

Processes, systems and tools supporting recognition of prior learning survey

Final report

Jon Mason, Wendy Perry and Allyn Radford

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Executive summary

This report documents the outcomes of research commissioned by the national training system's e-learning strategy, the Australian Flexible Learning Framework's (Framework) E-standards for Training business activity¹ aimed at documenting current recognition of prior learning (RPL) and recognition of current competency (RCC) systems and tools in use throughout the Australian training system (including vocational education and training (VET) and adult and community education (ACE)). This survey follows on from a study of e-portfolios for the Australian VET system commissioned in 2006 also by the E-standards for Training business activity and follows a key recommendation of that report.

This work has been undertaken within the context of the Council of Australian Government (COAG) RPL program (2006-2009) and is primarily concerned with three areas; RPL/RCC systems used in the national training system, provision of evidence to support RPL/RCC and verification of RPL/RCC claims. Within this context, the report identifies:

- Policies, processes, and tools centrally provided by jurisdictions for assessment of claims relating to RPL and/or RCC;
- Systems that provide electronic evidence to support RPL/RCC claims in each jurisdiction, while also specifying the component parts of a piece of evidence; and
- The standards, processes and tools that could be introduced to streamline RPL/RCC systems and improve interoperability across the VET system and beyond.

The report has made a number of key findings and recommendations for future work. A summary of the key findings are:

Systemic issues

- F1. Systemic barriers still exist to the implementation of RPL
- F2. Funding models affect adoption of RPL/RCC/RIL
- F3. Skills recognition must be considered in context
- F4. Support for RPL assessment 'in situ' is required
- F5. Clear differences exist between public and private sector RPL/RCC
- F6. Wider multi-sectoral alignment could support lifelong learning
- F7. There are inconsistencies in common skills across training packages
- F8. Assessments for RPL are often burdened by complex terminology.

Support for tools

- F9. RPL practice currently has limited use of technology
- F10. Numerous impediments to RPL and RPL tool adoption still exist in registered training organisations (RTOs)
- F11. Differences in RPL processes and systems exist between jurisdictions

¹ <http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/e-standards>

Recommendations

Based upon the outcomes and other information gathered during the research phase the project team makes recommendations in the following manner. The primary recommendations are those that are consistent with the role of the E-standards Expert Group (EEG) and are necessarily focused on the advancement of technology standards and software tools within the national training agenda. During the course of this survey a number of systemic and policy issues were discovered or confirmed. These issues will ultimately impact the standards and tools agenda. The survey team resolved that it was important to capture an additional set of recommendations so that the EEG could forward them to the appropriate organisational entities for consideration.

Towards the end of this report is a section titled *Priorities for Future Work*. This section provides the rationale behind the recommendations that have been made here and should be used as the primary information that provides context and additional meaning to these recommendations.

Technical standards and software tools recommendations

For further details about these recommendations, please refer to the section on priorities for future work.

1. A project be undertaken to develop a framework for harmonising the data, standards and conformance requirements for the different expressions of skill recognition RPL for the VET sector, RCC for industry and employment and recognition of informal learning (RIL) for ACE sector. It is also recommended that this approach be extended to include bi-directional recognition requirements between VET and Higher Education and must include consultation with each sector. (For detail on this recommendation refer to *Priorities for Future Work* Item 1, 1a and 1b.)
2. A functional architecture should be developed for the holistic support of skill recognition across the sectors included in Recommendation 1. Existing tools should be analysed with regard to their suitability to perform required functions and interoperability and data exchange requirements should be identified and documented. (For detail on this recommendation refer to *Priorities for Future Work* Item 2, 2a to 2d.)
3. An analysis be undertaken to assess the most effective methods for providing RIL support tools to the ACE sector in a manner that is consistent with the outcomes from Recommendations 1 and 2. (For detail on this recommendation refer to *Priorities for Future Work* Item 3.)
4. Future tool development accommodates user friendliness and the ability of learners/candidates to self-serve components of the RPL process. This includes translation of VET language, catering for those disengaged from training and education, those not in the workforce and those requiring language literacy and numeracy support.

Systemic and policy recommendations

The following recommendations relate to issues that will impact the work of the EEG who may wish to consider forwarding these recommendations to the relevant entities.

1. The broad usage of terminology associated with RPL/RCC is clarified at a national level, particularly if further exploration of electronic tools such as

e-portfolios is undertaken.

Comment: During this investigation it was found that RIL and Recognition of Community Learning are both in usage while RCC can expand to either Recognition of Current Competency or Recognition of Current Capability. In each case there is a difference in precise meaning; in the context of Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) definitions where Credit Transfer and Exemptions are also important, these differences become important.

2. A national approach to harmonise the variety of different workshops and professional development activities to support the uptake of RPL is adopted.

Comment: Activities should emphasise the potential that software applications and common processes can be used to support a common approach to both RPL and RCC.

Purpose

The motivation for this study was to provide background data that might inform future work on the potential for developing a nationally cohesive approach to supporting RPL/RCC with electronic tools such as e-portfolios. These tools allow learners to record and control access to evidence of their learning on a continuous basis, for a range of educational, employment, and workplace purposes. With the possibility of electronic verification of such evidence, there is a strong basis to support RPL/RCC in the interests of both learners and the training system at large. However, it was acknowledged at the outset that such software systems are not currently widely used in the RPL/RCC application process.

Thus, the study also aimed to develop an understanding of the requirements for technical interoperability between RPL/RCC software systems and user data (such as evidence and personal information).

Background

This survey provides a concise and focused snapshot of the issues surrounding RPL/RCC and the use of software applications to support RPL and RCC objectives. Approaches and the levels of success tend to vary across sectors and jurisdictions. While the efforts of the team involved in this survey, data gathering, analysis and reporting have been undertaken conscientiously, it is possible that some tools deployed at the RTO level were not identified. However, the project team is confident that the report does provide an accurate overall picture of RPL in VET. The EEG has provided a set of key RPL contacts which have been the point of focus of the data gathering. In some instances it has become obvious that exploration of a broader network of administrators, project leaders, practitioners and researchers involved in RPL/RCC activities would be of benefit, however, that has not been possible under the limited terms of this project.

Scope

The scope of the research focused on three related areas:

- RPL/RCC systems used in the national training system
- Provision of evidence to support RPL/RCC
- Verification of RPL/RCC claims.

RPL/RCC systems used in the national training system

This involved conducting an environmental scan to identify current systems for recording and processing RPL/RCC claims and evidence of competency attainment in all jurisdictions. Where possible, technical details of any software systems used at jurisdictional level were recorded, including data formats, system configuration and functionality. Other significant electronic tools and applications used by individual providers or training communities were identified.

Assumption: RPL/RCC systems should be able to support a learner through various transitions between training and other forms of learning and employment. It was expected that surveyed RPL/RCC systems were capable of conforming to the AQTF 2007 requirements that assessment is fair, flexible, valid, reliable and sufficient.

Provision of evidence to support RPL/RCC

Existing processes for providing evidence to support RPL/RCC applications were documented with a particular focus on evidence in digital formats. An important consideration for future standards work is to identify ways of electronically verifying such evidence where possible. These processes might include the use of forms/templates, agreed data formats and verification processes.

Verifying RPL/RCC claims

Existing methods of verifying RPL/RCC claims, particularly the submission of evidence in digital formats are described. Such evidence is sourced from two entities: institutions and individuals. Institutions such as educational or government institutions typically provide evidence such as transcripts; while evidence from individuals is typically more varied and often requires assessment by a trusted source to verify its authenticity.

Methodology

The project methodology proceeded according to the following sequence:

1. Preparation of agreed work plan
 - teleconference between e-Works and the consultants
 - development of a survey work plan
 - preparation of a brief outline background paper to aid consultation
 - further development of a list of RPL experts for consultation, listing of RPL contacts in national, state and territory governments and
 - desktop research that built the 'known' RPL tools into an expanded list.

2. Consultation (via phone, email and limited face to face meetings) with:
 - key RPL stakeholders in each jurisdiction and nationally, to identify existing policies, processes, and systems; (Appendix 1)
 - relevant technical staff for details on electronic systems and tools;
 - representatives of individual organisations providing relevant RPL support tools.

Note: For reasons of confidentiality the names of individuals consulted are not reproduced in this report.

This stage of the project involved the close collaboration between the research team and the Framework's E-standards for Training business activity in order to formulate a consistent set of questions. Appendix 1 provides details of the consultation questions.

3. Drafting and finalisation of the report, involving:
 - collation of research materials and discussions between the research team in order to identify common themes and a consensus around key findings and,
 - finalisation of the report following feedback from the E-standards Expert Group.

Timeframe

This project was conducted over a limited timeframe of 12 weeks commencing in late August 2007.

Project personnel

Personnel involved in this project include Jon Mason (InterCog Pty Ltd), Allyn Radford (Learnilities Pty Ltd), and Wendy Perry (Wendy Perry & Associates Pty Ltd).

Jon Mason provided overall project management and undertook consultation with vendors, jurisdictions and individual organisations; Allyn Radford undertook consultation with vendors, jurisdictions and individual organisations; and Wendy Perry undertook consultation on RPL policy and initiatives at a national level, across jurisdictions and individual organisations.

Jon and Allyn's expertise lies in the areas of information and communication technology (ICT) standards and interoperability; Wendy's expertise is in skills recognition and RPL.

The E-standards for Training business activity supported the survey team with advice, contact details and guidance.

Definition of RPL for this survey

As part of the brief of this survey the acronym's RPL and RCC were used somewhat interchangeably. During the course of the survey, an additional acronym, RIL, was also encountered. The terms have been found to have important differences in actual meaning and the way they should be applied but the broader term of skills recognition encapsulates all areas.

NOTE: At the implementation level within software tools and combinations of tools it is a requirement that all such systems comply with the relevant national policies and standards (eg the AQTF 2007) and that the competency definitions are implemented to comply with

competencies as specified in the relevant training package(s). The definitions provided below do not detract in any way from the expression of or requirements to comply with the national policies and standards.

