The Evolution of RPL in Australia:

From its origins to future possibilities

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This dissertation is presented as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the coursework degree of Master of Education (Honours) at Murdoch University, 2002.
I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary institution.

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Abstract:

The concept of formally recognising prior learning in Australia was introduced into the area of education and training as a part of the Federal Labor Government's Competency-Based Training initiatives within its Training Reform Agenda of the early 1990s. It was adopted by the vocational education and training sector, primarily as an avenue for industrial skills recognition within award restructuring. This study analyses documentary and interview sources to try and ascertain the future possibilities of RPL in the post-secondary education sector. Its focus is on the university and TAFE sectors. All universities and TAFE colleges in Australia were invited to participate. Thirty-six TAFE colleges and twenty-two universities responded, providing documentation concerning their policies and practices in relation to RPL.

Initially developing in North America, the idea of recognising prior learning was actively promoted by American educators in other countries, with England and Canada subsequently adopting the concept. The Australian Labor Government of the 1980s was acutely aware of the need for skills recognition as part of its program to reverse Australia's economic malaise. An ideas mission to Western Europe by the ACTU/TDC group was influential in recommending this training reform.

RPL was one of the five principles of the Competency-Based Approach to training adopted by the Labor Government. Factors such as the economic and
efficiency imperatives, notions of lifelong learning, mature age learning, and social justice contributed to validating the concept of RPL.

A broad range of inconsistent TAFE and university definitions for RPL, clearly contributed to a lack of consistency and confusion for both practitioners and applicants. The individual policies and practices of both universities and TAFE colleges were found to reflect very different views of this concept, not only from one another but also between the sectors.

Some innovative practices in RPL were found in both sectors, but the university sector, generally, was found to have grave misgivings about the concept of RPL. These misgivings proved to be a significant hindrance to the future development of RPL in the university sector and articulation between sectors was shown to be affected by this.

Conclusions drawn from this thesis suggest that the future possibilities for RPL are very narrow in focus. The policies and practices examined in the post-secondary education sector, revealed a debilitating lack of consistency concerning RPL. The prospects of future progress seem poor, unless major attitudinal changes occur within Government and education circles. Articulation between university and TAFE was the only arena where the practices of recognition of credit transfer bore any resemblance to the ideal of RPL, and that resemblance was disappointing in its proximity to the status quo.
The Federal Government has historically played a leading role in education and training reform. Only if this Government is prepared to proactively promote and support the further development of the wider concept of RPL is there any future possibility for much needed reform with its beneficial social and economic consequences.
Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Scope of this study
Humble beginnings
Data and methodology
The structure of the study

1. Why RPL: The historical context surrounding the inclusion of RPL in the Australian education and training sector. 13

1.1 The American origins of RPL
1.2 RPL spreads to the UK
1.3 RPL in other Countries
   1.3.1 In Canada
   1.3.2 In South Africa
   1.3.3 In New Zealand
1.4 The rise of RPL in Australia
   1.4.1 Government interest in Education
   1.4.2 The Kangan report on TAFE
   1.4.3 The links between the economy and education
   1.4.4 Economic rationalism and education
   1.4.5 Competency-Based Training in TAFE
   1.4.6 The need for efficiency
   1.4.7 The formal recognition of RPL
   1.4.8 The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA)
   1.4.9 The National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR)
1.5 Concluding comments
2. What does the concept of RPL encompass? 42

2.1 Understanding the concept of RPL in Australia
2.2 Assumptions found within RPL
   2.2.1 RPL lays the foundation for lifelong learning
   2.2.2 The relevance of RPL to mature age learning
   2.2.3 Is RPL necessary for social justice in education and if so, has it worked?
   2.2.4 RPL is an economic imperative for education and training
   2.2.5 RPL brings efficiency to education and training
2.3 RPL is a principal component of competency-based training
2.4 Concluding comments

3. RPL Terminology in Australia 57

3.1 An analysis of generic definitions
3.2 Tertiary Definitional analysis
   3.2.1 RPL or recognition of current competency (RCC)
   3.2.2 University definitions of RPL
   3.2.3 TAFE definitions of RPL
3.3 Concluding comments

4. Australian University Perspectives on RPL 72

4.1 The role of AVCC in university advancement of RPL
4.2 The Impact of the Topley and Cohen Reports
4.3 University adoption of RPL
4.4 AVCC guidelines
4.5 University Credit Transfer
4.6 Universities and Advanced Standing
4.7 RPL as non-formal learning
   4.7.1 Recognition of work-place learning
4.8 The RPL timeframe
4.9 The costs involved with RPL
4.10 Universities without a formal RPL policy
4.11 Private Universities
   4.11.1 Bond University
   4.11.2 Notre Dame University
4.12 Innovative practices
4.13 Concluding comments

5. RPL in the TAFE context  

5.1 ANTA’s role
   5.1.1 NFROT Guidelines
5.2 TAFE advocates for RPL
5.3 TAFE adoption of RPL
5.4 TAFE documentation on RPL
5.5 RPL for advanced standing or entry
5.6 RPL as non-formal learning
5.7 Does RPL include recognition of workplace learning?
5.8 RPL as Recognition of Current Competency (RCC)
5.9 Credit Transfer
5.10 The RPL timeframe
5.11 The costs involved with RPL
5.12 Innovative practices in RPL
5.13 TAFE colleges without a formal RPL policy
5.14 Concluding comments

6. Articulation  

6.1 The introduction of formal articulation
6.2 The establishment of links between the two sectors
6.3 The universities' dilemma
   6.3.1 Competency concerns
   6.3.2 Autonomy concerns
   6.3.3 Standards and benchmarking
6.4 TAFE concerns with articulation
6.5 Seamless education
6.6 Concluding comments

7. Conclusion

7.1 Summary of findings
7.2 Future trends and issues involving RPL
   7.2.1 The impact of globalisation
   7.2.2 Recovery of RPL costs
   7.2.3 A unified approach to RPL
   7.2.4 VET in secondary schools
   7.2.5 The role of NOOSR
   7.2.6 Credit transfer as the future of RPL
7.3 Concluding comments

Postscript

Appendices

Bibliography
References A. University and TAFE documents
References B. Books and Journals
References C. Internet sites
# Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Universities from which RPL documentation was requested</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>TAFE colleges from which RPL documentation was requested</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Letter of request</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Studies commissioned by Commonwealth Government Departments</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Studies commissioned by State Government Departments</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>OECD Education Policy</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The Finn and Mayer Competencies</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The NFROT Principles for RPL and Credit transfer</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The Rumsey Review of NFROT</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>University Definitions for RPL</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>TAFE Definitions for RPL</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tables and figures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>The Benefits of RPL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>10 Principles for the accreditation of courses in the NFROT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Aspects of Recognition of Prior Learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Recognition of Prior Learning in Australia: Articulation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

The scope of this study

This study deliberately confines itself to the policies and practices of the University and the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sectors only. While acknowledging the presence and role of private providers in the post secondary education area, it is considered that an examination of their approaches to RPL warrants a separate study. Similarly the secondary education sector, into which RPL also appears to be advancing, is also excluded from this study. The primary focus is on the concept of RPL, and its place within the traditional tertiary training sector.

Humble beginnings

My interest in the Australian concept of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) stems from teaching TAFE students for some years. While teaching women who predominantly wanted to return to paid employment, I was alarmed to find that they considered their previous study, years of home duties, and child rearing to be totally irrelevant to their future education and employment. It was quite a task to convince them that these prior achievements had laid the foundations for their present ability to learn and understand new skills.

