Draft report on national and international developments in recognition of informal learning

April 2005
Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide the Victorian Qualifications Authority and the ACFE Division with a report on national and international developments regarding the recognition of informal learning.

Background

In 2004, the Victorian Qualifications Authority Board and the Adult, Community and Further Education Board (ACFEB) initiated a project to examine ways of providing recognition for informal learning.

The first two stages of the project, which were undertaken during 2004,

• developed a definition of informal learning and provided a description of the extent of informal learning in Victoria
• reviewed key developments associated with the recognition of informal learning
• assessed the feasibility of granting recognition for informal learning within the qualifications system administered by the VQA
• considered a range of approaches for recognising informal learning, including the development of a unit of competency for recognising ‘learning gain’
• identified and evaluated existing FE/adult learning qualifications as potential sources of recognition or credit for informal learning.

The reports on these stages of the project were accepted by the VQA and ACFE Boards and a third stage of the project was commissioned in late 2004 with the aim of:

• designing a unit of competency that describes the ‘learning gain’, that is the volume and complexity of learning stemming from informal learning
• developing a discussion-based assessment process for determining the complexity and volume of learning achieved through informal learning
• testing the feasibility of including the unit of competency in accredited courses, Training Package qualifications, the Victorian Certificate of Education [VCE] and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning [VCAL]
• monitoring and reporting on developments in the recognition of informal learning.

The project has developed the unit of competency and associated assessment process. It is proposed that the Victorian Qualifications Authority will accredit these products and the recognition process will be trialed with groups of learners in the second half of 2005. Learners who gain the unit of competency will be issued with a nationally recognised Statement of Attainment.

The unit may also be incorporated into existing qualifications. At this stage it is proposed that the unit will be incorporated into selected further education /
adult learning qualifications, such as the *Certificates in General Education for Adults* and the *Certificate IV and Diploma in Further Education and Liberal Arts*. This would provide learners who hold the unit of competency with the opportunity to gain advanced standing in these qualifications.

Consultations conducted during the development of the unit of competency and assessment process indicated that this approach to recognising informal learning may have application in other post compulsory qualifications, including the VCE, VCAL and VET sector qualifications. A report on the potential of extending the recognition process to these qualifications has been prepared for the VQA.

There is growing interest within Australia and overseas in providing recognition of informal learning and building qualifications that incorporate the outcomes of both formal and informal learning. This report is designed to provide the VQA and ACFE Division with a snapshot of major developments.

**Methodology**

The Victorian Qualifications Authority and the ACFE Division commissioned Learning Australia to undertake this review of developments in the recognition of informal learning as part of the broader assignment to develop the ‘learning gain’ unit of competency and associated discussion based assessment process.

The review involved an environmental scan of developments in informal learning. This comprised:

- a review of the work undertaken in the previous stages of the project
- a series of interviews with representatives of:
  - Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board
  - Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
  - Victorian Qualifications Authority
  - Australian National Training Authority
  - Office of Training and Tertiary Education
- an Internet search of key documents and reports on informal learning

Information gathered through the environmental scan was collated and presented in a draft report to members of the Project Reference Group in mid April 2005.

This report was then circulated to a limited number of staff within the VQA and the ACFE Division for comment. Feedback from these sources was considered and incorporated in the final version of the report.
Outcomes of the environmental scan on developments in the recognition of informal learning

Developments in Australia

The Australian Qualifications Framework [AQF] describes the recognised post compulsory qualifications offered in Australia. All qualifications in the Framework allow for the recognition of informal learning through the provision of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). This enables people to gain recognition and credit for the knowledge and skills they have, no matter how and where they were attained.

While the RPL pathway is an integral part of the AQF and is incorporated in each of the qualification guidelines of the Framework, it has not provided a major pathway for people seeking recognition for informal learning.

A recent report, titled, Recognition of prior learning: Policy and practice in Australia, commissioned by the Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board [AQFAB] concluded that:

‘...there is a large gap between policy and practice, with relatively few students receiving RPL, despite the prominence given to RPL in policy. In 2001, approximately 5% of those enrolled in higher education qualifications reported that they received RPL, while just under 8% of those enrolled in VET qualifications reported that they received RPL.‘

Whilst the authors of this report acknowledged that there may be some non reporting of RPL activity and that in both the VET and higher education sectors the incidence of RPL increases with AQF levels, they went on to note that despite the 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'.