Recognition of prior learning

The definition of RPL in the AQTF Standards 2007 is:

An assessment process that assesses an individual's non-formal and informal learning to determine the extent to which an individual has achieved the required learning outcomes, competency outcomes, or standards for entry to, and/or partial or total completion of, a qualification.

On the assumption that individuals will learn continuously in both their work and daily experiences, the key interest for RPL is whether the accumulated result of that learning is sufficiently aligned with the required outcomes of units of competency and qualifications from national training packages. The evidence gathered is required to answer the question, "Should this learner be recognised as having met the requirements for partial or total completion of a formal certification or qualification(s)?" Misko *et al* (2007) place an emphasis on RPL as an assessment process. Further, they do not recognise accelerated progress within a course as RPL.

Recognition of current competency

As Hargreaves (2006) notes, RCC "*is a term particularly used by industry and employers who regard the process as assessing and recognising a person's current capacity to perform in a particular job role*". It is important to note the requirement that the assessment is both time sensitive and specific to a job context. The key differences between RPL and RCC are that RPL is concerned with entry into a program of study whereas RCC relates to current performance in a specific job. RPL does not necessarily require the same level of currency and it may be appropriate to recognise 'non-current' competency for the purpose of RPL in certain circumstances. In a number of cases, the RCC acronym is actually used to mean recognition of current capability. Such usage underscores an issue that measuring 'competence' and 'competencies' will be quite different in both process and outcome.

Recognition of informal learning

This term was encountered in the ACE sector. The intent of RIL is also that of RPL (Misko, 2007), however, the mission and philosophies of the ACE sector are sufficiently different to that of the VET sector for RIL to exist as a different term. The ACE sector itself contains many different organisations and has an important role in providing pathways for adults to engage with formal education and training providers, and/or employment. An important part of this work is through recognition of the informal learning that has taken place in life experiences. Their application of the term is generally in the context of skill development to break disengagement barriers and is not as closely focused on the units of competency as described in the training packages. The ACE sector states difficulties in working with RPL as used by the VET sector.

Relationship between RPL and RCC

The different terms have arisen to describe the practicalities of what is required in each case and they are not interchangeable. It could even be asserted that in many situations RCC is not achievable by training programs in the VET sector unless they are comprised of sufficiently authentic and contextually specific job performance measures.

It is feasible that on-the-job performance as measured by RCC can be translated into RPL for the purpose of advanced standing; however, it is unlikely that RPL in a non-specific context could be translated into RCC measures.

RPL and RCC may be usefully considered as two different currencies. While RPL can be used as a currency within the VET sector or for entry into the VET sector, it is not the same currency that is used in the workplace with job specific requirements. As stated in an interview with by Dr Marcus Bowles regarding the concept of competencies being used as a form of currency, "*the currency gets changed into other denominations when it gets spent*".

In the context of this discussion it is useful to characterise the concerns of RPL and RCC as providing pathways for:

- transition into VET
- mobility within the VET sector
- transition from VET into the workforce and,
- transition between VET and Higher Education.

These will be dealt with as separate issues for the purpose clarity but the significance of their interrelationship will be preserved.

Functions of RPL and RCC

One of the aims of this survey is to understand the way in which standards, processes and tools could be introduced to streamline RPL and RCC systems and improve interoperability across the VET system and beyond. This section is focused specifically on analysing the problem space in such a way that it clarifies the interrelationship between RPL and RCC functions, and therefore, how tools may be used to support these activities. From a VET perspective, the use of RPL and its relationship with RCC contains three areas of concern:

- (a) Transition into VET via RPL
- (b) Mobility within the VET sector and
- (c) Transition from VET into the workforce via RCC or to further study.

While it is useful to separate these areas for analysis, they are all part of the same set of issues concerned with "*a personal learning, competence and skill attainment history*", and therefore, data needs to be usable across the three functions.

Transition into VET via RPL

This activity is concerned with the establishment of a 'portfolio' of evidence that may be used to satisfy the AQTF 2007 definition of RPL as implemented by a jurisdiction or RTO. It is well recognised that the collection of a suitable portfolio of evidence may be a complex task, and there appears to be a lack of tools to support RPL

applicants. The assessment is currently a labour intensive process based around primarily physical evidence or the provision of digital evidence via physical media. There does not appear to be any software application that currently exists outside the context of an education or training institution that provides a suitable 'portfolio-like' function for applicants. This means it is almost certain that prospective entrants into the VET system will not be able to create or maintain an electronic portfolio (e-portfolio) unless they are enrolled in an education or training institution or are an alumnus of an institution that provides such a function. If students undertake education or training within multiple institutions it is probably counter-productive to have their evidential portfolio distributed across multiple institutions.

As a result, the exchange of data with a third-party e-portfolio host becomes an important consideration. In addition, there is the need to store and manage training or professional development data that may originate from various private training providers or employers outside of either VET or Higher Education sectors. To maintain its value as an authorised record, this data must be uploaded from a trusted source and should not be editable by the portfolio owner although they may be able to control its display to selected viewers.

It is also true that participation in certain industries may not produce artefacts that would become part of a portfolio of support and that other forms of assessment would be more useful, eg workplace assessments. For example, this may be true of trades and manufacturing workers or those that have no formal education or training.

In interviews with survey respondents and as noted in the review by Hargreaves (2006), there are several impediments to the uptake of RPL. Such issues would include the lack of information and processes that would assist potential applicants, the use of terminology that is unfamiliar to applicants, and the overall complexity of the process which acts as a disincentive to both applicant and assessor. As a result, the proportion of students granted RPL in publicly funded VET between 2001 and 2005 is approximately 4% of all VET students (Misko *et al*, 2007). This relatively low proportion impacts the potential significance of RPL as a mechanism to transition into VET more efficiently and also reduces the sample size of those using tools to support RPL. It is interesting to note that according to Misko *et al* (2007) the general trend in RPL is a slight decrease over the 2001 to 2005 period.

It has been indicated by respondents during interview and by Hargreaves (2006) that some statistics relevant to RPL are not currently recorded. Once learners have been enrolled into a course they are still eligible for accelerated progression through that course when they are able to demonstrate the required competencies. It is stated that participation rates may be as high as 10% (Hargreaves, 2006) once these statistics are included. One could also argue, however, that if the primary role of RPL is to negate the need for learners to even enrol in courses for which they are able to demonstrate competency, then accelerated progression is not fulfilling the same purpose and should be measured separately. Misko *et al* (2007) do not consider accelerated progression as a part of RPL.

Mobility within the VET Sector

Mobility within the VET sector is a less complicated issue. Government policy requires cross recognition of the completion of units of competency, and therefore, the training that has been satisfactorily completed. The reliance on national standards for the training packages, which include units of competency and common assessment requirements, provide for transportability of training between both RTOs and jurisdictions. Software applications can be used to improve the efficiency of these processes, however, the processes themselves are well understood and well rehearsed in practice.

An issue that does create some difficulty are those instances where units of competency are described differently in different training packages. It has been reported that as many as 24 different instances of what is substantively the same unit of competency for customer service have been found in different training packages. This impacts mobility within the sector and the ability to use software tools to support such processes.

Transition from VET into the workforce

Transition from VET into the workforce provides useful opportunities for software tools to be deployed to support both current and improved processes. In later sections of this report a concise review of the tools being used in the context of RPL is given.

The development of the national training packages for VET is normally undertaken in close partnership with industry. This ensures a close alignment of the units of competency with industry requirements; however, there is some dissonance with regard to the way VET competencies are expressed and the detailed requirements of certain industry sectors. Where employers require statements of current competency, the requirement for job specificity can be problematic in VET-based training and competency assertions. The current VET training package format for units of competency does not include behavioural competency which is often required by employers.

At a technical level this can be achieved by extending the data storage capability of the data model so that the additional elements could be captured and stored. While this would not impact the compliance of units of competency, it is not clear what other impacts this may have on the assessment processes, requirements for new content to be included in learning materials or the variations that would be required in training activities to allow the additional assessment to occur.

When a student has transitioned from VET into the workforce, there is once again no single place where the personal learning, skill acquisition and continuing education results can be stored and managed by the learner along with any other artefacts that act as evidence of achievement. This issue would need to be addressed separately. Within the context of a software application to support this need, there would also be the requirement to translate evidence gathered externally back into data that could be used for RPL requirements. These issues may vary according to industry and job types. For instance, the nature of evidence collected may vary between, say, nursing and carpentry, social work and interior design, accounting and engineering in the context of defence, and other similar examples.

An important consideration for RCC is the ability to gather authentic evidence that satisfies both the currency and competence elements as well as the behavioural elements. This suggests the ability to gather such evidence in authentic situations, include mobile devices, and to exchange data with central infrastructure in such a way that it can be shared with other stakeholders when required.

The concept of a 'repository' that holds a personal learning, competence and skill attainment history for an individual is suggestive of the functions provided by e-portfolio systems. In the context of the current discussion, it also suggests that such a repository will need to exist outside the context of a single institution, RTO or jurisdiction. The data should also be stored in ways that would facilitate a direct translation of RCC data into RPL evidence.

Further investigation and specification of the requirements of tools for these purposes is an important future activity.

During the course of this survey, it was indicated that a new set of tools would emerge during the first half of 2008. These tools should be reviewed when available.

Transition between VET and Higher Education

While the original brief for this project did not specifically include the issues related to the transitions between VET and Higher Education, it was found that the bi-directional pathway between the two sectors is important to consider within the context of a complete skill recognition strategy. There is a lot of activity between the sectors and while in some instances the articulation between VET and Higher Education is guided by well formed policy (eg where a VET qualification provides advanced standing into a Higher Education qualification) there are still many areas where policies and procedures have not been formulated. This is, in part, due to the differences in RPL procedures between VET and Higher Education and how governing policies are formulated in each sector.

