RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

REPORT ON CASE STUDIES

BHP Steel
Advance Bank
Building Industry Skills Centre
Panasonic: Matsushita Electric Company Pty Ltd
TAFE NSW—National Communication Modules
Canberra Institute of Technology—Fashion Course

MAY, 1995
PREPARED FOR THE

ASSESSMENT CENTRE FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

by

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# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The purpose of this paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Beneficiaries of RPL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues arising from case-studies</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Educational issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Administrative issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Issues related to applicants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Staffing and staff development issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>The financing of RPL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future directions</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Where to now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Summaries of Case Studies (by David Cervi)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Methods for Recognition of Prior Learning</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C: Charging policies in different State TAFE systems</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. THE PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is being progressively introduced in industry, in TAFE NSW, and by private training providers. At the same time, RPL is being practised in some industries and major enterprises. For this reason, reports on a number of Case Studies were prepared by several consultants, in an attempt to clarify the following questions:

- the relative efficiency of the various RPL processes
- the degree of user satisfaction
- any educational concerns
- any industrial concerns
- and administrative concerns
- the relative costs.

The aim of the case studies was to form a basis to enable the issue of the “practicability” of RPL in different circumstances to be addressed. This is one of the key issues if RPL is to form a stable part of a national approach to assessment and recognition.

This report attempts to draw lessons and general issues from these and other case studies. In its present form, it is directed primarily to those responsible for policy on recognition issues. It is also intended to serve as a basis for a shorter paper focusing on industry-related issues, to be circulated more widely.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Definition of RPL/RCC

Recognition of Prior Learning refers to the “acknowledgment of the skills and knowledge held as a result of formal training, work experience and/or life experience” (from NFROT, quoted in VEETAC 1993). It has become the standard term used by educational institutions in Australia, and refers particularly to credit given within a course. Different acronyms are used in other countries: by Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) we mean the same thing as the British when they talk about Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning (APL or APEL) or the North Americans when they talk of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA). With the development of more formal structures for RPL within companies has come the term Recognition of Current Competence, partly as a way of emphasising “current” rather than “prior”, and partly reflecting the industry focus on recognising areas in which people can demonstrate “competence” rather than “learning”. It also serves to underline another difference: the assessment is often carried out within a particular enterprise, against competency standards rather than against the learning outcomes of a course.
In this report the term RPL will be used to refer to practice in both educational institutions and companies, as the NFROT definition embraces both.

2.2 The current context of RPL

RPL has been practiced, in various forms, for many decades. In all educational systems in which adults participate, RPL has been informal and has involved teachers finding ways of taking account of the knowledge and skills that particular students bring into a course. This has normally involved informally-arranged exemptions from part of a course. Within companies, informal assessment of employees’ skills has been a role carried out constantly by supervisors, and leading to an understanding about the level of an employee’s skills.

Formal arrangements for RPL are more recent, and it is only over the last few years that mechanisms have been developed in vocational education in Australia. Because it is not well established, there has been a risk of very different levels of expertise, with decisions sometimes being taken on the basis of little evidence. There has also been a definitional problem. Although RPL is a process of assessing whether the competence or learning possessed by an applicant is equivalent in scope and depth to that expected, according to a defined standard (which could be a course, part of a course, or as defined in an appropriately-constructed set of competency standards), there has been some confusion in the past caused by the use of the term RPL to describe standard exemptions granted to students on the basis of formal study elsewhere. This is not RPL.

2.3 The purpose of this report

The starting point of this paper is to acknowledge the need for us to distinguish between:

- what is known and is working well (e.g. how to develop portfolios)
- what is known but is not working well (e.g. comparability of standards, alternative methods of demonstrating competence)
- what is not known and needs to be researched.

2.4 Methodology

The report has been prepared by analysing the following case studies:

Building Industry Skills Centre

This Centre was established in Castle Hill, NSW, in 1992 and has as its major objective the establishment of a state centre of expertise for the assessment of skills in the Building and Construction Industry. A major activity of the BISC is the assessment of new applicants for a Contractors

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1 The term “appropriately-constructed set of competency standards” is used to imply either a set of learning outcomes or a set of standards—including performance criteria, range statements and evidence guide—by which competence can be properly assessed. It must be emphasised that competence cannot be assessed merely by reference to the performance criteria of a set of standards.
Licence, granted by the Building Services Corporation of NSW, who do not hold appropriate TAFE NSW (or equivalent) qualifications.

Panasonic: Matsushita Electric Company Pty Ltd
Matsushita has been operational at its Penrith, NSW, site since 1968. It is an electronic manufacturing company with a predominantly female production staff. Panasonic has a strong commitment to workplace training and assessment. It has recently piloted a recognition process targeted at its production staff, using trained on-site assessors.

BHP Steel
BHP Port Kembla Steelworks has a strong training culture and a history of partnerships in training and assessment with TAFE NSW. This case study documents the company’s experience of a panel process of RPL assessment, conducted for employees at its Port Kembla site.

Fashion Course - Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT)
The RPL process in the Fashion Department of CIT is being refined within the framework of the CIT RPL policy. The RPL process adopted by the Institute is based on a model developed by Broadmeadows TAFE in Victoria.

National Communication Modules - TAFE NSW
These modules were piloted and evaluated across NSW TAFE Institutes during 1994. The implementation processes varied slightly from Institute to Institute but all were based on the TAFE NSW RPL Policy released in 1993.

Advance Bank
The Advance Bank has an established program of in-house training for its range of staff. It has recently begun to explore the implementation of RPL processes designed to provide staff with recognition for in-house training and work experience against relevant accredited training programs within TAFE NSW and other educational providers.

In addition, the report makes use of case studies reported in VEETAC (1993), and the evaluation of RPL in the UK reported in Sammons et al. (1994). It does not attempt to provide a detailed description of the aims and procedures of RPL, as these are covered elsewhere—see for example, Cohen et al. (1994) and Simosko (1991).

On the basis of the case studies, the main conclusion that can be drawn is that although there is one question that needs further research, most of the issues fall into the second category above: we know much of what we need to about what needs to be done, but the implementation remains a challenge yet to be met.

3. BENEFICIARIES OF RPL

RPL is sound educational practice. It enables education and training providers or employers to assess the extent to which applicants can demonstrate that competence that they have acquired informally or formally is equivalent to measurable outcomes from formal courses—something that should always occur in any case.
It also leads to the development of courses which clearly specify what students need to know, what they need to be able to do, the attributes they need to be able to demonstrate and how these will be assessed. RPL encourages teaching staff to apply appropriate assessment principles in developing a range of assessment instruments that provide valid and reliable measures of prior learning for courses, subjects or modules.

