Skills Recognition

valuing prior learning

Recognition Guide for Employers

Job

Qualification

Recognition

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Section 1 – Introduction to recognition

What is recognition?

Do you employ or manage people in a workplace?

Would you like them to spend less time training and more time working?

Do some of your people have the skills and knowledge required to do their jobs effectively, but without the formal qualifications?

Would you like to see them receive the formal recognition they deserve for the skills and knowledge they have without having to spend time undertaking unnecessary training?

This is what recognition can achieve – formal acknowledgement of your employees' existing skills and knowledge – resulting in the receipt of a qualification or part of a qualification.

This guide will explain the process of recognition available to people who have skills and knowledge, however they have gained them, without the need for more training in the things they can already do.

For example

John owned a small business specialising in providing tree services – pruning, felling, removing stumps. He employed two teams of four – each headed by a team leader with the qualification RTF30203 Certificate III in Horticulture (Arboriculture). The remaining team members were labourers without formal qualifications who had learned many skills in John's employ – workplace safety, teamwork and communication – as well as a range of skills in horticulture, arboriculture and using tools and equipment.

John approached the local training organisation and learned that it was possible for his workers to use their workplace experience to prove their skills and knowledge. They were observed at work by an assessor, who also asked them several questions, and John provided verbal references for each of them – again in response to questions. They were then issued with nationally-recognised Statements of Attainment for the competencies (skills and knowledge) they had demonstrated.

What's in it for John? A range of the following benefits:
* *John's employees gained qualifications without spending time in off-job training*
* *John's employees were more motivated in their work*
* *John used the experience of having employee competencies successfully measured and confirmed against external national benchmarks as evidence his business operations meet national benchmarks in his quality audit*
* *Money was saved by not providing employees with unnecessary training*

How recognition can help your business

The potential benefits for you are the same as those identified for John in the example above. They include, but are not limited to:

- Having employees gain qualifications without spending more time than necessary in off-job training

- Employee motivation and retention

- Having employee competencies measured and confirmed against external national benchmarks

- Saving money on unnecessary training

- Provision of individual training needs analysis information about employees at the same time as recognising existing skills and knowledge

- Evidence that the organisation commitment to continuous improvement and quality if required as part of the organisation's assessment for quality endorsement

- Proof the business meets national benchmarks in its operations

- Evidence towards individual employee performance appraisals

- Capability to maintain an up to date skills base in your business and to be able to demonstrate this when competing for work.

What is in this guide?

This guide contains a brief overview of the benefits and process of recognition and explains how you can begin to find out more about it. It is a starting point, not a complete and detailed explanation of all parts of the recognition process. It does not provide detailed information about the recognition process offered by any specific registered training organisation, but does introduce the key steps in the process which should be common to all RTOs.

Where does this guide come from?

The NSW Department of Education and Communities has put together a series of guides to help people understand how existing skills and knowledge can be formally recognised. This guide is for employers.

OTHER guides are for:

- **Registered Training Organisations** (RTOs), eg, registered providers of vocational education and training, including TAFE
- **Candidates** and potential candidates who want to have their skills and knowledge recognised (you and your employees)
- **Assessors** – working for RTOs and assessing the skills and knowledge of candidates
- **Group Recognition Candidates** – where larger numbers of candidates work through the recognition process together

Frequently asked questions

The following frequently asked questions deal with the most common questions asked about recognition:

If my employees get formal qualifications will I have to pay them more?
Not necessarily, but this will depend upon the conditions of employment and agreements made by you and your employees. Most employers pay at a level commensurate with the qualifications they require an employee to have, and use, in their job, but not for qualifications not used in the job.
Can a complete qualification be achieved through recognition, or only a percentage of it?
Yes it can be. If the candidate has all the required competencies and can prove this, then the whole qualification can be awarded through a recognition process.

Is recognition more difficult than doing the course to achieve a qualification?

No. The recognition assessment should be no more rigorous than the assessment undertaken to assess the same competencies as part of a course – without the need to spend time training.

Are qualifications achieved through recognition of a similar standing to those achieved through training and assessment?

They are exactly the same. Under the National Skills Framework it does not matter how the qualification was achieved, it is still a nationally recognised qualification. RTOs can assess (and grade if required) for recognition in the same way they would assess the same qualification undertaken as a training program.

Is recognition a long and complicated process?

The process should suit the candidate's needs and the competencies being assessed, but will generally be a much faster pathway to a qualification than undertaking training and assessment in a course. The length of the process may depend on the amount of recognition sought by the candidate and the type/s of evidence to be collected.

Can recognition be completed from a job description, as these provide an accurate and detailed description of the job?

No. A job description provides an idea of the competencies the employee should be applying to their work, but tells an assessor nothing about their standard of performance or whether they actually perform all the tasks listed. By itself a job description is not effective evidence of competency.

Is recognition time-consuming and disruptive to the workplace?

The recognition process can be completed with no disruption to the workplace and this will depend on the specific recognition process chosen. If workplace observation of the candidate is part of the assessment process, or if the candidate needs to be away from their normal duties to undertake some of the assessment, then there may be some disruption but this should be no more than necessary. It is usually possible for a variety of assessment to be used in recognition so the need for workplace disruption can be avoided.

Who are the key players in recognition?

