Report on the Further Scoping Project 2 - Recognition of Informal Learning – Critical Evaluation of Existing Further Education / Adult Learning Qualifications as Potential Sources of Recognition or Credit

September 2004
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Executive Summary

In early 2004, the Victorian Qualifications Authority [VQA] Board and the Adult, Community and Further Education Board [ACFEB] considered a report on the feasibility of recognising informal learning within the qualifications administered by the VQA.

The report highlighted the importance of informal learning and how effective recognition arrangements could contribute to the Victorian government’s goals and targets for promoting lifelong learning and developing cohesive and resilient communities, which are articulated in Growing Victoria Together.

Both Boards accepted the initial report, endorsed a statement of principles for guiding further work in the area and agreed to commission a project to examine whether the current suite of further education and adult learning qualifications might provide a source of recognition or credit for informal learning. In doing so, the Boards acknowledged that informal learning might be recognised through:

- assessment of knowledge and skills gained through informal learning against specific units or modules
- assessment of the individual’s learning skills and strategies demonstrated during informal learning against units and modules dealing with learning
- block credit or advanced standing based on the outcomes of informal learning.

The current study, which stems from this decision, focuses on the second of these three approaches. As such, the central concern of this report is to examine whether informal learning may be recognised against ‘learning focused’ units or modules in existing further education and adult learning qualifications.

Project methodology

This study builds on the outcomes of the earlier feasibility study and draws on information gathered through an environmental scan, which comprised a literature review and consultations with key stakeholders.

The outcomes of the environmental scan were used to develop a discussion paper that provided the basis for a focus group and subsequent consultations.

The material gathered through these sources was then incorporated in a draft report that was circulated to the Project Steering Committee and key staff in the VQA and ACFEB for consideration prior to the preparation of this report.

What is informal learning?

Informal learning refers to personal and employment capacity building that occurs outside the formal recognition system. In Victoria, this is any
learning that does not lead directly to a full qualification or credit towards a qualification accredited by the VQA or higher education providers.

As such, informal learning occurs when people develop their personal and employment capacities through:

- participating in work
- engaging in community activities
- pursuing activities and interests as individuals or in groups
- engaging in non course-based learning activities, such as discussion groups, meetings and workshops, provided in response to the expressed or potential interests and needs of individuals and communities
- taking part in non recognised but planned and structured programs, such as short courses.

What is recognition?

Informal learning may be recognised in a variety of ways. In some cases, recognition may simply involve learners acknowledging that they have engaged in learning. In other cases, recognition may involve establishing mechanisms to improve employer, organisation and community awareness or acceptance of the outcomes of informal learning. Whereas, in other situations, recognition involves granting credit for the outcomes of informal learning within nationally recognised qualifications.

Whilst there are different forms of recognition, this study concluded that formal recognition should always be available for those engaged in informal learning.

As such, recognition in this study is seen to be the formal approval or endorsement of the outcomes of learning, education and / or training by the awarding of a full or partial qualification administered by the Victorian Qualifications Authority or higher education institution.

Reasons for recognising informal learning

Some people do not seek recognition for the personal and employment capacities that they attain through informal learning. However there are others for whom this represents the first step towards a qualification. Further there are many learners who would not have considered entering formal education and training without prior engagement in informal learning. Informal learning supported by effective recognition arrangements provides an important bridge to formal education, training and employment.

People develop a broad range of capacities through informal learning. As such, it provides a pathway to entry level qualifications and also offers opportunities for people to develop higher order skills and capabilities.

Any new recognition arrangements should ensure learners gain recognition at the appropriate level – it must therefore be inclusive of all AQF qualifications that fall within the remit of the VQA.
In addition, the consultations conducted for this study highlighted the role that involvement in learning plays in community development. By promoting the value of learning and encouraging life long learning, individuals and organisations build social capital and community resilience.

An effective recognition system provides one way of encouraging participation in education and training and in so doing promotes the development of social capital and more cohesive communities.

Ultimately better recognition arrangements will help to ensure that a more diverse group of people has access to a broader range of formal qualifications.

Potential users of a system for recognising informal learning

The consultation discussion paper, which was released by the ACFE Board as part of the development of the *Ministerial Statement on Adult Community Education*, identified six key groups of ACE learners. These are:

- Women
- Culturally and linguistically diverse learners [CALD]
- Koories
- Learners with disabilities
- Young people
- Older learners

These groups engage in informal learning and are potential users of recognition services. Other potential users include:

- Unemployed
- Residents of socially and economically disadvantaged areas
- Early school leavers
- Existing workers
- Volunteers

Whilst membership of these groups overlaps, each group acquires informal learning in particular ways, has specific drivers for seeking recognition and experience different barriers to gaining recognition. For example, ‘existing workers’ who often acquire skills through work may seek to have their informal learning recognised in order to establish a fast track to qualifications required for promotion, career advancement or to keep pace with change in the workplace. Whereas, ‘young people’ who may acquire skills through participation in sporting and community organisations, youth development projects and casual work may wish to have their informal learning recognised as part of establishing a pathway to further education or employment.

Whilst each of these groups face specific barriers to gaining recognition, the study revealed a number of common barriers. These include:
• the difficulties in meeting the formal assessment requirements associated with recognition processes, such as not having sufficient evidence

• the mismatch between skills, knowledge and capabilities acquired through informal learning and the outcomes of recognised qualifications

• the lack of appropriate recognition service providers

• the time and cost associated with recognition services

• the lack of guidance for candidates.

Barriers such as these have frustrated previous efforts to assist people gain recognition for informal learning. They have also restricted the access that disadvantaged groups, which form a significant proportion of the ACE sector’s clients, to recognition services and nationally recognised qualifications.

Alternative ways of providing recognition for informal learning

The study revealed that there is a suite of existing adult learning and further education qualification that provide a potentially powerful structure for recognising informal learning.

These qualifications form the Certificates in General Education for Adults, the Liberal Arts and the Further Education programs. These three programs provide an articulated, broadly framed set of qualifications from Certificate I to Diploma that may be used to recognise informal learning. This suite of qualifications, through the Liberal Arts and the Further Education programs, also articulate with a range of higher education qualifications.

There are a number of different approaches that may be used to grant recognition against these qualifications. These are highlighted in the chart on the following page.

Assessors and RTOs involved in providing recognition services must be able to select the approach that is most appropriate to use in different contexts and with different clients.

One way of granting recognition, which is advanced in this study, involves providing recognition against a ‘learning’ oriented unit of competency. It is envisaged that this unit of competency will focus on recognising ‘learning gain’, that is the overall complexity (level) and amount (volume) of the learning acquired, rather than specific skills and knowledge. It is proposed that this unit of competency, which is titled Enhance personal and employment capabilities and is provided in draft form in the body of this document, will be incorporated in the elective bank of the Certificates in General Education for Adults and the Liberal Arts and Further Education programs.

This unit of competency has a flexible structure that enables it to be used to recognise the differing breadth and depth of skills, knowledge and capacities acquired by informal learners. This is achieved through the unit having a common set of elements and performance criteria and a set of
range statements and evidence guides that describe the characteristics of learning gain at different qualification levels. For example, when incorporated in the *Certificate IV in Liberal Arts*, the unit of competency would comprise the common elements and performance criteria with the range statement and evidence guide suitable for a certificate IV qualification.

The other key feature of the unit of competency is that it does not have a fixed allocation of nominal hours. It is envisaged that the nominal hours allocated to the unit of competency will vary according to the average learning time required to acquire the ‘learning gain’.

### Alternative approaches to recognising informal learning

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Recognition mechanism</th>
<th>Basic process</th>
<th>Contexts in which the approach is most appropriate</th>
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| RPL against specific modules or units of competency | Matching outcomes of informal learning with outcomes of recognised qualifications | • Close correspondence between informal outcomes and recognised qualifications  
• Significant breadth and / or depth of informal learning  
• Evidence rich environments  
• Candidates with pre existing skills in identifying and presenting information  
• Learner seeking recognition for whole or significant portion of qualification |
| RPL against broadly framed module or unit of competency | Matching outcomes of informal learning with outcomes of recognised qualifications | • Broad range of informal learning activities that rely on common set of underpinning skills, knowledge and capabilities |
| Mapping outcomes of non recognised program | Matching outcomes of informal learning with outcomes of recognised qualifications | • Non recognised program with clear outcomes that are stable over time  
• Host organisation for non recognised program to arrange mapping process  
• Close correspondence between outcomes of non recognised program and recognised qualifications |
| Recognition against ‘learning gain’ focused unit of competency | Identifying and crediting learning gain | • Small volume of learning  
• Learning not closely aligned with outcomes of recognised programs  
• Diverse skills and knowledge  
• Recognition of whole qualification not sought |
| Block or unspecified credit | Deeming equivalence of learning | • Outcomes of informal learning are perceived to have same value or worth as outcomes of recognised qualifications  
• Significant breadth and / or depth of informal learning  
• Extent of recognition clearly defined |

As illustrated above, this approach to recognising informal learning is particularly suited to situations where learners have gained a mixture of skills, knowledge and capacities that do not readily match the outcomes specified in recognised qualifications. It is also suited to situations where
the volume of learning is too small to be recognised through other approaches.

