instance, a first interview will normally determine the 'obvious' standard exemptions and these will be granted immediately. Approximately one month later, all of the outstanding decisions relating to both standard and non-standard exemption are dealt with. These decisions are dealt with on a one-to-one basis, although the claimant is able to have an advocate present. This second interview deals with the more difficult areas of decision making. It was commented on by many that the success of the second interview was largely dependent upon a thorough and positive first interview. In fact the risk management strategy used meant that the decisions as a result of the first interview, often done at a very demanding time of the year, had to be conservative. It is worth noting that not one appeal or grievance has been lodged anywhere in the college in regard to any RPL decisions. It is also important to acknowledge that students are able to claim recognition of any stage in the year.

The process for non-standard exemptions is parallel to those for standard exemptions. In fact, for many people, they start at the same place, although they may end up with a range of different types of RPL credits. Non-standard exemptions are those sought by individuals where they wish to gain exemption from module/s for prior life experience: this may include work experience, community work etc.

Non-standard exemptions can also be sought on the basis of an applicant's previous studies. For example, an applicant may have completed two years of a relevant degree course at university and could seek 'non-standard' exemptions in a TAFE course on the basis of relevant subjects passed in the degree.

It is also common for overseas applicants to seek non-standard exemptions on the basis of relevant courses completed in their country of origin. In this situation the claimant, upon discussion with the appropriate head teacher, seeks non-standard exemption. This means that the possibility of a standard exemption has been ruled out. After form filing has been completed, often with the assistance of the head teacher, an interview is conducted. This interview may be straight away or it may be scheduled for a later date, depending upon workloads and availability. This interview is often conducted in an informal manner on a one-to-one basis. For this type of experiential learning credit, many assessors seek some form of additional verification to back their claim. This may take the form of a letter from an employer, referee or advocate. Often the assessor will make direct contact, usually by telephone, as part of this verification process.

The assessor, once they have made their decision, will then via the appropriate form, refer their decision to the head of studies who must authorise the exemption. This will then lead to an 'enrolment adjustment' that recognises advanced standing.

In situations where the assessor is unable or unsure about a claim being made by a student may opt to administer a challenge test. Challenge testing was seen by most assessors as being an important tool in the recognition process. However, as challenge tests are not an official part of the New South Wales Recognition Policy an alternative approach has had to be investigated. On the advice of the Skills Standard and Assessment Division of the TAFE Commission, it is preferred that early exit tests be administered at any stage of the module delivery. This may also be seen as an 'assessment when ready' approach.

It is worth noting the non-standard exemption forms are numbered, with the numbers recorded centrally. Consequently these forms are available when deemed appropriate but not freely available. Two forms need to be filled in when granting 'non-standard' exemptions: the enrolment adjustment - advanced standing form (not numbered), and the register form which is sequentially numbered.

The enrolment adjustment - advanced standing form remains in the college and is used to record any standard and non-standard exemptions to which a student may be entitled. The register is the form which colleges send to the relevant Training Divisions so that unit can identify those 'non-standard' exemptions which should become standard exemptions.

Analysis

Assessors

Assessors are generally head teachers or senior head teachers within study areas of the college. Where a specialist teacher is required that teacher may undertake the assessment, but generally regular classroom teachers are not involved in the process. In this sense the operation and implementation of RPL within NSW TAFE is systemically pitched at the middle management level.

Assessors receive no special, formal 'RPL assessor' training, but may be involved in either college or institute workshops and/or training relevant to RPL assessments. The NSW Assessment Centre can act as a focal point for these assessors.

Applicants

This case study focussed upon RPL in the manufacturing section of the college, so generalisations about RPL claimants would not be possible to make. Nonetheless, a significant number of claimants were seeking recognition of overseas qualifications. Students appeared to be motivated by the possibility of reducing the volume of training they had to undertake in order to complete their course and receive a qualification. This reduced contact with formal training did not always translate through to accelerated course completion. Instead, successful claimants were able to do less hours per semester, but usually the same number of semesters. It was also quite notable that the vast majority of RPL claims received fell into the category of standard exemptions. It is possible with the continued implementation and maturity of the 1995 RPL policy that this balance could even up.