A number of recent studies [Bowman et al 2003; Byron, J, 2003; Wheelan et al, 2003] have attempted to explain the low uptake of RPL. Some of the explanations posed by these studies include:

- a lack of awareness of RPL
- a perception amongst providers that RPL outcomes do not have the same value as education and training outcomes
- the complex, costly and bureaucratic nature of RPL processes
- the existence of funding arrangements which provide disincentives for candidates and institutions to engage in RPL processes
- a lack of assistance and information for candidates on RPL processes
- inadequate professional development for RPL assessors
• a preference by recognised equity groups to participate in training rather than seek RPL.

Considerable effort has been invested in addressing these issues. This includes:
• the use of workshops to support applicants through the RPL processes
• the introduction of 'one stop shop' assessment services
• the provision of pre assessment interviews and direct assistance with portfolio development
• the production of evidence guides for learners making RPL applications.

Whilst these initiatives have assisted many applicants, the problems of low uptake of RPL and its failure to provide a pathway for disadvantaged and discouraged learners remain.

Partly in response to these concerns the Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board [AQFAB] undertook a major review of RPL policy in 2002 - 20031.

A key outcome of this review has been the development of *The National Principles and Operational Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning*. These principles and guidelines are

‘…. not prescriptive in intent but, acknowledging the wide diversity of RPL policy and practice, seek to encourage national consistency through sharing and facilitating good practice across sectors and jurisdictions’.

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

As such recognising prior learning involves:
• comparing the informal or non-formal learning the individual has achieved against the learning outcomes or performance criteria of the course or qualification for which the student is using as a basis for seeking entry or the award of credit, and
• determining appropriate evidence to support the claim of prior learning.

The policy acknowledges that a variety of processes may be used to assess RPL. These include:
• participation in exactly the same or modified versions of the assessment the student would be required to complete as part of the full course

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• assessment based on a portfolio of evidence
• direct observation of demonstration of skill or competence
• reflective papers, journals or portfolios that relate past learning to the learning or competency outcomes of the current course or qualification
• provision of examples of the student's work drawn from the workplace, social, community or other setting in which the student applies their learning, skill or competence
• testimonials of learning, skill or competence.

The National Principles and Operational Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning, which are listed below, provide a framework within which schools, Registered Training Organisations and higher education providers may develop policies and procedures for recognising informal and other forms of prior learning.

1. The AQF provides an agreed framework for designing, developing and issuing recognised qualifications within Australia
2. The AQF supports the development of pathways between qualifications based on access and credits that may consist of, or may include, RPL
3. RPL is critical to the development of an open, accessible, inclusive, integrated and relevant post-compulsory education and training system, and is a key foundation for lifelong learning policies that encourage individuals to participate in learning pathways, that include formal, non-formal and informal learning
4. There is no one RPL model that is suitable for all qualifications and all situations. In particular, different sectors give rise to different models. The model of RPL that is implemented must be aligned with the outcomes, goals and objectives of the qualification
5. RPL should recognise learning regardless of how, when and where it was acquired, provided that the learning is relevant to the learning or competency outcomes in a subject, unit, module, course or qualification
6. RPL will be more accessible to the individual if there is consistency in definition across sectors.
7. RPL can be used for:
   i. access into a course when the specified prerequisites based on completion of a formal course of education and training have not been undertaken; and;
   ii. the award of credit for the partial or complete fulfilment of a qualification, within the relevant institutional or sectoral guidelines that specify the maximum amount of credit that may be granted.
8. RPL processes should be timely, fair and transparent.
9. RPL assessment should be based on evidence, and should be equitable, culturally inclusive, fair, flexible, valid and reliable
10. RPL assessment processes should be:
   i. of a comparable standard to those used to deliver and assess the qualification;
ii. be evidence based, transparent and accountable; and,

iii. explicitly subject to the quality assurance processes used to ensure the standard and integrity of assessment processes within sectors or institutions, and be validated and monitored in the same way other assessment processes are validated and monitored.