This new approach to recognition, which focuses on recognising ‘learning gain’ needs to be accompanied by a new approach to assessment – it is proposed that a discussion based assessment process is used in recognising ‘learning gain’.

Regardless of the recognition process that is used, learners engaged in informal learning require better guidance and support services. This could be addressed through sponsoring community learning partnerships that are focused on delivering guidance and recognition services to informal learners at the local level.

In order to promote the recognition of informal learning it is recommended that the VQA and ACFE Boards consider the following recommendations.

**Recommendation One**

That the VQA and ACFE Boards support the development of a unit of competency for recognising ‘learning gain’ and the incorporation of this unit of competency into the Certificates in General Education for Adults and the Further Education and Liberals Arts programs through the curriculum maintenance process.

**Recommendation Two**

That the VQA and the ACFE Division develop guidelines for discussion-based assessment and a practical guide for assessors which illustrates the process.

**Recommendation Three:**

That the VQA and ACFE Boards support an initiative aimed at providing guidance and recognition services for informal learners in local communities that involves:

- training people who can offer guidance and recognition services for learners engaged in informal learning, and
- establishing ACE learning partnerships in selected ACFE regions that are aimed at delivering these guidance and recognition services in local communities
- trialing the approach described in this report for recognising and assessing informal learning against a unit of competency focused on recognising ‘learning gain’.

**Recommendation Four:**

That the VQA and ACFE Boards investigate the feasibility of establishing a credit based, adult learning framework which recognises the outcomes of formal and informal learning and builds learning pathways and qualifications based on the learning, career and employment aspirations of learners.
Background

In early 2004, the Victorian Qualifications Authority [VQA] Board and the Adult, Community and Further Education Board [ACFEB] considered a report, prepared by Learning Australia Pty Ltd, on the feasibility of recognising informal learning within the qualifications administered by the VQA. This report:

- acknowledged the importance of informal learning
- described the provision of informal learning in Victoria
- identified the barriers to recognising informal learning
- outlined ways of providing credit for informal learning
- advanced a set of principles for guiding further work on the recognition of informal learning.

The report also highlighted how an effective system of recognising informal learning could contribute to the Victorian government’s goals and targets for promoting lifelong learning and developing cohesive and resilient communities, which are articulated in *Growing Victoria Together*.

An effective system of recognising informal learning, it was argued, was seen to promote lifelong learning through:

- improving participation and achievement in education and training
- enhancing links between schools, business and education
- expanding opportunities for training and learning all through life.

This in turn would contribute to the government’s targets of:

- achieving a six per cent increase in the percentage of young people 15-19 in rural and regional Victoria engaged in education and training by 2005
- increasing the proportion of Victorians learning new skills.

The introduction of better recognition arrangements, it was also argued, is consistent with the government’s community development goals. Such arrangements were seen to be an integral part of broader programs designed to:

- support new community building initiatives and develop partnerships with local government around local communities' needs
- enhance community participation and engagement in cultural activities
- reduce unemployment and rejuvenate those areas worst affected by social and economic disadvantage

As such, improved recognition arrangements may contribute to the government’s targets of:

- increasing the extent and diversity of participation in community, cultural and recreational organisations
• reducing inequalities in health, education and well being between communities.

More effective recognition arrangements, the study argued, should enable Victorians to gain credit for learning achieved through work, life and community activities. This includes involvement in community development programs, such as Neighbourhood Renewal and the Community Capacity Building Initiative. This will assist people to access further education and training, gain formal qualifications and boost their employability. This in turn will help to reduce inequalities and deepen and broaden the pool of skills in local communities. It should also serve to support community participation and promote the value of learning and in so doing contribute to the development of social capital and community resilience.

The links between informal learning and community development and the role that community providers can play in fostering these links through forging effective community learning partnerships is a central theme in the recent Ministerial Statement titled, *Future Directions for Adult Community Education in Victoria*.

Both the VQA and ACFE Boards accepted the initial report on informal learning and endorsed a statement of principles for guiding further work in the area. These principles are designed to ensure that any arrangements for recognising informal learning:

• maintain the integrity of informal learning programs and outcomes
• are quality assured
• are voluntary
• provide for the formal recognition of generic skills
• incorporate guidance and support for learners and focus on equipping learners with the abilities to identify their current skills, assess their learning needs and evaluate their own progress
• must lead to a full or part qualification administered by the VQA
• are cost effective
• are part of a learning pathway
• facilitate partnerships between formal and informal providers of education and training.
• incorporate ways of allocating credit for the outcomes of learning attained.
• incorporate ongoing monitoring and review processes.

The VQA and ACFE Boards also agreed to commission a further scoping project to examine whether the current suite of further education and adult learning qualifications might provide a source of recognition or credit for informal learning. In doing so, the Boards acknowledged that informal learning might be recognised in a variety of ways, including through:
• assessment of knowledge and skills gained through informal learning against specific units or modules

• assessment of the individual’s learning skills and strategies demonstrated during informal learning against units and modules dealing with learning

• block credit or advanced standing based on the outcomes of informal learning.

The current study, which stems from this decision, is designed to focus on the second of these three approaches to recognising informal learning. As such, the central concern of this report is to determine whether knowledge, skills and capabilities gained through informal learning may be recognised or credited against ‘learning focused’ units or modules in existing further education and adult learning qualifications.

**Project methodology**

Learning Australia Pty Ltd was commissioned by the VQA and ACFE to undertake this study in mid 2004. The study involved four key stages. These were:

• project establishment – the consultant met with the Project Director and representatives of the VQA and ACFE to clarify the scope and expected outcomes of the project. During this stage a Project Reference Group was established to advise on the direction of the project and provide feedback for the consultant.

• environmental scan – the consultant undertook a review of key documents and reports, analysed available statistical information on the provision of further education and adult learning qualifications and conducted a series of key respondent interviews with representatives of the ACE and VET sectors. These included ACE, AEI and VET providers, ACFE regional councils, VAEAI, ACFE, OTTE, the Service Industries Curriculum Maintenance Manager and the Queensland Studies Authority. The key outcome of this stage was a discussion paper.

• consultation with key stakeholders – the discussion paper developed in the previous stage of the study was used to guide a focus group that was conducted in early August 2004. The focus group included representatives of:
  − metropolitan and regional ACE, AEI and VET providers
  − State education and training policy and planning authorities, including VQA, ACFEB and OTTE
  − LLENs
  − Learning Towns
  − the Service Industries Curriculum Maintenance Manager
  − the Australian National Training Authority
− other government agencies engaged in community capacity building initiatives such as Department of Human Services - Neighbourhood Renewal and Department for Victorian Communities – Office of youth
− industry and community groups.

Following the focus group a limited number of key respondent interviews were conducted to clarify issues that emerged in the discussion.

- report preparation – the consultant collated and analysed the outcomes of the environmental scan and consultations and presented a draft report to members of the Project Steering Committee in late August 2004. This report was also circulated to a limited number of staff within the VQA and ACFE for comment. Feedback from these sources was considered and incorporated in the final version of the report.

**Definition of informal learning**

In the feasibility study that preceded this study, informal learning was defined as personal and employment capacity building that occurs outside the formal recognition system.

In Victoria, this is any learning that does not lead directly to either a full qualification or recognition towards a qualification issued by the Victorian Qualifications Authority [VQA] or higher education providers.

Informal learning occurs when people develop their personal and employment capacities through:

- participating in work
- engaging in community activities
- pursuing activities and interests as individuals or in groups
- engaging in non course-based learning activities, such as discussion groups, meetings and workshops, provided in response to the expressed or potential interests and needs of individuals and communities
- taking part in non recognised but planned and structured programs, such as short courses.

Informal learning takes place in a wide range of settings, may be planned or incidental, may be structured or unstructured, may be facilitated or self directed and may be generated in response to group or individual needs and interests. Such learning is often not planned and stems from activities aimed at addressing individual or community needs.

For the purposes of this paper, informal learning encompasses any form of non recognised personal and employment capacity building that takes place, for example, within the government funded and non funded Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector, the workplace, industry and community organisations and the broader community.
Definition of recognition

Informal learning may be recognised in a variety of ways. In some cases, recognition may simply involve learners acknowledging that they have engaged in learning. In other cases, recognition may involve establishing mechanisms to improve employer, organisation and community awareness or acceptance of the outcomes of informal learning. Whereas, in other situations, recognition involves granting credit for the outcomes of informal learning within nationally recognised qualifications.

In April 2002, the Australian National Training Authority [ANTA] released a report titled, *Due Credit: Examining the potential to recognise the skills achieved by young people participating in youth development programs.* This report identified a number of options for recognising the skills and knowledge that young people acquire through non accredited youth development programs. Some of these options, such as enhancing ‘brand name’ awards and issuing participation certificates, were not intended to link the outcomes of these programs with VET qualifications. Rather the intention was to promote broader employer and community acceptance or acknowledgment of the value of such programs.

Other options, such as mapping the outcomes of programs against recognised qualifications, establishing a generic skills qualification and developing a specialist qualification for youth leadership, were designed to provide formal recognition for the outcomes of informal learning by incorporating these in nationally recognised qualifications.