Employers

Assessors

Employees

RTOs
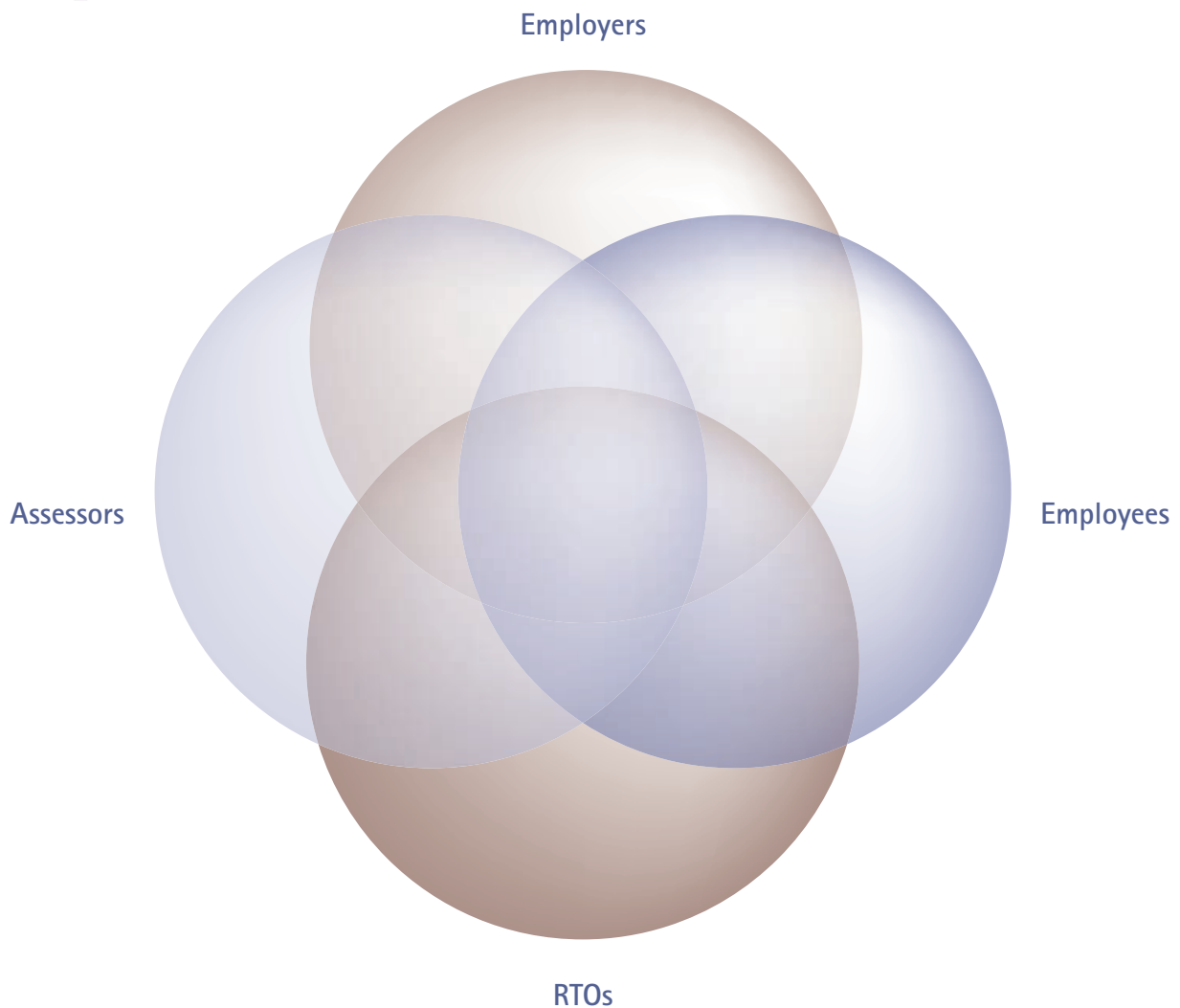
Employers help identify appropriate qualifications and competencies and support their employees through the recognition process.

Employees are the recognition candidates, and have their skills and knowledge assessed to gain qualifications or statements of attainment.

RTOs are training organisations registered by the government to provide training and assessment in vocational education and training and to issue qualifications.

Assessors are employed by RTOs to undertake the work of assessing the skills and knowledge of employees (and usually also of the students of the RTO). Assessors must be trained and qualified in assessment as well as in the skills and knowledge they personally assess. They also may assess in partnership with subject matter experts, as may occur when assessing in partnership with company specialists or technicians.

What do all the terms mean?

In plain English, the terms you will hear used in relation to the recognition process include:

Competency (or unit of competency)	Competency is the name given to a combination of skills, knowledge and attributes that enable a person to undertake a specific part of a job. Occupations require employees to have a range of competencies.
Qualification	The most commonly-issued qualifications in vocational education and training are Certificates I – IV, but there are also higher level qualifications – Diploma and above in the Australian Qualification Framework (AQF). Qualifications, like jobs, are made up of sets of competencies.
Recognition	Recognition is the name of the assessment process used to recognise people's existing skills, knowledge and attributes in order to issue them with formal qualifications and Statements of Attainment.
Statement of Attainment	Statements of Attainment (SofAs) are issued to people for individual competencies or small groups of competencies they have which do not make up a whole qualification. The competencies may come from qualifications at all levels.
Registered Training Organisation (RTO)	RTOs are training organisations registered by the government to provide training and assessment services in the vocational education and training sector. RTOs must comply with the Australian Quality Training Framework to gain and maintain registration. They issue qualifications and statements of attainment.
Training Package	Nationally-agreed groups of qualifications relevant to a particular industry sector, eg, Hospitality, Finance, Automotive, are published together in documents called Training Packages. Throughout Australia RTOs use these Training Packages to provide a nationally-consistent approach to their training and assessment for each industry, enabling the qualifications they issue to be nationally-recognised.