Interest in the concept and practices of RPL was further stimulated by the discovery that one of the TAFE modules that I had been teaching was not
accepted by another institution as being valid! That this lack of recognition was occurring was highlighted in the 'Report of the Review of the ANTA Agreement' in 1996 (p137). It noted that, “Despite the promise of NFROT [National Framework for Recognition of Training], too often courses and providers recognised in one state/territory have not been recognised automatically elsewhere”. Students of mine, who chose to continue on that career path, had no alternative but to do the module again. It revealed that the old adage, “If you have not done it with us, then you have not done it at all”, was alive and well. Recognition of prior learning was a concept developed within the NFROT with the intention of eliminating such duplication and to promote an efficient system of recognising prior learning.

Experiencing the joy of study as a mature age student and seeing the need for lifelong learning led me to further investigate the role played by RPL as a means of mature age students gaining access to tertiary study. Up until very recently in WA, the primary avenue for access was the mature age STAT (State Tertiary Access Test), which can be traumatic for adult applicants who have been removed from test situations for many years. Recognition of prior learning had no place in this process.

These experiences demanded further investigation of the concept of recognition of prior learning and resulted in this present study. The process and practice of formally recognising prior learning appears to be evolving extremely slowly and reluctantly. This paper asserts that RPL is a worthy concept in the development
of mature age education and ‘lifelong learning’. Through an analysis of past intentions and present policies, it attempts to offer some insight into the questions:

What is RPL?

How has it evolved?

How do Australian Universities and TAFE institutions currently view and apply it?

What form and direction will and should the future of RPL take?’

Recognition of Prior Learning is a concept that assumes that learning can take place at some previous time and that this past learning can be applicable to present learning and training. This assumption is nothing new, for it is the standard assumption upon which our Australian formal education system is premised.

Formal recognition of a student’s prior learning at the completion of the school year is what enables a student to proceed to the next level of education. There is the unspoken assumption that learning has taken place. Recognising what has been previously learnt is the basis of all school tests and examinations. What these tests and examinations seek to discover is the extent of that learning and whether enough has been gained to proceed with new learning. This is a tacit acknowledgment that learning is hierarchical and that learners are able to add to their knowledge, building on previous learning.
Similarly, the compliance with prerequisite learning in tertiary studies reveals the value of previous study. For selection into many tertiary courses, students must have succeeded in specifically chosen prior studies. This is further testament to the unspoken acceptance that prior learning is necessary for formal study.

But these basic assumptions about prior formal learning do not appear to extend beyond school learning to other periods and forms of learning, such as post-school age non-formal learning. Such learning is generally regarded as incidental, inconsequential and unrelated to formal tertiary study. Formal study in this context refers to all study that takes place in recognised tertiary institutions such as universities and Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges. RPL, at tertiary level, seeks to clarify the value of informal and experiential learning, which is undertaken outside of formal structures. This is harder to ‘pin down’ and therein lies a significant problem.

At present, the term RPL does not stipulate what constitutes valued learning, suggesting that all prior learning is worthy of consideration. It should follow then, with such recognition of value, that all prior learning should be regarded as relevant, and even necessary, to both the present and future learning of the student. If this is the case, then tertiary institutions ought to view informal and experiential learning as positive and work towards their inclusion in the range of learning approaches accepted. But this does not appear to be the case and the literature available revealed a great deal of confusion and caution regarding RPL.
The first universities to introduce formal RPL policy did not do so until 1996, five years after the TAFE colleges. Many other universities still did not have RPL within their policy framework in 2000. Hostility towards the concept is evident in some academic writings (Collins, 1993; Sundar, 1996; Golding, 1997) and yet articulation between universities and TAFE colleges continues to be promoted on the grounds of students’ prior learning.

In an effort to discover why these inconsistencies were present in a concept that was designed to be nationally acceptable and applicable, I have chosen to delve into the historical and political contexts, which saw RPL included in educational considerations and then to clarify the notions involved in this concept.

Following this exploration of RPL’s evolution, an investigation of University and TAFE policies concerning RPL seeks to establish what these institutions consider RPL to be. It is clear that Universities and TAFE colleges do not possess the same view of RPL. Universities appear to have been compelled to consider RPL within their sector, while not being party to the original decision making. TAFE colleges were required, by the Government of the day (Smith and Keating, 1997; ANTA, 1994; Beevers 1993), to adopt the concept of RPL and make it their own. To assess its future viability as an educational concept, there is a need to understand what these institutions consider RPL to be, within their own sphere and how they apply it in practice.
A concept must be understood and positively supported by an organisation before the practices and procedures of that concept can be properly developed. In 1993 Cohen et al attempted to list the benefits of RPL to learners, universities and employers (see Table 1) but not all educators were convinced. In the case of RPL, it appears that the concept was forced on the tertiary education sector and was not widely embraced by the people on whom it relied for its successful implementation. It is in the hope that the shape of future developments may be more positively applied that the present study is being undertaken.

Data and methodology

The key data for this study comprises written documents from a number of institutions. Description, analysis, and interpretation of this written documentation was the basis of this study, with research material being gathered from a variety of key primary and secondary sources. The most useful and appropriate source of university and TAFE policy data was the written documentation prepared by these institutions for their own internal use by staff and students. Such materials comprised internal administrative memos and instructions as well as advice, application information and forms for intending students. Secondary materials relating to RPL were gained from government, academic and private sources.

The study began with a blanket request for primary documentation from all Universities and TAFE colleges (see Appendices 1 and 2). A letter was sent to all
Australian Universities and TAFE colleges, or where appropriate, State TAFE Departments (see Appendix 3), requesting information, concerning their own policy and procedure for the development and use of Recognition of Prior Learning and Credit Transfer. Institutions with multiple campus listings were requested to forward the letter on to the most relevant campus.

A total of one hundred and two institutions were contacted (39 universities and 63 TAFE colleges). Fifty-eight institutions responded (22 universities and 36 TAFE colleges). It was very gratifying to receive documents from so many tertiary institutions. A few institutions were willing for me to use their policy documents for my research, while requesting that the information not be disseminated elsewhere in their name.

The literature review involved the examination and critique of secondary sources concerning relevant aspects of RPL. An integral part of this research were documents commissioned by Federal Government Agencies and lobby groups including the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), the Australian Vice Chancellors Committee (AVCC) and The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training (see Appendix 4). State Government documents and academic documents were also examined (see Appendix 5).
### Table 1

The benefits of RPL

**Benefits to learners**
- Reduces duplication of learning
- Enables completion of formal studies in a shorter time period
- Recognises achievement
- Opens access to formal recognition of knowledge, skills and attributes
- Increases opportunities for returning to learning
- Decreases time spent ‘time serving’ in courses
- Increases motivation because content is new and challenging
- Provides greater flexibility of learning options
- Validates prior learning and increases self-esteem

**Benefits to universities**
- Decreases the ad-hoc elements currently operating outside formal credit transfer
- Retains control over quality by formally assessing applicant’s prior learning
- Opportunity to reduce student drop-out and wastage rates
- Increases graduation rates
- Fewer disaffected course participants
- Decreases need for introductory courses
- Enhances skills of academic staff by increasing opportunities to teach at advanced levels
- Increases opportunities for equity provision
- Opportunity to foster partnerships and/or articulation with industry

**Benefits to employers**
- Assists in upgrading skills of staff
- Addresses award requirements
- Reduces costs for training
- Reduces time away from the job
- Promotes portability of competencies
- Accelerates response to training needs
- Potential for building positive partnerships with higher education providers
- Can promote positive changes in an organisation

(Table from Cohen et al, 1993: 47)
The major source of the secondary information was libraries of the West Australian Universities including access to inter-library loans and overseas data collections. Two sources of TAFE information were accessed through the use of microfiche.