The *Due Credit* report highlighted the different forms of recognition and reinforced the point that learners may not always seek formal recognition of the skills, knowledge and capacities they acquire through informal learning. Whilst this may be the case, the consultations undertaken for this study indicated that most stakeholders believe that formal recognition should always be available for those engaged in informal learning. As such, recognition in this paper is seen to be the formal approval or endorsement of the outcomes of learning, education and / or training by the awarding of a full or partial qualification administered by the Victorian Qualifications Authority or higher education institution.

Reasons for recognising informal learning

While some people do not seek recognition for personal and employment capacities attained through informal learning there are others for whom this represents the first step towards a qualification. Further there are many who would not have considered entering formal education and training without prior engagement in informal learning. As such, informal learning supported by effective recognition arrangements provides an important bridge to formal education, training and employment.

The personal and employment capacities obtained through informal learning are not restricted to entry level and it should not be assumed that
people lacking formal qualifications will only seek recognition for entry level qualifications. While informal learning provides a pathway to entry level qualifications, it also offers opportunities for people to develop higher order skills and capabilities. Examples include the capacities which people acquire through participation in non-recognised professional courses, taking on leadership roles in the community and developing higher level technical skills through work. It was widely agreed in the consultations that any new recognition arrangements should ensure learners gain recognition at the appropriate level – it must therefore be inclusive of all qualifications within the AQF that fall within the remit of the VQA. This is where the work currently being undertaken by the VQA on the Credit Matrix has an important role to play in providing a common measure of the complexity and volume of learning acquired.

As well as developing personal and employment capacities, the consultations highlighted the role that involvement in learning plays in community development. By promoting and supporting the value of learning and encouraging life long learning, individuals and organisations build social capital and community resilience. An effective recognition system was seen as a way of encouraging participation in education and training and in so doing promoting the development of social capital and more cohesive communities.

It was generally agreed that the recognition of informal learning would ensure that a more diverse group of people has access to a broader range of formal qualifications. This in turn offers opportunities to:

- increase participation in formal education and training
- provide an indicator of success for learners especially those who face multiple barriers to employment and may be a long way from being able to acquire a qualification or employment
- improve the status and profile of the outcomes of non accredited programs
- reduce the overall cost of education and training to government and the individual by ensuring that people are not retrained in skills which they already possess
- enhance learner motivation and alleviate marginalisation by enabling learners to achieve formal outcomes in less formal settings
- promote the value of learning and foster life long learning
- promote equity
- provide pathways for disadvantaged and discouraged learners
- open pathways for those who have not been able to access the formal education and training system, such as older workers
- foster community development and broaden and deepen the pool of skills in communities throughout Victoria.
• empower learners by enabling them to experience success in learning
• assist with long term integration of people into the labour market.

Potential users of a system for recognising informal learning
The consultation discussion paper, which was released by the ACFE Board in November 2003 as part of the development of the *Ministerial Statement on Adult Community Education*, identified six key groups of ACE learners. These are:

- Women
- Culturally and linguistically diverse learners [CALD]
- Koories
- Learners with disabilities
- Young people
- Older learners

The environmental scan and consultations, which were conducted for this study, confirmed that these groups engage in informal learning and are potential users of recognition services. In addition, the consultations revealed other potential users including:

- Unemployed
- Residents of socially and economically disadvantaged areas
- Early school leavers
- Existing workers
- Volunteers

Membership of these groups often overlaps. However, as indicated in the chart that appears on the following page, these groups acquire informal learning in particular ways, have specific drivers for seeking recognition and experience different barriers to gaining recognition.

For example, ‘existing workers’ who often acquire skills through work may seek to have their informal learning recognised in order to establish a fast track to qualifications required for promotion, career advancement or to keep pace with change in the workplace. Whereas, ‘young people’ who may acquire skills through participation in sporting and community organisations, youth development projects and casual work may wish to have their informal learning recognised as part of establishing a pathway to further education or employment. On the other hand, ‘volunteers’ who develop skills through participation in their host organisations may seek recognition to develop learning pathways to improve their own qualifications or bolster the capacity of their organisations.
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<tr>
<th>Potential user groups</th>
<th>Key sources of informal learning</th>
<th>Drivers for seeking recognition for informal learning</th>
<th>Potential barriers to gaining recognition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Family, parenting and caring roles</td>
<td>Access further education and training</td>
<td>Formal assessment requirements ie: lack of evidence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Community activities</td>
<td>Improve employability</td>
<td>Lack of supportive and accessible learning service provider</td>
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<td>Part time / casual work</td>
<td>Entry or return to work</td>
<td>Mismatch between skills and outcomes of recognised qualifications</td>
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<td>Culturally and linguistically diverse learners</td>
<td>Community organisations</td>
<td>Access language and employment skills</td>
<td>Lack of guidance</td>
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<td>Non accredited training</td>
<td>Upgrade overseas qualification</td>
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<td>Overseas skills</td>
<td>Access retraining in new occupation</td>
<td>Lack of local service provider</td>
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<td>Work</td>
<td>Entry to specific occupation</td>
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<td>Targeted skill development - not wanting to relearn existing skills</td>
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<td>Indigenous learners</td>
<td>Community programs and projects</td>
<td>Access further education</td>
<td>Overseas skills not valued</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Non accredited training</td>
<td>Entry or return to work</td>
<td>Language barriers</td>
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<td>Work</td>
<td>Enhance employability</td>
<td>Lack of culturally appropriate service provider</td>
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<td>Community capacity building</td>
<td>Lack of guidance and information</td>
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<td>Mismatch between skills and outcomes of recognised qualifications</td>
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<td>Ethnocentric recognition process</td>
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<td>Youth</td>
<td>Part time and casual work</td>
<td>Access further education</td>
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<td>Youth and community programs and projects</td>
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<td>Lack of culturally appropriate service provider</td>
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<td>Sporting and community organisations</td>
<td>Pathway development</td>
<td>Formal assessment requirements ie: lack of evidence</td>
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<td>Lack of basic skills</td>
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<td>Lack of guidance</td>
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<td>Lack of linkages between youth development programs and VET programs</td>
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<td>Older learners</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Transition from current to new occupation</td>
<td>Formal assessment requirements ie: lack of evidence</td>
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<td>Community organisations</td>
<td>Maintain employability and prepare for retirement</td>
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<td>Require targeted skill development - not wanting to relearn existing skills</td>
<td>Mismatch between skills and outcomes of recognised qualifications</td>
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### Figure 1: Potential users of recognition services [continued]

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<th>Key sources of informal learning</th>
<th>Drivers for seeking recognition for informal learning</th>
<th>Potential barriers to gaining recognition</th>
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<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>• Non accredited training</td>
<td>• Access further education</td>
<td>• Time and cost</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Unemployment programs and projects</td>
<td>• Entry or return to work</td>
<td>• Formal assessment requirements ie: lack of evidence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Mutual obligation requirements</td>
<td>• Pathway development</td>
<td>• Lack of guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Lack of basic and employability skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents of socially and economically disadvantaged areas</td>
<td>• Community capacity building projects ie: Neighbourhood Renewal</td>
<td>• Improve employability</td>
<td>• Formal assessment requirements ie: lack of evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Access further education</td>
<td>• Lack of basic and employability skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Entry or return to work</td>
<td>• Lack of local and accessible service provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Community capacity building</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early school leavers</td>
<td>• Work</td>
<td>• Access further education</td>
<td>• Formal assessment requirements ie: lack of evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Part time and casual work</td>
<td>• Pathway development</td>
<td>• Lack of basic and employability skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Entry to work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners with disabilities</td>
<td>• Non accredited training</td>
<td>• Access further education</td>
<td>• Formal assessment requirements ie: lack of evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Part time and casual work</td>
<td>• Pathway development</td>
<td>• Time and cost of recognition services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Programs and projects</td>
<td>• Entry to work</td>
<td>• Lack of basic and employability skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Mismatch between skills and outcomes of recognised qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing workers</td>
<td>• Work</td>
<td>• Fast track acquisition of new qualifications</td>
<td>• Formal assessment requirements ie: lack of evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Cope with workplace change</td>
<td>• Time and cost of recognition services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Structural adjustment - transition from current to new occupation / industry</td>
<td>• Mismatch between skills and outcomes of recognised qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Maintain employability</td>
<td>• Lack of basic skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Facilitate reskilling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Require targeted skill development - not wanting to relearn existing skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>• Volunteering</td>
<td>• Fast track acquisition of new qualifications for personal career development</td>
<td>• Time and cost of recognition services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Enhance capacity of volunteer organisation</td>
<td>• Support of volunteer organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Require targeted skill development - not wanting to relearn existing skills</td>
<td>• Failure to recognise transferability of skills gained through volunteering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Mismatch between skills and outcomes of recognised qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Formal assessment requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Lack of linkages between volunteer programs and VET system</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Whilst each potential user group faces specific barriers to gaining recognition, there appears to be a number of common barriers. These include:

- the difficulties in meeting the formal assessment requirements associated with recognition processes, such as not having sufficient evidence
- the mismatch between skills, knowledge and capabilities acquired through informal learning and the outcomes of recognised qualifications
- the lack of an appropriate recognition service providers
- the time and cost associated with recognition services
- the lack of guidance for candidates.

