

# Taking the lead on skills recognition Final Report

***.....A communication strategy for Victorian TAFE institutions' senior management on contemporary RPL practices and change management strategies to implement improved RPL systems/practices.***

Report to the Office of Training and Tertiary Education,  
Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development

From the Victorian TAFE Association  
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Victorian TAFE  
*Association*



Knowledge & Skills  
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## **TAKING THE LEAD ON SKILLS RECOGNITION**

### **FINAL REPORT JANUARY 2008**

#### **SHORT TITLE**

Taking the Lead on Skills Recognition

#### **LONG TITLE**

A communication strategy for Victorian TAFE Institutions' senior management on contemporary RPL practices and change management strategies to implement improved RPL systems/practices.

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) undertook a communication strategy to engage senior Victorian TAFE personnel in debates/discussions around RPL with the intent of raising awareness of contemporary practices and influencing the uptake of RPL among providers.

Over 300 participants attended workshops in TAFE Institutions debating local and systemic issues around skills recognition. In addition, electronic and web-based approaches were used to collect and disseminate information, encourage debate and stimulate networking. Case studies featuring good practice examples of skills recognition have been included on the VTA website.

Enablers and innovations noted as a result of the workshops included a shift in nomenclature from RPL/RCC to 'skills recognition', an increased focus on the diverse needs of the individual RPL applicant (case management, RPL processes, printed materials, quality management and other administrative processes) and the expectations of employers/industry bodies. Increasing attention is being given to the importance of service hubs and knowledge management in TAFE providers.

The workshops highlighted examples of existing good practice among TAFE Institutions. The workshops also highlighted areas where improved processes and practices could lead to enhanced skills recognition outcomes. Common themes included:

1. The need for consistent, common understanding of the definitions of skills recognition: RPL, RCC and Credit Transfer across the TAFE sector.
2. Industrial relations framework and management/administrative practices.
3. Workforce Development.
4. The desire to share knowledge of change practices being implemented throughout the TAFE sector.
5. Meeting projected increased demand for skills recognition services.



In response to these issues the following suggested actions are offered in the body of the report:

- OTTE to adopt the AQTF/AQF definition of Credit Transfer in the OTTE Statistical Guidelines and provide clear, unambiguous scenarios as a means of explaining the distinctions between RPL, RCC and Credit Transfer.
- TAFE Institutions to:
  - Note the prevailing industrial relations framework when allocating skills recognition duties.
  - Consider customer focussed outcomes in local management/administrative practices for allocating duties.
- VTA to consider developing competency based job profiles mapped to national competency standards.
- VTA and OTTE scope a project based on coaching and mentoring models to seed contemporary skills recognition practices throughout the TAFE sector in the next three years.
- TAFE Institutions to identify Skills Sets for teaching and non-teaching staff for their roles in enabling recognition of prior learning and skills recognition generally.
- VTA and OTTE scope a project to investigate the impact on skills recognition practices of a sample group of teachers that have themselves undertaken RPL against a training package qualification.
- Case study examples of change practices in Victorian TAFE Institutes, related resources and weblinks will be included on the VTA website.
- Develop proactive skills recognition management strategies based upon a model designed to enable TAFE Institutions to determine and measure Skills Recognition “preparedness”.

Providers each prioritised at least three key activities that the Institution is able to implement to increase the take-up of RPL. Consistent themes emerged and these short, medium and long term actions are summarised at the end of the report.

## **BACKGROUND**

In May 2007 the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, on behalf of the Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission, contracted with the Victorian TAFE Association to provide services to enhance the strategic knowledge, skills and capabilities of TAFE senior management to lead effective change strategies that increase and improve RPL in TAFE Institutes/Universities with TAFE Divisions.

The Victorian TAFE Association is pleased to report on the outcomes of this project.

## **THE LANGUAGE OF SKILLS RECOGNITION**

Research for the NCVET in 2003 by Andrea Bateman and Brian Knight ‘Giving credit: a review of RPL and credit transfer in the VET sector 1995-2001’, documents how and where RPL is applied and its perceived benefits and barriers. The writers note then that “RPL is linked with ‘workplace assessments’ and with other acronyms



such as accreditation of prior learning (APL) and prior learning assessment (PLA), 'recognition of current competency' (RCC); 'skills recognition' and 'recognition' are being used or promoted as alternatives" (page 10). In the contemporary mix of nomenclature is 'fast-track assessment' and 'accelerated learning'.

This report, based on discussions among leaders, managers and practitioners in Victorian TAFE institutions takes a view that it is not a worthwhile debate here to try and separate acronyms and particularly RPL and RCC. Outside of the definitional requirements of the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard (AVETMISS), the division between RPL and RCC has increasingly blurred. The language being adopted in TAFE Institutions is that of 'Skills Recognition'.

This report uses 'Skills Recognition' as a term including Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Recognition of Current Competence (RCC) and Credit Transfer.

### **ELECTRONIC AND WEB-BASED STRATEGIES**

The VTA is mindful of the importance of sharing explicit and implicit knowledge. As part of this project the VTA utilised electronic and web-based strategies, related TAFE Networks to disseminate information and sought to engage TAFE staff in discussions around skills recognition.

The VTA has established webpages on the VTA website for information and resources around skills recognition ([www.vta.vic.edu.au](http://www.vta.vic.edu.au)). There may appear to be a contradiction in the naming of the webpages as 'Skills Recognition - RPL' but this was done purposely to draw in people familiar with the old language of RPL as well as those adopting the new language of Skills Recognition. Over time, the 'RPL' reference in the name of the webpages will be deleted.

These webpages have been designed as an information hub for TAFE practitioners and those interested in skills recognition services under the banner of Skills Recognition. This site will evolve to include information about:

- Professional development and networking opportunities,
- Case studies of change practices,
- Resources, tips and tools,
- Web links including RPL networks outside Victoria and
- The Victorian RPL Network.

An advisory group, drawn from the Victorian RPL Network, has been formed to advise the VTA on the content of the webpage. Comment is also sought from the members of the VTA CEO Council Education Standing Committee. The website will be viewed by the VTA CEO Council Education Standing Committee at its first meeting in 2008. Interest in the website can be measured by the number of 'hits'.

The VTA has commenced distribution of an occasional e-newsletter for participants in the workshops 'Taking the Lead on Skills Recognition'. The intent is to maintain the interest among workshop participants with e-newsletters commencing distribution in December 2007. The first e-newsletter and the draft second newsletter are attached as Appendix 1.



The VTA Education Policy Consultant raises matters relating to skills recognition in meetings with the Apprenticeship and Traineeship Teachers Network, TAFE Student Services Network, Victorian Practitioners Network and other Victorian TAFE networks as opportunities arise.

## **CASE STUDIES**

Throughout the course of this project Victorian TAFE Institutions offered many examples of change practices to enable increased skills recognition outcomes for individuals and industry groups. Sample case studies are attached as Appendix 2; others can be viewed at [http://www.vta.vic.edu.au/?Name=SR\\_Case\\_Studies](http://www.vta.vic.edu.au/?Name=SR_Case_Studies). A snapshot of currently available case studies is provided here.

### ***RPL for Indigenous Learners CIV in Employment Services – East Gippsland Institute of TAFE***

In 2006 a number of Indigenous individuals working within the education and employment sectors in East Gippsland were approached by the Koori Unit at East Gippsland TAFE to determine whether they would be interested in completing some or all of the Certificate IV in Employment Services through skills recognition processes. This was initiated because East Gippsland TAFE acknowledged the wealth of experience and strengths within the local Indigenous community, particularly in the education/employment sector, and wanted these formally recognised through a higher-level qualification.

### ***Alcohol and Other Drugs Industry Partnership - GippsTAFE***

The key driver for this program has been industry. Via consultation with local employers and existing workers, it was identified that there was a high demand for skills recognition within the Alcohol and Other Drug sector. Moreover, the industry was able to clearly articulate that the individuals involved in the program would not be able to attend face to face classes or sessions at the Institute.

An evaluation of this program found that most individuals identified the ability to access, when required, the skills recognition provider to assist them in understanding the curriculum and how to select evidence as the most valuable aspects of the program.

### ***Skill recognition for existing/mature aged construction workers in the carpentry and bricklaying sectors – Holmesglen Institute of TAFE***

The aim of the Holmesglen skills recognition project was to develop and trial a process by which experienced carpenters and bricklayers in the building and construction industry could seek to have their existing skills and knowledge recognised against the relevant Certificate III trade qualification.

The outcome of this project offers a flexible process to existing workers so they can have their skills legitimately recognised in order to achieve a trade qualification.



### ***Knowledge Management and the Establishment of a Skills Recognition Centre – Sunraysia Institute of TAFE***

The Sunraysia Institute of TAFE established a Skills Recognition Centre in September 2006 as a key strategy to lay the foundations to increase the capability and capacity of the Institute to conduct skills recognition services.