It was anticipated that the Internet would provide another data source where accessible information concerning RPL was available to the general public. While information was difficult to find, information was available through the Internet from peak bodies such as AVCC and government departments, such as the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA, now DEST). These were accessed at regular intervals to keep abreast of the current situation.

There were some constraints on the gathering and use of information. Some institutions chose not to send their information, instead inviting me to visit their campus to peruse the documentation. However, this was not possible, given travel constraints and distance. Personnel from other colleges offered to talk directly with me over the telephone rather than send documentation, but contact was often not successful. General attrition meant that some people who had initially provided information were no longer available on request for follow-up information and often uncertainty was expressed about who might have the information that I was seeking.

While increased interest in RPL has resulted in a growing body of literature concerning the concept of RPL, unfortunately most of it focuses on areas other
than policy, preference being given to alternative topics such as assessment procedures. As a result, secondary sources only contained limited pockets of relevant data on the subject of RPL policy and procedure. Much of the literature was kept behind 'closed doors' and was available, if at all, only on request. But to request something requires knowledge of its existence. Individual University libraries had very little on the subject of RPL. As a result I relied heavily on inter library loans and access to personal collections, such as that of researcher, Dean Ashenden. Some papers were found by accident, listed in other publications. Indeed the literature search performed for this study provided additional support for the claims made by Taylor (1998: 8) that, "current research into RPL is limited in scope", and, "To date, there has been little substantial work in Australia".

The structure of the study

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the evolution of RPL and explains why it became part of education and training. It begins with an examination of the American development of RPL after World War Two. American enthusiasts took their program of RPL to other countries such as England and Canada, where its development has continued. This overview of the adoption of RPL is followed by a description of the political and social context, which prompted the emergence of the RPL concept in Australia. The Australian history of RPL reveals a concept slow to gain momentum until the 1990’s when it was incorporated in the National Training Agenda.
Chapter 2 explores the concept of RPL, from an Australian perspective, continuing to trace its evolution. Various aspects of the concept are individually examined to establish a clearer understanding of the philosophy and the quite diverse ideas underpinning the term. A concept tree has been developed (See fig. 1) to illustrate the complexity of this concept of recognition of prior learning, and to help the reader gain an understanding of the difficulties faced by institutions in their efforts to establish an RPL policy.

Chapter 3 attempts a definitional analysis of the concept of Recognition of Prior Learning. An investigation of the definitions of the words 'recognition', 'prior' and 'learning' prepares the reader for the descriptive analysis of the terminology found in the primary data provided by Australian universities and TAFE colleges. This documentation confirms a striking diversity in definitions.

Chapter 4 examines the perceptions of RPL held by individual public and private universities around Australia. An exploration of the primary documentation is undertaken to discover what commonalities, if any, exist in their policies and procedures for RPL.

Chapter 5 provides a parallel evaluation of TAFE documents concerning policies and procedures for RPL. As the TAFE sector was instrumental in promoting RPL it provides an interesting comparison.
Chapter 6 explores the significance of the findings of the previous two chapters on articulation between universities and TAFE colleges. Articulation is the transfer of students from one post-secondary sector to the other. The key question posed here is ‘What type of prior learning is appropriate for articulation?’

Chapter 7 provides a summary of the research, focusing on the conclusions drawn from the data presented. This study concludes that RPL probably has a limited and uncertain future, one which depends on the new Federal Minister’s (Brendan Nelson) plans for the post-secondary education sector.
Chapter 1

The Historical Context Surrounding the inclusion of RPL in the Australian Education and Training Sector.

1.1 The American origins of RPL

Although RPL is a relatively new term in Australian Education it has had a long history in America. It formally originated there as part of the G.I Bill of 1946 (Harris and Saddington, 1995), when people returning from war duty were encouraged to resume their education. Recognising that these people already had experience and knowledge in a range of skills, American education authorities decided to develop short tests to assess aptitude and skills for credit of some kind.

Because much prior learning was becoming recognised and assessed as valid learning and was beginning to be given formal accreditation the official term Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) emerged. PLA, in its present form began, according to Simosko (1991:18-19) in the 1960s and 70s as a research project known as “the Cooperative Assessment of Experiential Learning”. The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), a leading national organisation in the USA,
actively promoted joint ventures between education providers and employers to foster PLA.

A ground-breaking study by Allen Tough in 1967, "alerted educators to the depth and breadth of learning activities in which adults typically participate" (Mann, 1997:2). Tough found that the adults themselves initiated many of these activities, not the institution or training provider. Adding to this, a 1976 study by CAEL found that "college-level learning can and does occur outside of a college classroom and ... there are valid and reliable ways to evaluate this learning for college credit" (Mann, 1997:3). With such supporting evidence, according to Harris and Saddlington (1995:4), "RPL became firmly established practice in academia in the US in the 1970s".

In the early 1990s Ashenden (1992) noted that RPL in North America was "a small academic industry". This is supported by Cohen et al. who confirmed that by 1993, "1700 universities and colleges in the USA offer assessment and accreditation of prior learning and many have been doing so for over twenty years" (1993:5). Many incorporated systems offering advice, orientation programs and courses to assist students.
1.2 RPL spreads to the United Kingdom

Recognition of Prior Learning appears to have emerged in Britain in the 1980s. The US Kellogg Foundation provided funds for CAEL to develop a British/American Scholars Exchange Programme ‘(Simosko, 1991:19). With the assistance of American educators and their experiences, British educators began researching the possibilities for RPL. As the British program started as an offshoot of the America experiential learning program they adopted the term ‘Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning’ (APEL). But this learning was not based on standards of competence or learning outcomes and the need for such a framework was developing. This framework was to become known as Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL).

Growing British Government interest led to exploration of its viability within vocational education and training. (Simosko 1991, Harris and Saddington 1995) Early projects were conducted with the intention of creating access to higher education for adults. At the same time the British Government was calling for a more flexible and adaptable workforce, more responsive training programs and greater access to education and training for a broader spectrum of the population.

The decision, made in 1983, by the Scottish Education Department to switch from a time-based, fixed period of study to a modular criterion referenced format,
which provided clear and explicit learning outcome statements contributed to the application of APL in the UK.

As Simosko noted (1991:21):

*Achievement of credit would no longer be tied to a fixed period of study. Indeed it was now possible to be assessed against the learning outcomes without attending a single class. Scotland had essentially found its own way to APL.*

(Simosko, 1991:21)

In 1986, a paper entitled ‘Working Together – Education and Training’ established the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) and set the foundations for British APL. Several studies were conducted in 1987, the results of which included the endorsement of the concept of APL and the establishment of policies and implementation procedures. This prompted further studies into the application of APL.