Record keeping

The record keeping process related to the granting of RPL was relatively straight forward. The head teacher/RPL assessor is required to complete a range of forms. When a decision is arrived at, these forms are completed and sent to the central recording parts within the college (that is student records). The results are recorded on the students history as being either standard or non standard exemptions. Hence, it is not difficult to monitor and track the number of exemptions granted.

A copy of non-standard exemptions forms are also sent to the relevant training division. This is so they can gain a cumulative picture of emerging patterns of RPL, with the view to possibly standardising elements through common occurrence. It must be

noted that students are only able to obtain up to 75 per cent of a qualification. At least 25 per cent must be achieved via formal training.

Costs

There is no charge for RPL at Granville TAFE, or indeed other TAFE colleges in New South Wales. Students must be enrolled in the college and have paid their required enrolment fee. South West Sydney Institute of TAFE, however is currently piloting a system which enables non-enrolled applicants for RPL to pay a \$75 fee for a one hour consultation.

Earlier experiments with RPL in college did have attached fees. These fees, usually \$30 per module, have all been removed.

Risk management strategy

RPL assessors/head teachers consistently demonstrated a keen awareness of the responsibilities associate with RPL decisions, and a strong desire to make valid decisions. The rigour used in the decision-making process increased when decisions were being made about modules near the end of a course that is, close to the point of qualification, and the higher up the AQF/ASF scales the course was located.

Annexes

Consultation questions

1 What does RPL mean to you?

Prompt: What is RPL trying to assess?

2 What issues have to be addressed in developing quality practice in RPL?

Prompt: What do you see to be the barriers?
What do you see to be working well?

3 It is said that in some sectors RPL is well received whereas in other sectors there is lack of confidence in RPL

- (i) Is this your experience, and if so, in which sectors is RPL well-received?
- (ii) Why is this?
- (iii) In which sectors is there lack of confidence in RPL?
- (iv) Why is this?
- (v) What can be done to improve confidence?

4 The RPL Assessment Project involves case studies of “best practice” in different sectors—industry, community, TAFE and higher education

- (i) Please identify an example of ‘best practice’ in RPL in each sector
- (ii) What makes the example you have given ‘best practice’?

5 Are there any recent studies relevant to RPL that you have come across that we should know about?

6 Would you be willing to assist the project at a later date?

7 Is there anything you would like to ask us about the RPL Assessment Project?

Sources of information

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
RPL issues	Whole organisation	Site with organisation			Other e.g. union rep.
		(a)	(b)	(c)	
	Senior Management	Managers	Assessors	Clients	
<i>A. Policy</i>					
1 What is the goal of RPL policy?					
2 Is policy centrally devised/documentated?					
3 Who is responsible for implementation of policy?					
– to communicate goals?					
– to support implementation?					
– to monitor effectiveness?					
– to overcome resistance?					
<i>B. Practice</i>					
1 How formal is the RPL system?					

Participants in case studies and structured interviews

Informants

Consultations/interviews

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Peter Thomson
Colin Edwards
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Karen Owen
Kay Pitts
Virginia Simmons
Ken Owler

Case study sites

Holmesglen Institute of TAFE
MAINTRAIN
Council of Adult Education
Ford Australia
Granville College of TAFE
Regency Institute of TAFE
WINETAC
South-West College of TAFE

Acronyms

ACRC	Australia Competency Research Centre
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority (superseded VEETAC in 1994)
ASF	Australian Standards Framework
AVTS	Australian Vocational Training System
CBT	Competency-Based Training
CSB	Competency Standards Body
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training (now DEETYA)
ESFC	Employment and Skills Formation Council
ITAB	Industry Training Advisory Body
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs
MOVEET	Ministers of Vocational Education, Employment and Training
NBEET	National Board of Employment, Education and Training
NCCBT	National Centre for Competency Based Training
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NETTFORCE	National Employment and Training Taskforce
NFROT	National Framework for the Recognition of Training
NOOSR	National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition
NSDC	National Staff Development Committee
NTB	National Training Board
SCC	Standards and Curriculum Council
VEETAC	Vocational Education, Employment and Training Advisory Committee
VET	Vocational Education and Training