The aim of the initiative was to provide support to clients and staff in conducting skills recognition through centralising the promotion, facilitation and support, conduct, tracking, monitoring and reporting of skills recognition services delivered across the Institute. The impact of these initiatives has been far reaching with the development of a new continual improvement model and policy for the Institute. This outcome exceeded the anticipated and planned outcomes of the project.

### ***Recognition Access Point – Swinburne University of Technology (TAFE Division)***

Swinburne University established a single point of contact for skills recognition clients called the Recognition Access Point (RAP). The main focus of RAP is to accept, monitor and manage both Skills Store referrals and industry contacts for skills recognition. Previous work done to increase skills recognition capability within Swinburne was also incorporated in the initiative. RAP has implemented and maintained quality customer service and a streamlined, smooth passage through Swinburne for clients as the priority.

### ***The Assessor Mentor Project – University of Ballarat***

The Assessor Mentor Project focused on building teacher capability around skills recognition processes and tools. The aim of the project was to skill a number of teachers to become skills recognition mentors for their department to enable the area to develop responsive, innovative and flexible skills recognition processes and practices.

### ***Pre-Assessment Information Session for Skills Recognition Candidates – Victoria University***

During 2006, it was recognised that the RPL Process for the TAA40104 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment at Staff College Victoria University required improvement. An RPL Information Session was introduced to assist applicants to self assess their eligibility for skills recognition and help them provide the necessary evidence for the formal skills recognition interview. This enables applicants to progress through the processes more efficiently and effectively. The aim of the RPL Information Session was to reduce the time taken for skills recognition applicants to complete their RPL by decreasing the number of one to one interviews required.

### ***Skills recognition as an integral part of learner management – Wodonga Institute of TAFE***

Wodonga TAFE has committed to the creation of a sustainable relationship with learners through the development of an Individual Learner Management Process (ILMP). As part of this development, Wodonga TAFE undertook local research. This



research has shown a need to increase the profile of skills recognition with existing and prospective learners.

Wodonga TAFE aims is to make skills recognition a part of everyday practice at the Institute. To ensure that skills recognition is accessible and easily understood by applicants and staff was clearly part of the challenge. This led to the redevelopment of all communications and assessment tools with the emphasis on 'plain language'.

### ***RPL for Certificate III Light Vehicle (Mick) – East Gippsland Institute of TAFE***

Mick comes from a remote country town 60 kilometres from a regional TAFE campus. Despite his seven year employment history with four automotive enterprises Mick lacked a formal qualification and this was limiting his job mobility and earning capacity. Using a variety of innovative approaches to skills recognition Mick was able to achieve significant skills recognition and planned training to bridge the gap.

### ***Employer Commitment to a multi-mode approach – Victoria University***

A local Child Care Centre was having great difficulty in recruiting and appointing Diploma qualified staff. They wanted to support their existing staff to upskill so that they could appoint them as qualified staff to fill vacancies. A full time staff member at the Centre was asked by her employer to complete the Diploma of Children's Services. She is a long serving staff member and completed her Certificate in Child Care (Assistant) course in 1994. Due to the chronic shortage of Diploma of Children's Services trained staff in the Children's Services Industry, the employer is supporting the staff member to gain her Diploma qualification.

## **WORKSHOPS**

### ***Features***

Sixteen workshops (3 hours duration) were conducted among Victorian TAFE providers. This represents 33% more than required under the contract Service Standards. A schedule of workshops is attached at Appendix 3. Workshops were facilitated by either Wendy Perry of Wendy Perry & Associates Pty. Ltd. or Andrea Bateman of Bateman Giles Pty. Ltd. in conjunction with Nita Schultz, VTA Education Policy Consultant.

All workshops occurred onsite in TAFE providers to maximise participation and minimize disruption. Workshops were negotiated at the convenience of the TAFE provider and frequently coincided with senior management activities.

All providers were offered the opportunity to contextualise the workshop materials. TAFE providers engaged in contextualisation to varying degrees. The workshop facilitators reviewed all available information supplied by the providers and incorporated this into the workshop materials.

All participants were provided with a resource kit including:



- A copy of the workshop PowerPoint presentation.
- A copy of the AQF RPL National Principles.
- SegmentEd (OTTE 2005).
- RPL – Done Well in VET (S McKenna & J Mitchell, Reframing the Future 2006).
- Human Capital Enhanced by VET (J Mitchell & S McKenna, Reframing the Future, 2007).
- Professional Judgement in VET (S McKenna & J Mitchell, Reframing the Future 2006).

### ***Structure***

Broadly the structure of the workshop included:

- Skills Recognition from the customers' experiences.
- A business development approach - a proposed skills recognition continuum (refer Appendix 4).
- Knowledge of markets for skills recognition - market segmentation.
- Barriers to skills recognition.
- Enabler – process improvement.
- Enabler – enhanced communications.
- Enablers – support systems for applicants, skills recognition providers, centres.
- Core staff competencies involved in the skills recognition process.
- Using a knowledge management approach/knowledge mapping.
- Action Items.

### ***Participants***

The target audience was achieved with 321 participants drawn from members of TAFE providers' Executive Teams (CEOs and Associate Directors/General Managers) and Senior Managers. Providers also invited key stakeholders within organisations including such roles as Off-Campus Co-ordinators, RPL project officers, RPL Co-ordinators, RPL Champions.

Providers also ensured participants were drawn from senior managers of teaching and non-teaching areas (Information Technology, Information Systems, Human Resources, Student Services) recognising that the imbedding of skills recognition in providers is not solely the responsibility of areas directly associated with teaching and assessment services. As the workshops progressed, the participant list also included managers responsible for Skills Stores.

### ***Enablers & Innovations***

Workshop participants noted a range of enablers and innovations, such as:



**1. Nomenclature – Shared understanding of terminology.**

'Skills recognition' was considered a more overarching term that covered a range of processes that resulted in 'credit', with such a term suggested as being clearer in its outcomes and more useful in marketing. This shift from RPL/RCC/Credit Transfer to 'skills recognition' is reflected in this report and its appendices.

The terms RPL and RCC are seen to be part of the VET jargon with different meanings among and between TAFE staff. It was noted by workshop participants with a lot of experience in industry and workplace settings that RPL is interpreted by industry as only relating to educational qualifications (ie formal learning had to occur). By using the language of 'skills recognition', there was a mutual understanding between the TAFE staff and the industry person.

**2. Awareness of the need to use plain English language.**

All Institution participants recognised the need to use plain English statements and especially avoiding acronyms. Wodonga Institute of TAFE and Gordon Institute of TAFE had good practice examples in brochures to be made available to the general public.

**3. Not differentiating between the competency outcomes achieved by RPL and those achieved by other strategies.**

Some Institutions had addressed this issue by ensuring that Statements of Attainment and Academic reports to accompany Certificates did not differentiate between a 'competency achieved' and 'RPL/RCC granted' result. To achieve this outcome required adaptation of the student management system software to report student outcomes yet report RPL/RCC accurately through AVETMISS codes.

**4. Increased understanding of the application of skills recognition in industry settings.**

Participants provided examples of effective and meaningful skills recognition in enterprise settings noting that in these instances easy access to evidence and verification processes enabled a streamlined skills recognition process.

**5. Review of internal quality processes to enable skills recognition during the period of enrolment as well as at the front end.**

Streamlining the skills recognition processes upfront at enrolment was seen as critical to the success of skills recognition. However, consideration was also given to ensuring that skills recognition is offered throughout the 'life' of the learner as it was considered that as the learner becomes more familiar with the VET sector, Training Packages and acronyms, then their ability and willingness to seek skills recognition may increase.

**6. Establishment of access points for enquiries (eg Wodonga Skills Kiosk located in the cafeteria, Sunraysia Skills Assessment Centre, University of Ballarat - RPL Champions).**



For the Skills Kiosk and the Skills Assessment Centre, it was viewed as critical to locate the services in a busy student centred hub such as adjacent to the cafeteria.

7. Knowledge management strategies to capture/transfer of implicit knowledge.

Some Institutions had nominated key personnel within the organisation to either facilitate skills recognition processes or inform and mentor less experienced staff, such as designated RPL Champions (University of Ballarat) and designated RPL providers (numerous Institutions).

8. Using a case management approach (Individual Learning Plans – East Gippsland TAFE and Wodonga Institute of TAFE, allocation of work – Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE, Wodonga Institute of TAFE).

### **FURTHER ENHANCING SKILLS RECOGNITION**

The workshops highlighted examples of existing good practice among TAFE Institutions. The workshops also highlighted areas of common interest where improved processes and practices could lead to enhanced skills recognition outcomes.

1. The need for consistent, common understanding of the definitions of skills recognition: RPL, RCC and Credit Transfer across the TAFE sector.

TAFE Institutions want to imbed skills recognition into daily work processes and practices that are compliant with the reporting requirements of the AVETMISS, the AQTF 2007 and other quality systems.