In addition to this general benefit, RPL has a number of costs and benefits for all parties involved. This is summarised in the tables below (some items of which are taken from McDonald 1995). In these tables, the costs and benefits have been broken down into “Financial” and “Non-financial”, however, this classification is only intended to be approximate, as some “Non-financial” effects can have a cost in certain circumstances.

3.1 Costs and benefits to RPL candidates (students and/or employees)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>Financial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• lower costs associated with tuition (e.g. administrative fees, books and materials) and attendance (transport, childcare)</td>
<td>• application fee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• possibility of increased earnings more quickly because of hastened course completion</td>
<td>• cost of preparing for assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-financial</td>
<td>Non-financial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• shorter completion time for a qualification</td>
<td>• deprived of the benefits of education which go beyond what is normally assessed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• less time “wasted”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• better learning as a result of reflection on previous learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• encouragement to “semi-trained” people to complete a qualification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• portability of skills for those granted industry-based recognition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• boosted confidence and increased self-esteem (it may also help overcome psychological hurdles for those returning to education after a break)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the benefits listed in the Table, for those undertaking a course, is of the shorter completion time. The benefits of RPL shortening the amount of attendance necessary at a college can be looked at two ways:
— shortening the course length, which in some cases will allow a person to earn a higher salary more quickly; or

— keeping the course length the same, but freeing students up for part of the course:

“In one case, an employee recouped his entire RPL application costs in overtime the first night he did not have to attend a particular class.”

The view of the benefits of an education which go beyond what is normally assessed (for example, social benefits of participation in a group and the acculturation into a profession) is obviously also held by some students: not all those who might reasonably expect to be granted RPL apply for it, many for this reason.

On the other hand, the availability of RPL is seen by employees to be intimately linked with training:

“Some whose work in the plant does not require them to solder, or only infrequently, applied for this because they saw it as an opportunity to “jump the training queue.” Soldering components is seen as a more interesting and challenging job than many are currently doing.”

“I’ve told others to go for RPL. It will get you training if you need it, and if you don’t you’ll get the recognition.”

RPL also plays an important role in reassuring employees as to their competence:

“A technician said that he wanted to see if his TAFE training, undertaken a long time ago, still had currency, because the awards now are not based on certificates but on demonstrated competence.”

3.2 Costs and benefits to employers

The costs and benefits to employers are summarised on the next page. One of the unexpected benefits was that in some cases, assessors also found that assessing others had focussed their attention on their own work practices:

“To train and assess people, I have to do it right—I’m finding I’m more self-critical.”

In other cases, RPL has led to better-targeted training:

“In one case, a particular person who failed a practical test, but probing during the assessment process revealed him to be competent in that particular skill, he failed to demonstrate competence because he did not understand the requirement. Instead of 24 hours of training, 3 hours of training was required.”

The one possible disadvantage arises if workers are unable to fulfil their increased expectations:

“Some workers expect more varied and interesting jobs and, in a few cases, enhanced career opportunities, to flow from recognition. In view of the limited range of more interesting and varied production jobs currently available, if the company is to fulfil these expectations some redesigning of jobs will need to be instituted.”
### Benefits Costs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial</strong></td>
<td><strong>Financial</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• more effective use of the skills of its workforce</td>
<td>• the costs of developing and maintaining an RPL system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• training costs</td>
<td>• the costs of carrying out the assessments (unless the applicant pays)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• reduced costs of employee release for training</td>
<td>Non-financial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-financial</strong></td>
<td><strong>Non-financial</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• making both workers and assessors more aware of the need to maintain standards in work practices</td>
<td>• possible frustration if workers are unable to fulfil their increased expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• better identification of training needs and consequent targeting of training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• identification of under-utilised skills</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### 3.3 Costs and benefits to TAFE Colleges and other training providers

The statements about the financial effect on training providers in the Table arise from two assumptions (over page):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial</strong></td>
<td><strong>Financial</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• depends on funding arrange- ments within each system (nil on a teaching hours model, increased funding on a completions model)</td>
<td>• the cost of advising and assessing students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-financial</strong></td>
<td><strong>Non-financial</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• for training providers in a competitive environment, a higher profile and possible competitive advantage to those who are seen to have an RPL system in place—with both employers and potential students</td>
<td>• the cost of training of staff, establishment of administrative systems, and publicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• higher student completion rate</td>
<td>• re-drafting course descriptions so that the required outcomes can be interpreted by applicants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• a higher level of student motivation and satisfaction, through students not needing to repeat material which they already feel they have mastered</td>
<td>• possible, but not necessary, reduction of income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• creation of a more homogeneous class (but see right-hand column for an associated disadvantage)</td>
<td><strong>Non-financial</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• potential effect of RPL on course structure</td>
<td>• absence of more experienced students or “bright sparks” from a class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The actual benefit will depend on whether the exemption of students from a course enables any savings in the teaching costs. This may happen, for example, by requiring one less tutorial or laboratory group to be formed. One study has shown how factors such as this can result in major changes in the costs involved (Selby-Smith 1970).

By reducing the amount of "enrolled study" necessary by a student, RPL has the potential to reduce a College's teaching load. However this is only a problem if the diminution of load is unforeseen or unplanned, or if the pool of qualified applicants for a place is exhausted. As long as neither of these conditions operate, the institution can merely over-enrol in advance to compensate for this, as long as there is sufficient local flexibility.

The benefit of competitive advantage to individual colleges, mentioned above, has reached disturbing proportions in the US, with some colleges "outbidding" others in the amount of credit given, in an attempt to lure students (Peinovich 1994).

3.4 Costs and benefits to the nation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>Financial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• saved the cost of unnecessarily enrolling a student in a particular segment of a course</td>
<td>• Costs of informing industry and employees of RPL.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• an earlier contribution of trained people to the workforce</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-financial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• increased workforce mobility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• applicants granted RPL may be more likely to undertake further study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is one point that is not immediately apparent from the above Tables, and should be emphasised. RPL does not result directly in a better-trained workforce: it merely results in better recognition of the skills and knowledge that people possess already. This may lead, indirectly, to a better-trained workforce by allowing people to progress more quickly in their training, but not necessarily.
ISSUES ARISING FROM CASE-STUDIES

4. EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

4.1 Which methods?

The main educational issue raised by the case studies is that of fitness-for-purpose. There is a danger of people becoming locked into particular approaches, and not ensuring that the mechanisms used were most appropriate for the subject and applicants. One common example is the commitment either "for portfolios" or "against portfolios", rather than exploring the many assessment methods available (see Appendix A).