11. RPL policies, procedures and processes should be explicitly included in quality assurance procedures within institutions to ensure that qualifications achieved in part or in full through RPL are of the same quality and have the same standing as qualifications achieved as a consequence of formal education and training.

12. RPL assessment should be structured to minimise costs to the individual.

13. RPL decisions should be accountable, transparent, and subject to appeal and review.

14. RPL information and support services should be actively promoted, easy to understand and recognise the diversity of learners.

15. Jurisdictions, institutions and providers should develop advice and information about RPL for employers of students/potential students to promote RPL among employers, help employers understand the possible benefits to their business that may ensue through implementing RPL, and to encourage employers to support staff in undertaking RPL.

16. Jurisdictions, institutions and providers should include RPL in access strategies for disadvantaged learners who are not in the workforce, or marginally attached to the workforce, and who are not already engaged with studying or training.

17. Funding models should not impede the implementation of RPL.

Whilst these principles provide a flexible framework for developing recognition processes they do little to advance thinking on RPL beyond a simple matching of informal and other forms of prior learning against the outcomes specified in accredited courses, competencies and curriculum documents. Further the guidelines do little to assist RTOs design approaches to RPL that are attractive to learners, employers and other organisations – in many senses, the principles tend to reinforce the current high cost and time consuming approaches to RPL.

The point was reinforced in Moving on … The Report of the High Level Review of Training Packages which noted that there is a

‘… need to get the right incentive for employers, employees and those not in employment. Two options have arisen in this review that may be worth considering further. One would be a learning incentive payable to employers to contribute to RPL and gap training; the other would be a learning incentive payable to individuals (in or looking for employment) to facilitate their access to RPL and gap training.’

Work undertaken by the Department of Employment and Training in Queensland, in conjunction with ANTA, has also highlighted the need for more
effective approaches to RPL. This work\(^2\) has focused on:

- the development of narrative forms of evidence collection
- greater use of risk management in quality assuring RPL processes
- improved professional development for assessors
- the development of exemplar RPL processes and tools
- enhanced industry involvement
- system-wide mechanisms for encouraging RPL.

The *Training Package Assessment Materials Project*, which was commissioned by ANTA and DEST in 2002, provided a host of practical suggestions for assessors engaged in designing and implementing recognition processes. In particular the *Recognition Resource* developed by David Rumsey and Associates as part of this project provided a set of quality criteria to guide the development of recognition processes as well as a collection of assessment tools to support the process.

Further practical advice on ways of recognising informal and other forms of prior learning was provided in a report released by the Australian National Training Authority [ANTA] in 2002 titled, *Due Credit: Examining the potential to recognise the skills achieved by young people participating in youth development programs*. The report identified a framework, which may be applied in the ACE, VET and schools sectors, for recognising the skills and knowledge that young people acquire through youth development programs. The framework, illustrated in the chart above, identifies eight options for

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\(^2\)Department of Employment and Training, *RPL action: Toward more Queenslanders. skills becoming recognised, recorded and rewarded*, DET, 2003
recognising the outcomes of these programs.

Some of these options, such as enhancing ‘brand name’ awards and issuing participation certificates, are not necessarily intended to provide a mechanism for linking the outcomes of these programs with formal qualifications. However a number of the other options, including mapping the outcomes of programs against formal qualifications, establishing a generic skills qualification and developing specialist qualifications for youth leadership skills, offer approaches to recognising informal learning and incorporating this in nationally recognised qualifications that have relevance beyond the youth development sector.

ANTA commissioned a number of supplementary projects to further develop aspects of the framework outlined in the Due Credit report. For example in 2003, ANTA released a report titled Bridging Links – A practical guide for the mapping youth development skills to units of competency. As the title suggests, this provided a step by step guide for mapping the outcomes of these programs against units of competency in order to assist participants gain recognition within VET qualifications.

The Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia (SSABSA) has taken this work a step further and developed a new policy that gives credit to young people who have acquired learning outside school within the South Australian Certificate of Education [SACE]. Under this policy students may count up to eight units of community-based learning towards the twenty required to complete the SACE. SSABSA has recognised a range of community programs that lead to awards outside the AQF that may contribute to the SACE. These include awards offered by Scouts Australia, the Royal Life Savings Association of South Australia and the South Australia Country Fire Service.