To achieve this, TAFE Institutions need to have a clear understanding of the definitions of the components of skills recognition: RPL, RCC and Credit Transfer. Clearly this is not the case at present with interpretations differing between and within TAFE Institutions. TAFE staff tries to make sense of definitional requirements though their wide professional networks internally and externally. Anecdotal examples were provided during workshops where considered 'experts' in these matters outside the TAFE Institutions offered different interpretations of the meaning of RPL, RCC and Credit Transfer.

The definition of Credit Transfer as part of the skills recognition mix presents particular interpretational challenges. Workshop participants could cite both the AQTF 2007 definition and that of the OTTE Statistical Guidelines. The OTTE Statistical Guidelines defines Credit Transfer as:

*“Recognition obtained on the basis of prior agreements between institutions and organisations as to the credit value of a specific course/programs.”*

This is not entirely commensurate with the AQTF 2007 definition which is:

*“Credit transfer assesses the initial course or subject that the individual is using to claim access to, or the award of credit in, the destination course to determine the extent to which it is equivalent to the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes, or standards in a qualification. This may include credit transfer based on formal learning that is outside the AQF.”*



To add to the confusion, evidence of previous study can be a component of RPL activities.

The notion of RCC also clouds the issue and many workshop participants were not fully aware of the new AVETMISS that applies to this form of recognition.

In most instances, the concern of participants was to avoid issues that may arise at *invalid module enrolment* audits and/or AQTF audits.

These concerns are taking considerable work effort that could be invested more strategically in increasing the uptake particularly of RPL among providers.

**SUGGESTED ACTION:** OTTE to adopt the AQTF/AQF definition of Credit Transfer in the OTTE Statistical Guidelines and provide clear, unambiguous scenarios as a means of explaining the distinctions between RPL, RCC and Credit Transfer.

*(Alignment of the OTTE Statistical Guidelines to the AQTF 2007 definitions will mean one set of rules to focus on in planning for improved skills recognition strategies.)*

## 2. Industrial relations framework and management/administrative practices

TAFE Institutions need to observe prevailing industrial relations provisions (currently the MECA, MOU and Award) in allocating duties to staff including skills recognition duties.

It may assist Institutions in their local management/administrative practices to consider the outputs expected from skills recognition duties.

**SUGGESTED ACTIONS:** TAFE Institutions to:

- Note the prevailing industrial relations framework when allocating skills recognition duties.
- Consider customer focussed outcomes in local management/administrative practices for allocating duties.

## 3. Workforce Development

Workshop participants reflected on the key staff to enable imbedding of skills recognition into organisational practices; administrators, teachers, managers and learner support services. Core competencies of each of these key staff were documented and provided to the TAFE Institution for consideration.



**SUGGESTED ACTION:** VTA to consider developing competency based job profiles mapped to national competency standards.

*Nb: An agreed set of competencies could be included, as appropriate, in staff recruitment, engagement instruments, induction, professional development plans, job descriptions, work plans and performance management activities. These competencies could be used as a basis within the Institutions for an internal skills recognition process. This model should reflect good practice as a training needs analysis approach identifying strengths (Skills Recognition) and development gaps (training). The purpose of this approach is two fold – to gain a measure of the existing TAFE workforce against a contemporary skills profile, and to demonstrate workforce development practices that can be transferred to external clients.*

The outcomes of the workshop discussions also highlighted the need for professional development across the TAFE workforce to review current practices against contemporary research and to equip staff with contemporary skills recognition practices.

Recent research<sup>1</sup> highlights the various approaches to skills recognition within the meaning of the AQTF Standards (fair, valid, reliable and flexible assessments). Governments and providers are to be commended for facilitating professional development activities to enhance teachers' knowledge of contemporary skills recognition practices, yet there appears to still be a significant lack of confidence among practitioners to make professional judgements that are not rooted in collecting portfolios of printed evidence. Across the TAFE sector the question remains 'How much evidence is enough?'

Skills recognition staff needs knowledge of valid and contemporary best practices in skills recognition if they are to build industry confidence in RPL equivalence. Good practices require the development of tools for recognising skills and collecting evidence to support recognition practices that are holistic and integrate elements and units of competence in a meaningful way. At the same time, the person's experience in the workplace, or wherever else they have acquired the skills, have to be deconstructed and then the two processes pulled together. Anne Jones (Pro-Vice Chancellor Vocational Education Victoria University) commenting in Campus Review (Sept 27 2006) stated "to do RPL well we need to go back to training people in how to do it and we also need to be attentive to the degree to which knowledge is specified. With RPL we have to start focusing on the way people use skill and the attributes they display in using the skill, rather than the narrow skill itself."

Putting to bed some of the old myths surrounding skills recognition (complex, bureaucratic, paper driven, taking longer than attending face-to-face classes, not

<sup>1</sup>As examples: RPL – Done Well in VET (S McKenna & J Mitchell, Reframing the Future 2006), Human Capital Enhanced by VET (J Mitchell & S McKenna, Reframing the Future, 2007), Professional Judgement in VET (S McKenna & J Mitchell, Reframing the Future 2006), VET Teaching and Learning; the future now 2006-2010, H Guthrie, K Perkins & N Nguyen DET WA 2006.



equivalent to gaining a qualification by other means) will encourage practitioners to engage in skills recognition practices with individual students and engage industry. “Professional Judgement is the central activity for VET educators and this applies even more to RPL because the sorts of events that make assessment judgements difficult are more likely to occur in an RPL situation than in a controlled learning situation. For instance, with RPL you are walking into people’s lives, the evidence is sometimes second-hand and it can be a very problematic situation. Professional judgement is the key to RPL.” (Anne Jones, Campus Review, Sept 27 2006, page 13).

Skills recognition can be used as an individual, team or organisational capability measure translating into an increase in uptake of RPL through statistical reporting and a more sophisticated view of the value of skills recognition. Through a training needs analysis process, strengths (Skills Recognition) and development gaps are identified. TAFE Institutions need to build their own workforce capabilities for practitioners and administrators to support these emerging services.

Workbased learning methodologies are recognised as effective adult learning strategies to build workforce capabilities<sup>2</sup> enabling highly contextualised learning and the transfer of implicit knowledge. TAFE staff is no different to any other workforce. Cobden<sup>3</sup> points out that typically educational and training involves predominantly explicit knowledge. Expertise on the other hand depends on building up a large body of implicit knowledge, and this usually develops later in a person’s working life. To build the TAFE workforce’s expertise in skills recognition would be facilitated by on-the-job learning models such as coaching for inexperienced skills recognition staff and mentoring for more experienced staff.

**SUGGESTED ACTIONS:**

- VTA and OTTE scope a project based on coaching and mentoring models to seed contemporary skills recognition practices throughout the TAFE sector in the next three years.
- TAFE Institutions to identify Skills Sets for teaching and non-teaching staff for their roles in enabling recognition of prior learning and skills recognition generally.
- VTA and OTTE scope a project to investigate the impact on skills recognition practices of a sample group of teachers that have themselves undertaken RPL against a training package qualification.

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<sup>2</sup>As examples: Mitchell J Henry J & Young S ‘A new model of workbased learning in the VET sector’ ANTA 2001, At a Glance. What makes for good workplace learning Australian National Training Authority, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Adelaide 2003 & Corben, H “Understanding Learning at Work”, TAFE NSW ICVET 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Corben, H “Understanding Learning at Work”, TAFE NSW ICVET 2006.



4. Desire to share knowledge of change practices being implemented throughout the TAFE sector.

Practitioners seek a point of reference to guide their professional practices in skills recognition. What has worked well elsewhere? Key strengths of innovations and learning opportunities? The impact on learning outcomes? Methodologies adopted?

TAFE Institutions recognise the need to distribute explicit knowledge and to develop strategies to share implicit knowledge.

**SUGGESTED ACTION:** Case study examples of change practices in Victorian TAFE Institutes, related resources and web links will be included on the VTA website.

5. Meeting projected increased demand for skills recognition services

Skills recognition has been a feature of the VET landscape for many years articulated in the AQTF, the AQF National Principles and Operational Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning, and the subject of specific research effort and Governments' policies.

Skills recognition may occur close to enrolment, just before training begins or on the cusp of training but typically it has occurred within a training scenario and negotiated with the trainer. In some VET providers this is described as 'fast tracking' or 'accelerated learning'.

The COAG Human Capital reform agenda, the Victorian Government's statement 'Maintaining the Advantage *Skilled Victorians*' and the Skills Stores initiative are examples of drivers requiring TAFE Institutions to reconsider their practices and processes as these initiatives will generate increased demand for skills recognition services focussing more on services occurring prior to training commencing.