What's involved in the recognition process?

There are six main stages of the recognition process:

```
              1
           Context

6                              2
What next?                  Information

           RECOGNITION

5                              3
Decision                     Evidence
making

              4
          Assessment
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FAQs throughout the recognition process

1 Context	What industry/ies do your employees work in? What competencies do they have or need? What qualifications are relevant for them?
2 Information	How do you and your employees get more information? How do you find an RTO? How do you and your employees know exactly what will happen, how long it will take and what it will cost?
3 Evidence	How will your employees prove their competence? What standards does this 'proof' need to meet? What is the employer's role in providing proof?
4 Assessment	How will employees be assessed? Will they have to do tests and exams? Will they be assessed at work? How disruptive will it be?
5 Decision making	How is a decision made about your employee's competency? Who is involved in decision making? What if you are unhappy with the decision?
6 What next?	Once a decision is made, what happens next? What about employees who are unsuccessful in proving their competence? What ongoing support is available?

Refer to the Case Studies in Section 2 for examples of how these questions are answered in the process of recognition.

How you can help your employees during the recognition process:

Context

- Help employees and RTO assessors to understand where your organisation 'fits in' to an industry, so relevant competencies and qualifications can be identified.
- Help employees understand the impact of legislation and regulations governing their work, eg, OH&S, licensing requirements.
- Help the employees identify workplace support for the recognition process, eg, supervisors, peers, mentors and coaches.
- Be prepared to provide access to the workplace for assessment to take place if required.
- Be prepared to provide job descriptions, performance appraisals or other relevant work place documents as proof of an employee's competencies (within provisions for privacy and confidentiality).

Information

- Provide specific information to employees about your preferred qualifications and/or competencies, and, if relevant, the impact of qualifications on future progression with the organisation.
- Be prepared to discuss employees' needs with RTO staff.
- Help employees read and understand information kits provided by RTOs.
- Provide information on workplace support available during the process
- Assist employees to identify their own skills and knowledge

Evidence

- Help employees identify types of evidence they may have which is current, relevant to the competencies, and which demonstrates their knowledge and skills.
- Be prepared to support the employee's evidence as a referee.
- Allow workplace documents and products to be used as evidence by the employee as appropriate.

Assessment

- Become familiar with the process to be used by the RTO, and be prepared to be involved – as referee, employee support and/or technical expert.
- Reassure and support employees throughout the process.
- Cooperate in the collection of workplace evidence.
- Be prepared to provide an honest appraisal of the candidate's workplace performance.

Decision making

- Assist in maintaining the privacy of assessment decisions in the workplace.
- Review and evaluate the process with employees to help provide feedback to the RTO.

What next?

- Provide workplace acknowledgement of successful employees as appropriate.
- Assist employees to plan further development/support.
- Be prepared to make suggestions for, and know how to access, further support.
- Provide career planning and professional development information and services to employees.

Qualifications

Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)

Your employees can attain qualifications through recognition that are set out in the vocational education sector of the AQF. Most commonly:

- Certificates – levels I – IV
- Diploma
- Advanced Diploma

The Table on the next page explains the differences between these qualifications.

If your employees do not have all the competencies that make up a whole qualification, they may be issued with a Statement of Attainment - a record of recognised learning.

Statements of attainment are issued when participants choose to undertake individual units from a whole qualification. The statement of attainment may at some point contribute towards a qualification outcome, either as partial completion of a course leading to a qualification, attainment of competencies within a Training Package, or completion of nationally accredited short course which may accumulate towards a qualification through recognition processes.

For further information: **http://www.aqf.edu.au/aqfqual.htm**

AQF descriptors showing expected standards at each AQF qualification level

Qualification Characteristics	Certificate I (AQF 1)	Certificate II (AQF 2)	Certificate III (AQF 3)	Certificate IV (AQF 4)	Diploma (AQF 5)	Advanced Diploma (AQF 6)
Knowledge	As needed for defined range of activities	Basic operational, applied to varied activities	Technical depth/ breadth, some theory; able to transfer to new environments	Broad base and range incorporating theoretical concepts	Broad-base of theory, substantial depth in some areas, self-directed application	Specialist application of fundamental concepts and principles; complex; develops new areas
Skills	Basic use of tools/ equipment	Defined range of practical skills	Broad, well developed, able to select, adapt and transfer skills to new activities	Use skills to develop new procedures and apply to other situations	Broad range of technical and/ or managerial/ coordination and planning skills	Wide range of highly specialised technical, creative, conceptual, analytical, diagnostic managerial skills
Problem solving	Solutions are pre-ordained by others	Apply known solutions to predictable problems	Provide technical advice to solve problems in known routines	Contribute technical solutions in non-routine problems	Evaluate problems and initiate solutions	Devise new criteria and applications to solve diverse problems
Information processing capabilities	Receive and recall	Assess and record	Interpret	Analyse and evaluate current practice	Analyse and evaluate to forecast, plan and research	Generate new ideas and advise at strategic level
Scope of activities	Routine tasks	Known routines and functions, some non-routine	Range of skilled operations and activities	Varied and broad, depth in some areas	Complex and technical, assist in strategic areas, initiate activities	Unpredictable, wide range or highly specific skills
Operational environment	Narrow, pre-defined, includes pre-vocational / induction	Defined range of contexts	Variety of contexts within known operational environment	Wide, more complex, non-routine	Broad or specialised	Broad or specialised