Barriers such as these have frustrated previous efforts to assist people gain recognition for skills and knowledge acquired through work and life experience. More importantly they have restricted the access that disadvantaged groups, which form a significant proportion of the ACE sector’s clients, to recognition services and nationally recognised qualifications.

This was confirmed in a recent report commissioned by the Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board [AQFAB], titled Recognition of prior learning: Policy and practice in Australia, which concluded that despite policy intentions, RPL:

‘...has not, by and large, acted as a mechanism for social inclusion for those from disadvantaged backgrounds...indigenous students, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and those who were unemployed or otherwise outside the labour force were appreciably less likely to receive RPL that were their peers’.

**Alternative ways of providing recognition for informal learning**

There are many sources of informal learning and a range of ways of providing recognition for such learning.

The following case study, illustrates the learning opportunities which arose from a Neighbourhood Renewal project.

*Curtain Connection is a project supported by the Neighbourhood Renewal Project and auspiced by the Cloverdale Neighbourhood House which is a small ACE provider.*

*Through this initiative, a group of public housing residents are engaged in making curtains for new families moving into public housing in the area. This project aims to build community capacity through fostering a network of local residents and establishing linkages between new and existing residents. It also addresses issues of community pride in enhancing the look of the neighbourhood.*
This project was not conceived as a training or skill development program. However participants have engaged in learning. Some have developed technical skills, such as operating a sewing machine, measuring and marking up material and installing curtains, whilst others have gained generic skills in areas such as communication, team work and conflict resolution.

People who participate in activities, such as the Curtain Connection project, develop new knowledge, skills and understandings. This is called a ‘learning gain’. In some cases, this ‘learning gain’ may be a planned outcome. However in others, it may be unintended and may only be identified during or after the activity.

The critical question is what is the most effective way of having this learning formally recognised?

**Recognition of prior learning**

At present, the key recognition mechanism is Recognition of Prior Learning [RPL]. This involves matching the learning, such as the skills and knowledge that participants gained through the Curtain Connection project, with the outcomes specified in a relevant qualification.

Whilst RPL processes are widely available they are not always effective in recognising informal learning. This is due to:

- the outcomes of informal learning not matching the outcomes specified in nationally recognised qualifications
- applicants lacking the evidence conventionally required for RPL processes
- the bureaucratic and costly nature of RPL processes
- the lack of guidance and support for RPL applicants.

Partly in response to these problems, a number of further education and adult learning programs now include broadly framed modules, which comprise learning outcomes that may be used to describe a wide range of learning activities. An example of this is the General Curriculum Option modules that form part of the Certificates of General Education for Adults. As illustrated below, the learning outcomes for this module are framed very broadly and could be used to devise a broad range of teaching and learning activities and provide recognition for a range of informal learning activities that involve the use of these competencies. For example, activities as diverse as planning community activities and constructing a pergola could potentially be mapped against these outcomes.

**Figure 2: Learning outcomes for General Curriculum Option 1 – CGEA**

1. Can collect, analyse and organise information
2. Can plan and organise activities
3. Can communicate ideas and information
4. Can work with others and in teams
5. Can use mathematical ideas and techniques
6 Can solve problems
7 Can use technology
8 Can identify, analyse, and apply the practices of culture

Whilst these modules are more flexible and learners can often map their specific skills and knowledge against the broad learning outcomes, the process still essentially involves matching the particular skills and knowledge attained with the learning outcomes. This can produce situations where either the candidate’s learning and the learning outcomes are mismatched or the learning is not sufficiently broad or deep to meet the requirements of the module – in both cases this can mean that the learning cannot be recognised. This is a particular problem for informal learning where the learning is often fragmented, not sequenced and covers a range of topics or skill areas.

Whilst RPL is an important recognition mechanism, it is clear that the current approaches based on matching the outcomes of informal learning with the outcomes specified in recognised qualifications is too inflexible.

**Mapping the outcomes of non accredited programs against recognised qualifications**

An alternative approach to recognising informal learning involves mapping the outcomes of non recognised programs against the units of competency or modules within a recognised qualification.

In 2003, ANTA released a report titled *Bridging Links – A practical guide for the mapping youth development skills to units of competency*. This report, which built on some of the recommendations in the earlier *Due Credit* report, provides a step by step guide for mapping the outcomes of non recognised programs against units of competency in order to assist participants gain recognition within VET qualifications.

A further example of this approach is the provision within the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning [VCAL] for organisations to map their programs against the personal development units in the certificate. In this case, students who complete the relevant non accredited programs gain credit within the VCAL. The Maribyrnong and Moonee Valley LLEN has recently developed a guide to assist schools and other providers map informal learning outcomes against components of the VCAL.

This is an alternative way of providing recognition but like existing RPL mechanisms it also involves matching informal learning outcomes with the outcomes specified in recognised qualifications. This approach has the added complication that the mapping must be undertaken and maintained. Whilst it provides a viable option, this approach is most suited to situations where there is a host organisation which offers a non accredited program that has clear outcomes which are relatively stable over time.
Credit based arrangements for recognising informal learning

A further alternative is to provide credit for the learning gained through informal learning. This approach focuses on identifying the qualities of the ‘learning gain’ rather than on matching the learning to the outcomes specified in the units of competency or modules that make up a qualification. For example, in the Curtain Connection project, it may have been possible to:

- assist the participants reflect on their learning
- identify the baseline skills and knowledge they had at the start of the project
- establish the skills and knowledge they had at the end of the project
- determine their ‘learning gain’.

Having identified the ‘learning gain’, the next step is to ascribe a credit value to the ‘learning gain’. It is the ‘learning gain’, which is the overall complexity (level) and amount (volume) of the learning acquired, rather than the specific outcomes of the learning that provide the basis for recognition.

There are two main ways in which ‘learning gain’ may be recognised within further education / adult learning qualifications. These are:

- block credit or advanced standing based on the outcomes of informal learning.
- recognition against a unit of competency focused on identifying the ‘learning gain’ attained through informal learning

Block or unspecified credit

Block or unspecified credit arrangements enable learners to gain credit within a qualification, usually up to a designated value, by deeming or attaching a value to learning attained outside the qualification such as through non accredited education and training, work, participation in the community or other informal experience.

In summary, this involves identifying the learning that has been attained, giving it a value and granting learners exemption from components of the qualification based on the value of the learning attained outside the qualification. The key advantage for learners is that it provides a mechanism for recognising their informal learning and reducing the time needed to gain a qualification.

There are no arrangements of this type in the current suite of further education and adult learning qualifications available in Victoria.

However this approach is relatively widely used in higher education, an example being the credit given in some undergraduate degrees for the completion of a VET diploma or advanced diploma.

A further example is the reforms to the VCE, which were introduced by the VQA and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority [VCAA] in
2002. These reforms created provision for block credit recognition within the VCE. Under these arrangements, learners are able to apply for block credit towards the VCE if they have completed, or are completing training in nationally recognised VET/FE programs that are not already recognised VCE VET programs.

These arrangements provide credit towards the VCE for full or partial completion of nationally recognised VET qualifications at AQF II and above. The level of credit within the VCE varies according to the AQF level of the training undertaken. For example, certificates at AQF II attract credit for units 1 and 2 within the VCE, whereas certificates at AQF III and above gain credit for units 3 and 4 of the VCE. The maximum level of credit available for VET/FE programs under these arrangements is eight units, which may include two sequences at VCE units 3-4 level. Whilst these block credit arrangements apply only to recognised FE and VET programs, this approach could be extended to include a range of non recognised but quality assured programs.

There are currently no simple measures for determining the credit value of informal learning, however it may be possible, to express credit in terms of ‘average learning time’. For example, a learner may be able to gain a number of hours credit within a qualification based on an assessment of the average learning time that would be required to attain the skills and knowledge that they have attained through informal learning.

Initially, it may be necessary to establish a maximum level of credit that may be granted within a qualification. For example, the extent of block credit may be restricted to one or two units or modules from a nominated list of units or modules within the relevant further education / adult learning qualification. In effect, this would mean that the learner would have to complete one or two fewer units or modules to gain the full qualification.

Given the different qualification structures and varying nature of the further education / adult learning qualifications available in Victoria it is unlikely that there will be one set of credit arrangements that will apply to all qualifications.

As such, block credit arrangements would need to be developed on a qualification by qualification basis. This could be managed through the curriculum maintenance process. In this case, the Curriculum Maintenance Manager would make decisions about the extent of credit that may be granted and the units or modules to which it might apply.

In making such decisions, the Curriculum Maintenance Manager would seek to ensure that the maximum possible amount of credit is granted without compromising the integrity and / or intent of the qualification. These decisions would be incorporated into the qualification or course rules and would apply a system wide basis. This would mean that assessors and RTOs would simply be required to apply the course rules rather than make independent decisions about whether credit should be given for particular units or modules.
Recognition against a unit of competency focused on identifying the ‘learning gain’ attained through informal learning

A further option, which is the focus of this paper, involves the identification of a unit of competency designed to recognise personal and employment capacities gained through informal learning.

It is envisaged that the unit of competency may be incorporated in selected further education / adult learning qualification and will provide the benchmark against which recognition for informal learning is granted.