This approach to the recognition of informal community-based learning is underpinned by the following principles:

1. That the focus is on the learning outcomes that are achieved through an experience, and not on the experience itself.
2. That recognition of community-based learning is consistent with the goals, standards, and pattern requirements of the SACE;
3. That the integrity and international standing of the SACE are maintained;
4. That consistency of administration and reporting is ensured;
5. That the recognition process is clear, fair, and equitable;
6. That learning is valued as a lifelong experience;
7. That the recognition process is accessible to all students;
8. That the transition needs of students are supported by facilitating their progress along and between the multiple pathways of work, training, and/or education;

9. That recognised learning will contribute towards SACE completion.

[Extract from SSABSA – Recognition of non formal community based learning policy]

Under these arrangements the young person simply needs to bring the original certificate (e.g. Austswim Teacher) from the community organisation to the SACE Coordinator or student counsellor at their school. The school copies the certificate and forwards it to SSABSA along with a declaration signed by the student. If the community program is accepted by SSABSA the student is issued with recognition for the program at either Stage 1 or Stage 2 of the SACE with the non-formal learning being recognised at a level equivalent to 'satisfactory achievement'.

SSABSA is currently working with a range of community and youth development organisations, schools and schooling sectors, and other government agencies to promote the recognition of learning outside the traditional school environment. The Authority is developing a web-based guide that will provide examples of good practice of community learning and has a research program focused on recognising learning achieved in the community through activities such as part-time work, sports coaching and carer responsibilities.

The approach taken SSABSA relies on the existence of an established organisation which offers courses that are supported by documented curriculum and learning objectives. These courses are then assessed against SSABSA curriculum statement. Whilst this approach provides a relatively time and cost effective means of providing recognition for non AQF programs it is unlikely to be able to provide recognition for informal learning that occurs in other settings. It is likely that current review of the SACE will incorporate other measures for recognising informal learning within the Certificate.

In a similar arrangement, the Office of Post Compulsory Education and Training in the Department of Education in Tasmania has proposed a way of recognising community based learning within the Tasmanian Certificate of Education. Under this arrangement non-AQF community based programs will be credited within the TACE depending on whether they have been conducted within quality assured organisations. It is likely that programs will be given different levels of credit or points depending on the level of quality assurance built around the non AQF program.

The Adult Victorian Certificate of Education has incorporated credit arrangements for recognising informal learning for some time. Within the certificate, it is assumed that adults bring experience and knowledge learnt outside the classroom to their studies. The Adult VCE may be completed with eight half-year units of study as opposed to the sixteen units of study required within the standard VCE. To achieve the Adult VCE, a learner must complete:

- two units of an English study at the Units 1, 2, 3 or 4 level, and
three other studies taken at the Units 3 and 4 level.

In late 2002, the VQA and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority [VCAA] approved further reforms to the VCE which created provision for block credit recognition within the certificate. 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, such as many of the youth development programs that were the subject of the Due Credit report and which are able to attract credit under the SSABSA arrangements for recognising community based learning programs.

The inclusion of the personal development strand in the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning [VCAL] provides another way in which the outcomes of these programs may be recognised.

This component of the VCAL aims to develop communication skills, teamwork, self-confidence, self-esteem, and respect for others and the community. Students acquire these capacities through participating in community projects and/or activities that are organised by their school in partnership with community agencies. These include:

- non accredited training programs provided organisations such as the Victorian Youth Development Program and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award
- volunteer work with organisations such as Conservation Volunteers Australia, Country Fire Authority or the State Emergency Service
- local initiatives such as community radio and community service projects.

International developments

This component of the review is not intended to be a comprehensive overview of international developments in the recognition of informal learning. Rather it is intended to highlight key international developments that may have implications for the work being undertaken by the VQA and ACFE Division on informal learning. As such the review has focused on three key initiatives:
1. The development of common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning project by the European Union

2. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Recognition of Prior Informal Learning Project

3. The Transfer between formal, informal and non formal education [TRANSFINE] and the Recognising formal, informal and non formal education [REFINE] projects sponsored by the European Union

Common European Principles for the Identification and Validation of Non-formal and Informal learning

In mid 2004, the European Union endorsed a common set of principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

A two-stage process for recognising non formal and informal learning, that is 'identification' and 'validation', underpins the principles.