Discretion/ judgement	Activities are directed	Limited choice and complexity of actions/ options	More extensive choice and complexity of options/activities	Apply discretion/ judgement in handling more complex & non-routine functions	Plan and determine selection of equipment/roles/ techniques for self and others	Significant role in planning, design, operations
Self responsibility/ accountability	For own work and quality input to team	For own work and quality outcomes	For own work quality/outcomes and time management	Organise and be responsible for own work schedule	Prescribed autonomy for performing complex/ technical operations	Prescribed autonomy for complex/ technical operations

How to get started in using recognition

Some good places for you to start exploring further the idea of recognition for your employees include:

- Talking with the peak industry bodies for your industry – professional associations, industry associations, industry training advisory bodies – about qualifications, training providers and recognition processes available

- Talking with employees about their career aspirations in your industry and what they know about qualifications available to them

- Talking to a registered training organisation that delivers qualifications in your industry area about the different levels of qualifications and competencies

- Talking to other employers in your industry about their use of recognition services and the qualifications / competencies they used

- Using the internet to look up relevant Industry Skills Councils and Industry Training Advisory bodies to find out what qualifications and competencies have been nationally agreed for your industry

- A useful website **www.training.com.au** will provide you with links to sites for Industry Training Advisory Bodies, Industry Skills Councils, the Australian Qualification Framework and more

- Once you commit, find a good RTO partner to work with you, and for you, in building the skills your business needs. It is important to understand that your RTO partner is there to meet your needs and build the success of the business. It therefore helps to have some knowledge of your employees' skills and qualifications so you can assist and guide the improvement process.

Section 2 – Industry–based Recognition Case Studies

The attached case studies are provided as examples of recognition practices undertaken by RTOs providing assessment services in the following industries:

- Horticulture (Landscaping)
- Library Services
- Hospitality
- Financial Services
- Construction Industry
- Energy Distribution

As you read the case studies, consider:

- How might these case studies relate to your employees?

- What was done well?

- What could have been done better?

- What lessons can be learned about organising and managing your recognition processes in partnership with an RTO?

Case study 1: Recognition in the Horticulture (landscape) Industry

Overview

This case study highlights the process an RTO has applied for one candidate seeking recognition for the Diploma in Horticulture (Landscape) from the Horticulture Training Package. The candidate had recently completed the Certificate III in Horticulture (Landscape) and was seeking recognition for the additional units of competency needed to complete the Diploma.

Key steps

The assessor's first step in the recognition process was to meet the candidate and discuss the make up of the qualification, the procedures involved in the recognition process, the candidate's work and training history and the gathering of evidence to support the process.

Following this preliminary discussion, a handbook was sent to the candidate with an introductory letter. The handbook was self-explanatory and was used to guide the candidate through the whole process. This involved information on the selection of appropriate units of competency to suit the skills of the candidate and the completion requirements of the Horticulture Training Package for gaining the qualification, as well as suggestions on the types of evidence that might be suitable.

At this stage, the candidate was encouraged to contact the RTO again if he had not been able to follow the handbook. A coordinator was available to answer any queries and provide additional information to the candidate if needed.

The next step in the process was for the candidate to submit an application identifying the units of competency he would need for the required qualification. Detailed checklists were then sent to the candidate for each unit of competency he had selected. These sheets detailed the outcomes of the units of competency.

Once the candidate had identified the units of competency, an assessor was assigned to the candidate to assist him through the process. The course coordinator acted as a mentor and could be contacted by the candidate to answer any queries or give guidance on the process.

The next step was for the candidate to collect his evidence and forward it to the assessor. Once it was received, the assessor reviewed all the evidence and then interviewed the candidate.

As there was insufficient evidence to support one of the units of competency, the candidate was asked to supply more evidence. If he could not do so, the assessor would recommend additional training to fill the gap.

As the candidate was able to provide additional evidence for the required unit of competence, he was found to be competent in all units for the qualification. The final step in this process was to grant the qualification and sign off on the units of competence.

Key features of the recognition process

A number of criteria were used to maintain the quality of the recognition process in this case.

The assessor had extensive expertise in the area in which the candidate was seeking recognition, so he was very familiar with the units of competency and their requirements. The assessor also discussed the evidence provided with another assessor in the RTO. He did this to ensure his judgement was valid and reliable.

Interviewing the candidate helped to confirm the evidence that the candidate had provided and identified any potential gaps, particularly in underpinning knowledge. The qualifications and references provided by the candidate were checked to ensure authenticity. The RTO was contacted to confirm that the candidate had attended.

References had to be on company letterhead and photocopies were not accepted. The assessor also rang the candidate's workplace supervisor to ensure that he was performing to workplace standards in the area in which he was seeking recognition.

The assessment process was negotiated between the candidate and the assessor. The candidate was very involved and took a lot of responsibility for the evidence collection.

When the candidate was putting together his evidence, he was encouraged to itemise evidence into individual units of competency and have a separate folder for each. This ensured that it was easy to identify and locate, and therefore saved the assessor a lot of time. The candidate also submitted evidence for some of the units of competency one at a time, which made it easier and quicker to assess.