An initial draft of the unit of competency, titled *Enhance personal and employment capabilities* is provided on page 26. This unit of competency has a number of distinct features. These are:

- the unit of competency focuses on ‘learning gain’ rather than specific skills and knowledge. As shown in the draft unit of competency, the elements and performance criteria require the learner to:
  - participate in informal learning activity
  - reflect on informal learning activity
  - identify learning gain.

- the unit of competency describes different levels of ‘learning gain’ ranging from the acquisition of basic through to complex skills, knowledge and capabilities.

  This is achieved by specifying common elements and performance criteria and establishing a set of range statements and evidence guides that describe increasing levels of complexity of ‘learning gain’.

  For example, the unit of competency may be incorporated in a Certificate II qualification. In this case, the unit would contain the common elements and performance criteria along with the range statement and evidence guide that describes ‘learning gain’ at that level.

  To illustrate this point, the draft unit of competency has a common set of elements and performance criteria and a range statement and an evidence guide that may be appropriate for inclusion in a Certificate I and a Certificate IV qualification.

  The ‘learning gain’ described in the range statement and evidence guide suitable for Certificate I qualification focuses on the attainment of personal and employment capabilities that involve the ability to undertake tasks and activities which:
  - draw on a limited range of knowledge and skills
  - have a substantial repetitive aspect
  - are accompanied by clear rules and procedures to be followed.
Whereas the ‘learning gain’ described in the range statement and evidence guide suitable for a Certificate IV qualification focuses on the attainment of personal and employment capabilities that involve the ability to undertake tasks and activities which:

- rest on a comprehensive range of specialised knowledge and skills
- involve addressing a range of problems
- have unpredictable and or non routine aspects
- require skills in organising self and others.

The descriptors of ‘learning gain’ used in the draft unit of competency are based on the levels of learning identified by the VQA team undertaking the development of the Credit Matrix.

These descriptors identify a hierarchy of levels of learning based on four key criteria, namely:

- the characteristics of the context in which the learning is applied
- the level of autonomy the person has in applying the learning
- the level of problem solving the person uses in applying the learning
- the nature and complexity of the knowledge that underpins the learning.

It is envisaged that the final version of the unit of competency will have range statements and evidence guides appropriate for inclusion in all levels of further education and adult learning qualifications.

- the nominal duration of the unit of competency will vary depending on the average learning time taken to achieve the ‘learning gain’ at the given level of qualification. For example, a learner may have acquired a set of personal and employment capabilities at level one that has an average learning time of 20 hours. Whereas another learner may have gained different capabilities but at the same level of complexity which would have an average learning time of thirty hours to attain.

Whilst acknowledging that average learning time will vary, it is proposed that a ceiling be imposed on the time that may be claimed. It is recommended that the unit of competency may have maximum nominal duration not exceeding twenty per cent of the total nominal hours allocated to the qualification.

As illustrated in the following diagram, the unit of competency is designed to be flexible in terms of both the complexity of the ‘learning gain’ that may be recognised and the nominal hours allocated to the ‘learning gain’.
This approach to recognising informal learning has a number of attractions. These include:

- the problems associated with matching the outcomes of informal learning with the outcomes in further education / adult learning qualifications, which are inherent in RPL, are overcome.

- the focus on 'learning gain' rather than specific outcomes means that different skills, knowledge and capabilities may be aggregated and a credit value can be attached to the total package of learning. This avoids the problems associated with current approaches to RPL where the breadth and depth of learning may not correspond with the requirements of the unit of competency or module.

- this approach is able to recognise small quantities of learning and as such is able to provide an indicator of success for learners who may be a long way from being able to acquire a qualification or employment.

- the approach provides a way of recognising informal learning at all qualification levels and acknowledges that there are variations in the breadth and depth of learning acquired through informal learning. For example, one learner may acquire a broader base of lower level capabilities whilst another may gain a narrow range of higher order capabilities. The flexibility in the unit of competency enables these variations to be recognised.

**Summary of alternative ways of recognising informal learning**

The preceding discussion outlined the main approaches that may be used to recognise informal learning within the further education and adult learning qualifications administered by the VQA.
The following chart identifies the different approaches, highlights the recognition process that underpins each approach and describes the contexts to which each approach is best suited.

**Figure 3: Alternative approaches to recognising informal learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recognition mechanism</th>
<th>Basic process</th>
<th>Contexts in which the approach is most appropriate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| RPL against specific modules or units of competency | Matching outcomes of informal learning with outcomes of recognised qualifications | • Close correspondence between informal outcomes and recognised qualifications  
  • Significant breadth and / or depth of informal learning  
  • Evidence rich environments  
  • Candidates with pre existing skills in identifying and presenting information  
  • Learner seeking recognition for whole or significant portion of qualification |
| RPL against broadly framed module or unit of competency | Matching outcomes of informal learning with outcomes of recognised qualifications | • Broad range of informal learning activities that rely on common set of underpinning skills, knowledge and capabilities |
| Mapping outcomes of non recognised program | Matching outcomes of informal learning with outcomes of recognised qualifications | • Non recognised program with clear outcomes that are stable over time  
  • Host organisation for non recognised program to arrange mapping process  
  • Close correspondence between outcomes of non recognised program and recognised qualifications |
| Recognition against ‘learning gain’ focused unit of competency | Identifying and crediting learning gain | • Small volume of learning  
  • Learning not closely aligned with outcomes of recognised programs  
  • Diverse skills and knowledge  
  • Recognition of whole qualification not sought |
| Block or unspecified credit | Deeming equivalence of learning | • Outcomes of informal learning are perceived to have same value or worth as outcomes of recognised qualifications  
  • Significant breadth and / or depth of informal learning  
  • Extent of recognition clearly defined |
**UNIT CODE**  | TBA  
---|---  
**UNIT TITLE**  | Enhance personal and employment capabilities through informal learning  
---|---  
**FIELD OF EDUCATION CODE**  | TBA  
---|---  
**NOMINAL HOURS**  | The nominal hours are flexible and vary according to the average learning time that an assessor determines is required to gain the relevant personal and employment capabilities. The nominal hours allocated to this unit of competency however must not exceed twenty per cent of the total hours allocated to the qualification.  
---|---  
**UNIT DESCRIPTOR**  | This unit of competency recognises the personal and employment capabilities individuals gain outside the formal recognition system. These include knowledge, skills and capabilities acquired through participation in work; community activities, projects and programs; individual and group activities and interests; non course-based learning activities; and non recognised but planned and structured learning programs.  
---|---  
**ELEMENTS OF COMPETENCY**  | **PERFORMANCE CRITERIA**  
1.0 Participate in informal learning activity  | 1.1 Role and responsibilities in informal learning activity are identified and agreed with employer, community organisation or other host agency  
1.2 Generic and technical skills and knowledge required to actively participate in informal learning activity are safely practiced and applied in specified context in line with participant’s level of autonomy and responsibility  
1.3 Key tasks and activities are safely and successfully completed in specified context in line with participant’s level of autonomy and responsibility  
1.4 Problem solving skills are applied to resolve issues encountered in informal learning activity  
2.0 Reflect on informal learning activity  | 2.1 Personal and employment capabilities attained through involvement in informal learning activity are identified in consultation with facilitator and / or assessor, where appropriate.  
2.2 Evidence of acquisition of personal and employment capabilities is identified in consultation with facilitator and / or assessor, where appropriate.
**Level 1 - RANGE STATEMENT**

The Range Statement adds definition to the unit by elaborating critical or significant aspects of the performance requirements of the unit. The Range Statement establishes the range of indicative meanings or applications of these requirements in different operating contexts and conditions. The specific aspects that require elaboration are identified by the use of italics in the performance criteria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal learning activity</th>
<th>Informal learning activities include but are not limited to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• community activities, projects and programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• individual or group activities and interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• non course-based learning activities, such as discussion groups, meetings and workshops, provided in response to the expressed or potential interests and needs of individuals and communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• non recognised but planned and structured programs, such as short courses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context of informal learning activity</th>
<th>Personal and employment capabilities at this level are generally developed and applied in contexts where:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• roles, responsibilities and functions are very clearly defined and specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• there is a limited range of familiar and predictable variables</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supervision and autonomy</th>
<th>The learning environments in which individuals attain personal and employment capabilities at this level:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• are closely supervised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• offer direct guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• allow minimal discretion on the part of the learner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Problem solving skills               | Problem solving skills at this level involve the ability to deal with routine, repetitive problems that are addressed using established guidelines and processes and past precedents |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal and employment capabilities</th>
<th>Personal and employment capabilities at this level involve the ability to undertake tasks and activities which:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• draw on a limited range of knowledge and skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• have a substantial repetitive aspect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• are accompanied by clear rules and procedures to be followed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Level 1 - RANGE STATEMENT [continued]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence of acquisition of personal and employment capabilities</th>
<th>Evidence may include but is not limited to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• personal account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• third party report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• samples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• review by learner and facilitator / assessor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• diary or personal journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• reflection during or after activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• recorded observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• responses to assessor questioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• portfolio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**LEVEL 1 - EVIDENCE GUIDE**