Identification records and makes visible the individual’s learning outcomes. This does not result in formal certification but it may provide the basis for formal recognition. Whereas validation is the assessment of the individual’s learning outcomes and may result in the issuing of a certificate or diploma.

The principles also draw a distinction between formal, informal and non formal learning. These are defined as:

- **Formal learning** consists of learning that occurs within an organised and structured context (formal education, in-company training), and that is designed as learning. It may lead to a formal recognition (diploma, certificate). Formal learning is intentional from the learner’s perspective.

- **Non-formal learning** consists of learning embedded in planned activities that are not explicitly designated as learning, but which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner’s point of view.

- **Informal learning** is defined as learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family, or leisure. It is often referred to as experiential learning and can to a certain degree be understood as accidental learning. It is not structured in terms of learning objectives, learning time and/or learning support. Typically, it does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but in most cases, it is non-intentional (or ‘incidental’/random).

[Danielle Colardyn & Jens Bjornavold, Validation of formal, non-formal and informal learning: policy and practices in EU member states]

The principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning cover four key areas. These are:

1. Individual entitlements - the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning should, in principle, be a voluntary matter for the individual. There should be equal access and equal and fair treatment for all individuals. The privacy and rights of the individual are to be respected.
2. Obligations of stakeholders - stakeholders, should establish, in accordance with their rights, responsibilities and competences, systems and approaches for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning. These should include appropriate quality assurance mechanisms. Stakeholders should provide guidance, counselling and information about these systems and approaches to individuals.

3. Confidence and trust - the processes, procedures and criteria for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning must be fair, transparent and underpinned by quality assurance mechanisms.

4. Credibility and legitimacy - systems and approaches for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning should respect the legitimate interests and ensure the balanced participation of the relevant stakeholders. The process of assessment should be impartial and mechanisms should be put in place to avoid any conflict of interest. The professional competence of those who carry out assessment should also be assured.

The principles provide a framework for further work on the development of recognition and certification systems at European and national level. Member countries are expected to:

- disseminate and promote the use of the common European principles.
- encourage the European social partners, in the context of social dialogue, to use and adapt the common European principles for the specific needs of the workplace.
- encourage non-governmental organisations engaged in providing lifelong learning opportunities to use and adapt the common European principles as appropriate.
- support the exchange of experiences and mutual learning including the development of a European Inventory on the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning.
- strengthen co-operation with international organisations with a view to achieving synergies in this field.
- To develop and support coherent and comparable ways of presenting the results of the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning at European level, and consider how the existing instruments in the Europass framework for transparency of qualifications and competences can contribute to this.
- consider how the common European principles could support ongoing work on credit transfer and accumulation, quality assurance and guidance and, in general, contribute to the development of a European Qualifications Framework which was called for in the Joint Interim Report of the Commission and Council, February 2004.
- support the development of quality assurance mechanisms and, in particular, to consider how to promote the professional development of those who carry out assessment, for example, through support networks aimed at developing and disseminating good practice.
The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Recognition of Prior Informal Learning Project

This project aims to enhance recognition for non-formal and informal learning within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). The key outcome will be a set of guidelines to support the implementation of RPL across post compulsory education and training.

These guidelines will form a section of the SCQF Handbook and will cover all prior learning that has not been assessed or credit-rated. This includes prior learning achieved through life and work experiences as well as prior learning gained in less formal contexts in community-based learning, work-based learning, continuing professional development and voluntary work.

The interim report on this project, which was released in mid 2004, identified the need for RPL for:

• personal and carer development
• bridging activities that support the transition between informal and formal learning
• access to and credit within formal programs.

The report highlighted a number of different approaches that could be used to improve RPL provision in these three areas.

Recognition for personal and career development could be granted by identifying a notional SCQF level or alternatively a general credit rating for prior learning. This may be achieved through a two-stage approach that incorporates formative and summative validation of informal learning. This is similar to the identification and validation of informal learning proposed in the Common European Principles for the Identification and Validation of Non-formal and Informal learning.