This bi-directional pathway between the sectors is a difficult area, even for those universities that are dual sector. Some of the difficulties directly relevant to this survey are the differences in both language and data that are used in each sector. While VET has standardised the language of competencies and a method to codify the relevant data, Higher Education has never been comfortable with that terminology and the sector is generally more fragmented. Many universities express the achievements of students in terms of 'graduate attributes' and 'outcomes' however the interrelationship between the terminologies used in the different sectors remains unclear. In order to provide software tools, data structures and standards that would provide the basis for data interchange and conformance requirements it would first be necessary to clarify the terminology interrelationships and how they could be expressed reliably in data structures that would allow interoperability.

National policy context

RPL and the broader term of skills recognition have had a renewed focus at a national and state/territory policy level. Recent policy announcements and VET sector reforms such as Skilling Australia, COAG and the National Quality Council initiatives, implementation of the AQTF 2007, licensing reform and national VET workforce development have highlighted the need to improve RPL practice.

Skilling Australia – New Directions for Vocational Education and Training, DEST, February 2005, outlined changes in the VET system with guiding principles including:

1. industry and business needs must drive training policies, priorities and delivery
2. better quality training and outcomes for clients, through more flexible and accelerated pathways, must be assured and
3. processes should be simplified and streamlined.

COAGs Meeting 10 February 2006 Communiqué, included a section on human capital which provides a renewed emphasis on skills recognition:

To make the most of existing skills in the workforce, COAG has agreed that a better process to recognise the existing skills of all people entering training will be introduced by January 2007, so that workers do not have to repeat or undertake training for skills they have already acquired on the job.

The National Quality Council is influencing VET reform with the council spear-heading changes to areas such as the implementation of the AQTF 2007, skills sets,

next generation training packages, employability skills, equity in VET, quality indicators and excellence criteria and harmonisation with regulatory and licensing requirements http://www.nqc.tvetaustralia.com.au/about_nqc

In 2006, COAG commissioned a review of the AQTF, with the aim of becoming more outcomes-focused, increasing the emphasis on skills outcomes over inputs and processes and encouraging more innovation and flexibility in RTOs.

The resulting AQTF 2007 framework adopts a modern approach to regulation, taking into account recent trends in regulatory reform, particularly the move towards a more flexible and responsive regulatory focus. A key feature is the underpinning concept of 'continuous improvement', with increased opportunities for RTO's to demonstrate excellence in quality training delivery and assessment:

Assessment (including RPL):

- a. meets the requirements of the relevant training package or accredited course*
- b. is conducted in accordance with the principles of assessment and the rules of evidence*
- c. meets workplace, and where relevant, regulatory requirements.*

Evidence for RTOs in other elements of the essential standards includes an RPL strategy, processes, pre-enrolment information, gathering information about learners and validation of RPL assessments.

Further information in regard to the AQTF 2007 can be found at the following website: <http://www.training.com.au>

Reframing the Future, the national VET workforce development initiative has a number of priorities and programs of funding, with a major focus on 'RPL Done Well' through a series of forums conducted in a number of capital cities in 2006. The 'RPL Done Well' publication with case studies and examples of good practice is available from <http://www.reframingthefuture.net>. A national RPL network has been established with the support of Reframing the Future funding.

Other RPL related projects and initiatives have been funded through the Framework.

Key findings

Systemic issues

- F1. Systemic barriers still exist to the implementation of RPL
- F2. Funding models affect adoption of RPL/RCC/RIL
- F3. Skills recognition must be considered in context
- F4. Support for RPL assessment 'in situ' is required
- F5. Clear differences exist between public and private sector RPL/RCC
- F6. Wider multi-sectoral alignment could support lifelong learning
- F7. There are inconsistencies in common skills across training packages
- F8. Assessments for RPL are often burdened by complex terminology.

Support for tools

- F9. RPL practice currently has limited use of technology
- F10. Numerous impediments to RPL and RPL tool adoption still exist in RTOs
- F11. Differences in RPL processes and systems exist between jurisdictions

F1. Systemic barriers still exist to the implementation of RPL

While an important focus of the survey was to identify the software applications being used to support RPL processes and then comment on areas where interoperability is likely to be a problem, the interviews were more frequently constrained by systemic *Issues related to RPL*. Hargreaves' (2006) review of previous research found that a number of interrelated factors are acting as barriers to effective RPL. "*These include individuals' lack of awareness and understanding of RPL, providers' concerns about the practice of RPL and its costs vis-a-vis funding arrangements.*" During the interviews as part of this survey these factors were again confirmed and interviewees also stated that the language was cumbersome, and emphasised some of the more practical issues relating to the practice of RPL. The combination of these factors acts as an immediate constraint to the adoption of RPL itself and thus also impacts the use of tools and processes that support RPL, RCC, and RIL.

F2. Funding models affect adoption of RPL/RCC/RIL

It would seem that if state, territory and national Governments made targeted investments towards resolving existing issues that are impacting the adoption or effectiveness of RPL/RCC/RIL, the return on such investment would be substantial. Nonetheless, any such investment should be clearly targeted to providing real solutions to the problems preventing or minimising the value of RPL rather than focusing only on issues concerned with the volume of assessments being undertaken. The latter would be more likely to be achieved across systems and jurisdictions once the impediments have been removed. Victoria for example is acting on both issues simultaneously with a study to determine jurisdictional impediments to RPL and is also promoting volume targets for RPL via the Skills Stores initiative.

F3. Skills recognition must be considered in context

A significant professional development activity has arisen from the approach adopted by Western Australia (WA), where there is a focus on assessing competencies in clusters rather than at the unit of competency level. The purpose for this approach is to reduce the complexity of language of RPL, which has been identified as a major barrier. This focus is somewhat different to that found in most other jurisdictions. The most similar approach is Tasmania where the use of technologies such as the *QTI m-Player* has been explored to conduct on-the-job assessments.

.As part of the planning process for assessing clusters of competencies, an administrative, course planning, assessment planning and apprentice management tool called the ASsessment and Resulting Interface (ASRI) is used to design the assessment to be used in RPL. This has an added value because it automatically relates the assessment back to course planning and to the clustered competencies in training packages.

The value of workplace assessment of authentic tasks is emphasised in professional development workshops. It is reported that wherever the WA RPL workshops have been conducted, the uptake of RPL and confidence with RPL assessments has

increased. Due to this novel approach to RPL no suitable software application has been found and a tender process for the development of a new RPL support tool has been commenced.

F4. Support for RPL assessment 'in situ' is required

A significant professional development activity has arisen from the approach adopted by WA. The approach is somewhat different to that found in most other jurisdictions. The most similar approach is that of Tasmania where they have explored the use of technologies such as the *QTI m Player* to conduct on-the-job assessments.

The WA approach has not yet adopted this tool, however, the models are consistent. In order to reduce the complexity of language of RPL, they have established a focus on assessing competencies in clusters rather than assessing at the unit of competency level as used in the training package descriptions. As part of the planning process an administrative, course planning, assessment planning and apprentice management tool (ASRI) is used to design the assessment to be used in RPL. This has an added value that it automatically relates the assessment back to course planning and to the clustered competencies in training packages.

The value of workplace assessment of authentic tasks is emphasised. Professional development workshops that were designed in WA are not being taken to other jurisdictions. It is reported that wherever these workshops have been conducted, the uptake of RPL and confidence with RPL assessments have both increased. Due to their different approach to RPL they have not found any software application that meets their needs, including those commonly used by other jurisdictions. As a result they will enter a tender process to have a new RPL support tool designed and developed.

F5. Clear differences exist between public and private sector RPL/RCC

For private RTOs and enterprises, skills recognition is more commonly undertaken as RCC (Recognition of Current Competency or Capability Measurement). The systems used are also typically unique to the enterprise concerned so that there are interoperability issues in the interchange of data with other systems external to the enterprise.

For industry and business, the focus on RCC is also typically more on performance, talent management, succession, workforce planning/job design, and development planning linkages. During consultations it was suggested that the intersection of established RPL for training and or certification does not necessarily align well with such processes.

Moreover, within the corporate context the interest in competencies is not just about national competencies and accredited training but also includes knowledge, capabilities, behaviors and links to competencies that are not typically associated with Australian occupation types. This strong focus on behavioral competencies is not reflected in VET structure and is more to do with job outcomes rather than learning outcomes. One respondent also observed that *"the IR [industrial relations] implications also have to be stressed; that is why the training aspects are too blunt an approach as the IR implications are huge for most corporations"*. From an employee/union perspective it could be argued that pay rates should be linked with competencies. From the employer perspective, however, competencies are all about things like recruitment, job performance, succession planning, and talent management. While competencies are currency within the RTO world (in a training and learning outcomes sense) they are not necessarily viewed like this in the corporate context.

F6. Wider multi-sectoral alignment could support lifelong learning

RPL is not often viewed holistically as a common currency supporting lifelong learning objectives and models. Lifelong learning is often artificially disrupted by the segmentation of funding approaches across the learning opportunity spectrum. A holistic approach to skills recognition and the recognition of competence in the context of lifelong learning could function equally well across informal and formal learning, VET and Higher Education, or workplace skills and certification/qualification. This is not the current status with regard to RPL/RCC/RIL. In Higher Education, the notion of competencies being applied to learning outcomes is often rejected. This is frequently a rejection of the term 'competency' which is seen to relate to task-based training activities which are often not considered applicable to the sector. This is despite the evidence of research to the contrary provided by researchers such as Bowden and Masters (1993), Bowden (1997), Brown and Duguid (1996).