Workshop participants provided anecdotal examples of challenges to implementing effective and efficient upfront skills recognition services within the constraints of current bureaucratic processes. For example, rather than having a full quota of class numbers and all students mostly working through the program at a similar pace, with skills recognition occurring prior to training commencing, it may mean that individuals have dynamic training plans with different strengths (RPL) and developmental (training) needs. This flexibility and shift is important in terms of supporting learners and clients but also challenges traditional class timetabling and resource allocation as learning becomes more individualised. Funding agreements are underpinned by assumptions around the costs of delivering training and education in group based face-to-face delivery models.

The recent implementation of Skills Stores in Victoria will also have an affect on the market for skills recognition services. Potential clients are becoming savvier and have higher expectations of these services. Access to government program funding may be limited in the latter part of a year and some clients, simply by virtue of the timing of their application may be faced with fee-for-service charges as all government funded places have been allocated.



Workshops also included discussions around the barriers for international students to access skills recognition services due to immigration/visa requirements. Clearly there is no simple solution to this problem yet increasingly international students will ask for recognition of current competencies, skills gained in other employment, learning and personal circumstances.

**SUGGESTED ACTION:** Develop proactive skills recognition management strategies based upon a model designed to enable TAFE Institutions to determine and measure Skills Recognition “preparedness”.

### **PROPOSED ACTIONS TO INCREASE FUTURE UPTAKE OF SKILLS RECOGNITION IN VICTORIAN TAFE INSTITUTIONS**

Workshop groups each prioritised at least three key activities that the Institution is able to implement to increase the take-up of skills recognition. Consistent themes emerged and these are summarised below.

#### **Short Term**

- Streamline information delivery via web portals and build search capabilities.
- Review recognition processes to simplify for all stakeholders.
- Redesign information materials (including websites and brochures) into plain English.
- Review marketing material to put skills recognition more up-front.
- Professional development plan including all key staff sectors to build confidence in professional judgement and build trust in RPL.
- Map existing internal capabilities to meet impending demand.
- Develop internal networks for practitioners involved in skills recognition.
- Development of RPL strategy at local level aligned to other strategic, business and operational plans.

#### **Medium Term**

- Introduce pre-enrolment services to allow customers the opportunity to gauge commitment/cost of skills recognition/perceived benefits to them.
- Identify business development opportunities. Focus on solutions for corporations by building internal capabilities and use Training Needs Analysis / competency analysis / workforce development methodologies.
- Professional development plan including all key staff sectors to capture tacit knowledge.
- Information strategy around contemporary skills recognition processes.
- VTA to review the effect of any changes to the industrial relations framework on skills recognition duties.
- Undertake market differentiation for skills recognition.
- Customise information, marketing materials and approaches for different client segments.
- Incorporate skills recognition into reward and recognition processes.
- Develop internal accountabilities.
- Development of Institution targets in specific market segments.



- Investigation of a coach/mentor model for senior managers around skills recognition.

#### **Long Term**

- Review Human Resource tools to include skills/knowledge to enable imbedded skills recognition in work practices.
- Trial and share any new management/administrative practices for allocating and reviewing skills recognition work and outputs.
- Undertake research to identify external benchmarks and internal good practice examples. Map and showcase good practices.
- Develop a Skills Recognition knowledge management and transfer strategy.

### **CONCLUSION**

During the course of this project it was evident that there is a high level of willingness to imbed skills recognition into daily work practices in the Victorian TAFE sector. While some barriers to improved uptake of skills recognition will be addressed at the local Institution level, others may require system-wide assistance.

Many of the issues raised by TAFE CEOs and Executive staff during the workshops echo the sentiments of Dr Larry Smith (Director, Centre for Business Research at University of New England) in the Campus Review September 18 2007 where he stated '(i)n particular, much more needs to be known and understood regarding the factors that encourage Australians of various ages, gender, employment areas and cultural and socio-economic backgrounds to have their work and life experiences assessed for RPL entry formal qualifications.' (page 14).

It is hoped that this report can inform the current review of Government Policy Drivers Impacting on the Level of Recognition of Prior Learning initiated by Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation, the Hon. Jacinta Allan.

David Williams  
Executive Director, VTA

Nita Schultz  
Education Policy Consultant, VTA



# SKILLS RECOGNITION-NEWS

## *Welcome*

December 2007

Following the successful roll out of the workshops 'Taking the Lead on Skills Recognition' the Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) will be producing an occasional newsletter for workshop participants and the RPL Network. This newsletter will feature topical issues, case studies and resources for TAFE leaders, managers and practitioners with an interest in Skills Recognition. It will also be available on the VTA website.

The first of these newsletters builds on the discussions during the workshops around knowledge management. The VTA appreciates Wendy Perry's assistance in preparing this information. Please feel free to distribute it within your professional networks. Your feedback and contributions are welcome.

Nita Schultz  
Victorian TAFE Association  
[nschultz@vta.vic.edu.au](mailto:nschultz@vta.vic.edu.au)

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## ***Skills Recognition (RPL) using a Knowledge Management approach – hints and tips***

Debowski (2006) defines explicit knowledge as,

... knowledge that can be shared with others – it can be documented, categorised, transmitted to others as information, and illustrated to others through demonstrations, explanations and other forms of sharing.

And, "Knowledge that draws on accumulative experience and learning of a person and which is hard to share with others is called tacit knowledge". Skills Recognition (RPL) practice includes a combination of explicit and tacit knowledge.

For TAFE Institutions to build sustainable knowledge cultures about RPL from a leadership perspective there needs to be strong consistent messages, accountability and the valuing of knowledge management. From a cultural perspective the focus should be on collaboration in practice and principle; rewards, trust and respectful climate; and the transfer of knowledge and learning.

In practical terms, the list below refers to activities, hints and tips to effectively build and transfer knowledge about skills recognition across a TAFE Institution:

1. Build a knowledge map – where does the knowledge about RPL sit within the Institute now? Can you classify the knowledge as tacit or explicit? Is it positive or negative i.e. does it support the Institution's goals of increasing RPL or does the existing knowledge undermine the Institution's focus on RPL?

2. Develop a shared picture of what you want the knowledge map to look like into the future.
3. Work out the knowledge that you want to disseminate and transfer across the organisation... for example are there good practices that could be shared? What does the research and literature say? What are other organisations doing with skills recognition?
4. Classify the knowledge that you want to build or transfer... and for whom. Define the transfer process you think best suits the type of knowledge you want to develop – from articulation, combination, socialisation, internalisation.
5. Design specific activities to support the knowledge transfer process. For example if you want to develop tacit-tacit knowledge, underpinned by a socialisation process, mentoring, coaching and observation approaches would be best suited.
6. In terms of the knowledge culture how do you capture and share knowledge? Does the Institution provide opportunities to collaborate? Are the leadership messages consistent about the importance of skills recognition?
7. Consider the infrastructure that may be required to support knowledge management...
8. What about the knowledge competencies of staff? Are they defined? Built into job descriptions and human resource practices?
9. Develop a knowledge framework for skills recognition... who needs to know what..?
10. Define a knowledge strategy that is measurable, iterative, evaluated and builds on a continuous improvement approach.

Prepared by Wendy Perry, December 2007 for the Victorian TAFE Association

References: Debowski, S. 2006, *Knowledge Management*, John Wiley & Sons Australia Ltd, Milton QLD.

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## **VTA Website**

Located on the VTA home page ([www.vta.vic.edu.au](http://www.vta.vic.edu.au)) is a point of access to information around skills recognition and recognition of prior learning. This information hub is intended for use across the TAFE sector. Currently you can find case studies, resources, useful weblinks and the activities of the RPL Network. Please don't hesitate to contact VTA if you have some additional tools or information to share across the Victorian TAFE sector.

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## **Did you know....**

In 2004 the highest rates of RPL uptake were among students in the 25-39 years age range (4.4%) and those seeking to gain higher-level qualifications. At diploma and above, 10% of students received some RPL in 2004 compared with 1.8% at AQF levels I and II, and virtually none for students in non-AQF programs.

(source, NCVET, 'Recognition of prior learning at a glance', 2006, p.4 (DEST))

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## **Useful Resources**

'National Principles and operational guidelines for recognition of prior learning', available from <http://www.aqf.edu.au>. This document sets out the 17 principles that underpin quality RPL.



# SKILLS RECOGNITION-NEWS

January 2008

## ***Welcome***

Welcome to the second newsletter for TAFE leaders, managers and practitioners with an interest in Skills Recognition. A copy is also available on the VTA website.

This newsletter builds on the discussions during the workshops in 2007 'Taking the Lead on Skills Recognition' around the use of skills recognition to measure capability at different levels. The concept of a skills recognition continuum is used in conjunction with practical case study examples. The VTA appreciates Wendy Perry's assistance in preparing this information. Please feel free to distribute it within your professional networks. Your feedback and contributions are welcome.