Providing guidance and support was a necessity in the process, as it helped to ensure that the candidate understood what was required and did not submit evidence that was not appropriate. To ensure that the candidate was currently competent, specifically in the areas of health and safety, chemical use and farm machinery, the assessor had to be rigorous.

This was achieved by contacting the candidate's current supervisor to get feedback on the use of correct health and safety procedures and chemical use. The candidate was also asked how he would deal with particular safety aspects and how he would use a particular chemical or piece of machinery. It was important for the assessor to seek more evidence in these critical areas, paying close attention to the currency of the evidence. All evidence was summarised and signed off by the assessor and the candidate using the Evidence Summary Document, which follows.

Unit of competency	Past evidence	Evidence of current workplace competence	Assessors Comments
Supervise worksite activities	Copies of past tenders Copies of past quotes	Copies of contract documentation Business records Records of meetings attended Work schedules and progress charts	
Manage landscape projects	Copies of past tenders Copies of past quotes	Copies of contract documentation Business records Records of meetings attended Work schedules and progress charts	
Prepare estimates, quotes and tenders	Business records Stock inventories	Copies of successful tenders for local government contracts and acceptance letters Copies of quotes Copies of standard contract documentation Stock inventories	
Negotiate with clients and others	Letters from bank managers Letters from clients	Letters from clients Records of meeting attendance required as part of contract conditions Correspondence with consultants	
Prepare reports	Assignments completed for past qualification Business financial reports	Project management reports Minutes of meetings attended	
Manage business operations	Business records	ISO9001 accreditation Copies of contracts Work schedules and progress charts	
Additional evidence needed to verify candidate's role within company		Additional evidence provided included an affidavit and an accompanying letter affirming his role as director with responsibility for management, planning, technical supervision and performance monitoring	
Candidate's name:			
Details of Recognition outcome:		Competent – all units	
Additional Training		N/A	
Assessor Signature/Date:			
Candidate Signature/Date:			

Case study 2: Recognition in the library industry

Overview

This case study took place in a large city library which conducted recognition for nine candidates, for Certificates III and IV in Library and Information Services. These qualifications were from the Museum and Library/Information Services Training Package.

The process involved identifying who was eligible to undergo the process, holding regular group meetings to guide and support candidates, collecting evidence, judging the evidence provided, and providing feedback and future action plans. An assessor from an RTO worked closely with the Manager of Library Services throughout the process to confirm the job roles of candidates, the requirements of the units of competency and the possible evidence that could be provided.

Key steps

The first step in this process was to identify the candidates who could undergo recognition. The manager had identified that many of the employees were highly skilled and could be awarded a qualification. These candidates enrolled with the RTO and would undergo recognition in the workplace.

A two-hour workshop was held for candidates where the assessor explained the process, what was involved and what the candidates would have to do. The workshop also outlined the units of competency, guidance on suitable evidence and how it could be gathered, keeping records of the process and the outcomes. Candidates were also given the opportunity to ask questions and clarify any areas they were unsure about.

A self–assessment workbook was used to help candidates identify the units of competency and the evidence they could provide. They were encouraged to indicate which units they felt competent in and what evidence they would be able to provide, and to gather that evidence and clearly label it against the relevant units of competency.

The manager and the assessor together held regular group meetings with candidates to discuss progress and identify any difficulties they had encountered. This saved time and provided an opportunity for candidates to share ideas about the evidence they had collected.

Candidates were encouraged to think about what evidence they could provide by going through the units of competency and identifying what each one meant to them. Candidates could consider a particular task and what they would be able to provide as evidence to verify their competence. Candidates were guided through the process, given advice where needed and encouraged to think about particular aspects they might have missed.

Candidates usually provided evidence in the form of a portfolio, along with their workbook. Together the assessor and the manager were able to identify the critical evidence required and how it matched the units of competency.

If they found gaps or there was some doubt about the evidence, a workplace supervisor was interviewed or the candidate was asked to provide additional information. In some cases candidates were observed in the workplace to confirm that they were competent in the relevant task.

Once a judgement on competence had been made, candidates were provided with individual feedback. The candidates who were found to be competent were awarded a qualification or a Statement of Attainment, as well as being encouraged to further develop their skills and knowledge. If they were found to be not yet competent in a particular area, they were encouraged to undertake relevant training and assessment.

Key features of the recognition process

A number of criteria were used in this case study to maintain the quality of the recognition process. Working together, the manager and the assessor were able to clearly identify the requirements of the units of competency and what evidence was critical in particular areas. Working together to make a judgement ensured that the process was thorough and a reliable and valid decision had been made.

As the manager was deeply involved in the process, she was able to support and guide the candidates throughout the process. Candidates were well informed and had many opportunities to discuss their progress and raise any concerns.

When candidates were putting together their evidence, they were encouraged to label each piece against the relevant units of competency. This helped to provide a clear and easy to follow portfolio, which saved the manager and the assessor time when judging the evidence.

Where evidence was not sufficient, there were a number of ways to seek additional information. The candidate's supervisor was interviewed to confirm competence or the candidate was observed in the workplace. This ensured that enough evidence was gathered to confirm competence.