While there are regional and national bodies responsible for credit frameworks in the UK, the U.K Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) (Online: 7 5) notes that APL arrangements vary between institutions which have their own guidelines. They comment, too, that academic institutions in the UK have only recently accepted the notion that they may be able to grant credit for learning from experience for awards. The National and Scottish Vocational Qualification (NSVQ) places “the assessment of existing competence, regardless of how or when this competences was achieved” (UCAS: 3), as the cornerstone of its philosophy. One Australian position appears to be strikingly similar to this aspect of their philosophy.
Ashenden (1992) noted that while recognition of prior learning in the UK used many of the American techniques, it focused more on further education, such as adult education, rather than on higher education and vocational purposes, which was the American focus. APL has encouraged the re-entry of mature persons to education or training. "Its significance is growing now that increasing numbers of HEI's [Higher Education Institutions] are prepared to accept learning from experience as well as learning which has already been certificated, as a valid indication of achievement" (UCAS, [Online], Accreditation of prior learning: 3). APL has come to be regarded as an umbrella term to cover both APEL (accreditation of prior experiential learning) and APCL (accreditation of prior certificated learning) in the UCAS documentation.

Some universities, responding to social justice elements (Cohen et al, 1993), are providing more flexible forms of education to meet the demands of less traditional students. APEL and work-based learning are two of these options. APEL is recognition of learning gained "wholly or partly through experience". At the University of Central Lancashire (online), APEL began as a means of access into educational institutions, but its use has broadened to include entry into subsequent years and for advanced standing.

Universities such as the University of Leeds (online) and the Glasgow Caledonian University (online) include programs for students interested in work-based learning. They acknowledge that these students do not possess formal educational qualifications and provide for recognition of prior experience and
learning through assessment. According to the Glasgow Caledonian University (online: 1) the underlying principle is, "appropriate learning at higher education level, wherever it occurs, provided it can be assessed, can be given credit towards an academic award".

If Beevers (1993a: 61), in his critique of Hill (1993) and Brown's (1992) descriptions of the NCVQ is correct, these APL developments have significance for the Australian concept of RPL. He agreed with Hill that, "the NVQ model and associated concepts "has been adopted in its entirety by the National Training Board, with only the most minor changes to a few of the Key Terms". He concluded that, "it mirrors the NCVQ model".

1.3 RPL in other countries

1.3.1 In Canada

The Canadian form of RPL is the PLAR process. Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition came to the fore in 1994, having been recommended in a range of reports and studies (Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition [online] 1996). Labor market partners combined to develop a new system "for education/training and access to employment that is effective, efficient and equitable" (Prior learning Assessment and Recognition [Online] 1996:1). The Canadian Labour Force Development Board accepted the leadership responsibility of PLAR implementation on a nationwide basis. It recognised that without a national
strategy and national standards PLAR would not succeed as a significant contributor to education and training reform.

The Canadian system of education appears to be similar to our own Federal system with Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), developing on a 'provincial basis' (Harris and Saddington, 1995). Prior learning Assessment was introduced in the Province of British Columbia, in 1995 (Province of British Columbia, [online], 1999). According to this document “prior learning assessment helps people gain recognition and credit for what they already know and can do”, which is strikingly similar to one Australian definition. By 1996 educational institutions and provinces throughout Canada were developing policies and practices for PLAR.

1.3.2 In South Africa

Since the democratic elections in 1994, much research and development has taken place in South Africa regarding RPL. Harris (online, 1999) acknowledges the importance of the role that RPL should play in her country when she asserts that:

The recognition of prior learning is clearly an important concept for educational reform in South Africa...with social redress and widened access to education and training for those who have been systematically denied opportunities in the past.

Leading South African RPL researchers, Harris and Saddington, from the University of Cape Town, examined international models of RPL including those from the United States, England, Canada and Australia, while developing policies and practices for the application of RPL in South Africa, in the 1990s.
1.3.3 In New Zealand

A preliminary examination of New Zealand reveals that, like its Australian counterpart, RPL did not become policy until 1990 in New Zealand. The need for economic rationalisation in the face of high unemployment, which was viewed as the product of inadequate education (Sundar, 1996), forced education and training reform. The New Zealand Quality Framework (QFNZ) was established in 1991. A number of pilot schemes researching the implementation of RPL took place in 1993. RPL appeared to progress upon similar lines to its Australian introduction. Formed in 1995, the Australian and New Zealand joint council for co-operation in vocational education and training set the scene for these two countries to work together towards a common recognition system that would, "enable transferability and portability of competencies and qualifications between the two countries" (TRAIN, Online).

1.4 The rise of RPL in Australia

Though it appears that Australia was not alone in its hesitancy to adopt RPL, the question persists: why has it taken Australia so long to adopt the practice of recognising non-formal prior learning? Recognition of formal learning, or learning that has taken place in a tertiary institution of similar standing, has been accepted practice for many years in Australia. However, it is the practice of recognising learning done outside of these institutions that has been slow to materialise.
The presence of RPL in Australian tertiary education began as a result of World War Two. But it did not maintain a significant profile. An historical perspective allows the opportunity to gain an understanding of this evolution of a small but nevertheless increasingly important part of the Australian education system.

The wartime Federal Government’s Walker Report (1943) formalised Commonwealth intervention in education and training and in 1945 the Education Act of Australia formally acknowledged the Commonwealth Government’s participation in education and training. Prior to this the States had been the primary decision-makers so far as university and vocational education and training were concerned (Coble-Neal, 1995). Initially, the Federal Government considered the education of its population as the direct role of the states, as the respective states already had developed education systems.

1.4.1 Government interest in education

Government commissioned reports were to play a major role in the transformation of the education arena. Many such ‘landmark’ reports were followed by the development of statutory bodies to advise the government on education, such as the formation of the Australian University Commission (AUC) after the Murray Report of 1957. Smart and Manning (1986) observed the prevalence of national committees of inquiry. They wrote, “National reports of committees have played a key role on shaping policies and creating policy-making structures” (1986: 201), and further, “we have to acknowledge a strong
relationship between reports and their effects” (1986: 211). Later, in the West Review of 1998, the Minister for Education, Dr Kemp, still acknowledged the value of such reviews stating that they were, “A key source of advice for the government” (1998:1). Such reports were to play a major role in the determining the rate and direction of the evolution of RPL policy and practice.

According to Smith and Keating (1997:7), “interest on the part of Governments in Vocational Education and Training has often been associated with economic and social crisis in the form of depressions or wars”. The Murray Committee (1957), which was assembled by the Menzies Government to look into Australian Universities “concluded that the Commonwealth government must accept greater responsibility for the states’ universities” (National Report on Australia’s Higher Education Sector, 1993:9) The result of their recommendations was the creation of the Australian Universities Commission (AUC) and the establishment of permanent triennial federal funding grants for universities.

In 1965 The Martin Report into tertiary education “proposed a tripartite system of universities, technical colleges and teachers colleges…” (National Report on Australia’s Higher Education Sector, 1993:12). The following period saw the expansion of the universities and teachers colleges being jointly funded by State and Federal Governments (Smart, 1990), while technical and further education suffered a time of ‘stagnation’ under exclusive funding by the states (Beever, 1993).
Whenever there had been a need for an increase in skilled labour in Australia, recruitment from overseas sources had been considered the most expedient way to expand the nation’s skills base. Established to facilitate the recognition of skills possessed by migrants, the Tregillis Report (1969), made a significant discovery that as well as deficiencies in technical training, Australia lacked national competency standards. (Beevers, 1993)

In the 1970s education became a vital aspect of the Whitlam Government’s social wage policy and a “major policy and expenditure priority” (Beevers, 1993: 34). As Commonwealth funding for tertiary education accelerated, the level of Commonwealth policy intervention became increasingly influenced by its financial contribution (National Report on Australia’s Higher Education Sector, 1993). The Whitlam Government’s abolition of tuition fees in 1974 made the institutions of higher education, though not the technical college sector, totally reliant upon the comparatively wealthy federal government for financial support.