The current approaches to records of evidence of the attainment of skills and/or graduate attributes vary considerably between VET, Higher Education and the needs of employers. E-portfolio adoption is growing in the Higher Education sector (although with variation in functionality) while in the VET sector the trend is to adopt single application tools for RPL which enable self-assessment and the collection of third party evidence, including work samples. This investigation found no examples of e-portfolio applications used to support skills recognition (although it is possible that some instances may exist within individual RTOs). While there is little issue of interoperability of the structure of data that describes competencies within the VET sector, the way in which the data is stored is not consistent (see the tools section of this report). In addition, a lack of interoperability is likely to occur when a learner is transitioning between sectors. This is likely to affect the transition of learners' data or their personal 'lifelong learning history' as they move from VET sector to the Higher Education sector or industry.

F7. There are inconsistencies in similar skills across training packages

Competencies representing similar skills such as customer service or occupational health and safety (OH&S) are defined differently in different training packages. These definitions are often not interoperable and can therefore affect RPL. However, it is acknowledged that while many skills may be common across occupational areas there will often be specific additional required skills.

F8. Assessments for RPL are often burdened by complex terminology

The current language of competencies in the training packages is often too complex and cumbersome to be approachable to most of the participants in RPL processes.

F9. RPL Practice currently has limited use of technology

A fundamental theme in the consultations related to the views of VET practitioners on the use of technology to support RPL processes. Whilst some tools have been developed, they mostly relate to self-assessment of the candidate against national competency standards or qualifications and the collection or identification of evidence to support RPL claims. VET practitioners are very concerned where it may be suggested that an RPL application or assessment decision or evidence verification could be automated. This goes to the very heart of their assessment practice and professional judgment as it suggests that their role could be redundant ie undertaken by an electronic tool. It is useful to note that this concern is not unlike previous concerns regarding e-learning replacing teaching/academic staff.

F10. Numerous impediments to RPL and RPL tool adoption still exist in RTOs

Several respondents commented on the range of impediments to RPL adoption, including:

- Sufficient knowledge of RPL – in a number of cases respondents commented that the level of understanding around RPL with staff and employers (including assessors) in most RTOs would be generally low.
- RPL practices and job roles – complications arise in the way RPL is administered with respect to cost and recognition of time spent by practitioners for RPL activities. RPL is often an additional load on teaching staff and the models for remuneration often differ. In WA for example, while the notional load of RPL is equivalent, an assessor may not be remunerated unless the RPL application is successful. Complicating the administration is how the RPL workload for the VET practitioner is calculated (is it part of all VET practitioners work or on top of) and what funding source is used. While there is some evidence to suggest that individual processes and practices in relation to the RPL assessment are less efficient and more complicated than necessary the problem is not necessarily easy to overcome. The concerns surrounding the potential for problems arising from audits tend to make teachers and trainers cautious and the lack of 'best practice models' for RPL assessments lead to diverse and individualistic approaches. In some circumstances these have lead to uncontrolled increase in cost because the teacher/trainer has tended to teach/train rather than assess. In some jurisdictions there is indication of a latent industrial relations issue with regard to job function/job description and any requirement to undertake RPL assessments. If not resolved, this issue could severely impact RPL.
- Funding – RPL tends to be a marginalised activity that is performed during lunch breaks at a rate that is not equivalent to that of teaching/training. There is also a substantial difference between rates for teaching the same training packages in the ACE sector compared to the VET sector which further impacts RPL activities suggesting that RPL criteria may need to be further qualified. As mentioned previously, there are situations in which an RPL assessment may be undertaken but the work may not be remunerated unless the application is successful. This creates artificial pressure to either pass all applicants or to refuse RPL assessments because they may be unfunded effort if unsuccessful. There are also other issues which may be incorrectly regarded as funding issues from a teacher's/trainer's perspective. For instance, it has been reported that in some situations poor practice and lack of guidance has meant that instead of RPL being an assessment activity, it becomes a one-on-one teaching/training activity over an extended period. This is outside the scope of RPL and should be replaced with better practices. From the teacher's/trainer's perspective, however, this is observed as a funding issue.
- Complexity – RPL is often reported as being complex. The complexity arises from an applicant's lack of understanding of competencies, the language used for competencies as described in training packages, and how they relate to current work functions. This makes it difficult for applicants to gather and provide the appropriate evidence and difficult for teachers/trainers to undertake the assessment as a result.

F11. Differences in RPL processes and systems exist between jurisdictions

Most states and territories do not use electronic RPL tools on a jurisdiction-wide level. Queensland and Victoria have implemented a first stage pre-assessment model with Skills Stores. A Skill Store consultant will assist a potential applicant with

a pre-assessment of their eligibility to apply for RPL and will then refer them to the RTO most suited to their skill recognition or training requirements. The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) has a model that can be described as a virtual skills store approach and South Australia (SA) is announcing Skills Store implementation in 2008. Where this centralised model has been implemented, the Competency Navigator tool is being utilised. Western Australia has also expressed their plans to move towards a Skill Store model.

The funding made available from COAG has not been used in the same way by all states and territories. Because funding was on a 'matched' or 'dollar-for-dollar' basis in many cases, there was negotiation with COAG regarding the eligibility of state/territory-based projects to be recognised in relation to the matching of funds dedicated to state and territory initiatives. Some states and territories have applied the funding directly to RPL activities, however, some jurisdictions (eg Victoria) were able to negotiate matched funding recognition for longer term projects (eg Skills Stores which is a multi-year project) while dedicating the national money to short-term analytical or development projects.

States and territories with smaller but distributed populations have focused on the provision of centralised technology resources to support RPL, whereas states such as Victoria² and New South Wales (NSW) were less inclined to provide centralised technology but would support solutions at a more local level, although in the case of NSW the primary issue has been more to do with cost. WA is also looking to move to a centralised approach. This has impacted the way in which software applications to support RPL have been selected, adopted and implemented, although the total volume of RPL prior to entry into the VET system is only approximately 4% (Hargreaves, 2006) and thus any assumptions concerning the uptake of tools to support RPL are probably drawn from a smaller than useful sample size. Where independent choices can be made in relation to software selection, the likelihood for problems in interoperability is significant where no standards or selection criteria related to interoperability of applications are in effect.

While differences between the states and territories clearly exist, it is also important to note that at the RTO level the policies and procedures for RPL are generally consistent in terms of needing to comply with the AQTF 2007.

² While Victoria has implemented the Skills Store approach as a jurisdiction-wide approach there is no centralised technology provision as such.

Jurisdictional summary

Australian Capital Territory

<p>Overview of activities</p> <p>The COAG RPL Project is jointly funded over three years from 2006 to 2009 by the Australian Government and the ACT Government to simplify the RPL process by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trial and evaluation of a web-enabled self assessment tool • investigating evidence requirements against work activities • developing training plans for skill gaps. <p>RTOs on the panel can apply for funding to deliver gap training identified in this project under pilot programs.</p>
<p>Policies and processes</p> <p>Policies within the ACT are formulated by COAG and in accordance with national policies such as the AQTF. These national policies have been adopted in the wording within contracts with RTOs. However, during consultation it was noted that there are many different RTOs (some local to ACT, some national, some small and some broad ranging), each of whom implements RPL in their own way. The trial use of the Competency Navigator is underway within Community and Health Services (Children's Services), Tourism and Hospitality (Chefs), and Building and Construction (Plumbers) Training Packages. If successful the program will be extended to include the ACT Public Service Training Package.</p> <p>However, one of the identified problems during consultation is that these tools are not open to the public and assessors need training.</p>
<p>Tools used</p> <p>Trial use of the Competency Navigator.</p>
<p>Further information</p> <p>ACT Skills Recognition and RTO registry: http://www.det.act.gov.au/services/skillsrecognition</p>

New South Wales

<p>Overview of activities</p> <p>The Department of Education and Training in NSW has implemented a number of professional development and networking strategies. Activities have included the establishment of RPL networks across South Western Sydney (RPL On Line) and the Hunter region. The networks aim to provide practitioners with the opportunity to discuss and share ideas and strategies and explore the available electronic RPL tools.</p> <p>TAFE NSW is using COAG RPL funds to implement a professional development plan to build staff capability in providing effective skills recognition. This included an initial program under the banner of State of Recognition covering the range of existing tools, strategies and processes that will facilitate their approach to granting recognition.</p> <p>The State of Recognition – REAL program ran workshops in May – June across all TAFE NSW institutes. The TAFE NSW International Centre for VET Teaching and Learning also facilitated an RPL Colloquium in June 2007. TAFENSW has committed to 'RPL being a key focus for VET and TAFE NSW as a whole and an opportunity to bring</p>

TAFE NSW closer together.'.
Virtual RPL (Advisory and Referral Centre)
The Virtual RPL (Advisory and Referral Centre) Project is funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and NSW Department of Education and Training (DET). The main product of the project will be a website which provides an RPL 'map' which explains the RPL process while estimating the time and cost of the application.
Phase 1 will be launched in December 2007, with Phase 2 in September 2008 and Phase 3 in 2009. Whilst this project is managed by NSW it is national in focus.
Policies and processes
NSW RPL policies and procedures are based upon the requirements of the AQTF 2007 with a broad range of state based courses used in addition to national training packages.
Tools used
A number of tools have been developed by TAFENSW including <i>Prove It!</i> and <i>Skills Pro</i> that are used in some faculties within some institutes but not across the board. TAFENSW institutes have recently negotiated a state wide agreement for the Competency Navigator tool. At a jurisdictional level, across all NSW RTOs and NSW DET, no one tool is supported.
Further information
Virtual RPL Project http://virtualrplproject.com/
TAFE NSW Recognition resources http://www.tafensw.edu.au/applyenrol/recognition/

Northern Territory

Overview of activities
The NT RPL Program is jointly funded by the Australian Government and the NT Government and is aimed at assisting RTOs and assessment centres to offer streamlined skills assessment and recognition and assist individuals and employers to be better informed about RPL. The RPL Program commenced on 1 July 2006 and will lapse on 30 June 2009. This activity is being driven by RPL project grants of \$40,000. Two projects were funded in the first round and two more rounds of funding are planned.
<i>Note:</i> NT uses the SA curriculum for years 11 and 12 and therefore refers to some Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia (SSABSA) resources.
Policies and processes
Policies within the NT are framed to include recognition of current competency within RPL but they do not accommodate credit transfer. Policies that relate to RPL take into account learning that has occurred outside schooling and can be recognised through a range of application/interview processes. Policies include:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Provisions Policy – Interrupted Schooling • VET Policy – The NT recognises 12-15 units of standalone VET, and recognises competencies according to groupings (eg Group 1 subjects focus on humanities and communication).