Feedback was provided throughout the process, as well as upon completion. Once a decision had been made, feedback as provided to the candidate regarding the outcome and future action plans were discussed. Whatever the outcome, candidates were encouraged to further develop their skills.

Case study 3: Recognition in the hospitality industry

Overview

This case study outlines the process an RTO undertook to provide recognition for a candidate working in the hospitality industry. The candidate sought recognition to identify her current skills and knowledge so she could undertake additional training needed to further develop her career. Recognition was conducted against units of competency from the Hospitality Training Package.

Key steps

The first step in this process was for the candidate to apply for recognition and complete a self-assessment. Here the candidate identified her previous and current experience within the hospitality industry. She needed to note down her job role, qualifications and relevant training completed, and the number of years she had worked within the industry.

The next step in the process was for the assessor to conduct an interview with the candidate. This was done to help the candidate identify the units of competency she felt she would be able to achieve competence in. It also provided the opportunity to go over the process, discuss any concerns and identify ways in which the candidate would be able to gather evidence.

Following this the assessor and the candidate identified opportunities to gather evidence of her competence. Some of this involved the candidate providing documentation of courses she had attended, letters from supervisors, menus she had prepared and photographs of work she had completed. It also identified the areas where the assessor would be able to observe her completing tasks as part of the assessment.

As the candidate was seeking recognition for only a few units of competency she was able to gather it for one unit at a time and give it to her assessor.

Evidence was put together and an assessment form completed for each unit. Where the assessor needed to observe her in the workplace, suitable times were discussed and appropriate arrangements made with her supervisor.

Two critical areas were identified in this case study as requiring close attention. These were in the areas of hygiene and occupational health and safety. To ensure competence in these areas, the assessor observed the candidate preparing a meal in the workplace. This would ensure that she followed the correct procedures.

Once the assessor had gathered all the evidence from the candidate and observed her in the workplace, he was able to judge all the evidence and make a decision. Assessment was made against the units of competency and the rules of evidence to establish if it was valid, sufficient, current and authentic.

Evidence was validated by relating it to the relevant units of competency to ensure that it adequately reflected the requirements.

The sufficiency of the evidence was established through observing the candidate as well as through the evidence provided by the candidate.

Currency of evidence was established through the observation of the candidate, as well as speaking to her supervisor about the work she was currently doing.

The authenticity of the evidence was established by having a statutory declaration signed for the photographs provided, calling her previous employer and speaking to her current supervisor.

The next step in the process involved the assessor providing feedback to the candidate. Though she was found competent in the units of competency she had identified, she still needed training in some additional areas to achieve the full qualification. This was discussed in detail and some learning strategies were put in place with her supervisor. It was also suggested that she attend a two week learning program to specifically develop her skills in a supervisory area.

This case study shows that, while documented evidence is critical in Recognition, it is not always enough. Sometimes the assessor needs to make a careful decision about observing the candidate demonstrating competence. This is particularly important in areas such as occupational health and safety, where it is not always easy to determine if the required procedures have been followed.

Case study 4: Recognition in the financial services industry

Overview

This case study involves a private RTO working on a Recognition project with a major insurance firm involved in the restructuring of its organisation. An assessment team from the RTO worked in collaboration with staff in the firm.

The Recognition process was conducted to identify the skills and knowledge of the existing staff and to provide suitable training to enable the staff to be placed appropriately within the new structure. The Financial Services Training Package was used in the benchmarking process to identify the extent of current competence and training needs to fill any gaps identified.

Approximately 600 staff members were involved in a number of different work areas. The process involved working with staff, supervisors and in–house trainers to clarify the existing and proposed work activities and tasks. These were then linked to the relevant units of competency and qualifications in the Financial Services Training Package. This enabled the staff and supervisors to better understand the language and content of the units of competency.

Group workshops and individual interviews were used extensively to involve the candidates and supervisors and to ensure everyone was informed about the process.

Key steps

The Recognition process used candidate self–assessment to raise candidate awareness and involve candidates in gathering evidence and critically assessing themselves at the beginning of the process. Candidate perceptions of their competence or otherwise were discussed in individual interviews with the assessor.

Following a preliminary judgement of competence, assessors observed candidates over a period of four or five months in the workplace. This enabled the assessors to gather evidence of current competence and confirm, or otherwise, the initial judgement.

Candidates worked with assessors, alerting them when unusual or rare work tasks or incidents were about to occur. This allowed assessors to reschedule their assessment work for the day to observe how the candidate completed the task or handled the incident. At convenient times, the assessors questioned the candidates on what they were doing, why they were doing it and what they would do if unexpected events occurred.

At the completion of the assessment period, the candidates met with assessors to discuss the outcomes of the Recognition process. The discussions all had a positive direction aiming to place each candidate in a role in the organisation which matched their competency profile.

Where they were already competent, this was confirmed. More often than not, the Recognition process revealed that some additional training would not only better equip the candidate for the new position but would give them the confidence to do their work well.