Nita Schultz  
Victorian TAFE Association  
[nschultz@vta.vic.edu.au](mailto:nschultz@vta.vic.edu.au)

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## ***Using Skills Recognition (RPL) to measure capability at different levels***

The following case studies have been developed by Wendy Perry from Wendy Perry and Associates Pty Ltd and Workforce BluePrint. They are examples from the field of how skills recognition can be used to measure capability at different levels. The concept of a Skills Recognition continuum is used, rather than a narrow focus of the purpose only being for an individual to gain part of or all of a qualification.

### ***Skills Profile***

To build a skills profile of an individual, the process of self review and collaborating evidence is used. A comprehensive list of all the competencies that an individual has is developed, with units of competency as the building blocks from multiple qualifications and national Training Packages. This list can then be married back to the list of national qualifications indicating a match to a potentially considerable number of qualification pathways.

The Skills Store models in Victoria are based on developing skills profiles of individuals and supporting them through a formal recognition process.

### ***Individual Capability***

Using units of competency to define individual capability in a workplace context can support recruitment, career development, performance management, succession planning and knowledge management.

An example relevant to the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector is the upgrade process from the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training to the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment that many VET practitioners have experienced. A good practice approach to skills recognition includes reviewing the practitioners existing formal qualifications, resume and job description; using a facilitative, discussion based approach (preferably in the practitioner's workplace) covering the critical aspects of evidence, underpinning knowledge; and identifying processes and products as naturally occurring evidence. This process is relevant, rigorous, efficient and time effective, working through a questioning process with the candidate. Self-assessment, peer and line manager support can also be used as methodologies.

### ***Team Capability***

Building a picture of a team's capability involves developing individual profiles and aggregating the results. This concept can be applied to any aggregation within an organisation such as a business unit, department, campus, faculty and/or of all people in a particular position (head teachers/principal lecturers, administrative officers, managers etc).

The common strengths, that is specific competencies that are found in a majority of individual's profiles, can be used to describe the team's capabilities. The identification of prioritised development needs through the skills recognition process is equally important. An evaluation of the teams strengths (competencies held) and development needed (competency gaps) will identify areas for improvement such as recruiting new team members with the [gap] competencies required or upskilling across the team or structural change through job redesign.

### ***Organisational Capability***

Profiling the capability of an organisation, or of a large group, using skills recognition, can be undertaken using a variety of methodologies. Individual profiles can be aggregated at an organisational level, specific job roles may be a priority and therefore profiled first or solely, or an approach using a sampling technique across the organisation and at different job levels can provide a picture that can be extrapolated to represent an organisational profile.

In the context of a restructure, a large Registered Training Organisation (RTO) focussed on profiling new staff moving into VET leadership and administrative positions. The methodology involved self-assessment by all people moving into the new job roles and the aggregation of the results at the job role, campus and organisational level. Analysing the competency profiles to identify the 'most commonly selected' competencies for each job role enabled the development of draft competency based job descriptions for validation. These national competency standards could also be paired with the broader internal competency/capability statements that the RTO had built. From this process, individual learning plans can

be developed with the most common priority training needs forming the professional development program in the context of the new directions of the organisation.

### ***Cluster/Network Capability***

Competencies can also be used to measure the capability of a cluster or network of businesses or a skills ecosystem via a skills recognition process.

In a recent South Australian state government initiative, the skills of small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) were profiled and benchmarked against each other. Fifteen SMEs were involved in the project with approximately half supplying the defence market and half with the potential to supply the defence market. The organisations ranged from a sole trader to a 140 full time equivalent business, across ICT & Electronics, Manufacturing, Maritime, Land Vehicles and Weapon, Aerospace and other ancillary services.

The methodology involved profiling a sample of employees across different job roles and levels including management, administration, sales/marketing and technical areas. Information was aggregated to provide the CEO/business owner with a picture of the skills within their business and their development needs. A comparison was undertaken of the profiles of those companies engaged in the defence market, those with the potential and at a high level the skills and competencies that the defence primes (major contractors to whom the SMEs supplied) required within their supply chain partners.

Interestingly, the SMEs stated that being technically strong was important in the defence market and the defence primes identified systems, processes, quality and risk management as important. The strengths identified in the group of SMEs included:

- ▶ Occupational health and safety
- ▶ Fire safety systems
- ▶ Install metal structures and features
- ▶ Develop, implement and review policies and procedures
- ▶ Contribute to the achievement of on-time performance standards
- ▶ Systems research development and diagnosis
- ▶ Apply quality procedures
- ▶ Plant and machine operations
- ▶ Automotive engineering, vehicle mechanics and automotive vehicle operations
- ▶ Tool making

The main development needs for the SMEs were:

#### Strategic management

- Develop a strategic plan
- Human resource management

- Manage customer focus

#### Financial Management

- Control organisation finances
- Coordinate business resources
- Secure funding

#### Marketing

- Conduct market research
- Develop a marketing communications plan

#### Business planning

- Develop and implement a business plan

#### Risk management and legal requirements

- Develop and maintain contractual relationships
- Establish business and legal requirements
- Identify risk and apply risk management processes
- Manage risk management system

#### Project management

- Design and manage complex projects

#### Various

- ▶ Identify and monitor environmental policies
- ▶ Analyse and present research information
- ▶ Use of planning software
- ▶ 5 Sigma procedures in manufacturing

These development needs have been used as a basis for the [re] design of existing and new programs and initiatives to support SMEs in the defence market.

### ***Industry Capability***

Identifying the current skill level of an industry through skills recognition and the key training needs can be undertaken in a variety of ways.

A sampling technique was used to define plant operators' skills by profiling a 'representative' gang across a number of different civil construction companies. This process was undertaken one-on-one with plant operator's onsite, at their workshop and in breaks. The language of skills recognition was customised to the group of plant operators, such as asking what equipment do you use?, what sort of sites have you worked on?, what can you do?, what do you know? and so on.

The individual profiles were aggregated to gain a picture of the 'gang', the contractor and across the industry. Three key development needs were identified including competencies related to:

- ‘Supervising the gang’ (people management)
- Provide instruction and demonstration in the workplace – for the experienced operators to break down the tasks related to learning the operation of the civil construction machinery for the new operators; and
- Communication and team work skills for new plant operators

On scanning the training provision on offer there weren’t any programs that addressed the above training needs and so new programs, developed and validated with the civil construction companies were designed.

### ***Regional/Community Capability***

Using a change management and community capacity building approach, skills recognition can also describe the competencies, capabilities and human capital or assets within a region or community.

Profiling small businesses or community members within a town, or an indigenous community setting, can provide information far broader than skills strengths and training needs. The analysis of the current picture gained through skills identification/recognition, with the future picture of where the region/community wishes to be in terms of economic development, sustainability and the labour force, can value add to the community planning process, support structural adjustments (particularly in a workforce context) and/or identify areas for community growth. The growth areas may relate to new business development, regional context and focus (such as tourism and viticulture) and population/skill set demographic change.

## ***VTA Website***

See: [http://www.vta.vic.edu.au/?Name=SR\\_Case\\_Studies](http://www.vta.vic.edu.au/?Name=SR_Case_Studies) for local Case Studies listed under the following titles:

- RPL for Indigenous Learners: Certificate IV in Employment Services
- Pre-assessment information sessions for RPL candidates
- RPL for the Children’s Services sector
- RPL in Community Services – Alcohol and Other Drugs sector
- RPL – a single point of contact in a University TAFE provider
- Building capability through an assessor mentoring project
- Skills recognition as an integral part of learner management
- Knowledge Management & the Establishment of a Skills Recognition Centre
- Skill recognition for existing/mature aged construction workers in the carpentry and bricklaying sectors
- DVD of information on RPL for the Diploma of Engineering—Advanced Trade
- Skills recognition for the individual and for the industry Advanced Diploma of Hospitality Management

# RPL CASE STUDY



December 2007

During the course of 2007 the Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) conducted 16 workshops across the Victorian TAFE sector to enhance the strategic knowledge, skills and capabilities of TAFE senior management to lead effective change strategies that increase and improve Skills Recognition (RPL) in Victorian TAFE Institutes / Universities' TAFE Divisions. The VTA is grateful for the support provided to this project by the Victorian Office of Training and Tertiary Education.

In the course of these workshops the VTA has learned of many initiatives within TAFE Institutes/Universities to increase the uptake of RPL by TAFE students/industry clients.

The following is one example.

## **RPL FOR INDIGENOUS LEARNERS CIV IN EMPLOYMENT SERVICES – EAST GIPPSLAND INSTITUTE OF TAFE**

### **Background**

In 2006 a number of Indigenous individuals working within the education and employment sectors in East Gippsland were approached by the Koori Unit at EGTAPE to determine whether they would be interested in completing some or all of the CIV in Employment Services through the RPL process. This was initiated because the RTO acknowledged the wealth of experience and strengths within our local Indigenous community, particularly in the education/employment sector, and wanted to formally recognise these through a higher-level qualification.