Community Learning Policy – This ‘Recognition of Community Learning’ also accommodates community learning gained through experience(s) or a learning program that does not follow a formal, accredited curriculum.
Tools used
Currently, there are no tools and systems that have relevance to electronic support for RPL/RCC in the national system. However, a ‘Toolbox’ is currently being trialed with remote students in relation to careers advice.
Further information
NT Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) – Training Policies http://www.deet.nt.gov.au/training/policies/ NT DEET RPL Policy http://www.deet.nt.gov.au/training/policies/docs/nt_rpl_funding_policy.pdf Step Up Community Learning http://www.stepup.ssabsa.sa.edu.au/ Dovaston Training Centre RPL information http://www.dovaston.com.au/faqs.htm Charles Darwin University RPL resources http://learnline.cdu.edu.au/t4l/teachinglearning/planning.html

Queensland

Overview of activities
Through its <i>SkillsFirst</i> program (see <i>Case study</i> section), the QLD Government is currently building upon an earlier program known as <i>Skilling Solutions</i> specifically designed to encourage skills recognition and referral to providers and support for individuals and employers. The skills stores aim to increase the uptake of apprenticeships and also provide subsidies for mature aged training in targeted industry areas. Supporting these services is an ‘RPL Preferred Supplier Framework’ that is designed to encourage the adoption of efficient RPL practice.
Policies and processes
RPL policies within QLD are framed in order to support granting full or part qualifications to individuals who have earned skills and knowledge through formal or informal training and education, work experience and general life experience. The RPL assessment benchmarks are the same no matter what the pathway (training and assessment, RPL, etc). These benchmarks are usually the endorsed competency standards from training packages which means that the ‘Principles of Assessment’ and ‘Rules of Evidence’ must be adhered to in the same way as any other form of assessment. Assessments may involve: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work samples or photos of work samples • practical demonstrations • assessment interviews • references and support from supervisors • training certificates • performance reviews. Policies include incentives for both individuals wishing to undertake RPL as well as for

RTOs to update their processes that support RPL.
Tools used
<p>The 'Fast Track' RPL process used by Skills Solutions Customer Service Centres is based on the Competency Navigator tool, and enables individuals to identify their competencies and qualification pathways.</p> <p>In the initial stage, tool development has focused on Assessor Kits that are based upon a consistent model for 30 trade and 50 non-trade vocational qualifications. <i>SmartJobs Info</i> has been developed as a labour market tool and career planning tool that provides information about employment trends in 340 occupations.</p> <p>There are plans to develop a simple skills self-identification tool to assist in pre-assessment that will integrate with private and public RTO enrolment systems which should enable RTOs to identify skills quickly at the enrolment stage.</p>
Further information
<p>Queensland Skilling Solutions and SkillsFirst http://www.skillingsolutions.qld.gov.au/rto/fast_track.htm</p> <p>Assessor Kits http://www.trainandemploy.qld.gov.au/partners/training_delivery/rpl/skills_first/assessor_kits_complete.html</p> <p>SkillsFirst Toolkits http://www.trainandemploy.qld.gov.au/partners/training_delivery/rpl/skills_first/toolkits.html</p>

South Australia

Overview of activities
<p>The SA Government through the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST) has implemented an RPL program which will see the formation of a new Skills Recognition Service to promote the use of RPL. The service will provide information and advice to employers and individuals on recognition of skills and obtainment of qualifications through an initial evaluation of an individual's skills and likely success in gaining partial/full qualifications through RPL. Referral to an appropriate RTO for assessment will then follow a similar model to the skills store model in Queensland and Victoria. A RPL network has also been established, with grants for RTOs for the engagement of RPL coaches and mentors.</p>
Policies and processes
<p>SA's policy development and implementation of a range of activities is aimed at increasing the level of RPL and reflects the AQTF 2007 requirements.</p>
Tools used
<p>When launched, the SA centralised model for self-assessment and referral to an RTO for RPL application processing will use the Competency Navigator tool.</p>
Further information
<p>DFEEST training portal http://www.training.sa.gov.au/</p> <p>TAFE SA RPL resources http://www.tafe.sa.edu.au/StudyOptions/RecognitionofPriorLearning/tabid/637/Default.aspx</p>

Tasmania

Overview of activities
Tasmania has established an RPL Network across the state and has run a number of professional development activities. Private RTOs are also involved in a Reframing the Future project connecting with VIC and WA members in relation to RPL.
Policies and Processes
The TAS Government is currently determining the views of industry and other clients of the training system and training providers on the management of VET in TAS. This consultation will take place through the release of the Skilling Tasmania Discussion Paper, through direct liaison and through a series of forums to be held throughout the state.
Tools used
There are no electronic RPL tools supported at a jurisdiction wide level.
Further information
Skills Tasmania http://www.skills.tas.gov.au/ Department of Education – Skills Recognition www.education.tas.gov.au/vet/employers/stafftraining/needs_assessment/skills_recognition

Victoria

Overview of activities
<p>The Department of Education has implemented 'Skills Stores' as an initiative under the VIC Government's skills agenda. They provide free professional advice and information about VET, an initial assessment of an applicant's existing skills, and referral to specific training organisations for RPL. The Skills Stores have been established in accessible locations such as shopping centres or through a mobile service.</p> <p>The TAFE Development Centre has been undertaking a training needs analysis of the RTO networks working within the skills store model. Professional development is being provided for staff. A series of workshops have been conducted across the TAFE sector for Executive Team and Senior Managers to consider strategies to improve the take up of RPL.</p> <p>A VIC RPL Network has also been established to share expertise, experience and resources, to promote consistency in RPL processes across the VET system, to develop the skills of assessors and to encourage the uptake of RPL.</p>
Policies and processes
<p>The implementation of the Skill Stores service has been designed to make VIC's VET system more accessible and easier to understand and is a major policy direction.</p> <p>Currently, there are Skills Stores locations and mobile services covering the regions of: Eastern Melbourne, North Western Melbourne, South Eastern Melbourne, Goulburn Ovens, Central Gippsland.</p> <p>By 2009, locations will include Ballarat, Geelong, Bendigo, Wodonga, Sunraysia, East Gippsland, South West Victoria and central Melbourne.</p>

Tools used
The tool used to support the Skills Store model is the Competency Navigator.
Further information
Skills Stores http://www.education.vic.gov.au/sensecyouth/careertrans/skillstore.htm Victorian RPL Network http://www.vta.vic.edu.au/?Name=SR_TAFE_RPL_Network

Western Australia

Overview of activities
<p>WA is concerned that its adoption of RPL is slightly lower than the national average. There has been a concentration of effort on providing high quality information, documentation and professional development to RTO assessors with an emphasis on consistency of process and practice.</p> <p>Two initiatives of major significance in WA are the move to implement a Skills Stores model and also the release of a tender for a software application to be developed to support RPL. Their experiences in the use of tools such as ASRI (see <i>Case study section</i>) will inform the tender requirements.</p> <p>WA recognises that the appointment of an RPL Coordinator at an RTO greatly assists many aspects of RPL implementation and are seeking to have an RPL coordinator at each RTO.</p>
Policies and processes
WA has developed a clustered competency approach and focus on job performance and tasks (more consistent with RCC concerns) in contrast to other states/territories which take a more granular view.
Tools used
WA has a requirement for tools that support their approach to clustered competencies and have found that none of the existing tools are suitable.
Further information
RPL Assessor's resource: http://www.vetinfonet.det.wa.edu.au/progdev/docs/rpl%20skills%20recognition.pdf

Tools and systems

The project team has identified the following software tools that are directly relevant to RPL, RCC, and RIL. While investigating these tools, other tools were identified as being of possible relevance in any future developments concerning systems interoperation and/or integration.

- CCM Solutions – Eddy and Capable
- Competency Navigator
- JigSaw Publications - ResourceBuilder
- Provelt!
- QTI M-Player
- SkillsPro Learning Plan Generator

NOTE: WA has been using the ASRI as a tool to support RPL. ASRI has not been included in this section because it has not been developed for RPL purposes. A description of its use has been included in the *Case studies* section.