4.2 How much assessment?

A second issue, and one that affects the choice of methods, is that of minimising the risk of an incorrect assessment. As a recent report has pointed out (McDonald 1995) all decisions about assessment methods involve a consideration of risk, although it may be rarely stated in these terms. In a formal training environment, teaching staff establish procedures and modes of assessment so that the risk of an incorrect assessment is acceptably low. This normally takes the form of making an assessment only as precise as it needs to be (by the extent of the assessment tasks, the level of supervision, and so on) for the stage of the course, the level of qualification, the importance of this assessment to the aims of the qualification or the requirements of a professional area, and the risk to the community of incompetence. The VEETAC Report on RPL (VEETAC 1993) suggested, for example, that assessment procedures should become more rigorous as the opportunity for further assessment (prior to the award of a qualification) decreases.

It is important that assessors be trained in that role. There are still examples of assessors flouting the most basic rules of assessment—for example, the use of irrelevant criteria:

"One assessor failed a person because he disapproved of the colour of the candidate wearing grey rather than white overalls."

Notions of "risk" and "precision" are much more significant in RPL assessment than in normal assessment, because of

— the variety of different ways in which learning can be demonstrated within a flexible RPL framework,

— the fact that RPL is normally a one-off assessment, in which the assessor makes a decision usually without knowledge of the person's performance throughout a course;

— the culture throughout TAFE systems that "someone above will check it" and

— the uncertainties about assessing non-academic learning; to quote a recent Canadian paper:
the evaluation of non-academic learning is plagued by a number of obstacles. To what extent can all the course objectives be measured immediately? To what extent can knowledge acquired from work experience be measured immediately in terms of a given educational objective?" (OECD 1992)

4.3 Assessment standards

Experience has also shown that assessors are commonly more severe in their assessment of applicants (particularly in assessment of portfolios) than they would be if the applicant was enrolled in the course and undertaking the normal assessment process. This is obviously inappropriate.

5. ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

A general issue concerning the administration of RPL is the importance of evolution: the more successful case studies appear to have been those in which a system has been allowed to evolve at a pace consistent with the other pressures within an organisation, rather than being rushed through. To quote one example:

"The current RPL procedure has developed over time with changes made as problems were recognised or circumstances changed. The development of the procedure is continuing, with changes incorporated regularly as management and staff refine the process and work within changing constraints."

There are some policy issues that need to be clarified which would normally be the same across an entire system or Institute. They are:

5.1 Limits to the extent of RPL

Some training providers have limits to the amount of RPL that can be granted, normally expressed in terms of the minimum proportion of a course in which a student needs to enrol in order to be awarded a qualification. This rule can in fact be justified on educational grounds: given the amount of uncertainty in assessing students—particularly with respect to higher-level skills, and values—the requirement for enrolment in a proportion of the course minimises the chance that someone will be granted a qualification as a result of incorrect assessment. However, this argument is much stronger in some subject areas than others.

It is hard to see any educational justification for a blanket rule such as the "70% rule" which applies in some TAFE systems:

- it has no educational justification as a blanket rule covering all subject areas;
- it is only applied in some TAFE systems, and
- it is inconsistent with the granting of up to 100% credit for workplace-based assessment

A better approach would be a rule which specified the minimum enrolment for each qualification, depending on risk factors mentioned above.
A separate issue that needs to be resolved at a system-wide level is the policy on repeated applications for RPL.

5.2 Timing of the RPL process

RPL presents a sequencing problem when applied to courses: often, particularly in trade courses, credit is likely to be allowed in the more elementary subjects. This raises three issues. Firstly, many of the subjects in which credit is most likely to be allowed are at the start of courses, a point at which students would be least likely to have a knowledge of what RPL is and how to apply for it. Secondly, by the time the RPL assessments are completed, students have often started those subjects. To quote one case-study:

"Applicants were not notified of the results until three weeks after TAFE classes had commenced. Some applicants would have changed their subject option as a result of the recognition granted."

Thirdly, the elementary subjects are sometimes pre-requisites for other subjects, which can create a scheduling problem.

As an example, a possible time-scale that has been suggested for an RPL process for hydraulics and pneumatics within a large manufacturing company is

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Weeks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting, checking and processing apps</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal review of apps</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop documentation for the panel</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel session and notification of recog</td>
<td>3-4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly the amount of time needed for the various steps will differ according to circumstance, and will need to fit in with course application and acceptance deadlines. However, the general point is that the issue of timing is one that needs attention.

5.3 Centralised versus devolved models of administration in training providers

This has been a matter of debate within TAFE NSW, with some Institutes adopting a centralised model and some a devolved one. Both are obviously needed, with different stages of the RPL process being carried out as appropriate (see Table on next page).

This might, however, be changed in cases where there were so few applicants that it was impracticable to devolve any activities. However, in such cases, there may well be a case for not offering RPL at all.
Centralised | Devolved
---|---
Establishment of policy and implementation guidelines and design of system | Provision of specific advice regarding applications within particular subjects
Training of those responsible for course development re RPL requirements | Design of subject-specific assessment procedures and instruments
Training and accreditation of advisors and assessors | Assessment of applications
Provision of general advice to applicants, and handling enquiries | Monitoring College-wide progress and quality control
Monitoring and evaluating system-wide progress | Marketing to the College clientele
Marketing throughout the system | |

5.4 Local issues for training providers

Apart from this, there are many ways in which the administration of RPL systems can be improved. None of them require any further research: the need is for development of simple systems to support each RPL process, and the dissemination of the necessary information to those involved:

- format of applications, and information required
- recording and notification of results
- format for comparing competencies with learning outcomes
- practice regarding subjects composed of multiple modules
- approach to “partial” credit
- cut-off dates for applications.

Such issues point to the need for a realistic implementation plan for the introduction of RPL—particularly for a system as diverse and broadly based as TAFE NSW. A useful outline is to be found under the heading “Best practice in the recognition of prior learning” in VEETAC (1993), pp 25-29.