In some instances, it was revealed that candidates needed substantial training, and this was arranged. For some, their current competence and strengths indicated they would be better working in another section or in a different role. At all times, the candidates played a major role in determining their action plan.

Key features

Some of the key features of this Recognition process included:

- Active involvement of the candidates
- Interpretation of units of competency into local workplace tasks and language with which the candidates and supervisors were familiar
- Use of candidate self–assessment
- Use of supervisor/candidate workshops to identify and clarify purposes of the Recognition, the workplace activities and related standards, and the processes that would be used
- Development and use of candidate-friendly charts and PowerPoint presentation materials for use within the Recognition process
- Using a process for a great number of candidates over many months (which gave assessors and supervisors ample opportunity to gather evidence of current competence, which was used to confirm historical evidence, candidate self–assessment and third party evidence)
- An opportunity for assessors to network closely with each other, supervisors, subject experts and trainers, enabling shared understanding and also contributing to consistency in the Recognition process
- Access to a range of resources to assist assessors through the process, including charts, presentation materials, templates and checklists, sample questions and quality management resources for gathering information on how the Recognition process was working and how it could be improved.

Meaning

The assessment team involved in the project recognised the importance of shared meaning for all involved, including candidates, supervisors, subject specialist advisors, trainers and managers. The information provided to candidates sought to answer such questions as:

- Why are we doing this?
- Why are we being assessed against the Financial Services Training Package when we are in the insurance business?
- What is competence?
- How will workplace knowledge and skills be matched against units of competency?
- What will the recognition process actually involve?
- What is the process if I am not happy with the outcome?
- How do I carry out self–assessment?
- How can I be sure the recognition process won't be used for the wrong reasons? Is my job on the line?

Section 3 – Further Reading and References

ANTA 2001 *Recognition Resource*, Guides 1 and 3, Training Package Assessment Materials Kit

Bateman, A. 2006, *Yes we are there!*, Engaging VET Practitioners Forum, RPL – Done Well.

Bateman, A. 2003, Has RPL *Served Its Purpose?* AVETRA, Nowra, NSW.

Bateman, A. & Knight, B. 2003, *Giving Credit*: *A review of RPL and credit transfer in the vocational education and training sector*, 1995 to 2001, NCVER, Australia

Bowman, K., Clayton, G., Bateman, A., Knight, B., Thomson, P., Hargreaves, J., Blom, K., & Enders, M. 2003, *Recognition of prior learning in the vocational education and training sector,* A project funded by ANTA, NCVER, Australia

Catanzariti, T. 2006, *Inquiry into skills shortages in rural and regional NSW*, Standing Committee on State Development, NSW Government, Australia

IPART NSW, 2006, *Review of the Skills Base in NSW and the Future Challenges for Vocational Education and Training.* NSW Government. Australia

Hargreaves, J. 2006, *Recognition of Prior Learning – At a glance*, NCVER, Australia Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2003, Beyond Rhetoric: *Adult Learning Policies and Practices*, Paris

Web sites

SkillsRecognition
www.skillsrecognition.nsw.gov.au

SkillsOnline
https://www.training.nsw.gov.au/training_providers/resources/skillsonline/index.html

NCVER
www.ncver.edu.au

DEEWR
www.deewr.gov.au

Assessor networks

Hunter Trainers and Assessors Network
www.htan.org.au

Sites of potential interest to candidates

Skills Recognition – valuing prior learning

The Skills Recognition website provides information about the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process, and encourages people to have their existing skills formally recognised with a qualification. This website was developed with support from the NSW and Commonwealth governments under the Council of Australian Governments RPL initiative.

http://www.skillsrecognition.nsw.gov.au/

Australian Skills Recognition Information (ASRI)

The ASRI site is part of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship main site. It tells you about skills recognition for the purpose of migration to Australia or having your skills or qualifications, which were gained overseas, assessed to allow you to practice your occupation in Australia. You can also find state-specific licensing and registration requirements to practice your occupation in Australia.

http://www.immi.gov.au/asri/

Centrelink

Find out if Centrelink's Career Information Centres can help you by looking in this section of the Centrelink site. The centres are 'one-stop-shops' providing a comprehensive free service to all Australians. Specialist staff provide assistance to students, the unemployed or people who are looking at changing jobs. Career Information Centres can help customers make informed decisions about education, training and employment options and pathways.

http://www.centrelink.gov.au/

DEC Apprenticeships and Traineeships

This site explains the processes which allow people who have trade skills and experience but do not have formal qualifications to have them formally recognised by the NSW Vocational Training Tribunal (VTT) and receive trade certification.

https://www.training.nsw.gov.au/businesses/apprenticeships_traineeships/index.html

JobWise

Jobwise is a web site supporting mature age employment and contains information for employers, mature age job seekers and mature age workers.

http://www.jobwise.gov.au/

myfuture

This site gives you information about career planning, education, and training options for Australian jobs. You can use the myguide feature to guide you through activities to help you explore your career. You will answer questions, explore career suggestions made by myfuture, select career favourites, clarify your career direction, and then create an action plan to help you reach your career goals. The section called ~The Facts ~ gives you access to information on career related topics.

http://www.myfuture.edu.au/

HSC/TAFE Credit Transfer

This website is a useful reference for school students, parents, teachers, career advisers and other interested persons on credit transfer arrangements between the Higher School Certificate (HSC) and TAFE NSW.

https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/hsctafe/

Trades Recognition Australia

International skills assessment for people intending to migrate to Australia.

http://www.deewr.gov.au/Skills/Programs/SkillsAssess/TRA/Pages/default.aspx

Qualifications Recognition