CCM Solutions – Eddy and Capable

Name of application:	Eddy and Capable
Developed by:	Compliance and Competency Management (CCM Solutions) Level 1, 99 Frome Street Adelaide SA 5000 P: (08) 8412 5100
Brief description:	<p><i>Eddy</i> is a desktop tool allowing users to create online content and assessments. There are plans to expand the capability of <i>eddy</i> to receive feeds from the National Training Information Service (NTIS) website to auto-generate assessments against competencies for self-assessments or instructor led assessments.</p> <p>Using <i>eddy</i> to create a specific RPL evidence collection process allows assessors to input information about the process. It also allows them to create a variety of assessment combinations such as self-assessment, workplace, instructor-marked, online assessment, etc as required.</p> <p>CCM are developing a companion tool called <i>Capable</i> that will enable the specific RPL evidence collection process to be imported into their training management system and linked to the appropriate units in the structured catalogue. RPL candidates will be processed and the system will track the evidence and outcomes. Once passed, the candidate's training plan will reflect the achieved units.</p>
Data exchange formats:	RPL assessment types may include QTI type questions or word documents in check-list format and the ability to upload evidence. Content can also be output as SCORM 1.2 and in

	tab delimited format and XML
Data elements available for exchange:	Data varies but includes a complete 'portfolio' – otherwise understood as 'required and achieved' competencies as well as contact and some profile details.
Other comments:	The CCM product suite is marketed as accommodating the needs of both training and human resource (HR) management.
Further information	http://www.ccm-solutions.com/products_capable.htm

Competency Navigator

Name of application:	Competency Navigator
Developed by:	The Work Lab 373 Elizabeth Street North Hobart TAS 7000 P: (03) 6234 9422
Brief description:	<p>The <i>Competency Navigator</i> is an online skills assessment tool that is used in the context of skills recognition. An individual's competencies are identified through an assessment process and then these competencies are aligned to the competencies as stated in the national training packages.</p> <p><i>Competency Navigator</i> currently has 23,000 competency standards, 72 training packages and over 1,700 qualifications within its data set.</p> <p>Apart from supporting RPL during the enrolment phase it is also used to support course selection, career counselling and for profiling an organisation's workforce skills and capabilities.</p>
Data exchange formats:	The product is built on an open source platform which includes MySQL as the database. It is able to export assessment records as files in a variety of formats including XML, text file of declared structure, CSV, Word, PDF, or other formats if required by the client.
Data elements available for exchange:	Any/all fields as determined by the client.
Other comments:	Competency Navigator is used within Skills Stores in Victoria. Other jurisdictions (eg SA and NSW) are using it in similar ways. NSW has also entered a state-wide licensing agreement.
Further information	http://www.portal.competencynavigator.com/

Jigsaw – ResourceBuilder

Name of application:	ResourceBuilder
Developed by:	Jigsaw Publications 188 Sir Donald Bradman Drive, Cowandilla SA, 5037 P: (08) 8234 9780
Brief description:	<i>ResourceBuilder</i> has been designed primarily to assist in the gathering of evidence to support the RPL process. Clients are stepped through the collection of evidence (online) against small blocks of learning used to identify their prior learning. Each of these blocks (called 'mini publications') is mapped to performance criteria from various units of competency. Once the evidence has been collected and verified by an appropriate lecturer/RPL assessor, the client is marked as being either competent or not competent against each of the blocks of learning.
Data exchange formats:	It is anticipated ³ that the data could be exported as both XML and text, according to client requirements.
Data elements available for exchange:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • student identifiers. • competency, at the performance criteria level, giving a picture of which, if any, performance criteria need to be covered to ensure a student is competent in the entire unit or course. • PDFs of evidence uploaded by the student. • details of the trail of communication between student and RPL verifier..
Other comments:	<p>If a student is already competent in certain units, this information can be added to the student's records, to ensure they are automatically marked as competent in the blocks of learning relevant to these units. This will save them from having to re-enter evidence against these blocks. The entering of this information will be done manually, via the online interface, or possibly by the import of an appropriately formatted CSV file.</p> <p><i>ResourceBuilder</i> generates reports based on the results of the assessment. However, Jigsaw Publications is still in the development phase with this application and will be seeking advice on the best format for these reports to take to enable ease of upload into student management systems, and to provide a clear audit trail for RTOs.</p>
Further information	http://www.jigsawpublications.com.au

³ The ResourceBuilder is scheduled for release in late 2007

Prove It!

Name of application:	<i>Prove It!</i>
Developed by:	NSW TAFE Learning Technology Standards Centre for Learning Innovation
Brief description:	<i>Prove It!</i> assists the user build a portfolio of evidence and apply for recognition through a RTO. <i>Prove It!</i> contains information about the recognition process and an online self-assessment tool which will help users identify whether or not they are competent in the selected units of competency.
Data exchange formats:	There are no specific formats for data exchange with other systems. <i>Prove It!</i> produces reports in HTML and RTF formats. <i>Prove It!</i> is under further redevelopment and the requirements include the ability to import existing data from sources such as NTIS.
Data elements available for exchange:	None specified.
Other comments:	<i>Prove It!</i> is based upon recognising qualifications with a limited number supported to date.
Further information	http://www.proveit.edu.au/

QTI m-Player

Name of application:	QTI m-Player
Developed by:	Funded by the Australian Flexible Learning Framework, the tool was developed as a collaboration between technology companies and TAFE Tasmania.
Brief description:	This project is led by TAFE Tasmania and completed in conjunction with the private research and software engineering companies, the Institute For Working Futures and Intelitec Pacific. The field tests provided acceptance-testing and proof of product for a mobile application enabling the user to access, read, play, complete, record and report outcomes for IMS QTI 2.0 (Question and Test Interoperability) conformant assessment tools. The <i>QTI m-Player</i> TM for mobile devices will initially operate on any handheld mobile device with Microsoft® Windows® mobile TM 2005 or 2006 software. A portable device running Windows Mobile 2005 or 2006 is loaded with a QTI assessment application for performing on site surveys. This may include different question types (eg short answer questions, long answer questions, multiple choice formats etc). Once a survey has been completed, the application creates a 'zip' archive that contains a content

	<p>package described by an 'imsmanifest.xml' file and along with the survey xml files and various media files if gathered or created. This package is sent via email to the assessors email address.</p> <p>Email is used because it is potentially accessible from a range of mobile devices. There is no current functionality to upload to other software systems such as e-portfolios</p>
Data exchange formats:	IMS Content Packaging with IMS QTI assessments and supporting materials.
Data elements available for exchange:	Final result only which is expected to be entered into some form of student management system.
Other comments:	This software tool has been used in a number of pilot projects but it is not deployed system-wide in any jurisdiction at this stage.
Further information	http://qti.flexiblelearning.net.au/about.html

SkillsPro Learning Plan Generator

Name of application:	<i>SkillsPro</i> Learning Plan Generator
Developed by:	Manufacturing, Engineering, Construction and Transport (MEC&T) Curriculum Centre TAFE NSW P: (02) 9204 4663
Brief description:	The <i>SkillsPro</i> Learning Plan Generator is an application service developed by the MEC&T Curriculum Centre. It is designed to enable teachers and training providers to develop and deliver compliant training programs. Advanced features of the tool are designed to be used by private enterprise for task analysis and skills audits to identify work re-organisation and gap training needs to meet industry standards. Documents with customised data (generated because students may require different units of competency from a training package) can also be automatically generated.
Data exchange formats:	Compliant with training packages developed under the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and AQTF. Data in Excel spreadsheets, tables in Word documents and text files can be imported to tables in the application (a MS Access database). Data in the application can be exported to Excel spreadsheets. Reports can be exported as Word documents. Also exported as: mdb files
Data elements available for exchange:	Data elements that can be exported include: user details, units of competency in learning plan and RPL document
Other comments:	The <i>SkillsPro</i> Learning Plan Generator is not principally an

	<p>RPL tool as such – but by situating RPL tools within the development of personalised learning plans and the planning of program delivery it provides an integrated, holistic approach. RPL documents can be printed out to facilitate learners' self-evaluation and collection of evidence for RPL/RCC.</p> <p>Planned future capabilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • functionality of saving documentation electronically for inclusion in e-portfolios • functionality of linking to SIS (student information system) and Wex Online (an electronic log book of work experience) where needed
Further information	http://www.lq.tafensw.edu.au/skillspro/default.htm

Priorities for future work

This section is intended to provide the rationale and context for the recommendations to be considered for future action by the EEG. While the recommendations relating to the systemic and other issues will almost certainly have an impact on the deployment of standards and tools to support skill recognition processes, however they fall outside the scope for the EEG and thus are not covered in this section.

While various tools currently exist to provide a range of functions related to the recording of units of competency as part of the RPL assessment process, their deployment is limited by both context and jurisdiction (see the previous section on *Tools and systems*). There is not likely to be any single software application that will perform all functions related to the different expressions of skill recognition (RIL, RPL and RCC) nor is it recommended that a 'single, monolithic application' approach be taken. A more viable approach would be to allow flexibility in the choice of a range of interoperable software components at national, jurisdictional and individual RTO levels. The implementation of specific applications must be guided by a well articulated plan for the harmonisation of requirements across the skill recognition spectrum and by conformance requirements relating to data exchange, relevant standards (including AQTF 2007) and a strong focus on the interoperability of infrastructure, desktop applications and mobile devices. These are all viewed as important elements of the solution set.

Within that context, the most important elements of a solution strategy to provide both the harmonisation requirements and the conformance requirements would involve following these recommended activities:

Recommendation 1: *A project be undertaken to develop a framework for harmonising the data, standards and conformance requirements for the different expressions of skill recognition RPL for the VET sector, RCC for industry and employment and RIL for ACE sector. It is also recommended that this approach be extended to include bi-directional recognition requirements between VET and Higher Education and must include consultation with each sector. (For detail on this recommendation refer to Priorities for Future Work Item 1, 1a and 1b.)*

This recommendation requires an analysis of the nature and extent of any divergent or unmet data or technical requirements relating to the different forms of skill recognition that have been noted in the different sectors (RIL for the ACE; RPL for VET; RCC for industry/employment. It is also suggested that articulation

requirements for RPL between VET and Higher Education⁴ in either direction are included). This work should produce a framework which represents the interrelationships between the sectors and identifies the data requirements to support each sector and would include:

- a. An analysis of the level(s) of granularity at which data exchange will be required to take place in order to satisfy skill recognition across ACE, VET and industry; and,
- b. Development of an approach to the harmonization of the data used across the variations of skills recognition.

Recommendation 2: *A functional architecture should be developed for the holistic support of skill recognition across the sectors included in Recommendation 1. Existing tools should be analysed with regard to their suitability to perform required functions and interoperability and data exchange requirements should be identified and documented. (For detail on this recommendation refer to Priorities for Future Work Item 2, 2a to 2d.)*

The development of a functional architecture would provide holistic support for skill recognition across the sectors involved in Item 1. An analysis of relevant existing software applications and related technologies should be undertaken to determine their fit within that architecture. This work should include a determination regarding the interoperability and data exchange implications for such tools and would identify and describe any software tools that have not yet been developed or are not yet being used to support skill recognition. This work would include, for instance:

- a. An analysis of the approach to RPL developed by WA and how the clustered competency approach is supported by the ASRI tool so that the functional requirements of this method can be captured and aligned with the functional model;
- b. An analysis of the QTI m-Player as a mobile technology for RPL surveys and determine the interoperability and data exchange requirements;
- c. An analysis of the general suitability of e-portfolio-type applications (not necessarily any individual e-portfolio application) and their general ability to meet the agreed standards, conformance and data exchange requirements; and,
- d. Analyses of other software applications of interest as identified by the EEG or the Framework.