### **Client focus**

An important aspect of this project was that participants had significant choice in the vocational path they wanted to take. To achieve this it was essential that the Koori Unit team source a culturally appropriate and RPL skilled trainer who would meet the participant's individual needs.

There were four Indigenous people who chose to take part in the process. All participants were particularly interested in gaining skills recognition for the work they had done and were currently undertaking in the field of Employment Services.

## Organisation

Once the appropriate RPL staff had been identified and employed, she met with the applicants as a group to inform them of the RPL/evidence gathering process. She structured this session around teamwork and knowledge sharing, and because peer support is culturally important she established a timetable of group/self-help sessions to capitalise on this. She then organised individual appointments to assess individual needs and ensure that applicants were clear about what they were required to do (evidence gathering). Traditionally RPL is a huge paper-based task, and this is sometimes unrealistic for Indigenous people who may have low level literacy skills, lack confidence in their ability to perform skills, or who may not have kept evidence from past employment. As part of their everyday commitments, members of community organisations have skills that they don't realise. The staff member in this case was able to determine and tease the skills out of these applicants and document these. This process took patience and time and was carried out over a period of 3 months. Because of the generous time allocation she was able to facilitate evidence gathering, specify appropriate documents and determine gaps through a number of one-on-one sessions with each of the applicants.

## Challenges

The biggest challenge was competing pressures and commitments. All applicants had busy work schedules and because of their standing in the community were also frequently called on to do other work and presentations. This meant there was less time available to do individual visits and it meant that the assessor had to be very flexible with her time to accommodate last minute changes.

## Outcomes

- Individual ownership of the RPL project – all decisions on modules to be assessed were made by participants in consultation with the assessor.
- Successful completion of CIV Employment Services, or modules thereof, for each of the four participants

This RPL process was successful due to:

- individual involvement and ownership
- respect for Indigenous identities, culture, knowledge and values
- working one-on-one
- flexibility in delivery and time allocation
- a committed highly skilled RPL assessor
- extensive support (KLO and other Koori Unit staff)
- funding that allowed for all of the above

## Further information:

Contact: **Margaret Curran**

Team Leader, Koori Unit, *East Gippsland Institute of TAFE*,

[mcurran@egtafe.vic.edu.au](mailto:mcurran@egtafe.vic.edu.au)

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# RPL CASE STUDY

January, 2008

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In the course of these workshops the VTA has learned of many initiatives within TAFE Institutes/Universities to increase the uptake of RPL by TAFE students/industry clients.

The following is one example.

## **Skill recognition for existing/mature aged construction workers in the carpentry and bricklaying sectors**

### **The change Initiative**

The aim of the Holmesglen Skill Recognition (RPL) project was to develop and trial a process by which experienced carpenters and bricklayers in the building and construction industry could seek to have their existing skills and knowledge recognised against the relevant certificate III trade qualification.

### **The drivers for change**

The project was an Innovation Funds project supported by OTTE. The impetus for the project proposal was the need to:

- provide upskilling and recognition services for the construction industry which is currently suffering significant skill shortages in some sectors,
- meet the Victorian government focus on skilling existing workers and adult learners as detailed in the 'Learning Longer' action of the statement *Maintaining the Advantage: Skilled Victorians* statement, and
- become more innovative in the way trade training is delivered to meet the demands of industry stakeholders and employees for more flexible options.

## **The Methodology Used**

The first stage of the project consisted of significant stakeholder consultation with employer associations, union representatives, other training providers including group -training schemes, employers and existing learners. The consultation process enabled the project parameters to be determined and refined in a manner that ensured industry support.

The second stage involved the development and technical editing of the tools and documentation that would support the skill recognition process. This resulted in the creation of a participant self assessment kit, a guidelines document and a range of skills recognition tools for both carpentry and bricklaying. These tools were moderated with industry representatives to ensure accuracy. The documentation was a significant improvement on the course materials that were originally available in the Holmesglen departments. The new skills recognition tools in particular encouraged a marked change in the strategies of the Institute in the relevant sectors and encouraged a holistic approach to skills recognition.

During the third stage a number of Holmesglen carpentry and bricklaying teachers undertook specific professional development in contemporary skills recognition practices.

The final stage of the project was the trialing of the skill recognition process. The participants were sourced from existing student waiting lists who were interested in applying for carpentry trade accreditation and an advertisement targeting bricklayers that was placed in the local newspaper. In both sectors word of mouth also became an important method of attracting potential participants. A number of participants have now undertaken a Skill recognition (RPL) interview and commenced gap training and assessment where needed. It is anticipated that all participating carpenters and bricklayers will complete their qualification during the first half of 2008. This is within a considerably shorter time period than a traditional apprenticeship certificate III program.

## **Strengths of the initiative**

The outcome of this project offers a flexible process to existing workers so they can have their skills legitimately recognised in order to achieve a trade qualification. Skill recognition is a fair and reasonable expectation of workers with experience and knowledge. It is envisaged that a growing number of existing workers will seek skill recognition in the future particularly if being qualified becomes linked to wage improvement.

Undertaking the project challenged the way in which the Holmesglen trade departments managed the recognition of existing skills in the carpentry and bricklaying areas. The teachers had to be prepared to embrace a new approach rather than continuing with a more 'lock step' process as used in the past. At this stage only a small number of teachers have engaged with the skill recognition program however the numbers are anticipated to grow with industry demand.

Another challenge will be ensuring the construction industry as a whole has faith in the skill recognition process as a reliable and rigorous process, one that is equivalent to the apprenticeship training program.

This will be overcome by encouraging more employers and workers to be involved in the process.

The skill recognition process will be extended in 2008 to other trade sectors within Holmesglen. The documentation, kits and skills recognition tools will no doubt be improved as part of the extension project. Additional feedback from participants in the New Year will also assist us to improve the procedure.

### **Known or anticipated impact**

The impact of the project cannot be ascertained at this early stage as none of the current participants has completed their certificate III qualification. Gap training is continuing during 2008 for this group. However, Holmesglen anticipates a growing demand for construction skill recognition pathways in the future as a means of existing workers achieving qualifications, reducing the duplication of training for some individuals and possibly the acceleration of apprenticeships for those apprentices with existing skills. It is also anticipated that a successful skill recognition process will raise the profile of Holmesglen within the community as a provider of flexible training options.

### **Further information:**

Contact: Alexandra Mannell  
Curriculum Maintenance Manager, Building and Construction, Furnishing and Water ([alexandram@holmesglen.vic.edu.au](mailto:alexandram@holmesglen.vic.edu.au))



# RPL CASE STUDY

December 2007

During the course of 2007 the Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) conducted 16 workshops across the Victorian TAFE sector to enhance the strategic knowledge, skills and capabilities of TAFE senior management to lead effective change strategies that increase and improve Skills Recognition (RPL) in Victorian TAFE Institutes / Universities' TAFE Divisions. The VTA is grateful for the support provided to this project by the Victorian Office of Training and Tertiary Education.

In the course of these workshops the VTA has learned of many initiatives within TAFE Institutes/Universities to increase the uptake of RPL by TAFE students/industry clients.

The following is one example.

## **Skills recognition as an integral part of learner management**

### **The change Initiative**

Wodonga TAFE has committed to the creation of a sustainable relationship with learners through the development of a Individual Learner Management Process(ILMP). As part of this development, Wodonga TAFE's research has shown a need to increase the profile of skills recognition with existing and prospective learners. While these findings were consistent with the directions of COAG, the Victorian Government's skills agenda and requirements under the AQTF, Wodonga TAFE's implementation of strategies to increase skills recognition as an integral part of learner management needed a rethink and redesign.

Wodonga TAFE aims is to make skills recognition a part of everyday practice at the Institute; to ensure that skills recognition is accessible and easily understood by applicants and staff was clearly part of the challenge. This led to the redevelopment of all communications and assessment tools with the emphasis on 'plain language'.

### **The drivers for change**

The Strategic Plan of the Institute is clearly 'learner focussed' with a number of strategic directions and business objectives articulating the importance of skill development and skills recognition for individuals as critical to successful employment. Against a back drop of rapid economic growth and demographic change in the region, resulting in skills and labour shortages, it was vital that skills recognition formed an integral part of the Institute's approach to managing the learning experience of the individual and the business or industry client.

The Institutes' emphasis on skills recognition as a part of the assessment and training delivery process has been validated through the Victorian Government's

skills statement, 'Maintaining the Advantage: Skilled Victorians (MTA)'. The MTA strategies mirrored and confirmed Wodonga TAFE's Strategic Plan and provided further evidence for the case for change within the Institute.

A number of challenges relating to practice needed to be addressed. RPL, RCC and Credit Transfer had been around a long while and have been seen as quite discreet activities. A major challenge was to ensure that delivery departments viewed skills recognition as important a service as their training deliver. In other words the status of skills recognition needed to lift from being a "bolt-on" service, to one that was part of everyday business.