1.4.2 The Kangan Report

In 1974, the Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education (ACOTAFE), under the chairmanship of Myer Kangan was instrumental in altering the perspective of Australian education, through the report on technical and further education. Kangan was aware that technical and further education “did not yet appear to rank officially as an integral part of the nation’s education
system” (Technical and Further Education in Australia, April 1974: xvii). The Kangan Report (Smith and Keating, 1997) was instrumental in positioning TAFE as the third sector of post-secondary education and training (along with universities and CAE’s) and with this inclusion into the fold came Commonwealth involvement and the TAFE Commission (TAFEC). (Coble-Neal, 1995) This report stressed the need for education, generally, to be beneficial for the individual and to enhance their abilities to contribute to the community’s prosperity, with technical institutions, particularly, focusing on “vocationally oriented education and the manpower need of industry” (Technical and Further Education in Australia, April 1974: xviii). Mention was made of the notion of equity of access to training and the future need for recurrent training, two aspects closely linked to the concept of RPL, which was to surface later.

1.4.3 The links between the economy and education

In ‘The Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Education and Training’ (1979), Williams “referred to the fact that education is an important political issue and that education cannot be taken out of politics” (Sclanders, 1987:52). This comment is noteworthy, in light of the growing links between the economy and education in the 1980s. Coble-Neal (1995) considers the Williams Report significant in its forecasting of change and its recognition of the inability of the three education sectors to adapt to changing community and industry needs.
For the entire country to benefit from the proposed reforms, an Australia-wide system had to be developed and implemented. Technological change had rapidly rendered non-skilled employment redundant. Unemployment was growing and the education system was blamed for not providing a suitably prepared workforce. A new approach to training was required, to ensure appropriate skill development. The respective State and Territory Governments had administered education for many years. A national system, linked by the cooperation and agreement of the ministers for training of these individual states, was required to ensure the success of the new training reforms. To accomplish this agenda, employment and training were brought into a centrally controlled system with the establishment of the National Training Board (NTB) in 1990.

Economic restructuring through macro and micro economic reform dominated the Hawke government’s concerns from 1983. This government presided over a period of recession in which unemployment and trade deficit dominated. Changes in work practices were necessary to reverse the situation (Smith and Keating, 1997). Labour market reforms such as multi-skilling and the reassessment of job classifications were regarded as vital for economic recovery. Through the ‘Accord’ between government, business and unions, award restructuring took place with an emphasis on links between training, skills and wages. The National Training Board (NTB) described the award restructuring process as “a principle driving force for change” (Collins, 1993b: 2). “Award
Restructuring was often associated with wider changes in work organisation which generally had training implications" (Smith and Keating, 1997:27).

Employees were encouraged to undergo training to take up new award classifications. Wage increases were linked with productivity increases. Recognition of on-the-job training and learning was introduced to assist workers to access these wage increases for skills already possessed or gained. The metals industry was the first to undertake this process (Beevers, 1993, Smith and Keating, 1997) and others such as the Ford/ TAFE articulation project were to follow.

From 1980 there had been calls from industry and education groups for competency–based trade training with consideration of skill formation being an important factor. Post secondary education, in its then present form, was regarded as inadequate to fulfill society’s need for employment and economic survival. The Kirby Report (1985) into Labour Market Programs spurred an increased interest in education and training of the workforce. The inadequacies of the current system were becoming clearer as the education and training provided was not producing workers with appropriate skills for industry. Gary Collins (1993:4) commented that this report “signalled the expansion of structured competency-based training beyond the limits of the … apprenticeship system".
In 1986 the ‘Report of the Commonwealth/State Working Group on Skills Shortages and Skills Formation’ recommended a system that would require the working together of Commonwealth and State Governments and industry towards appropriate vocational education and training. This resulted in the collation of a range of vocational education reforms that became known as The National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA). “In the 1980s and 1990s The NTRA has become the vehicle for change and establishment of a national system of vocational education and training” (Coble-Neal, 1995:11).

The visit to Western Europe by the representatives of the ACTU and TDC (Trade Development Council) in 1986 was influential in commitment to training reform. In their report, ‘Australia Reconstructed’, it was recommended that “Australia should develop a central national economic and social objective”, as a priority (Australia Reconstructed, 1987:19). The members of this group considered that “the most striking aspect of active labour market policies is the emphasis placed on skill formation, skill enhancement, skill flexibility and overall training” (1987:107). Emphasis was also placed “on combining equity with flexibility and the promotion of a productive and efficient society” (Australia Reconstructed, 1987:49). **These recommendations for industry reform with training and skills formation as primary objectives, contributed to the prominence of the competency-based approach to training** (Collins, 1993).
The ACTU/TDC observed that, in Sweden, “Vocational education and training is not seen as a one-off exercise but as a process of life-time learning, contributing to both personal and career development” (1987:109), which was pertinent to the development of RPL in Australia.

1.4.4 Economic rationalism and education

As the world experienced an economic downturn in the early 1980s economic rationalism was considered to provide the solution. “After 1987 economic rationalism and human capital theories became the orthodoxy of education policy” (Dudley1998: 36). Economic rationalism was defined by Peter Walsh, the Commonwealth Minister for Finance in 1992 as, “the belief that market forces will generally produce better outcomes, or more efficient allocation of resources, than government intervention” (Marginson, 1993:56).

The most influential change came with the re-election of the Hawke/Keating government in 1987. Keating’s dire prediction, in 1986, that Australia would become a ‘banana republic’ had shocked the Australian public, who recognised the need for government action to halt this decline. Micro-economic reform took centre stage and reforms were considered on an industry by industry basis. As part of this reform the education industry was also required to change and adopt a strategic role for the nation’s benefit. This approach lead to the replacement of the traditional view of education as having both intrinsic and extrinsic value, with the view beginning to predominate of education as the exclusive tool of the
marketplace. Education was to be realigned to promote employment and help redevelop the economy.

In Australia unemployment had become unacceptably high, especially youth unemployment. Added to this, technological changes had reduced the need for unskilled workers and rendered many workers unprepared for the changes that were taking place. Retrenchments and unemployment seemed inevitable. The Government of the day had to face the fact that Australia was falling behind economically. To become more competitive in the world market, this country had to cease relying on primary industry and develop more secondary manufacturing industries.

In the 1980s the economic situation forced Australian Federal and State Governments to face the fact that its vocational education and training was not ‘up to par’ (Ducker in Collins. C, 1993). A change in the focus of these areas had to take place to accelerate economic reform and build up a skilled, technologically able, and thus employable workforce.

John Dawkins’ appointment in 1987 as the Federal Minister for Employment Education and Training instigated “wide and sweeping reforms of all sectors of Australian education ...as part of the government’s micro-economic reform agenda” (Dudley1998: 37). While the Kangan reforms of the 1970s were developed in the light of the post-war economic boom, Dawkins' reforms were precipitated by nearly 2 decades of economic decline.
The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) first began to exert a global influence on education policy in 1978. “The economic imperative was beginning to take centre stage in OECD thinking about education” (Lingard and Rizvi, 1998:262). The social purpose of education was included as an aspect of these economic considerations and retained some importance. These subjects were to be more closely linked 10 years later, under the driving influence of Dawkins, at the 1988 OECD conference ‘Education and the Economy in a Changing Society’. Lingard and Rizvi (1998:263) claim that this conference was the ideal platform for the Australian Federal Government to link “the economic and social purposes of education”.