6. ISSUES RELATED TO APPLICANTS

A recurrent theme was the need for timely and accurate information to be provided to potential applicants—preferable by the use of a briefing session accompanied by self-assessment materials. The information for applicants needs to include, particularly:

- an explanation as to how to prepare for assessment
- how the assessment process is used to indicate competence.
It is also important that there be effective post-assessment guidance and explanation of the appeal process in the event of a dispute over the assessment process or outcome.

7. **STAFFING AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT ISSUES**

Two issues that need to be addressed are:

- the need for better understanding and acceptance—for example, one concern (although rarely expressed) is the thought among some teachers that the granting of RPL on a large scale would create less need for their own skills;
- the development of appropriate arrangements for the allocation of staff hours to RPL.

7.1 *Training of curriculum development staff*

There is a need for training of those who develop curricula, in order that guidelines can be set for RPL within each course.

7.2 *Training and guidance for assessors*

As with all aspects of RPL, there is a need for guidance of assessors. The standard to be applied in each RPL situation needs to be clarified, much in the same way as assessors clarify these matters in normal assessment:

- currency and relevance of evidence
- amount and authenticity of evidence (for example, do knowledge and skills need to be assessed separately if ways cannot be found to infer knowledge or understanding from workplace performance?)
- level required
- types of evidence.

In order for assessors to fulfil their obligations, it is obviously necessary that they themselves be competent and, particularly, up-to-date in the area being assessed.

Experience has shown that assessors can quickly develop sophisticated approaches to satisfy themselves of the integrity of assessment methods. For example, to partly fulfil the requirements of a garment production module in a Fashion course, students brought in samples of their work.

"Some teachers were worried about the authenticity of the samples brought as evidence. Experience has shown that ownership is demonstrated by the body language of the applicant and the way they can talk about the development process. One applicant did bring in a commercially made garment as evidence but this was very obvious by the way the finer details could not be discussed."

[However, it should be said that body language may be a misleading indicator, as the applicant may be nervous.]

The need for training of administrative staff should also be emphasised, as they may often be the first point of contact for applicants.
7.3 Who assesses?

In making a decision on who will assess (either in industry or in a course), the important issue is that of impartiality. The process, as with all assessment processes, needs to be impartial and needs to be perceived as such. This is particularly important in industry, in which the relationship (or separation) between the outcome and industrial awards needs to be made clear.

8. THE FINANCING OF RPL

8.1 Variables which affect the cost

The costs of any assessment process obviously depend on how it is carried out. This is particularly true of RPL, although there is as yet no reliable data to enable us to be more precise about how the costs can differ. Obvious examples of how the cost can differ are:

- the use of holistic rather than atomistic assessment methods. (An example has been described in which 17 hrs of assessment became 1 hr when a holistic assessment scheme was developed (D. Greening, personal communication)),
- the use of a briefing workshop to ensure that all applicants have a good understanding of the process,
- having a mechanism which stops students approaching, in turn, all teaching staff in a course.

The savings to a training provider of granting RPL depend on the exact circumstances, as has been described in the Table on costs and benefits above.

8.2 Financing options

For a training provider (in which RPL is carried out in order to give credit within a course), there are three different bases for charging a fee for RPL:

- on the basis of time spent by an assessor;
- on the basis of amount of credit applied for;
- on the basis of the cost of enrolling in the relevant subjects.

All three were to be found in operation in Australian TAFE systems in late 1994 (see Appendix B).

For an employer, the equations are simpler: RPL will form part of the investment in training and assessment that are an integral part of the company’s operations.

To quote a recent ANTA paper on assessment:

"Assessment of performance by people in the workplace ought to be, and in many cases is, an expected part of the relationship between the supervisor and the employees. An employee ought to be able to count on receiving recognition for their current performance in a job, without incurring any individual costs" (ANTA Assessment Transition Team, 1995)
9. WHERE TO NOW?

At the beginning of this paper the point was made that it was important to distinguish between

- what is known and is working well
- what is known but is not working well
- what is not known and needs to be researched

Much is known about RPL, and some of it is working well. Enough is known, as well, for us to know what we need to do next.

There have been enough broadly-based case studies, such as those studied in the course of preparing this report, to illuminate the issues. What is needed now can be broken up into an implementation issue and a policy issue.

9.1 Why does so much remain to be implemented?

What the case studies show is that implementation strategies need to be set in place to ensure that RPL is carried out to the same standard of professionalism as operates for other aspects of assessment. This includes addressing the issues in this paper under the headings of

- educational issues (see section 4)
- administrative issues (see section 5)
- issues related to applicants (see section 6)
- staffing and staff-development issues (see section 7)

Implementation of what is already known to be good practice will result in an effective system of RPL.

It is not, however, quite as easy as that. The need to implement many of the requirements described in this report have been known for some time, and yet the task remains, in most cases, to be done. This raises the question of whether there are barriers to implementing the procedures needed. One barrier is obviously some doubt as to the usefulness of RPL in all circumstances, but there would appear to be others. Examination of this issue is beyond the scope of this report, but needs to be carried out

9.2 When is RPL practicable?

In the longer term, RPL needs to become embedded within a wider framework which might be encompassed by the phrase “assessment and recognition”, which will in turn bring with it the commitment of managers to RPL as one of several mechanisms by which students can demonstrate their competence.

Before that can happen, however, there remains one question to be addressed—but a question which it is, in retrospect, impractical to expect the broadly-based
case studies so far carried out to answer. That is the question of the practicability of RPL: unless a policy decision is made that there should be universal access to RPL, the question is one of who should have access to RPL under what conditions? This is an important question, but one that could not be answered with these case-studies because it is tied up with the issue of implementation: if the processes in place are less than effective, it is pointless to look at the costs and benefits of RPL.

For example, RPL within companies is at present enterprise-based. It would obviously be more cost-effective if a number of companies within the same sector (or an industry body) shared the costs of designing and developing generic assessment packages which could then be adapted and applied within each company. This would increase the reliability of standards throughout the industry, as well as making RPL more readily available to employees of small- to medium-size firms.