To this end, the words and language used was seen as a key enabler. The term *Skills Recognition* provided an opportunity to bring RPL, RCC and CT under the one banner and to implement a number of change management strategies around a service that addressed Skills Recognition.

## The Methodology Used

In designing and implementing Skills Recognition, the Institute embarked on a number of concurrent strategies to improve access to, and understanding of, the service:

- Skills Recognition was to be a 'supported' process.
- Skills Recognition targets were imbedded in operational plans at Institute and department levels.
- A financial model that demonstrated the cost effectiveness of Skills Recognition was developed, primarily for managers and coordinators.
- Skills Recognition was to be incorporated into teacher workplans as a discreet activity, enabling allocated effort and associated outcomes to be recognised.
- The Institute established from its own resources, a 'Skills Kiosk'. The Skills Kiosk is located in the student cafeteria and is a demonstration not only to clients but to staff of the Institute's commitment to skills recognition. The Skills Kiosk manages enquiry, referrals to delivery departments and supports the teacher, other staff and the applicant through the process.
- Skills Recognition was a major focus of staff professional development during 2006-07.
- The Institute produced a plain language Skills Recognition information guide available on the website. [www.wodonga.tafe.edu.au](http://www.wodonga.tafe.edu.au)
- Skills recognition fees were simplified and in many cases, fees for this service were reduced substantially or not charged. Fee information was published in the plain language Skills Recognition information guide.
- Skills Recognition tools have been systematically simplified for both the applicant and skills recognition provider, with a number of plain language 'skills and abilities' guides now being used to support the process.

## **Strengths of the initiative**

On going Skills Recognition for enrolled learners continues to be part of everyday practice of teachers. Data relating to the operations of the Skills Kiosk, the service that responds to 'upfront' Skills Recognition need, is encouraging. Of the 89 clients seen since operations began in May 2007, 83 have taken up skill recognition services.

The Institute is aware of the need to continue to increase the importance of Skill Recognition as a priority for teaching staff with particular emphasis on 'up front' skills recognition. The continued 'multi- pronged' approach will continue to ensure both pedagogical integrity and confidence in the process.

In 2008, the Institute will further develop its Individual Learner Management Process(ILMP). The ILMP will enable individual learner progress to be tracked and progress in processing Skill Recognition will be just one of the measures that will be visible to the individual, appropriate staff member and manager alike.

The introduction of a Victorian Government 'Skills Store' in 2008 facilitated by the Institute will further strengthen the importance of skill recognition and compliment the Institute's existing approach.

## **Known or anticipated impact**

The Institute has a goal to ensure that individuals have their skills recognition and their learning managed through an Individual Learner Management Process that provides a quality service, that is cost and time effective. This service is also important to business clients that require their staff to have skills recognised and want this service undertaken with the least amount of lost production time.

Our approach to Skills Recognition is just one of the strategies employed to enhance the learning experience at Wodonga TAFE. The Institute has recently completed a review of its articulation and pathway arrangements and have published a guide to the recognition of qualifications that plots the options for learners from secondary school through Wodonga TAFE to participating higher education providers. This approach 'guarantees' not only credit for eligible school leavers but a place at Wodonga TAFE. Integral to the adult learner experience is skills recognition for employment and further learning.

These strategies will ensure that the Institute remains responsive to the needs of the individual, our community and our businesses.

## **Further information:**

Contact: Brian Smith, (02) 60556632  
bsmith@wodonga.tafe.edu.au



# RPL CASE STUDY

December 2007

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In the course of these workshops the VTA has learned of many initiatives within TAFE Institutes/Universities to increase the uptake of RPL by TAFE students/industry clients.

The following is one example.

## **Recognition Access Point – Swinburne University of Technology (TAFE Division)**

### **The change Initiative**

Swinburne established a single point of contact for RPL clients called the Recognition Access Point (RAP). The main focus of RAP is to accept, monitor and manage both Skill Store referrals and Industry contacts for RPL. Previous work done to increase RPL capability within Swinburne was also incorporated in the initiative. RAP has implemented and maintained quality customer service and a streamlined, smooth passage through Swinburne for clients as the priority.

### **The drivers for change**

The Swinburne University Recognition Access Point (RAP) was set up in January 2007 in response to the State Government Initiative to increase uptake of RPL, part of the COAG agenda of skilling Australia.

This year five Skill Stores have been set up across Victoria and Swinburne is a network RTO provider to both the Eastern and South Eastern Skill Stores. More Skill Stores will be open in 2008 through to 2010 with a total number eventually across Victoria of thirteen.

### **The Methodology Used**

Research of RPL best practice in Victoria, NSW and Tasmania was undertaken along with consultations conducted with all Swinburne Schools. Participants consulted included School Directors, Departmental Managers,

Senior Educators and key staff with responsibility for RPL, with a separate consultation conducted with Senior Executive Group.

A system for tracking and monitoring clients from initial contact to completion of RPL process has been implemented. After consultation a Swinburne wide RPL service evaluation form was designed and now in use, with an online evaluation survey to follow in early 2008.

Continued development of RPL resources and regular meetings and communication across the Division is seen as imperative.

## **Strengths of the initiative**

During various stages of this project Swinburne Departments and RAP have worked together to ensure that all outcomes build on work already undertaken. These partnerships ensured that any additional Skill Stores processes would align to existing policy and procedures.

Services standards were struck between network RTOs and Skill Stores and these same service standards are now accepted across the TAFE Division for all RPL enrolments. Progress to date has included excellent relationships being developed with both Eastern and South Eastern Skill Stores.

Referral protocols and services standards were developed and implemented across the division.

Marketing brochures were designed and developed and distributed to build market.

Swinburne has strengthened its capability to provide an accessible, quality response to RPL.

Opportunities for improvement include the continued PD for all Swinburne staff to keep abreast of RPL.

## **Known or anticipated impact**

### **Example 1**

Through the Skill Up program at Swinburne, a worker about to be retrenched within one week was urgently referred to the South Eastern Skill Store then back to Swinburne for review/evaluation. Using the self assessment report from the Skill Store and advice from Swinburne he was able to gather sufficient evidence prior to leaving his employment.

With a clear understanding of the type of evidence he needed he was able to complete the qualification for Certificate III in Transport & Distribution (Warehousing). The formal recognition of his work skills and the positive boost to his self confidence through the RPL process has enabled him to gain another position in Warehousing, shortly after his retrenchment.

**Example 2**

Swinburne received a referral from the Eastern Skill Store for a client interested in the Diploma of Financial Services (Banking). She had seen an advertisement for the Skill Store in a local paper and wanted to get some formal recognition for her many years in banking service. From the high level of evidence she was able to provide she was granted successful RPL for the Diploma. She is now able to look for promotions within her Industry and is also keen to progress next year into higher study, perhaps a Graduate Certificate.

A Skill Store referral to Swinburne was able to assist both these clients achieve their individual goals, which is a very positive outcome of the initiative.

Evaluation from all completed RAP clients has established the benefit of a single point of contact for any queries. The level of service provided by all Departments within Swinburne has been highly commended.

**Further information:**

Contact Perrie Hoxley at Swinburne University of Technology:  
[phoxley@swin.edu.au](mailto:phoxley@swin.edu.au)



December 2007

# RPL CASE STUDY

During the course of 2007 the Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) conducted 16 workshops across the Victorian TAFE sector to enhance the strategic knowledge, skills and capabilities of TAFE senior management to lead effective change strategies that increase and improve Skills Recognition (RPL) in Victorian TAFE Institutes / Universities' TAFE Divisions. The VTA is grateful for the support provided to this project by the Victorian Office of Training and Tertiary Education.

In the course of these workshops the VTA has learned of many initiatives within TAFE Institutes/Universities to increase the uptake of RPL by TAFE students/industry clients.

The following is one example.

## The Assessor Mentor Project – University of Ballarat

### The change Initiative

The Assessor Mentor Project focused on building teacher capability around RPL processes and tools. The aim of the project was to skill a number of teachers to become RPL mentors for their department to enable the area to develop responsive, innovative and flexible RPL processes and practices.

### The drivers for change

The project was part of a broader review and update of our RPL assessment practices. The review highlighted that our procedures needed to be updated to reflect current delivery needs, funding requirements, and COAG and OTTE's directives for simpler and more responsive RPL processes.

### The Methodology Used

Department Managers were asked to identify an Assessor Mentor for their department. Mentors were allocated time release from their regular teaching duties for one day a week for the duration of the project.

The project had three phases:

- capability building, through weekly workshops;
- resource development, with individuals developing tools and resources for department areas; and
- mentoring of department staff.

The project commenced with weekly workshops to build the RPL pedagogical capability of the Mentors.