Advice on how Australian and overseas qualifications compare to help overseas qualified people study and work in Australia.

http://www.aei.gov.au/AEI/QualificationsRecognition/Default.htm

Australian Education International – National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (AEI–NOOSR)

Australian Education International (AEI), through the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition, can help if you are a professional trained outside Australia and have permanent residence in Australia. AEI-NOOSR helps you have your qualifications recognised in Australia by helping you meet specific academic or professional requirements for registration.

http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/services/noosr.htm

A shared responsibility

Apprenticeships for the 21st Century
Final Report of the Expert Panel
31 January 2011

http://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/FAQ/Documents/Apprenticeshipsforthe21stCenturyExpertPanel.pdf

Other Websites

National Training Information Service

The database on vocational education and training in Australia which provides a Search and Browse function that allows you to find specific Training Packages, Qualifications, Courses, Units of Competency and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) that are licensed to provide training in one or many states.

http://www.ntis.gov.au/

RON – RPL Online Network

RON is the RPL Online Network. The network is about providing a supportive environment for anyone interested in recognition of prior learning. You can choose your level of participation. Private or public RTO assessors and trainers are all very welcome! You can join weekly online discussions, participate in online discussions, attend or view our face to face forums, review current RPL resources or find out who is a part of this network. The network is COAG funded, managed by TAFE NSW South Western Sydney Institute and supported by DEC State Training Services. If you are interested in RPL, want to know more about RPL or are an experienced RPL assessor, everyone is welcome!

http://rplnetworkonline.wikispaces.com/

Hunter Trainers and Assessors Network (HTAN)

This is a strong and well-established network of practitioners who engage in face-to-face, online and other forms of professional development and collaborative learning-related VET activity in the Hunter Valley of NSW.

www.htan.org.au

training.com.au

As a single point of access to a vast range of vocational education and training information, training.com.au provides information about training products and services in Australia. You can search for courses or training providers or read the latest news in vocational education and training. The site includes information aimed at training providers, businesses and employers, apprentices and trainees.

http://www.training.com.au/

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research

This is the major national centre for research in vocational education and training and manages many large research projects. It also stores and archives research information, reports, policy documents and data about national VET policy and issues.

www.ncver.edu.au

Engaging VET Practitioners Forums, RPL – Done Well in VET

This resource derives from a series of forums which were conducted in Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Sydney. By adopting an appreciative inquiry methodology, participants focused on what was positive, what was possible and what works in Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in practice. There are case studies presented in RPL for mature-aged workers, youth, experienced staff and managers, and in trades, equity, and regional areas. It is suggested that in future RPL should be included as an integral part of assessment, and generate a high degree of industry acceptance and confidence. It requires a simplified process which is speedy and accessible.

http://www.reframingthefuture.net/docs/2006/Goal3/3evp_Using_apprec_inquiry_RPL_july06.pdf

Recognition of Prior Learning – an Assessment Resource for Practitioners

This publication was developed by the WA Department of Education and Training to provide Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) with up-to-date information about Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). It includes a matrix of general principles for RPL matched to the relevant elements in the Australian Quality Training Framework and the steps which are: self-assessment by the candidate; interview with assessor; demonstration/observation of tasks; and provision of further supporting evidence. Other issues include: rules of evidence; employability skills; and validation processes.

http://www.vetinfonet.det.wa.edu.au/progdev/docs/good_practice_guide.v5.pdf

Processes, systems and tools supporting recognition of prior learning survey

The Australian Flexible Learning Framework has commissioned a report aimed at exploring current recognition of prior learning (RPL), and recognition of currency competency (RCC) in the use of e-systems and tools through the Australian Vocational and Education (VET) and Adult and Community Education (ACE) systems. Key findings are: barriers still exist to implementing RPL; funding models influence uptake of RPL and RCC; skills recognition should be considered in context; support for RPL assessment on site is required; clear differences exist in applying RPL/RCC by public and private sector; alignment with the ACE sector could support lifelong learning; inconsistencies exist in common skills across training packages; and complex technology is often encountered in RPL assessment.

http://e-standards.flexiblelearning.net.au/docs/e-standards-vet-rpl-survey-v1-0.pdf

RPL policy to practice: Why the reticence of practitioners to engage?

This conference paper explores the reluctance of teachers and educational leaders to take up Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policies and practices. Findings suggest that many Vocational Education and Training (VET) practitioners have a poor understanding of the tools, frameworks, competency units, nature of evidence and collection for assessment, and a fear of making inappropriate professional judgments.

http://www.avetra.org.au/AVETRA%20Work%2017.04.08/CS6.1%20-%20 Janet%20Hewson.pdf

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Australia

This report consists of six sections that includes contextual factors (demography, globalisation, technological developments, social changes, economic developments, and issues regarding skills levels and shortages); institutional arrangements (political and legal frameworks, role of government, and resourcing); and technical arrangements (qualifications, credit arrangements and approaches to assessment). Other components of the report are: stakeholder behaviour; nine case studies demonstrating RPL processes in Australia; and key issues, challenges and threats in the context of the data.

http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/4BD9F352-6AFB-44E5-8568-F6DAD0E6A87E/18525/RecognitionofNonformalandInformalLearninginAustral.pdf