There is still no answer to the question of “under what circumstances is RPL a good investment?” There is much anecdotal evidence on the costs of RPL—even too much. To move beyond anecdotal evidence will require data on costs of the process under a variety of circumstances, and the associated benefits. Such a study should start now, using good examples of RPL systems to illuminate the various variables and pressure-points.
REFERENCES

In addition to the references listed below, this report has drawn on the following case-studies of RPL in practice, commissioned by the Assessment Centre for Vocational Education:

Building Industry Skills Centre (Linda Hopkins)
RPL in Communication Subjects (Pat Strauss)
Fashion Course at Canberra Institute of Technology (Robin Bishop)
BHP Panel Approach (Robin Bishop)
Advance Bank—Recognition Process (Linda Hopkins)
Matsushita RCC/RPL Case Study (Lesley Goldberg)


Peinovich, P E (1994) The time is now. Quality for a new paradigm. CAEL Forum and News 17 (2) 15-18 & 35


VEETAC (1993) *Arrangements for the recognition of prior learning in Australia*. Canberra: Vocational Education, Employment and Training Advisory Committee
APPENDIX A.

SUMMARIES OF CASE STUDIES

Prepared by David Cervi, KDC Consulting Pty Ltd

A1. RPL AT THE BUILDING INDUSTRY SKILLS CENTRE, CASTLE HILL

The Building Industry Skills Centre (BISC), an independent unit within the Western Sydney Institute of TAFE, has been involved in RPL for some time and on a relatively large scale. Assessing tradespeople for licensing purposes is a major part of its role.

The study described here aimed to contribute to an understanding of the circumstances in which RPL is a sensible investment. It involved interviews with nine RPL assessors representing nine different trade areas and with 78 candidates for assessment representing nine trades.

The Centre’s RPL process involves full-day assessments including observation of tasks such as estimating materials, reading plans and writing quotes and specifications, as well as the physical skills involved. Assessments are based on industry competency standards or, where these are not available, on criteria developed by BISC in consultation with industry. Assessments are conducted by a single assessor, although they are supervised throughout the day by a project officer.

Assessors are required to have appropriate knowledge and/or qualifications and work experience, often at supervisory level. They are selected for their good communication skills and unbiased attitudes and are required to complete Workplace Assessor training. Eight of the assessors interviewed for the study agreed that additional training would be beneficial.

The study found that RPL needs to be promoted widely, with consistent information and by a means which is likely to reach the specific target audience. In the case of BISC, briefing nights were an important element in the success of the process, helping to ensure that candidates are as well prepared as possible for their assessments. Prompt response to requests for information and rapid notification of results were also important to applicants, who were satisfied with receiving their results within 14 days and were mostly satisfied with the level of detail they received.

All stakeholders involved in the case study expressed the view that the most appropriate evidence of competence in practical skills is gathered by observing RPL applicants actually using the skills concerned. They generally agreed that evidence such as portfolios including photographs of completed work, references...
from supervisors and visits to worksites was unsuitable: it was impossible for assessors to be certain that the work presented was the candidate's own, work in progress could not be observed and site visits were time-consuming and expensive.

Some RPL applicants at BISC were dissatisfied with the ease or difficulty of the assessment - possibly because of a misunderstanding of the ways within which performance of specific skills can be used to indicate broader competence in a range of skills. However, most were satisfied with the RPL process. Even though half were not successful in their first attempt, almost all of these acknowledged that they needed further training or re-assessment, and welcomed the further support that they were given. Only four had any complaints about the helpfulness or fairness of staff.

A small number of people voiced concerns about industrial matters surrounding different aspects of the selection of assessment staff. These included the possibility that trade teachers conducting assessments might fear that students obtaining licensing without attending courses would reduce their employability as teachers; that tradespeople conducting assessments would see aspiring tradespeople receiving RPL as a threat to their own work opportunities; and that the possibility of obtaining a trade licence via RPL would be perceived by existing practitioners as devaluing the licence or the professionalism of that trade.

Assessors were generally positive about the RPL process, although some were critical of the standards required of RPL applicants; of BISC's involvement in training as well as assessment; of the small number of assessment tasks available for assessors to choose from in some trades, and of the use of only one assessor, which some found too demanding. All but one of the assessors also expressed the view that industry supports RPL and regards trade qualifications obtained in this way as having equal status to qualifications obtained through an apprenticeship or other traditional means.

Costs of RPL are high for a Centre such as BISC because of the kinds of skills being assessed and the need for large amounts of materials. Although industry contributions of materials help reduce the cost of RPL assessments for many trades, the fees charged to applicants are inevitably much higher than in course areas which do not concentrate so heavily on practical tasks which require expensive materials and equipment (for example, $250 for a standard assessment or reassessment).
This study aimed to evaluate the trial of Matsushita (Australia)'s Recognition of Current Competency/Recognition of Prior Learning (RCC/RPL) process with a pilot group of 12 employees at the company's production plant at Penrith, NSW. The trial was conducted in the context of the company's implementation of the National Metals program, which requires an assessment of workplace competence.

The trial was based on the production line skill essential to the manufacturing process at Matsushita - soldering. This skill was selected on the basis of recently gathered information which revealed limitations in employees' understanding of heat transfer principles and identified a need for further training of employees in soldering/resoldering.

The volunteers gave a variety of reasons for wanting to participate in the trial. These ranged from wanting to 'jump the training queue' to personal reasons which appeared to relate as much to self-esteem as to job progression. Few of the candidates had undertaken, or said that they wanted to undertake, TAFE courses.

The assessments involved a challenge test requiring demonstration of practical skills (one-and-a-half hours), followed by a post-assessment interview and counselling session (half an hour). Challenge tests were conducted for two candidates at a time and were held in the company's training facility, enabling candidates to complete tasks undistracted.

The 12 RCC/RPL candidates, as well as the three assessors and two members of the company's RCC/RPL implementation team, were interviewed for the study. There was general agreement among them that the method chosen for the trial was appropriate for the assessment of practical workplace skills. Most candidates praised the level of support they had received from their assessor, and even those who said they found parts of the challenge test difficult did not think the assessment itself was unfair.

Some candidates, however, feared that they might lose pay if they did not achieve competency. Others felt uneasy about the possibility that their jobs might change as a result of the assessments.

The assessors acknowledged that they would have benefited from more extensive training than the three-day Workplace Assessor Training program they attended before the trial. In particular, they indicated that they felt a need for more training in designing valid assessment tools and workplace assessment packages.

Another concern for the assessors was the difficulty of keeping their own expertise current, given that the company's current enterprise agreement does not allow supervisors to perform technical production work. This issue was reflected also in the skills of some of the RPL candidates: the three candidates who were
assessed as 'not yet competent' were surprised by this result, which seemed to be a result of not using soldering skills regularly as part of their jobs. Four of the other candidates were assessed as competent and five as requiring further assessment.