Workshops included:

- national, state and Institution directives on RPL
- professional judgement
- the role of the mentor
- researching current practices
- evaluating skills recognition tools
- AQTF 2007 RPL requirements
- application of technology for skills recognition and recording
- learning pathways to a qualification
- learning styles

The workshops enabled the Mentors to engage in professional conversations with assessors from different Schools and staff from the support areas. Mentors were asked to review their department's skills recognition practices against best practice models to identify areas that were working well and areas that needed to be updated. From this evaluation the Mentors went on to develop improved skills recognition tools and processes to suit a wide variety of students.

While focusing on tools and processes the Mentors were also involved in reviewing the Skills Recognition procedure and participated in a skills recognition strategic planning workshop with Department and Support Managers. Providing opportunities to engage the Mentors in strategic and operational issues was a strength of the project and ensured a unified approach to skills recognition at all levels.

The Mentors have passed on information through regular updates at staff meetings and presentations at Planning Days, and will continue to mentor staff in 2008.

## **Strengths of the initiative**

The strength of the project has been the engagement of the Mentors in professional conversations and their shared learning. While Mentors were working on individual tools, the processes developed applied across the departments to ensure a consistent approach to managing and reviewing RPL.

## **Known or anticipated impact**

The main impacts have been increased skills recognition capability, a shared understanding of the value of RPL and its strategic application, and simplified skills recognition processes. The project has seen skills recognition moving away from a process that relied on the applicant providing a piece of evidence against every learning outcome and performance criteria, to a guided conversation between an assessor and an applicant using a range of evidence gathering practices.

The Mentors are now working with staff in their departments and will continue to share their knowledge through a Community of Practice.

## **Further information:**

Contact:

Heather MacLeod - [hamacleod@ballarat.edu.au](mailto:hamacleod@ballarat.edu.au)

Lyndall Smith - [l.cooper-smith@ballarat.edu.au](mailto:l.cooper-smith@ballarat.edu.au)



# RPL CASE STUDY

January 2008

During the course of 2007 the Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) conducted 16 workshops across the Victorian TAFE sector to enhance the strategic knowledge, skills and capabilities of TAFE senior management to lead effective change strategies that increase and improve Skills Recognition (RPL) in Victorian TAFE Institutes / Universities' TAFE Divisions. The VTA is grateful for the support provided to this project by the Victorian Office of Training and Tertiary Education.

In the course of these workshops the VTA has learned of many initiatives within TAFE Institutes/Universities to increase the uptake of RPL by TAFE students/industry clients.

The following is one example.

## **Knowledge Management & the Establishment of a Skills Recognition Centre**

### **The change Initiative**

The Sunraysia Institute of TAFE established a Skills Recognition Centre in September 2006 as a key strategy to lay the foundations to increase the capability and capacity of the Institute to conduct Skills Recognition services.

The aim of the initiative was provide support to clients and staff in conducting Skills Recognition through centralising the promotion, facilitation and support, conduct, tracking, monitoring and reporting of Skills Recognition services delivered across the Institute.

A Reframing the Future Project 2007 submission was prepared aimed at developing the new transferrable model of Skills Recognition for a rural, remote and multi-campus institute. This project particularly focussed on the use of action work based learning groups and knowledge management to improve processes within the Institute.

In addition, a Learnscope Project 2007 was used to develop an online application process for Skills Recognition for the Institute's website.

### **The drivers for change**

The drivers for the change were;

- The Council of Australian Government direction aiming to increase the level of Skills Recognition occurring across Australia in response to the forecast Skills Shortages and the low level of reported Recognition of Prior Learning rate reported by NCVET of 4%
- Skills Stores were being introduced into Victoria and the Institute wanted to position itself effectively to work with this initiative
- The Sunraysia Institute of TAFE had a dispersed and diverse approach to offering Skills Recognition services which did not provide clients or staff with a focal point and a consistent effective structure for promoting, initiating, implementing, tracking, monitoring or reporting on Skills Recognition
- There was a need to develop a process of Skills Recognition which staff fully supported and was user friendly to all stakeholders
- The development of the new AQTF 2007 Standards which has a focus on continual improvement in training and assessment services was not supported by the previously dispersed approach because of the difficulty of capturing knowledge and improvements effectively. Centralising Skills Recognition means that continual improvement and knowledge management of processes can be achieved with the result that improvements can be shared more effectively with all staff
- The Institute was moving away from an ISO 9001:2000 based quality system to one focussed on the new AQTF. As a consequence policies and procedures need to be revised
- The explicit and tacit knowledge required to deliver effective Skills Recognition services was not being captured and maintained for all staff to access by the previous quality management system

## **The Methodology Used**

The development of the Skills Recognition Centre has been achieved through the following key initiatives and activities:

- Research including visits to other RTOs who had centralised processes in Victoria in 2006.
- The Institute applied for and was successful in gaining a Reframing the Future 2007 project to develop a new model for conducting Skills Recognition based on action workbased learning and knowledge management theory. This project included research strategies such as conducting a literature review, networking with other RTOs, discussion groups and asking staff to reflect on their experiences as they conducted Skills Recognition with clients.
- The Reframing the Future project focussed on the traditional trade areas such as building, engineering, plumbing and training and assessment. These programs are conducted across the major campuses of the Institute in Mildura and Swan Hill.
- Further visits and networking was conducted with other Institutes, the Victorian RPL Network and E-Works to acquiring new knowledge.

- The Institute applied for a Learnscope Project 2007 to develop an online Skills Recognition application capacity. This is being trailed with staff first using an internal web page and Skills Recognition upgrades to the new Certificate IV in Training and Assessment qualification as a pilot study.
- Professional development sessions have been conducted to share the new processes and procedures with staff and to introduce staff to new tools and resources available.
- Institute staff have been kept informed and presented the key developments and outcomes of these initiatives locally, within Victoria and nationally.

## **Strengths of the initiative**

The approach taken to improve and develop a new Skills Recognition model was perceived as very effective by staff involved in the project. Both the use of knowledge management theory and action workbased learning were seen as effective and essential strategies to progressing and improving processes. The real strength of the strategies is the capacity and focus on capturing what works well in practice.

Staff perceived the capturing of tacit knowledge as a particular strength of the initiative as the previous quality system did not capture and record this knowledge. The new quality system is therefore recording and capturing processes occurring at the practical level in different study areas required for success rather than mainly concentrating on processes occurring at an organisational level.

Overall it was determined that action workbased learning is best conducted on a more formal yet flexible basis with respect to structure, methods of capturing knowledge and improvements, and, establishing timelines to guide the activity. This was essential to cater for the needs of different study areas. It was also established that action workbased learning is best conducted with smaller groups to accommodate the flexibility required by staff conduct services relevant to the project. Often one to one sessions were held with Skills Recognition Centre staff and study area staff working directly with clients together.

The key initiative in conducting an effective Learnscope Project was the operation of a management committee to ensure that project scope and outcomes matched the needs of the Institute and clients. It met regularly throughout the period.

## **Known or anticipated impact**

The impact of these initiatives has been far reaching with the development of a new continual improvement model and policy for the Institute. This outcome exceeded the anticipated and planned outcomes of the project.

Other key outcomes of the project were:

- Skills Recognition has now been completed in study areas and by staff who had not previously conducted Skills Recognition.
- The development of a new flowcharted Skills Recognition model for the Institute which is transferable to different study areas. This includes a new Skills Recognition Policy and Work Instruction.
- Clear role definitions were identified for Skills Recognition Centre staff and teaching centre staff.
- The development of new simpler and clearer Skills Recognition Application forms and promotional material including an online application capability.
- The development of a Skills Recognition Staff Guide which includes the capturing of tacit knowledge for different study areas.
- Clear and workable definitions and business rules have been established for Credit Transfer and Recognition of Prior Learning.
- Development of a new professional development package for staff based on the new Skills Recognition model.
- The development of a Skills Recognition Resource Register to allow staff to access materials already developed appropriate for their areas.
- The Skills Recognition Centre is a focal point for clients and staff to enquire and conduct Skills Recognition.
- Centralising knowledge management has had a very positive effect.

### **Further information:**

Contact: Stan Pietsch, Manager Operations Planning and Reporting,  
Sunraysia Institute of TAFE (spietsch@sunitafe.edu.au)

### APPENDIX 3 - SCHEDULE OF WORKSHOPS

Month	Date	TAFE Institution	No. of participants
<b>August</b>	7	Bendigo	16
	29	Victoria University	22
<b>Sept</b>	4	South West	22
	10	Chisholm	13
	20	East Gippsland	19
	21	NMIT	20
	26	Wodonga	24
<b>October</b>	9	Sunraysia	14
	12	RMIT	16
	16	Kangan Batman	20
	23	Central Gippsland	19
	26	University of Ballarat	48
<b>Nov</b>	1	Goulburn Ovens	9
	8	Gordon	24
	22	Holmesglen	19
<b>Dec</b>	4	Box Hill	16
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>321</b>

**APPENDIX 4 - A BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT APPROACH - A PROPOSED SKILLS RECOGNITION CONTINUUM**