According to Coble-Neal (1995), the Australian reform process really began to take shape in 1987 with the presentation of several major documents including ‘Skills for Australia: Commonwealth Policy’ and ‘Australia Reconstructed’. The Federal Government's National report on Australia’s Higher Education Sector, (1993) described the Green and White Papers, (presented by Dawkins in 1987 and 1988 respectively) as the catalysts of change within higher education. Though this report does state that “the process of change…had been evolutionary rather than revolutionary: many of the key issues which influenced these changes had emerged at the beginning of the decade” (1993:23).

Significantly, The White Paper referred to the issue of accreditation, credit and credit transfer (Dawkins, 1988) and expressed concern about the ad hoc nature
of the system and the need for a framework and principles to deliver a more streamlined approach within a Unified National System of higher education.

Consensus between OECD governments had led to the decision that economic considerations would play a major role in the development of educational reform. This was a carefully considered plan to boost the world economy. Educational practice, with a previous emphasis on societal benefits, was now forced to address the need for economic reform. The OECD document on education, 1989b, (appendix 6) generated policies that specifically placed education within the framework of world economic development. Crittenden commented at the time:

Now in 1989, the focus is not directly on what economic benefits individuals or particular groups can attain through schooling, but how the system of education can be used more effectively to lift the economic prosperity of the nation as whole. (Cited by Poole, 1992: 5)

In 1987, the abolition of the Commonwealth statutory bodies of CTEC and the Schools Commission heralded the transfer of considerable power to one mega-government department, over which Dawkins had complete control. Poole (1992) states that the formation of one government department, through amalgamation, to create the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) signalled a unification or rationalisation of the fields of education and work. A small statutory board, the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) was created. It was this board, which commissioned many of the studies into vocational training which supported the competency –based approach to training, one aspect of which was RPL.
One report from the Employment and Skills Formation Council (ESFC, 1989), a division of NBEET, commented that: “there was strong support for training to be competency-based and modular and for skills to be recognised” (Collins, 1993a: 11). This is clearly evident in the establishment, by NBEET, of the “10 principles for accreditation of courses” in the National Framework for the Recognition of Training (NFROT), presented in Table 2 overleaf.

“In the light of the pace of award restructuring” (DEET, in Collins, 1993a: 13) the government established a national competency-based vocational education and training system the same year. In doing so it “endorsed the principle of competency-based training and agreed to expand and accelerate the competency-based approach” (DEET, in Collins, 1993a: 13).

1.4.5 Competency-Based Training in TAFE

Developed as an educational response to the need for economic restructuring Competency-Based Training (CBT), which had been part of the industry-training sector for many years, was adopted for educational purposes (Collins, 1993). The National Training Board (NTB) drafted a model of CBT in 1991, which presented a national approach focused on skill development and training, award structures and qualifications. (Preston and Walker, in Collins, 1993: 120).

In the early 1990s three important Commonwealth reports, (the Finn Report on ‘Young People’s Participation in Post-Compulsory Education and Training’
<table>
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<th>10 principles for accreditation of courses in the NFROT</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Identified industry training need/market need</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Course standards appropriate to the requirements of the particular credential</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Competence-based training</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Multiple entry and exit</td>
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<td>Flexible learning</td>
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<td>Articulation</td>
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<td>Customisation of courses</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Promote access and participation</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Appropriate assessment</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Ongoing monitoring and evaluation</td>
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(1991), the Mayer Report into 'Employment Related Key Competencies' (1992), and the Carmichael Report on 'The Australian Vocational Certificate Training System' (1992)) were commissioned. In these investigations of education and training, consideration was given to aspects of the competency-based approach. The Finn Review:

**Endorsed the development of a competency-based curriculum in all areas of post-compulsory education and training and stated that progression through an educational or training program must be based on achievement or demonstrated competence.**

(Collins, 1993a: 19)

The Finn and Mayer Committees developed the concept and structure of key competencies (Appendix 7), which represent a broad range of skills and knowledge. By 1992, with the Mayer key competencies endorsed as its basis, CBT had become the 'keystone' of the vocational education reforms of the National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA). (Beevers in Collins, 1993: 91).

According to Borthwick, the Carmichael Report,

**Proposed a new system of entry-level training in Australia and showed how the key competencies could form a bridge between general education and vocational education and training as the core component of the proposed Australian Vocational Certificate.**

(Borthwick, 1993: 21)

These vocational education reforms were intended "to make the system more efficient, responsive and relevant to industry requirements for a skilled and adaptable workforce" (CEDA, 1995:23).

### 1.4.6 The need for efficiency

A study by Cohen et al. (1993) found that the increased portability of nationally
recognised knowledge and skills reduced the costs of, and time spent, on training to the individual and community. RPL encouraged employers and trainers in industry and tertiary education to work together in their efforts to develop and provide qualified expertise in a shorter timespan (Cohen et al., 1993).

The implementation of CBT led to increasing interest in the notion of RPL. The idea was gaining credence that recognition of one's prior learning and experiences could assist in this rationalisation, particularly in the area of reskilling and education of the workforce. The emphasis of prior learning had begun to move from generally useful history to more specific practical correlations with the job to be done.

1.4.7 The formal recognition of RPL

The concept of formally recognising prior learning was dramatically introduced into Australia through a joint venture between the Ford Motor Company and the Broadmeadows College of TAFE in Melbourne in 1989. The intention was to establish links between the workplace training undertaken at Ford and accredited courses run at the TAFE College. Together they developed an RPL assessment system for industry, parts of which were to be later used in the educational application of RPL. The process of reskilling Australia was accompanied by the realisation that the knowledge and skills derived from previous occupations could not be ignored but required some form of consideration in the retraining process. Prior learning could not be marginalised in the context of formal education.
So fundamental was this need for nationwide recognition of qualifications, that with the State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers in agreement, the National Framework for Recognition of Training (NFROT) was developed in July 1992. Its intention was to provide local trainers with accreditation, which would be recognised on a national level, to enable the portability of qualifications and training. The NFROT document stated, “The move to competency-based training is a key element of training reform in Australia” (Collins, 1993a: 24). RPL and credit transfer are both major components, covered by principles in the original training package documentation. (See Appendix 8) The NFROT established the principles of competence, commitment, access, fairness and support as the basic principles of RPL practice. Universities and TAFE colleges have made reference to the NFROT in their RPL documents.

Unfortunately however, a national body was not appointed to manage the NFROT (ANTA, 1994), which became “subject to different interpretations across the country” (Smith and Keating 1997:37). Since its inception, the NFROT had been in a continuous process of change (Hawke and McDonald, 1996, p8). The principles had been revised regularly through a number of reviews. The ‘First Review of the National Framework for the Recognition of Training: Final Report’, known as the ‘Rumsey Review’, in 1993, identified many concerns held by stakeholders in the development of the NFROT. (See appendix 9)

A subsequent review of the NFROT, by the Allen Consulting Group in 1994, (‘Successful Reform: Competitive Skills for Australians and Australian Enterprises’) was established to determine how the system was progressing.
They found mixed results and raised concerns that the issues tabled by Rumsey had not been resolved. The Hawke/McDonald paper of 1996 entitled 'When Rhetoric Meets Reality: issues confronting the National Framework for the Recognition of Training', also found that few of the issues raised by previous reports had been adequately dealt with. From this they concluded that "the unwillingness of key stakeholders to confront difficult issues" (1996: 2) was a major hurdle to the establishment of successful training reforms - one of which was RPL.