The RPL process was costly for the company to set up, especially because of the small numbers of employees assessed in the trial. High initial costs included the design of assessment methods and materials, which can take up to 40 hours for some competencies, and advertising the RPL process.

Ongoing costs include administration of the process as well as interviewing and counselling of applicants before and after assessments. The cost of releasing workers from production for assessment and training is also high. However, these costs are partially offset by substantial savings in conventional training time.

Participants' suggestions for reducing costs included collaboration between enterprises in the electronics manufacturing sector to share the costs of designing and developing assessment materials. Increased numbers of applicants within a single enterprise or across a group of enterprises would reduce set-up costs as a percentage of the total costs of RPL.

The implementation team and the assessors described the benefits of RPL to the company as: identification of resources, including skills not currently utilised; better planning and targeting of training programs; and the collection of information which could be valuable to the electronics manufacturing industry. They said employees would benefit from finding out their own capabilities and from enhanced career paths and portability of skills. Two of the assessors also found that they themselves benefited because the process focused their attention on their own work practices.
A3. **BHP PORT KEMBLA STEELWORKS: PILOT OF PANEL APPROACH TO RPL WITH EMPLOYEES IN THE SLAB AND PLATE PRODUCTS DIVISION**

This case study aimed to evaluate the panel approach to RPL used with employees at BHP’s Port Kembla Slab and Plate Products Division, involving BHP and Illawarra Institute of Technology, TAFE NSW.

Applicants were seeking recognition of prior qualifications and experience in relation to the criteria for Graded Trades levels in areas such as Hydraulics, Fluid Power, Welding and Pneumatics. They hoped to use this RPL to determine which TAFE NSW courses they would need to take.

Agreement to trial the panel approach to RPL resulted from the release of the TAFE NSW RPL Policy and Procedures, from input by Prof Rod McDonald and from consultations between TAFE NSW and BHP. Employees who had expressed an interest in RPL were invited to participate; the short timeframe made it impossible to advertise the process more widely within the organisation.

The panel approach was designed to involve a TAFE NSW panel assessing groups of applicants of a similar profile, although BHP in fact presented the applications as individual applications. Some negotiation of guidelines and procedures was necessary, but once this had taken place the process worked smoothly and time-effectively.

The concept of RPL was not new in the company. For three years BHP had operated a policy and procedures for recognition of current competencies (RCC) in relation to its own training modules and classifications. This helped training staff and supervisors to understand and implement the RPL process. Most applicants reported that they had no difficulties with the application process, which required them to provide verification of courses completed as well as relevant work experience and life experience.

Evaluation data was gathered through telephone interviews conducted with eight out of a group of 10 RPL applicants over a period of three days. Meetings and telephone interviews were also conducted with panel members.

None of the applicants expressed dissatisfaction with the recognition they received, and some were pleased to receive more recognition than they had sought. However, administrative delays meant that applicants did not receive notification of the recognition they had received until after TAFE classes had begun. By that time some applicants had already enrolled in classes, whereas they might have made different decisions about their courses if the RPL information had been available earlier.

The RPL pilot was not costed but was seen as a normal work requirement for BHP’s training staff. However, the costs to the company were significant, with one training officer spending 40 per cent of his time on it for six weeks and three other training staff members spending approximately 20 hours each in supplying information, supporting applicants, processing applications and serving on committees in relation to the panel process. The costs to TAFE NSW were less,
consisting mainly of the time spent by the panel members and an RPL Project Officer, and venue costs for the panel session.

In contrast to individual RPL, where it is common to charge candidates an application fee, there was no monetary cost to applicants as BHP covered their training costs including RPL applications.

Among the benefits of the process for BHP were quicker recognition of individuals' competencies; a reduction in training costs; increased self-esteem and motivation among applicants (including motivation to undertake further study) and potential for increased productivity. Perceived benefits for TAFE NSW included an increase in the number and quality of students enrolling, the ability to fast-track students, improved student morale and an increased intake of mature age students from an organisation which promotes ongoing learning.

Several suggestions were made, however, for future improvements in the RPL process, which in its current form was felt to focus more on equivalence and exemption than on true recognition of current competencies. The principal suggestion concerned time allowed for the process as a whole; ideally it was felt that the process should begin five to six months before the TAFE enrolment date.

Other suggested improvements included clarifying groupings of applicants and clustering applications, clarifying arrangements for dealing with individual applicants outside these groups, guidelines for marketing and administering the RPL process within the company; improved application forms and clear guidelines for presenting documentation; and better information for panel members on equivalences between employees' competencies and relevant TAFE courses.

BHP also suggested a two-tier process whereby BHP staff would consider applications internally on a redesigned application form, grouping applicants with similar backgrounds and culling inappropriate applications, before submitting groups of applications to the panel. The panel would then consider two or three applications to gain a profile of the group and grant recognition to the group as a whole.

Also, while many senior TAFE staff have extensive experience in granting subject exemptions and in considering the experience of older people returning to study, and while RPL is accepted as an extension of this, it was felt that RPL assessors would benefit from formalised training in the RPL process.
A4. EVALUATION OF RPL APPROACH IN FASHION COURSES
AT CANBERRA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

This case study aimed to evaluate the RPL assessment process used with students enrolled in the Advanced Certificate in Fashion and the Certificate in Garment Production at the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT).

The process, which is based on one developed by Broadmeadows College of TAFE in Victoria, involved interviews conducted by two teachers. (All permanent staff are trained in the RPL process.) Applicants seeking recognition for technical modules are encouraged to present samples of their work as evidence of competence. In some cases, particularly for communication subjects, applicants were interviewed by telephone and granted RPL.

Information on CIT's procedures for RPL is available in two pamphlets which have been developed for applicants and staff members. Telephone interviews with 10 of the 21 RPL applicants revealed that most of the applicants had found out about RPL during enrolment through teachers explaining the process to those they thought may benefit from it. There was little additional pre-screening of applicants to determine whether they would benefit by applying for RPL.

Findings

The study found that, during the pilot phase, there was a need to attend to the timing of the RPL process. Ideally this should occur before enrolment so that modules for which students receive recognition can be identified in enrolment applications. In practice, most students applied during enrolment, placing pressure on staff to conduct RPL assessments within a short timeframe.

All but three of the applicants received the full recognition they requested and some received more than they had sought originally. A few applicants received the maximum possible recognition of 70 per cent of their intended course. The majority of applicants therefore benefited by saving both time and money.