A two-stage approach to RPL, based on a formative recognition and summative recognition has the potential to provide a more holistic approach to recognition of an individual's learning. A formative recognition could focus more on the notion of ‘distance travelled’ and embrace learner defined goals more easily than a summative recognition process based on the achievement of externally defined outcomes.

Formative recognition might lead to a notional SCQF levelling in terms of defining broadly where a learner is located in the Framework as part of educational and career guidance, while summative recognition might lead to a general SCQF credit rating. This could then be used by the learner to seek specific credit within a formal programme of study."3

The report proposed that the core skills framework, which has been developed by the Scottish Qualifications Authority, could provide a means of granting recognition for generic or transferable skills. In this case learners would be able to gain recognition for informal learning against a set of proposed ten

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3 SCQF RPL Project Steering Group, **Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL) Project Interim Report**, May 2004
hour or one credit point core skills units which would represent a step towards completion of full core skills units.

The report also highlighted the need for RPL processes to form part of learning pathway. This involves RPL being:

- linked with bridging activities that ease the transition between formal and informal learning
- able to be used to gain access to and credit within formal programs.

Whilst acknowledging that there are existing approaches for granting RPL within formal programs, the authors of the report, argued that these need to be made

‘… less resource-intensive by utilising models which provide more structured guidance to the learner on the type of evidence that is required for their RPL claim and which utilise group approaches to learner support, rather than solely individualised tuition. Self-evaluation and the use of e-learning tools should also be considered as methods to complement the support and assessment provided by academic staff.

Similar to critics in Australia, the authors of the report noted that

‘… current RPL activity in Scotland is limited and marginal, largely due to the complexity and time-consuming nature of RPL processes. This issue requires to be addressed through the development of more manageable approaches to RPL support and assessment if wider RPL activity within the HEI and college/SQA sectors is to be encouraged. The current lack of resources to support increased RPL provision will continue to act as a barrier to further RPL activity.’

The Transfer between Formal, Informal and Non Formal Education [TRANSFINE], the Recognising Formal, Informal and Non Formal Education [REFINE]

The TRANSFINE project, which was funded by the European Union, focused on the development of a European framework for the credit-rating of non-formal and informal learning.

The final project report, which was released in July 2003, identified a set of principles to guide the development of the framework. These called for a framework for recognising non formal and informal learning that is:

- comprehensive and common with flexible implementation
- light and developmental not heavy and bureaucratic
- focussed on learning outcomes not teaching inputs
- open to all and voluntary
- serving the needs and purposes of learners – learner centred
- located in a personal development plan
- located in a framework of advice, guidance and support.

The project also identified the need for:
• a shared language for describing the processes associated with the recognition of informal and non formal learning
• a set of tools for the recognising non-formal and informal learning
• a system of quality assurance
• arrangements for sharing experience on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning
• an advice and guidance system for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

The REFINE project, which is also funded by the European Union, was commissioned in 2004 to further develop the outcomes of the TRANSFINE project. The REFINE project, which is expected to report later in 2005, is expected to:

• test a range of European tools – ECTS, the Euro CV, the European language portfolio, Europass, codes of practice and guidelines for practitioners, the European language portfolio, Computer Driving Licence, and some national tools - eg VAE dossier in France, code of practice in UK - for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning
• test the tools in a range of different institutional and organisational contexts:
• evaluate the quality assurance arrangements surrounding these of these tools
• share the experience of the testing

The development of assessment and recording tools to support the recognition of formal and informal learning is also a key aim of the Valuing Learning through Experience [Valex] Project. The key aim of this project, which is led by Glasgow Caledonian University, is to develop a recognition model and tool kit which is aimed at assisting hard to reach learners gain recognition. It is envisaged that the outputs of this project will include the recognition model, a ‘toolkit’ comprising electronic and paper-based learning tools, and professional guidelines for teaching, advising and support staff.

Implications of national and international developments in the recognition of informal learning

The preceding review highlighted some of the key developments in Australia and overseas related to the recognition of informal learning.