Recommendation 3: *An analysis be undertaken to assess the most effective methods for providing RIL support tools to the ACE sector in a manner that is consistent with the outcomes from Recommendations 1 and 2. (For detail on this recommendation refer to Priorities for Future Work Item 3.)*

Further analysis of the most effective method for providing tools to support RIL in the ACE sector is required. The analysis and resulting recommendations should address issues concerning the viability of providing tools for the ACE sector and whether these should exist at the level of national infrastructure or jurisdictional infrastructure. The provision of any such tools should be required to be consistent with the framework, standards, interoperability, and conformance requirements resulting from Items 1 and 2.

⁴ See section on *Transition between VET and Higher Education*, page 10 above

Recommendation 4: *Future tool development accommodates user friendliness and the ability of learners/candidates to self-serve components of the RPL process. This includes translation of VET language, catering for those disengaged from training and education, those not in the workforce and those requiring language literacy and numeracy support.*

Professional development and a national communication/support strategy should be developed to support exploration and implementation of RPL and e-portfolio tools.

Case studies and examples

Skills First, Queensland

http://www.skillsolutions.qld.gov.au/rto/fast_track.htm

Skills First has been developed as the Queensland Government's "new approach to recognition of prior learning, identified in Action 19 of the Queensland Skills Plan". It aims to:

- "boost the quality and quantity of recognition of prior learning in Queensland's VET sector
- increase Queensland's skills profile through more qualifications
- improve apprenticeship and traineeship completion rates
- provide a better match between the skills of the Queensland population and the needs of industry."

Skills First RPL Assessor Kits are now available as professional development resources from the Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Art's Resource Generator website. They have been developed as part of a strategy to "drive improvements in recognition of prior learning" and to "ensure recognition of prior learning assessment is practical, efficient and relevant". Although the materials are freely provided a registration process must first be completed in order to access these kits.

Consultations revealed:

- The Skilling Solutions program introduced in 2005 has provided a good foundation for *Skills First*.
- Skilling Solutions shop front – people turn up and look for a match between their skills and are then referred on to preferred suppliers depending on what skills have been recognised.
- *Skills First* is undoubtedly a successful program within a broader professional development program – figures are looking very good with RPL rates increasing. Targets are now being set (4% last year, 8% this year) and linked to funding.
- Awarding a number of small scholarships (\$500) in order to reduce fees on achieving qualifications has assisted in the RPL program.
- *Skills First* has already shown an increase in rates of RPL and has assisted in making the processes more user-friendly. Under the program dedicated positions (funded 0.5 EFT) have been provided for in each TAFE institute.

- Looking at trade recognition there was a desire to move away from the old tradesman register. Through the new program individuals are getting access to a *Certificate of Recognition* that then counts toward an RPL qualification pathway.
- The *Skills First* program is also developing new RPL tools – quite a few around media and trade qualifications (available via the Resource Generator website).
- The Assessor Kits provide a framework for assessors to assist them in the process of RPL documentation. Each kit also contains performance criteria.
- Each RTO is invited to participate in development of the Assessor Kits for each qualification involved prior to publication. (All states/territories are similar).

Skills First has also developed a Good Practice Guide for Streamlined, Client Focused, up-front Skills Assessment. Key messages include:

“A Skills First RPL Preferred Supplier provides high level client service that meets the client’s needs as well as the industries in which they are employed.

Skills First - RPL is not about the candidate supplying documentary evidence that is aligned to competency units and/or elements and performance criteria. Instead, Skills First is about creating an RPL assessment process that is user-friendly to the candidate and more closely linked to what they can do in the workplace.

Becoming a preferred supplier under the Skills First program may require some RTOs to reconsider their current RPL assessment practices. Skills First RPL requires implementing practices that are beyond, or different, to those an RTO may consider adequate against the AQTF 2007.

A Preferred Supplier works with the relevant industry in the development, delivery and continuous improvement of their RPL processes.”

RPL Network Online (RON), TAFE NSW

RON has been developed to support RPL assessors in their activities and professional development through a peer network facilitated by various web-based tools.

Three broad areas of support are enabled:

1. RPL Professional Development Workshops.

A series of three regional network forums within the south western Sydney region during 2007 that all practitioners are invited to attend.

<http://rplnetworkonline.wikispaces.com/Regional+Workshops>

2. RPL Online Discussions

Weekly meetings are facilitated by online tools (Adobe Connect Meeting Room). Regional forums are also supported by this tool.

<http://webconf.det.nsw.edu.au/swsiron/>

3. RPL resources and support

A wiki has been set up to capture all recent and relevant RPL materials. The wiki also provides links to the online discussions and offers the opportunity to ask questions of the network.

<http://rplnetworkonline.wikispaces.com/Resources>

TAFE NSW SkillsPro Learning Plan Generator

Clients use the RPL function of the Skills Pro Learning Plan Generator in three main ways:

- independently as an RPL tool
- as part of the process of developing personalised learning plans for students
- in planning delivery of learning/training programs.

Clients include:

- every institute/college/section within TAFE NSW where Generators are available
- a number of VIC TAFE institutes: Wodonga, Sunraysia, Kangan Batman and Ballarat University
- Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) – case study available at: <http://flexways.flexiblelearning.net.au/studies/ross.asp>
- The Generator is currently trialled by over 30 RTOs and TAFEs in SA, QLD and WA.

Currently available generators:

- Metal and Engineering Industry (MEM05)
- Coal Training Package (MNC04)
- Training and Assessment (TAA04)
- Automotive Industry Retail, Service and Repair (AUR04)
- Plumbing and Services (BCP03)
- General Construction (BCG03)
- Beauty (WRB04)
- Hairdressing (WRH06).

Soon to be available generators:

- NSW TAFE Framework (AEET)
- Community Services (CHC02)
- Business Services (BSB01)
- Financial Services (FNS04)
- Health (HLT07)

Future development: making this tool available Australia-wide for the whole range of training packages.

ASessment and Resulting Interface (ASRI)

The ASessment and Resulting Interface has been developed recently by ICT Training Solutions within TAFE WA and is being used by various RPL assessors within TAFE WA. Although this tool was not originally intended for RPL, it has been shown to add substantial value because it brings assessment for training courses together with assessment for RPL. It also allows an assessor to plan RPL assessments in the same they would plan training. The interface was created to bring several underlying resources together this has added value and has been said

to have simplified some the RPL planning and management activities. For further information refer to the ASRI User Guide.

ASRI provides authenticated access from any internet enabled laptop or PC, aides in AQTF compliance, supports Apprentice and Trainee management, and integrates several existing systems [specifically, the TDS data repository assessment application (ASM), the DET Training Package data (CMS-STARs), Apprentice & Trainee Management System (ATMS), and the Training Record System (TRS)].

By accessing the STARs data, ASRI facilitates the creation of Course Study Plans (CSP). These plans can be used for the creation of AQTF compliant Assessment Plans as well as delineate the verification of awards. To meet the unique requirements of a student, a customized CSP (i.e. a Student Study Plan) can be created. Because of the integration of the TDS data repository, all student details and their results can be associated with these plans.

In addition, Training Plan Outlines (TPOs) can be produced from CSPs/SSPs for management of Apprentices and Trainees. The tracking of a student's RTO (TAFEWA) and employer progress of their training plan (TPO) is accomplished by the ASRI Training Record Book (TRB). Contact and absences can also be tracked with their employers. Student results and the production of Statements of Academic Records (SAR), Statement of Attainment (SOA) are all handled through Award Management features of ASRI.

(Reproduced from the ASRI User Guide)

QTI m-Player assessment use case

A teacher is required to undertake 'on the job' assessment of students working in agriculture. The students are currently enrolled and have been set tasks to complete in accordance with their approved training plan. The student has emailed their teacher and assessor and advised that they are ready for assessment and have nominated days on which they will be available.

The assessor using their QTI m-Player downloads the appropriate Observation Checklists, Testimonials and Oral Questions validated assessment tools which have been converted to QTI conformant tools.

On location, the assessor using the tools loaded onto their QTI m-Player assesses the student and provides feedback to the student. The student also advises the assessor that they have some evidence of their achievement in the competency recorded as a short video and a word document and provides these to the assessor on an SD card. The assessor takes a still shot with their QTI m-Player of the actual assessment as evidence. The assessor records the results on the QTI m-Player and attaches the still photo, video and word file as an attachment. The assessor then advises the student that they are now competent in the competency SFIAQUA208A. With this the assessor selects the send button and the assessment is created as a zip file and emailed to the nominated email address within the RTO.

Following the discussions the assessor agrees that the student is ready to be assessed on SFIAQUA209A. Not being aware of this prior to the visit, the assessor downloads the necessary Observation Checklists, Testimonials and Oral Questions validated assessment tools to the QTI m-Player. The assessment process is repeated but it becomes evident that the student is not quite competent. A short video of the assessment is taken as evidence by the assessor. The assessor provides feedback and advice to the student on how they can improve their performance and makes a time to return for a repeat assessment. The assessor records the assessment on the QTI m-Player and 'saves as' an incomplete assessment. With this, the assessor selects the send button and the assessment as a zip file is emailed to the nominated email address within the designated RTO.