Most Fashion staff recognised RPL as a means of legitimately acknowledging student skills gained through experiences other than formal learning. They indicated their willingness to commit time and energy to supporting and further developing the process as a way of helping students. This appeared to be partly the result of Fashion courses having been restructured into competency-based modules. Some staff expressed the view that granting RPL to some students could result in classes becoming more homogeneous and lacking the valuable input that the most able students can often have into the learning process for all students.

Issues

RPL requires a major shift in educational thinking and the study identified a need for professional development for teachers conducting RPL assessments. Currently staff can undertake a two-day course in RPL, which forms part of an accredited Certificate in Tertiary Education and Training.
For technical/fashion modules students bring samples of work to show their competence. Some teachers were initially worried about the authenticity of samples but experience has shown that ownership can be verified during the interview.

Applicants and staff were also concerned about the cost of RPL. There were some difficulties in distinguishing between some non-standard exemptions, for which there is no charge to students, and the RPL process, for which students pay an application fee. Policy clarifications would help resolve this issue.
A5. TAFE NSW STUDENTS ENROLLED IN NATIONAL COMMUNICATION MODULES

Seven TAFE NSW Institutes and 21 students participated in a trial of RPL assessment for students enrolling in three Communication subjects in 1994. The trial aimed to evaluate and report on the extent to which RPL was used and on how effective the RPL processes were. It also looked at the implications of granting RPL and at the cost of the process.

Applicants were assessed using both student portfolios of evidence (supplemented where necessary by student interviews) and challenge tests. In assessing portfolio evidence, staff worked from the performance criteria set down in the modules. In four Institutes, staff worked in centralised teams to consider evidence, discuss judgments and plan follow-up. Elsewhere, decentralised teams worked individually but shared portfolios at a meeting to establish common standards and iron out inconsistencies created by demographic factors such as non-English speaking background or by geographical factors such as remote location.

Whereas most Institutes used challenge tests as an adjunct to portfolio assessment, one (Hunter Institute of Technology) offered the option of a challenge test alone. Some staff felt that challenge tests should not be offered without preliminary portfolio application, as not requiring a portfolio could lead students to regard challenge tests as an easy option and lead to Institutes being inundated with RPL applications. In reality, however, a flood of applications was not received and staff reported that many students found the challenge test an even more daunting prospect than preparing a portfolio.

The trial revealed a generally low level of student familiarity with the term RPL or with the concepts involved. While most students were satisfied with the information they received in response to one-to-one enquiries, student feedback also indicated that advisers at information sessions held at enrolment time were not always able to give accurate information about what was required for RPL. This suggests that particular attention may need to be given to the training of advisers in small or isolated centres or in locations which do not have a full-time Communication teacher.

Some Institutes expressed the view that the level of competence demanded of a successful RPL applicant was higher than that demanded of a student passing the course, and that this could be unfair. While staff did not consider this a problem, they did express a wish for more guidance in the form of examples of successful and unsuccessful portfolios.

Another potential inequity was the fact that, as the trial was conducted with Communication subjects, some assessors may have been less forgiving of deficiencies in portfolio presentation than teachers of other subjects might have been.

In challenge tests, maintaining validity can be problematic if a weak applicant is assessed together with a group of stronger candidates, as the weaker candidate may benefit from a 'halo effect'.
The study found that challenge tests can also pose administrative problems and be costly when they involve role plays with small numbers of candidates, whereas they can be more efficient when a larger number of candidates is involved.

The Director of one Institute involved in the pilot expressed the fear that the infrastructure costs of administering RPL would not be covered by the $30 application fee. However, increasing application fees would be problematic as already some non-working students found that they could not afford to apply for RPL.

Some staff and students were also concerned about variations in the practices regarding RPL in subjects which comprise several individual modules. Existing, informal arrangements adopted by centres for crediting at subject and/or module levels need to be replaced by clear procedural guidelines concerning partial recognition of prior learning.
A6. RPL PROCESS IN THE BANKING INDUSTRY:
ADVANCE BANK OF AUSTRALIA PROJECT, PHASE 1

This case study set out to focus on a project in which the Advance Bank of
Australia agreed to jointly develop, pilot and evaluate recognition processes
which would help the Bank's employees to obtain advanced standing in the TAFE
NSW Associate Diploma of Banking and Finance (and possibly the Associate
Diploma of Business).

The project was initiated in the context of the Advance Bank's policy that all
management staff must possess a relevant tertiary qualification by the year 2000.
The target group initially comprised Customer Service Officers (CSOs - tellers in
branch operations areas), although this was later expanded to also include
Customer Service Managers (CSMs).

The project was not completed, however, due to difficulties relating to internal
issues in the Bank.

Over half of the people the Bank recruits to CSO/CSM positions have had
previous experience in the banking and finance industry, with the result that it was
considered reasonable to expect many of them to be suitable candidates for
Recognition of Prior Learning.

Key elements in the project were to include the development of a standard profile
to enable mapping of in-house training and work-based experience against TAFE
NSW curriculum, and the development of a work-based learning and assessment
process to enable individuals to increase their skills in areas where they have not
yet met all the learning outcomes of particular TAFE NSW modules.

However, in a survey of 40 CSOs and CSMs, eight respondents (or 20 per cent of
those interviewed) indicated that they saw no reason to undertake further study
which they believed was not necessary for them to perform their present jobs, and
for which they could see no incentive in terms of remuneration or recognition.
Personal commitments may have been a major factor contributing to the
widespread reluctance to cooperate with the proposed training arrangements: 70
per cent of CSOs and CSMs who are married women with children and would
fund it difficult to undertake further study other than in working hours

There was also a degree of cynicism among employees in regard to available in-
house training, which in some cases was felt to lack direct relevance to their
current jobs and career prospects within the organisation. Some respondents
objected to the in-house Banking Certificate being compulsory, and thought that a
compulsory external qualification would be similarly resented. They suggested
that a lower-level qualification such as a Certificate course, which would provide
employees with a shorter-term goal, might be better received.

Some respondents also felt that managers who themselves did not have formal
qualifications would feel threatened by more junior staff undertaking the course
and that managers should do the course first. They thought that first-hand
experience of this kind would give managers a better understanding of the training
process and could engender more positive attitudes to skills development in staff.
APPENDIX B.