The Evidence Guide provides advice to inform and support appropriate assessment of this unit. It contains an overview of the assessment requirements followed by identification of specific aspects of evidence that will need to be addressed in determining competence. The Evidence Guide is an integral part of the unit and should be read and interpreted in conjunction with the other components of competency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical aspects of evidence to be considered</th>
<th>The evidence required to demonstrate competence for this standard must confirm that the candidate has acquired personal and employment capabilities required to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• perform basic tasks and activities which draw on a limited range of knowledge and skills, generally are of a repetitive nature and are accompanied by clear rules or procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• deal with routine problems for which there are established guidelines, clear processes and past precedents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• apply relevant concrete, factual knowledge that is procedural in nature and limited in scope in the performance of basic tasks and activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Concurrent and / or prerequisite relationship of units | This unit of competency must be assessed on its own. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Underpinning knowledge</th>
<th>Competence in this unit of competency requires knowledge that is directly related to the personal and employment capabilities attained by the candidate. This knowledge will generally be:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• concrete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• factual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• procedural in nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• limited in scope.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Underpinning skills</th>
<th>Competence in this unit of competency requires:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• problem solving skills that are suitable for dealing with routine problems for which there are established guidelines, clear processes and past precedents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• literacy and numeracy skills that are consistent with level 2 of the National Reporting System</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Resource implications | The learner and assessor require access to resources that are relevant to the personal and employment capabilities attained by the candidate. |
### Consistency in performance

In order to achieve consistency of performance, evidence should be collected that is sufficient to include dealing with an appropriate range and variety of situations.

Evidence may be gathered through:

- a verbal account of the learning activity provided by the candidate that is supported by assessor questioning
- a portfolio of evidence compiled by the candidate.
- direct observation and questioning
- third party reports

### Context of assessment

This unit of competency may be assessed in a workplace, community or institutional setting.

### Key competencies

There are seven key competencies that are considered essential for effective work participation. Each of these competencies is described at three levels of performance. These are:

- level one which represents the competence to undertake tasks effectively
- level two which represents the competence to manage tasks
- level three which represents the competence to use concepts for evaluating and reshaping tasks

The key competencies and relevant levels of performance associated with this unit of competency are listed below. The bracketed number against each key competency indicates the performance level required in this unit.

The Key Competencies relevant to this unit are:

- Communicating ideas and information [1]
- Collecting, analysing and organising information [1]
- Planning and organising activities [1]
- Working with others and in teams [1]
- Using mathematical ideas and technique [1]
- Solving problems [1]
- Using technology [1]
### Level 4 - RANGE STATEMENT

The Range Statement adds definition to the unit by elaborating critical or significant aspects of the performance requirements of the unit. The Range Statement establishes the range of indicative meanings or applications of these requirements in different operating contexts and conditions. The specific aspects that require elaboration are identified by the use of italics in the performance criteria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal learning activity</th>
<th>Informal learning activities include but are not limited to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• community activities, projects and programs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• individual or group activities and interests</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• non course-based learning activities, such as discussion groups, meetings and workshops, provided in response to the expressed or potential interests and needs of individuals and communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• non recognised but planned and structured programs, such as short courses.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context of informal learning activity</th>
<th>Personal and employment capabilities at this level are generally developed and applied in contexts where:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• roles, responsibilities and functions are not static and are predominantly subject to change</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• there is a range of unfamiliar / unpredictable variables</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supervision and autonomy</th>
<th>The learning environments in which individuals attain personal and employment capabilities at this level:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• are subject to routine guidance and direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• require the learner to exercise discretion, planning and coordination within broad parameters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Problem solving skills   | Problem solving skills at this level involve dealing with largely non-routine problems that are identified and addressed using guidelines which require significant interpretation and adaptation |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal and employment capabilities</th>
<th>Personal and employment capabilities at this level involve the ability to undertake tasks and activities which:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• rest on a comprehensive range of specialised knowledge and skills</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• involve addressing a range of problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• have unpredictable and or non routine aspects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• require skills in organising self and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of acquisition of personal and employment capabilities</td>
<td>Evidence may include but is not limited to:</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• personal account</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• performance appraisals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• self evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• third party reports</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• written reports and planning documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• scheduling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• peer reviews</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• action plans</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• review by learner and mentor / facilitator / assessor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• daily diary or personal journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• in depth reflection during or after activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• recorded observations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• responses to assessor questioning and problem solving scenarios</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• presentations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• portfolio</td>
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</table>
The Evidence Guide provides advice to inform and support appropriate assessment of this unit. It contains an overview of the assessment requirements followed by identification of specific aspects of evidence that will need to be addressed in determining competence. The Evidence Guide is an integral part of the unit and should be read and interpreted in conjunction with the other components of competency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical aspects of evidence to be considered</th>
<th>The evidence required to demonstrate competence for this standard must confirm that the candidate has acquired personal and employment capabilities required to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• perform tasks and activities which require a comprehensive range of specialised knowledge and skills and require a range of problems to be addressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• organise self and others to perform tasks and activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• identify and deal with largely unpredictable and non routine problems using guidelines that require significant interpretation and adaptation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• apply relevant and comprehensive theoretical, technical and abstract knowledge in the performance of tasks and activities.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concurrent and / or prerequisite relationship of units</th>
<th>This unit of competency must be assessed on its own.</th>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Underpinning knowledge</th>
<th>Competence in this unit of competency requires knowledge that is related to the personal and employment capabilities attained by the candidate. This knowledge will generally be:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• theoretical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• technical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• comprehensive in scope.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Underpinning skills</th>
<th>Competence in this unit of competency requires:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• problem solving skills that are suitable for dealing with largely unpredictable and non routine problems using guidelines that require significant interpretation and adaptation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• literacy and numeracy skills that are consistent with level 4 of the National Reporting System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• team skills require to lead, organise and supervise the work of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• personal and work organisation skills required to operate in an environment of broad guidance and direction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Resource implications

The learner and assessor require access to resources that are relevant to the personal and employment capabilities attained by the candidate.

Consistency in performance

In order to achieve consistency of performance, evidence should be collected that is sufficient to include dealing with an appropriate range and variety of situations.

Evidence may be gathered through:

- a verbal account of the learning activity and the associated learning gain provided by the candidate that is supported by assessor questioning involving investigation of complex scenarios
- a portfolio of evidence compiled by the candidate
- third party reports

Context of assessment

This unit of competency may be assessed in a workplace, community or institutional setting.

Key competencies

There are seven key competencies that are considered essential for effective work participation. Each of these competencies is described at three level of performance. These are:

- level one which represents the competence to undertake tasks effectively
- level two which represents the competence to manage tasks
- level three which represents the competence to use concepts for evaluating and reshaping tasks

The key competencies and relevant levels of performance associated with this unit of competency are listed below. The bracketed number against each key competency indicates the performance level required in this unit.

The Key Competencies relevant to this unit are:

- Communicating ideas and information [2]
- Collecting, analysing and organising information [3]
- Planning and organising activities [3]
- Working with others and in teams [2]
- Using mathematical ideas and technique [2]
- Solving problems [2]
- Using technology [2]
Key issues associated with basing recognition on a unit of competency focused on identifying the ‘learning gain’ attained through informal learning

Incorporating the draft unit of competency, *Enhance personal and employment capabilities*, in appropriate further education and adult learning qualifications is a new and relatively straightforward way of recognising informal learning and building pathways to qualifications and employment.

However before this approach may be implemented three key issues need to be addressed. These are:

- identifying suitable further education and adult learning qualifications in which the unit of competency might be incorporated
- establishing an assessment process for the unit of competency
- identifying the support which learners will need to access this approach to recognising informal learning and establish pathways to qualifications and employment.

These issues are addressed in the ensuing section of this paper.

*Identifying appropriate further education and adult learning qualifications*

There is a diverse range of programs offered by Victorian ACE providers.

A recent study, undertaken by Dench Consulting for the ACFE Division as part of the preparation of the *Ministerial Statement on Adult Community Education in Victoria*¹, identified five broad program types. These are:

- Adult, literacy and numeracy programs that account for 24% of student contact hour provision
- Employment skill programs aimed at giving learners essential skills to enter or perform more effectively in the workforce. These program account for 12% of student contact hour provision
- The Victorian Certificate of Education and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning which account for 3% of student contact hour provision
- Vocational programs which provide learners with more specific skills to reenter or enter the workforce and for particular industries and occupations. These account for 41% of student contact hour provision.
- Enrichment programs that primarily meet people’s leisure, hobby and personal development needs. These account for 20% of student contact hour provision.

The first two categories of programs comprise qualifications that are primarily focused on further education and adult learning, generally have a

modular, core and elective structure, and incorporate a strong pathways dimension. In addition, these qualifications generally fall within the remit of the VQA and are not subject to nationally administered recognition arrangements. As such, additional units or modules may be added to these qualifications through the curriculum maintenance or reaccreditation process without reference to broader national mechanisms. Given these conditions, it is likely that these two categories of programs will contain qualifications that are best suited to this approach to recognising informal learning.

A review of these two categories of programs, which involved discussions with the Service Industries Curriculum Maintenance Manager, the ACFE Division and a search of the National Training Information Service [NTIS] and TAFE Institute program offerings, identified sixty seven qualifications in these categories. As indicated in the following chart, these qualifications ranged from short courses to Diploma qualifications, with the majority being clustered at lower AQF levels.