1.4.8 The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA)

A coordinated approach to VET was expected to be finalised with the establishment of ANTA in 1992 and the ANTA agreement in 1994. (Collins, 1993a) VET had remained a State and Territory responsibility that the Commonwealth Government wanted to influence. ANTA was an agency established as a compromise between the Federal, State and Territory Governments to provide 'strategic directions' for the national VET system. (Smith and Keating, 1997) This compromise included additional Commonwealth funding "provided that the States and Territories support a nationally consistent approach to VET and that they 'maintain their own effort' in VET" (Smith and Keating, 1997:40). To be eligible for this funding, each state and territory was required to provide a 'training profile' of its VET goals and objectives (Smith and Keating, 1997). But ANTA was part of a large and complex system whose stakeholders had interests ranging from government, industry and federalism to employment
and labour market demands (Smith and Keating, 1997). Inevitably the goals and priorities were in a state of constant change.

The six objectives within the ANTA agreement were:

1. A national training system
2. Industry involvement
3. An effective training market
4. An effective and productive network of publicly funded providers
5. Increased opportunities and improved outcomes
6. Improved cross-sectoral links.

Several of these objectives, namely the national training system, increased opportunities and improved outcomes and improved cross-sectoral links are related to the development of RPL in both the VET and tertiary systems in Australia. The ‘Report of the Review of the ANTA Agreement’ presented by Taylor in 1996 found that, while there had been growth in the national system with strong support for ANTA and the agreement, “insufficient progress had been made in improving the equity objectives of the agreement” (Taylor, 1996: 164). RPL had been promoted as a means of progress towards social equity and it appeared that, while trainers generally accepted equity and access policies, their implementation was slow.

Cross-sectoral links included discussion of credit transfer and Taylor acknowledged (1996:155),"An additional form of credit transfer is the recognition
granted for the knowledge and skills acquired outside formal study”. He added that “some 1.8 percent of commencing students in 1993 received credit for informal study, a 50% increase over 1992”. While this might have been a significant increase, it was clearly from a very low base.

The Taylor report made several relevant recommendations including: improvement in cross-sectoral links should remain a priority; facilitation of student movement to be encouraged and:

**Co-operation should be encouraged between enterprises and institutional providers of vocational education and training; in particular through the sharing of staff, facilities, curricula and teaching and assessment materials.**

(Taylor, 1996:160)

The ANTA agreement, supported by the findings of the Allen Review led to the development of significant changes to The NFROT. These changes resulted in a shift in focus in 1997 and the birth of The National Training Framework.

**It was the broadening of the scope of recognition to include uncredentialled learning that was central to the training reforms.**

Recognition of formal studies and qualifications, known as "credit transfer", had been in place for some time in both VET and university courses. According to Smith and Keating (1997), work and life experience were gaining acknowledgment in the field of training reform.
Smith and Keating (1997: 165) highlighted five reasons for the importance of RPL:

- *To make qualifications nationally portable*
- *To save money*
- *To improve student motivation*
- *To improve access and equity*
- *To ensure that training providers remained in touch with industry*

1.4.9 National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR)

The National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR) was previously known as the Council on Overseas Professional Qualifications (COPQ). This council was regarded as inadequate in the new plan for a National Agenda. NOOSR was its replacement. (Employment and Skills Formation Council, 1990). Established within DEET in 1989, the intention was for NOOSR “to provide correct and useful information to migrants about the recognition of their skills in Australia” (Collins, 1993c:1).

But events in the early 1990s led to a shift in focus. Collins (1993c:1) explained that, “The work of NOOSR links to the work being carried out on general vocational competencies by the National Training Board”. Until this time the universities and professions had not been included in discussions on the competency-based approach. Though initially created to reform the process of recognising skills gained overseas, it became apparent that NOOSR had been given the task of developing competency standards for the professions and
university training within Australia. In order to develop these competency standards NOOSR needed benchmarks of professional standards. The lack of such benchmarks highlighted the need for this to be addressed. By this means the CBT agenda, and hence RPL, had begun to permeate higher education.

1.5 Concluding comments

In the past decade, Australia has made inroads into the implementation of RPL as a nationwide strategy of education and training reform. All areas of education have become involved, with some institutions, such as the universities, being drawn reluctantly into the fold. Though established initially for post secondary purposes, RPL also appears to be making inroads into the schooling of children at all levels; however it is beyond our present remit to pursue this latter development.

In the next chapter an exploration of the evolving concept of RPL is undertaken. Here important aspects of the concept are examined to discover their relevance to education and training in areas such as lifelong learning, social justice, competency-based training and economic accountability.
Chapter 2

What does the concept of RPL encompass?

RPL is a concept based on the adult learning principles of learner centredness and the uniqueness of the individual learner. In an 'active' concept of educational development many types, styles and contexts of learning are mooted. Educationalists are actively promoting the concepts of open learning, self-directed learning, learning pathways and lifelong learning. RPL is a concept that is intended to enhance the development of people through validation of these alternative learning approaches. But before this purpose can be achieved, RPL must itself be examined and validated as an educational concept.

2.1 Understanding the concept of RPL in Australia

RPL in Australia has been bedevilled by a lack of understanding of the concept and its applicability. This concept, when examined from a range of perspectives can be seen to incorporate both an intrinsic value and an economic incentive.

The concept of RPL proposes that learning gained by means other than credentialled study is worthy of consideration. Knowledge gained through credentialled or formal study is acknowledged as valid through the credit transfer process. But the area of RPL which causes most concern to Australian educators
is that of the uncredentialled /non-formal and experiential acquisition of information. To assume that any real learning has taken place, when evidence is lacking or difficult to validate, is regarded by many educators as untenable.

2.2 Assumptions found within RPL

RPL is a concept based on assumptions. Some of these assumptions have factual foundations, which can be substantiated, while others rest on supposition.

It is widely acknowledged (Hill, 1991) that learning is an active, cognitive process. Students are not regarded as sponges waiting to absorb new information. Educators, in all sectors plan concrete activities for students including role-play and practical exercises, as they are aware of the need for learning to be a physically and mentally active and inclusive process. The transferability of learned information implies an active individual, not a passive one.

Implicit in this terminology is the expectation that all people learn. This is indisputable, but the extent to which they learn varies from person to person. For many people, those with learning difficulties for example, learning does occur, but the amount of learning and the rate at which that learning takes place is often reduced. Autism is a condition in which the individual has no awareness of consequence and can repeat an action over and over neither learning from it nor remembering the result of the action. There is the assumption then that a person who is not autistic will remember experiences and will know when they have
learned something from that experience. Many people repeat actions and appear not to learn from the previous act or to have learnt the wrong thing - repeat offenders for example.

RPL appears to suggest that all learning is positive in nature and yet often a person may learn ‘what not to do’ rather than the opposite. Not all experiences are positive nor have positive outcomes. The experience of failure is not a positive one and not all individuals will reflect upon such failure and gain a positive perspective. Often the learning gained from an experience is not what we expected or wanted. At these times learning is not appreciated.

RPL assumes that all learning has value. If this is the case, then all of a person’s previous learning is important. Yet when applying for tertiary studies, the only learning considered relevant for year 12 students in Western Australia is that of their final 2 years work and the culminating TEE (tertiary entrance examination) for university placement.

Mature age students are required to sit an entrance examination also based on proof of similar learning. In these cases the evidence sought is of specific rather than general learning. The concept of RPL presupposes that individuals should know when they have learned something, remember what they have learned and recognise its value. But who remembers much of their prior learning and then realises that the prior learning gained is worthy of consideration?
This concept assumes that it is possible for some previously gained knowledge to be relevant and viable to present studies. It presupposes that some of the knowledge may be of such a standard, as to render the student skilled enough to pass the relevant unit without having to submit to further study and assessment.