METHODS FOR RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

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<th>Assessment methods</th>
<th>Purposes and examples</th>
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| Interviews               | To clarify issues raised in documentary evidence presented and/or to review scope and depth of learning. May be particularly useful in areas where judgment and values are important (May be structured, with applicants given questions prior to interview, or relatively unstructured, with no specific preparation required)  
  e.g. Qualified draftsperson who has performed duties requiring additional skills, and is seeking advanced standing in architecture degree, is asked to explain the legal basis for certain building codes |
| Debate                   | To confirm capacity to sustain a considered argument demonstrating adequate knowledge of the subject  
  e.g. Union representative on national union seeking recognition for negotiation skills in law degree is asked to prepare a topic for formal debate or take part in a mock trial |
| Presentation             | To check ability to present information in a way appropriate to subject and audience  
  e.g. Law clerk seeking advanced standing for contracts in law degree is asked to explain precedents existing in case law on a particular issue.  
  e.g. Laboratory assistant with six years experience with ICI and seeking RPL for a laboratory component in first year chemistry, explains the theoretical basis for an experiment.  
  e.g. Part-time technical teacher for eight years in business has provided videotapes of an introductory lecture and evaluation reports on workshop conducted in last six months seeks credit for the practicum in Bachelor of Teaching. Applicant to write/present a lecture for novices on [specific complex subject matter] |
| Performance testing      | To test applications of theory in a structured context in correct or safe manner (in a simulated environment or in the workshop or laboratory or in the workplace)  
  e.g. Applicant uses specific laboratory equipment to conduct an experiment and explain the findings in writing  
  e.g. Applicant is asked to explain the rationale for a sequence of tasks undertaken using a range of complex equipment |
| Examination              | To test concepts and basic skills and application using practical examples (May be similar to end of subject examination or a separate challenge test)  
  e.g. Financial accountant who has worked with the same large company for twelve years since joining as a fixed assets register clerk, seeks credit for introductory financial accounting |
| Oral Examination                      | To check deep understanding of complex issues and ability to explain in simple terms (For post-graduate students this might take the form of a viva)  
|                                     | e.g. Multilingual teacher seeks credit in a language degree by means of oral examination |
| Essay                               | To check quality and standard of academic writing and use of references, ability to develop a coherent argument, and to confirm extent, understanding and transferability of knowledge and critical evaluation of the ideas (Essays may be similar in scope or format to formal academic essays set for enrolled students.)  
|                                     | e.g. Applicant has read widely and done three Continuing Education Units in European History and seeks RPL for part of an Arts course |
| Examples of work done or performed or designed | To check quality of work, relevance to credit sought and authenticity of production (Often combined with interview or oral test)  
|                                     | e.g. Applicant has worked in video production and has many examples of videos produced. Seeks credit towards video design and production units in visual communications degree  
|                                     | e.g. Applicant has developed design for a prototype of an energy-efficient machine, and seeks non-specific credit in an unrelated course  
|                                     | e.g. Applicant seeks credit towards writing subjects in communications degree on basis of published works and experience as editor of technical journal and other freelance work. |
| Special projects                    | May be used to meet a variety of purposes — to add greater currency to knowledge or skills, to top up learning, to extend scope of prior learning  
|                                     | e.g. Experienced computer programmer is familiar with two of the three components in the course curriculum. Applicant agrees to cover third method in current work project and provide evidence in two weeks |
| Book review                         | To ensure currency and analysis of appropriate literature is at a satisfactory level (This is often used where the applicant has creditable learning but appears to have missed a major specific reference or viewpoint which has been a prerequisite for enrolled students and is basic to future studies in the area)  
|                                     | e.g. Nurse of many years experience in both nursing and health administration seeks credit towards health sciences degree. Through RPL, all clinical and most of the introductory theory subjects are credited at high levels. A current major text is required reading and needs to be read and critically reviewed. |
| Annotated literature review         | To illustrate the range of reading done by applicant and ensure appropriate coverage to fulfill subject requirements (This is particularly suitable for post-graduate assessment)  
|                                     | e.g. Applicant seeking credit for several Agricultural Science subjects worked in the field with an R and D team for three years and has been keeping a record of reading in this area for a number of years in relation to problems emerging during agricultural field visits. Mainly a summary of content, but occasional comments compare different approaches and indicate reflection about the way the subject is presented and its usefulness to the agricultural problem under consideration. Applicant is asked to add to this using a more formal approach |
| Reports, critiques, articles | To indicate level of knowledge and assess analytical and writing skills and issues involved in current debate
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| e.g. Applicant from the public sector presents a range of reports written about the subject over the past few years. Applicant may be given a current government report and asked to critique from a lobby group's particular viewpoint.
| e.g. Animal carer who has been recognised for researching a specific malady in native animals seeks credit for an introductory subject in veterinary science |

| Portfolio | To validate applicant's learning by providing a collection of materials which reflect prior learning and achievements. Will include own work, reflections on own practice and indirect evidence from others who are qualified to comment. The portfolio will identify relevant connections between learning and the specified or unspecified credit sought.
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<td>e.g. Applicant has worked in voluntary capacity as president of local community child care group, secretary of local parents' committee for the high school and music director for musical productions of two local high schools. Seeks to have this credited towards Degree in Teacher Education. Applicant also has private music students learning piano, clarinet and flute achieving well in the Conservatorium examinations. Applicant seeks advice on what might be credited.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(from McDonald et al. 1995/Cohen et al. 1994)
# APPENDIX C.

## CHARGING POLICIES IN DIFFERENT STATE TAFE SYSTEMS IN 1994

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Territory</th>
<th>Charging policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>$45 per module, with a maximum charge of $250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>$30 per module applied for, with a maximum charge of $60 per application (For 1995 it is understood that no charge will be levied)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>TAFE Colleges in Victoria are free to set their own fees for RPL, and there is considerable variation (Although there is a general understanding that the fee charged for RPL assessment should not exceed the course fee, wide variations in fee have been reported, from $20 to several hundred dollars)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>Students must enrol in the course for which credit is applied for and pay the course fees ($0.78 per tuition-hour), they are then assessed at no charge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>Students must enrol in the course for which credit is applied for and pay the course fees (without the cost of materials), they are then charged $10 per module to be assessed, with a maximum fee of the cost of undertaking the module</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>No policy at present, however, a policy is under consideration of charging 3/4 of the total charge for enrolling in the relevant modules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>Students must enrol in the course for which credit is applied for, and pay the course fees; RPL assessment is free if it can be carried out on the documentation alone, if not, students are charged $50 per hour of assessor's time, including time taken for an interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(from McDonald 1995)