**Figure 5 : Number of further education and adult learning qualifications offered in Victoria by level of AQF qualification**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course in …</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate I</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate II</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate III</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate IV</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Diploma</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Certificate</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCAL</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not surprisingly a number of these qualifications have a particular focus or are designed to address the skill development needs of specific target groups. These programs were deemed not to be appropriate vehicles for trialing this new approach to recognising informal learning. Rather it was decided that the proposed unit of competency should be incorporated in qualifications that:

- have broad application
- are likely to accessed by the range of potential users identified earlier in this report
- offer pathways to a range of other qualifications.
- have flexible structures.

Including the proposed unit of competency in such qualifications would enable learners to gain advanced standing based on their informal learning and structure learning pathways that lead to further training or employment.

One program that meets these criteria is the four qualifications that comprise the *Certificates in General Education*. These qualifications are
offered widely in Victoria, with one hundred and sixty four RTOs and ACE providers listing these qualifications within their scope of registration on the NTIS.

The qualifications in the *Certificates in General Education for Adults* range from Certificate I to Certificate III and provide an articulated pathway that offers an entry point to a range of other further education, adult learning and vocational qualifications.

The *Certificates in General Education for Adults* have a common structure which comprise a core of compulsory modules focused on literacy and numeracy and an elective bank. The elective bank includes units of competency and modules that are selected from:

- Oral communication
- General curriculum options
- Modules from accredited courses
- Units of competency from Training Packages.

In all four certificates, there is a significant allocation to electives, with the Certificate I and III qualifications comprising 160 hours of electives and the Certificate II qualification providing for 80 hours of electives.

Further these electives currently comprise a mixture of modules and units of competency and as such the notion of combining units and modules within the same qualification has already been established within the *Certificates in General Education for Adults*. As such, there appears to be no structural barriers to including the proposed unit of competency in each of the four qualifications that comprise the *Certificates in General Education for Adults*.

In addition, there is an extensive range of pathways that emanate from the *Certificates In General Education for Adults*. This would mean that learners who gain credit for informal learning through the proposed unit incorporated in the CGEA could structure pathways that lead to a range of other qualifications. The pathways from CGEA, which are identified in the course accreditation documentation, are:

**Certificate I in General Education for Adults (Introductory)** provides pathways to:

- Certificate I in General Education for Adults
- Certificate I in Workplace Education
- Certificate I in Transition Education
- Certificate I in Science Education.

**Certificate I in General Education for Adults** provides pathways to:

- Certificate II in General Education for Adults
- Other Certificate II courses, depending on content covered and modules undertaken
- Certificate II in Science for Adults.
The **Certificate II in General Education for Adults** provides pathways to:

- Certificate III in General Education for Adults
- VCE Units 1 and 2
- Course in Introduction to Psychology: Return to Study
- Other Certificate III courses, depending on content covered and modules undertaken
- Certificate III in Science for Adults.

The **Certificate III of General Education for Adults** provides pathways to:

- VCE Units 3 and 4
- Certificate IV in Liberal Arts
- Certificate IV in Further Education.

As noted above, the **Certificates in General Education for Adults** articulate with the **Certificate IV in Liberal Arts** and the **Certificate IV in Further Education**. Both of these qualifications are broad general education programs that include a range of pathway options. These qualifications articulate with Diploma qualifications in the same field and in turn link with a range of higher education offerings.

At present the **Certificate IV in Further Education** is listed on the NTIS as being in the scope of registration of twenty Victorian ACE providers and RTOs and the corresponding Diploma is listed in the scope of registration of thirteen providers. Whereas the **Certificate IV and Diploma in Liberal Arts** are listed in the scope of registration of nine providers.

The **Certificate IV and Diploma in Liberal Arts** have a core and elective structure. With the elective component comprising 472 nominal hours in the Certificate IV and 342 nominal hours within the Diploma. The course rules allow providers to customise the qualifications by substituting modules or units of competency for up to two stream modules within both qualifications – this would be up to 180 nominal hours.

The **Certificate IV and Diploma in Further Education** also have a core and elective structure. With the elective component comprising 120 nominal hours in the Certificate IV and 480 nominal hours within the Diploma. The course rules allow providers to customise the qualifications by incorporating modules or units of competency into the elective bank that are relevant to the learner and which are at the same AQF level as the qualification.

By incorporating the proposed unit of competency, *Enhance personal and employment capabilities*, into the **Certificates of General Education for Adults, the Certificate IV and Diploma in Liberal Arts** and the **Certificate IV in Further Education**, it is possible to ensure that:

- formal recognition for the ‘learning gain’ that stems from informal learning may be recognised within qualifications ranging from Certificate I to Diploma
having gained recognition for their ‘learning gain’ at any qualification level, learners are able to structure a learning pathway that leads to further education or employment.

The Certificates in General Education for Adults and the Further Education and Liberals Arts programs are within the remit of the VQA and are maintained by the Service Industries Curriculum Maintenance Manager. As such, the unit of competency, *Enhance personal and employment capabilities* could be incorporated into the elective component of each of these programs through the curriculum maintenance process.

**Recommendation**

That the VQA and ACFE Board support the development of a unit of competency based for recognising ‘learning gain’ and the incorporation of this unit of competency into the Certificates in General Education for Adults and the Further Education and Liberals Arts programs through the curriculum maintenance process.

Whilst it seems possible to incorporate the proposed unit of competency into these qualifications and use this to provide formal recognition for skills, knowledge and capabilities gained through informal learning, the question remains whether these qualifications provide appropriate pathways for the learners. In some cases, these qualifications may not meet the needs of learners. For example, the strong focus on preparation for tertiary study in the Certificate IV and Diploma of Further Education may not be relevant for some learners. Similarly, the focus on literacy and numeracy development in the Certificates in General Education for Adults may not suit some learners.

One response to this issue, as canvassed in the initial report presented in the VQA and ACFE Boards on informal learning in early 2004, is for the VQA to consider the development of a credit based adult learning framework. Such a framework would enable learners to build nationally recognised qualifications based on their informal learning and a selection of learning units drawn from senior secondary school, VET and higher education qualifications. The key advantage of this approach is that it enables learners to define their own learning pathways rather than have these prescribed by the requirements of particular qualification structures.

Whilst discussion of such a framework is beyond the scope of this paper, it clearly aligns with the credit accumulation and transfer approach underpinning the Credit Matrix.

Similarly, the Department of Employment, Training and Energy in Queensland, is currently investigating the introduction of customised qualifications that reflect the preferred learning pathways of individuals rather than the prescribed packaging arrangements in Training Packages.

These moves towards establishing more flexible, learner centred, credit based qualification structures should assist in ensuring that learners gain recognition for informal learning but also are able to build learning pathways that genuinely reflect their learning, career and employment objectives. As such it is recommended that the VQA and ACFE Boards give
further consideration to the proposal for developing an adult learning framework.

**Recommendation**

That the VQA and ACFE Boards investigate the feasibility of establishing a credit based, adult learning framework which would recognise the outcomes of formal and informal learning and build learning pathways and qualifications based on the learning, career and employment aspirations of learners.

**Establishing an assessment process**

In this approach to recognising informal learning, the ‘learning gain’ is identified and recognised against a unit of competency that is incorporated into nationally recognised further education and adult learning qualifications.

Given this situation the assessment process for this unit of competency must comply with the requirements of the *AQTF Standards for RTOs*. In summary, this means that the assessment must be managed by an RTO, the assessor must be qualified and the assessment must be based on a judgement supported by evidence. In addition, the assessment process must be subject to audit.

While conforming with these requirements, there are a number of features of this approach to recognising informal learning that require new thinking about the nature of evidence, how evidence is collected and how assessment judgements are made. These features include:

- informal learners often have little experience in dealing with the requirements of the formal education and training system
- informal learning activities may not have explicit learning outcomes and these may need to be clarified through the assessment process
- the proposed unit of competency, *Enhance personal and employment capabilities*, focuses on the qualities of the ‘learning gain’ rather than specific, observable outcomes
- the ‘learning gain’ will normally comprise a mix of different skills, knowledge and capabilities. For example, the ‘learning gain’ may be based on the learner acquiring a mix of generic and vocational skills or fragments of learning from different skill and knowledge areas
- the ‘learning gain’ will vary in terms of both breadth and depth of skills, knowledge and capacities and the average learning time taken to acquire these attributes
- learners may have limited physical evidence to support their claim that learning has occurred
- the recognition process needs to be viewed as part of a learning pathway and the learner may require guidance and advice on establishing their learning pathway. As such, assessors may need to provide learners with guidance in relation to pathways development or
help them access other professional staff who can provide such guidance.

In this environment, assessors will require skills in:

- engaging learners in reflecting on the learning process and identifying the learning that has occurred
- confirming learners’ baseline skills, knowledge and competencies on commencing the learning activity
- identifying learners’ skills, knowledge and competencies on completing the learning
- confirming the ‘learning gain’
- determining the nature of the ‘learning gain’ by referring to the descriptions in the unit of competency
- establishing the average learning time for the ‘learning gain’
- determining the level of recognition which learners will receive
- providing advice and guidance on pathways development.