Acronyms

ACE	adult and community education
AQTF	Australian Quality Training Framework
AVETMISS	Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard
BIHECC	Business Industry Higher Education Collaboration Council
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
Framework	Australian Flexible Learning Framework
ICT	information and communication technology
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
RCC	recognition of current competency (also used for: recognition of current capability)
RIL	recognition of informal learning
RPL	recognition of prior learning
RPL/RCC system	A system for the preparation and/or assessment of RPL/RCC claims. For the purposes of this document, a system may comprise software, workflows, policies or any combination of these things.
RTO	registered training organisation
VET	vocational education and training

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<http://www.training.com.au/aqtf2007/>

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<http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/982.html>

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Bowden JA; Masters GN (1993) *Implications for Higher Education of a Competency-based Approach to Education and Training* Canberra: Australian Government Printing Service.

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<http://www.parc.xerox.com/ops/members/brown/papers/university.html>

Council of Australian Governments (COAG)

<http://www.coag.gov.au/>

Hargreaves, J., (2006). *Recognition of Prior Learning: At a Glance*, NCVER

<http://www.ncver.edu.au/teaching/publications/1662.html>

McNeill, M., (2007). *Virtual RPL (Advisory and Referral) Centre - A report on user consultations, students and teachers/trainers/ assessors*, DEST & DET NSW

http://virtualrplproject.com/uploads/2007/09/executive_summary.doc

Queensland Skills Program

<http://www.trainandemploy.qld.gov.au/skillsplan/index.html>

Resource Generator RPL resources

<http://www.resourcegenerator.gov.au/loadpage.asp?Page=PDResources.htm>

Skills First Assessor Kits

http://www.trainandemploy.qld.gov.au/partners/training_delivery/rpl/skills_first/toolkits.html

Skills First RPL Preferred Supplier Framework for RTOs

http://www.trainandemploy.qld.gov.au/resources/training_delivery/pdf/skills_first_rpl_framework_0707.pdf

Skills First RPL Preferred Supplier Guide

http://www.trainandemploy.qld.gov.au/resources/training_delivery/pdf/guide_application_skills_first_rpl_0807.pdf

Smith, L. (2004). *Valuing recognition of prior learning: Selected case studies of Australian private providers of training*, NCVER

<http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/proj/nr2030.pdf>

Appendix 1 – Consultation Questions

Central/jurisdiction-level questions

[Note – These questions will be addressed to key RPL people identified from each jurisdiction] General introduction – discussion re state and territories focus on RPL, state and territory level strategies, models (eg Skills Stores), targets and use of COAG funding (such as RPL networks, professional development etc).

Question 1 is concerned with policy issues prior to any data collection. The jurisdiction will be asked to provide policy documents for review that will help us in developing an overall picture of RPL/RCC in the state/territory.

1. Do you have centrally developed policies and processes for RPL/RCC that institutions in your jurisdiction are required to observe?

- a) What is the intent of the policies?
- b) How are institutions monitored for conformance?
- c) Are there processes or procedures that are mandated?
- d) Are there guidelines on the validity of RPL claims?
- e) What are the most important parts of the policy documents?
- f) Why?
- g) What variations are allowed at the local/institutional level?
- h) Why?
- i) Do variations affect the reliability of conformance?

Policy documents should be reviewed with the potential for follow up questions. Those questions would be determined at the time.

Questions 2 and 3 are related to any tools that may be supported by the jurisdiction.

2. Are there any tools provided centrally by the jurisdiction for assessment of RPL/RCC claims and verification of evidence?

- a) Name of tool/system
- b) Vendor/provider
- c) Main purpose/use
- d) Functionality and reporting
- e) Examples of use/referral to RTOs
- f) Include provision of electronic evidence (components/parts of evidence/data captured)
- g) Are the tools mandated? How widespread are their use? Do you have examples of institutes using them?

3. Are there tools/processes operating widely in your state/territory that aren't centrally provided?

Question 4 relates to what could be used/developed (existing or new) to streamline processes.

4. What standards, processes and/or tools **could be** introduced to streamline RPL/RCC systems and improve interoperability across the VET system and beyond? (Provide expert opinion on improvements and suggest future work to achieve the proposed improvements.)

Institution-level interview questions

General introduction – discussion re institute’s focus on RPL, strategies, models (eg skills assessment centres, RPL champions), policies, procedures, targets, support and tools.

- Name of organisation
- Location/s
- Type of organisation
- Name of interviewee
- Contact details of interviewee

Question 1 is a high level question only. This question and its sub-parts just map out the level of experience and sophistication of the institution and respondent. It should be easy to identify if the remaining questions should be directed at the current respondent, and if so, which ones, and if not, the other suitable respondents can be identified.

1. Are you using any electronic tools such as an e-portfolio or other application to manage, record or maintain RPL information? If not, then do you have any future plans concerning such tools? [Proceed with following only if answer is YES]

- a) How do you use the tool/application?
- b) Which customer group(s) make use of this tool/application?
- c) Is the system provided on-campus or centrally? Web or software based? Vendor/provider? What support is provided?
- d) Are policies and guidelines managed locally or centrally?
- e) What information is recorded by the tool?
 - i. Is the data in a standardised format? eg base on national units of competency from training packages? Curriculum? Other?
 - ii. Is it self-assessment based? How is it verified?
 - iii. How does it correlate with RPL requirements?
 - iv How is supporting evidence stored and/or linked to?
- f) What was the intended role for the application prior to installation?
- g) Has it fulfilled that role?
- h) Has it been used for other purposes?
- i) Is it user friendly?
- j) Are users satisfied?
- k) Are there plans to extend its use?
- l) Is it better for this function to be managed locally or centrally?
- m) Why? Why not?
- n) Do you have any future plans to extend the use of e-portfolios?
- o) For what functions?

Question 2 focuses on the high level interoperability issues but require someone with at least some technical knowledge to respond. Further sub questions would emerge in the discussion. These questions are for top level technical diagnostics only. A competent project manager or sponsor could probably answer these but they may defer to an IT resource.

2. Does the application interoperate with any other internal software systems? (eg SIS, LMS etc)

- a) Which systems?
- b) What data is exchanged?
- c) Do you export or import data from other systems?
- d) What data formats are used for these functions?

Question 3 is about the experiences of using an e-portfolio system as part of RPL evaluation. It requires a knowledgeable manager of this activity in the institution or a practitioner.

3. If you use an e-portfolio (or similar) system as part of your RPL evaluation process, what role does the application play?

- a) How long have you used it?
- b) Does it support to an interview process?
- c) Is it used instead of an interview process?

- d) What validation is performed on the data entered?
- e) Are standard processes or guidelines recommended for its use? If so, are they controlled at the local institution or system-wide?
- f) Have you ever wanted to or needed data across institutional boundaries? (eg from another VET institution or provider)
- g) Were you able to exchange data easily?
- h) Would this capability be useful to you or other institutions?
- i) What is the current value of the e-portfolio system in RPL?
- j) Could it be used in more effective ways?

Question 4 establishes the level of standardization (if any) that has been achieved in relation to the recording of competencies.

4. Is the system based upon standards other than national competency standards?

- a) What are the relevant standards applicable to you?
 - i. How do you use them?
 - ii. Do you believe they are useful?
- b) Are these standards part of a broader framework defined and implemented in your organisation and tools? Are the competencies directly related to VET courses?
- c) How is the framework related to student/client performance and achievement? Can you provide some examples?
- d) Do you or would you like to exchange this data with other VET systems or institutions?

Product or service vendor questions

Question 1 is concerned with the technical specification of the product.

- 1. *How would you describe the RPL/RCC product or service you are offering?*
 - a. Is it a commercial-off-the-shelf (COTS) product, a managed service (MSP), or an application service (ASP) offering?
 - b. For a COTS product, please provide brochure(s) and product materials that describe the functions and services it provides and high-level specifications related to its installation and operation requirements. Technical information would include:
 - i. Operating system, versions, etc
 - ii. Supporting applications and versions (eg Oracle, MySQL, MS SQL or middleware etc)
 - iii. Any information on scalability
 - iv. Does the application support SOA and web service approaches? How?
 - v. Is it designed to interoperate with other enterprise applications? Which ones? How? Why?
 - c. For MSPs and ASPs, provide product materials that describe the range of requirements that clients are required to satisfy in order to remotely provide your services to clients. Also provide information on these requirements at different levels of service if they are available.
 - d. Is your product or service compliant/conformant with any Australian or international standards relating to RPL/RCC?
 - e. Is your product or service compliant/conformant with any other IT or educational technology standards?
 - f. Are you able to exchange data or other content with other products or services that are similar to yours? If so, how and what kinds of systems?
 - g. What is the licensing model and indicative license levels for your product or service?
 - h. What future capabilities do you plan integrating into your product(s)?

Question 2 is concerned with product or service overview and the features and capabilities.

2. *Please provide an overview of the solution your product or service provides for clients.*
 - a. What functions does it offer?
 - b. What is its role in relation to RPL/RCC?
 - c. Other info arising from questions...

Question 3 is concerned with the use of the product in various contexts.

3. *Please give examples of current clients and how they are using your product or service.*

Supplementary questions to vendors

- a) Is the application you have developed able to import or export data to other applications being used to support RPL? How?

- b) What is the data format and what are the data elements that you are able to export from your application for upload into another application? (eg xml file, text file with a declared structure to assist import etc AND list of elements such as student identifiers, competency data and format, etc)

- c) What constraints are you likely to experience in importing data from a different tool?

- d) What constraints may another RPL application experience in importing data exported from your application?

- e) Do you have any particular preferences related to the interoperability of data interchange?

For more information:

On E-standards for Training:

Owen ONeill

E-standards for Training Business Manager

Phone: (03) 9661 8711

Fax: (03) 9661 8799

Email: e-standards@flexiblelearning.net.au

On the Australian Flexible Learning Framework:

Phone: (07) 3307 4700

Fax: (07) 3259 4371

Email: enquiries@flexiblelearning.net.au

Website: flexiblelearning.net.au

GPO Box 1326

Brisbane QLD 4001