The work that has emanated from these initiatives has important implications for the ongoing activities of the VQA and ACFE Boards in this area. These include:

1. The AQFAB principles for recognising prior learning – the National Principles and Operational Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning developed by AQFAB provide a useful set of benchmarks for designing and evaluating recognition processes. The VQA and ACFE Boards
should seek to ensure that the proposed new approach for recognising informal learning is consistent with these principles. This will also help to ensure that stakeholders at State and national level accept the proposed recognition process.

2. **The need for a shared language** – the TRANSFINE Project highlighted the need for a shared language for describing recognition systems and processes. A key challenge facing the VQA and ACFE Boards will be to introduce assessors, trainers, learners, employers and the broader community to some of the new terminology associated with the proposed recognition process. For example terms such as ‘learning gain’, ‘complexity of learning’, ‘recognition’, ‘credit’ and ‘volume of learning’ will not be readily understood and may be interpreted in different ways in the school, VET, ACE and higher education sectors.

3. **Funding the recognition of informal learning** – the Report of the High Level Review of Training Packages highlighted the need for more effective ways of funding the provision of recognition services. Whilst much effort has gone into the development of systems and materials to support RPL and other forms of recognition, little attention has been paid to funding recognition services. The lack of an effective funding model has proved to be a major barrier to increasing uptake of recognition services. The question of funding should be addressed as part of the trialing of the proposed recognition process.

4. **Cost effectiveness of the recognition processes** – the cost of recognition services is a separate but related issue to funding. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Recognition of Prior Informal Learning Project highlighted the need for less resource intensive recognition processes. It suggested that this may be achieved through more structured guidance to the learner on the type of evidence that is required for RPL and which utilise group approaches to learner support. Self-evaluation and the use of e-learning tools were also considered as methods to complement the support and assessment provided by academic staff.

5. **Different approaches to recognising informal learning** – the review highlighted the different approaches that are currently being used to recognise informal and other forms of prior learning. It is clear that there is unlikely to be a ‘one size fits all’ approach to recognising informal learning and it is critical that both assessors and learners are aware of and have access to different recognition processes.

6. **Distinguishing between the identification and validation of informal learning** – the work on the development of common principles for the recognition of informal learning in Europe has drawn a distinction between the identification and validation of informal learning. This distinction is useful as ‘identification’ focuses on making the individual’s learning outcomes visible in a way that is separate from assessment and certification processes. This will help to create an environment in which informal learners, especially those re-engaging with education and training, feel more supported and confident. Whereas ‘validation’ is the
assessment of the individual’s learning outcomes and may result in the issuing of a certificate or diploma. These two processes have been incorporated into the discussion based assessment process that has been developed to support the assessment of the ‘learning gain’ unit of competency.

7. **Recognition tools** – the recent work undertaken by the Department of Employment and Training in Queensland and the *REFINE* and *Valex* projects in Europe has highlighted the need for assessors and learners to have access to a range of effective recognition tools. The qualifications requirements for assessors, as specified in the *AQTF Standards for RTOs*, set minimal requirements with regard to the design and development of assessment tools, yet many existing recognition processes assume that assessors have the skills required to develop their own assessment and recognition materials. As a result many assessors simply do not have effective tools for planning, conducting and reviewing assessment processes or recording and reporting assessment outcomes. There is an ongoing need for the development of quality, ready to use assessment materials.

8. **Linking recognition processes with advice and guidance services** – the TRANSFINE and *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Recognition of Prior Informal Learning* projects have highlighted the need for recognition processes to be integrated with advice and guidance services and for the outcomes of recognition processes to contribute to pathways development. This point was emphasised in the work which David Rumsey and Associates undertook for the Australian National Training Authority during the preparation of the *Recognition Resource for the Training Package Assessment Materials Project*. In this work Rumsey argued that one of the key quality criteria for recognition processes is that they should foster pathways development. This point that has been emphasised in the two research projects that preceded the current stage of this project.

9. **The importance of quality assurance** – a major challenge facing any recognition process is how to ensure the quality and consistency of recognition or assessment outcomes. This is emphasised in both the *National Principles and Operational Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning* and the *Common European Principles for the Identification and Validation of Non-formal and Informal learning*. For this reason, at a minimum, any new recognition process endorsed by the VQA and ACFE Boards must comply with the quality assurance provisions in the *AQTF Standards for RTOs*. 
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