Given the nature of the potential users of approach to recognition and the type of information that needs to be collected it is recommended that a discussion-based assessment process be used. This will involve the assessor in leading a conversation with the learner, which enables learners to tell their story about their learning experience. Wherever possible learners should be encouraged to cite evidence or provide artefacts to support their claims. This may include conventional forms of evidence such as:

- samples of work
- third party reports
- personal reflection
- daily diary or personal journal
- host organisation records
- action plan
- attendance records
- reports.

In addition, assessors should use opportunities presented by the discussion-based assessment process to identify evidence that confirms learners achievement of the unit of competency. This will involve assessors in:

- looking for evidence in the learner’s performance during the discussion that confirms that learning has occurred. For example, does the learner’s use of correct terminology confirm the development of relevant underpinning knowledge? Does the learner’s response to questions confirm the development of effective communication skills? Does the
learner’s participation in the discussion show the development of interpersonal and presentation skills?

- posing questions to probe the depth and breadth of the learner’s knowledge, ability to solve problems, capacity to function independently and validate that the learning stems from the involvement in the agreed informal learning activity. The following set of questions may be useful in devising appropriate questions. It is based on the theory of ‘narrative storytelling’ and is known by a variety of names (eg complex storytelling, structured interview). It is adapted from the Ethical Pursuits Kit, developed by the Vocational Education and Assessment Centre (1999).

  - **Invitation questions** – these questions are designed to invite learners to select and describe aspects of the learning activity that were challenging or stretched their capability. For example: ‘Can you tell me about how you …?’

  - **Exploration questions** – these questions are designed to assist learners develop their simple stories into more complex accounts by seeking information about other participants’ or stakeholders’ perceptions. The questions should clarify the contexts involved and help learners to analyse the options that were available and the choices they made. For example: ‘So, how did you work out the best way of …? What were the results of talking with …? How did the other members of your work team respond to your proposal?’

  - **Confirmation questions** – these questions are designed to validate the baseline of skills, knowledge and capacities that learners had at the commencement and completion of the learning activity. For example: ‘Can you describe your skills at …? Could you have completed X task at the commencement of …? How have your skills in X changes since you commenced this program?’

  - **Investigation questions** – these questions are designed to follow up areas of uncertainty or ambiguity and check the depth and breadth of learning, learners ability to solve problems and act autonomously. These questions are used to fine tune the evidence presented and confirm assessor decisions. For example: Can you tell me a bit more about what happened? How did you react? What did you do to gain their support? How did you keep things on track?’

  - **Scenario questions** – these are questions designed to assess the breadth and depth of learning by seeing how learners might apply their learning in new or emerging situations. For example: Can you tell me how you would deal with …? Given this situation what would you …?

  - **Reflection questions** – these questions are designed to invite learners to analyse their practice to gain insight about areas of personal development and improvement. For example: ‘What
would you do differently next time? What did the experience tell you about your own views and opinions?

- documenting their observations during the discussion
- using these observations as part of the evidence used in determining the nature and extent of the 'learning gain'.

This will require assessors who are able to assist learners reflect on their learning, talk about their learning experience and who are able to use effective questioning to confirm that learning has occurred.

It will require assessors who, according to Ivan Johnstone from Canberra Institute of Technology, are able to 'read' the learners’ answers and then prompt them with the right follow up questions. Assessors should use learners’ responses to add or subtract from their developing view about the learner’s acquisition of personal and employment skills, knowledge and capabilities. This active use of evidence means that there may be no set pattern for the discussion because it will flow according to learners’ responses.

Further work is required to develop an effective discussion based assessment process. As such it is recommended that the VQA and the ACFE Division develop guidelines for discussion-based assessment and a practical guide for assessors which illustrates the process. This guide should include an outline of the process, case studies and sample assessment tools.

**Recommendation**

That the VQA and the ACFE Division develop guidelines for discussion-based assessment and a practical guide for assessors which illustrates the process.

**Providing guidance and developing pathways**

Recognising informal learning must be viewed as part of a learning pathway.

All learners seeking recognition for informal learning should have access to assistance to plan a learning pathway that identifies the scope, direction and pace of their learning and how this fits with their family, employment and other goals. In order to do this, learners require guidance and access to:

- accurate information on the recognition process
- informed advice on formal learning options
- support to structure learning pathways
- follow-up support
- career information, guidance and counselling
- brokerage services to assist them deal with ACE and VET providers
- individual learning support.
The need for improved advice and guidance is acknowledged in the recent Ministerial Statement titled, *Future Directions for Adult Community Education in Victoria* which argued that ‘…Victorians, who experience past and ongoing disadvantage, need support and mentoring to undertake adult education’.

It is important that such guidance and support is provided in an environment in which the learner has confidence and trust. In many cases, this is likely to be the organisation that facilitated their informal learning. For example, the most appropriate source of support for participants in the Curtain Connection, described earlier in this paper, may be the Cloverdale Community Centre that auspiced the project.

However many smaller ACE providers lack the resources and expertise to provide such services.

One way of addressing this issue may be through the establishment of community learning partnerships in which regional networks of larger and smaller ACE providers, TAFE Institutes and other organisations, such Neighbourhood Houses, work together to provide guidance services. Such services, which should be offered at the local level, must be able to:

- assist learners identify the skills, knowledge and capabilities acquired through informal learning
- provide information on recognition services
- either offer or provide the learner with access to recognition services
- provide accurate information on training options
- help learners to establish learning pathways
- assist learners access formal training and skill development that is part of their learning pathway
- provide ongoing support for learners.

This is beyond the capacity of many small ACE providers. However such services could be provided through community learning partnerships in which trained staff, who are supported by larger training and community organisations, provide these services to groups of local centres. The key point here is that the services must be offered through local ACE providers that are attuned to local needs but have the support of larger training and community organisations.

At present there are relatively few people in the ACE sector that have the expertise required to provide this type of service. In addition, there are relatively few networks of ACE providers and other education and community agencies that are able to provide such a service.

The ACFE Board should give consideration to supporting an initiative that supports the recognition of informal learning by:

- training people who can offer guidance and recognition services for learners engaged in informal learning, and
establishing community learning partnerships in selected ACFE regions that are aimed at delivering these guidance and recognition services in local communities

- trialing the approach described in this paper for recognising and assessing informal learning against a unit of competency focused on recognising ‘learning gain’.

Such an initiative would be consistent with the Ministerial Statement on ACE in Victoria, which aims to broaden the role of ACE through the establishment of community learning partnerships. This would provide a practical example of community learning partnerships in which ‘…community based adult education organisations join with other learning organisations to deliver programs which meet community needs and capitalise on the expertise of the partners’.

**Recommendation**

That the VQA and ACFE Board support an initiative aimed at providing guidance and recognition services for informal learners in local communities that involves:

- training people who can offer guidance and recognition services for learners engaged in informal learning, and
- establishing community learning partnerships in selected ACFE regions that are aimed at delivering these guidance and recognition services in local communities.
- trialing the approach described in this report for recognising and assessing informal learning against a unit of competency focused on recognising ‘learning gain’.

**Overview of recommended approach to recognising informal learning in adult learning and further education qualifications**

In summary, there is a suite of existing adult learning and further education qualification that potentially provide a vehicle for recognising informal learning.

There are a number of different recognition approaches that may be used to grant recognition within these qualifications.

Assessors and RTOs involved in providing recognition services must be able to decide which of these approaches is most appropriate to use in different contexts and with different clients.

One way of granting recognition would be to incorporate a unit of competency focused on recognising ‘learning gain’ into the elective bank in the selected qualifications. A draft of such a unit has been prepared and is included in this report.

To support this approach to recognition:

- the unit of competency, *Enhance personal and employment capabilities* should be incorporated into the elective structure of the *Certificates in*
General Education for Adults and the Further Education and Liberal Arts programs through the curriculum maintenance process.

- a practical guide on discussion based assessment should be developed for assessors engaged in assessing the new unit of competency.

Regardless of the recognition process that is used, learners engaged in informal learning require better guidance and support services. This could be addressed through sponsoring community learning partnerships focused on delivering guidance and recognition services to informal learners at the local level.

Summary of recommendations

**Recommendation One**

That the VQA and ACFE Board support the development of a unit of competency for recognising ‘learning gain’ and the incorporation of this unit of competency into the Certificates in General Education for Adults and the Further Education and Liberal Arts programs through the curriculum maintenance process.

**Recommendation Two**

That the VQA and the ACFE Division develop guidelines for discussion-based assessment and a practical guide for assessors which illustrates the process.

**Recommendation Three:**

That the VQA and ACFE Boards support an initiative aimed at providing guidance and recognition services for informal learners in local communities that involves:

- training people who can offer guidance and recognition services for learners engaged in informal learning, and
- establishing ACE learning partnerships in selected ACFE regions that are aimed at delivering these guidance and recognition services in local communities
- trialing the approach described in this report for recognising and assessing informal learning against a unit of competency focused on recognising ‘learning gain’.

**Recommendation Four:**

That the VQA and ACFE Boards investigate the feasibility of establishing a credit based, adult learning framework which recognises the outcomes of formal and informal learning and builds learning pathways and qualifications based on the learning, career and employment aspirations of learners.
References

Documents


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