2. 2.1 RPL lays the foundation for Lifelong Learning

Learning is a lifelong activity that begins at birth, or even at conception. Some people believe that a child learns while still in the uterus and that children are born with ‘prior learning’. Others consider learning as beginning immediately after birth and encourage play and other forms of activity to develop learning. One positive aspect of recognising past learning as being beneficial in and of itself, is the respect it delivers for the individual learner and their innate ability to learn and develop from that learning.

In OECD countries ‘lifelong learning’ is recognised and practiced (Tuijnman and Van Der Kamp, 1992). No longer do people regard learning as ending at secondary school or at tertiary institutions, but acknowledge that it occurs throughout the lifetime of an individual. As technology is changing at such a fast rate, education and learning must change too. It is no longer realistic to suggest that once a person has post secondary certification, that he/she will require no further training in that area.
Onstenk (1992:144), writing from a Scandinavian viewpoint, considered that “the recognition of previously acquired knowledge and skills is a prerequisite for further learning”. People are continually learning and adapting to change. RPL is a concept that confirms that learning does not occur in isolation but acts as foundation stones for subsequent learning. Acknowledging the individual’s prior learning reveals an awareness of the changes that take place in learning as people have new experiences. In recognising the foundations of past learning, RPL confirms the view that individuals can predict what may happen if similar circumstances were to recur.

One aspect of lifelong learning, ‘professional development’, can occur in many forms, not all of which is formal study. It is more likely that an individual working in a particular field will undertake informal learning rather than take time off for additional formal training. In OECD countries much training now is accomplished in the workplace, with learning taking place in the situational context (Onstenk, 1992). Adaptation of the human race to constant change is the foremost example of learning. “Changes in the world of work are leading to a convergence of work and learning and of vocational and general educational skills and knowledge”, according to Australia’s National Training Board (1992:7). Award restructuring had placed a new emphasis on skills development and the notion of career paths. Dawkins emphasised in 1989 that, “These concepts give practical expression to the notion of lifelong education and will generate significant new
demands for the recognition of previous education and training, wherever acquired” (Dawkins, 1989: 23).

In 1996 NBEET examined the key issues involved in lifelong learning (1996:16). Seven key issues were identified, one of which was RPL. Credit transfer for formal learning alone was not regarded as sufficient. When combined with RPL, these concepts were seen as necessary to promote lifelong learning.

Implementation of a national system of RPL was suggested especially to provide access to formal education. Such use of formal education institutions enabled the birth of the University of the Third Age. This university program encourages people over the age of 55 to maintain their learning and enhance their cognitive functioning.

2.2.2 The relevance of RPL to Mature Age Learning

RPL is a concept which seems particularly relevant to mature age or adult students. When considering the age of adulthood there are two main views, either ‘over 21’ or ‘25 and over’ (West et al. 1980). The latter is preferred for this study. A person of 25 and over is considered more likely to have had time in which to accumulate a greater depth and range of experiences. It is the role of RPL to determine what the individual has learned from those experiences.
Athanasou has argued (Foley, 1995) that RPL has been a significant
development for the future of adult education and training in Australia and has
prompted the realisation that lifelong learning is important. This importance was
evident in a report presented to the Council of Adult Education (White and
Baster, 1995) dealing with the development of RPL policy and procedures. Seven
policy recommendations were made, including the adoption of the NFROT
principles, formal and consistent assessment and the resourcing of the process
of RPL.

Given the social demographics of Australia, it was becoming more important to
maintain adult learning and skills. Foley worried that although it was “already a
well-established part of some accreditation procedures ... [its] availability to
learners is patchy, and there are widely differing conceptions of how it might be
implemented on a broader scale” (Foley 1995:104).

2.2.3 Is RPL necessary for Social Justice in Education and if so, has it
worked?

While some of the strongest motivation for introducing RPL has come from
industrial and vocational quarters, RPL has also been promoted on the
humanitarian basis that it could be a valuable tool for social justice. It is important
to note that the social justice element of RPL is unanimously endorsed.
Andresen, Boud and Cohen, (1995: 216), stated that there has been
“acknowledgment by Government, educational providers and workplaces that RPL is an equity matter as well as according with training reform agendas”.

Since 1989 (ANTA, 1993) access and equity principles have underpinned the policy development of the National Training Reform Agenda. At the same time Broad Meadows College of TAFE (1990:30) concluded from the Ford/TAFE articulation project that, “RPL...responds to the social justice aspects of access to training and education, availability and access to career paths, and acknowledgment of existing skills”. In support of this, Davidson (1996), from the Centre for Learning and Work Research at Griffith University, asserted that RPL contributed to the Australian notion of giving everyone ‘a fair go’.

One view that also holds true for Australia is that of Simosko (1991:9) who, when speaking of England, stated that, “As a nation we must put individuals first and provide opportunities whereby everyone can make maximum use of their potential”. The process of RPL is intended to provide formal recognition for skills that an individual may already possess. In this respect, the application of RPL in Australia was intended to enable people such as those from disadvantaged backgrounds; women, Aboriginals, people with disabilities and those from ethnic cultures to gain entrance to educational programs in institutions such as TAFE and university. Whether this has actually occurred will be explored in a later chapter.
There is a common assumption that RPL applies to everyone equally which is certainly not the case. Like other policy directives intended to support disadvantaged groups, such as those with disabilities and those of different cultural backgrounds, the process involved in recognising prior learning has the potential to create barriers to access. For example, with English being the only language of RPL, the language barrier may be insurmountable for people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Gibson (1997:38) is one who questioned the social justice strategy with regard to languages other than English. He cited the state of Victoria as an example where a survey revealed that few education providers offered interpreter assistance.

Mattner (1997) also looked at what RPL was intended to achieve and what it had done and felt that as far as social justice strategies were concerned, RPL actually restricted disadvantaged communities more than it assisted them.

**2.2.4 RPL is an important aspect of the economic imperative for education and training**

Chapter one revealed both the need, and rationale for, a concept such as RPL in the new economic design of education and training in Australia. Indeed, we have shown that Australia was not alone in this requirement for fundamental changes in the direction of education and training. Change became an economic lifeline for vocational education and training at all levels.
Recognising and utilising a person’s previously acquired skills and knowledge made economic sense. The costs involved with training are considerable and history has revealed that funds for such ventures have always been at a premium. Industry's demand for a skilled workforce cannot afford the reduction in human resources, nor deal with the costs associated with having present or future employees caught up in a system of fixed entry and exit points, in a lock-step approach to education and training. Re-training and up-skilling require efficient and effective training procedures and cost accountability.

The National Training Board stated in 1992 that the National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA) was a cooperative national response to economic and industry restructuring, including labour market imperatives and emerging requirements arising from workplace reform. The over-riding aim was to increase the competitiveness and productivity of Australian industry through responsive reform of the vocational education and training system.

The historical exploration has revealed that RPL was an integral part of this reform. Unfortunately with such a single minded focus, Mattner warned that, “the social justice goals of RPL appear to be compromised by economic interests” (Mattner, 1997: 16). But economic interests can also favour the candidate and offer significant benefits.
2.2.5 RPL offers greater efficiency for education and training resources

The costs, both personal and societal, involved in unnecessary re-training are an inefficient and ineffective use of scarce resources. RPL is one avenue of system reform that enables greater economic efficiency. Cohen et al. (1993: vii) in their examination of RPL for university practice, conceded that "in terms of efficiency, by acknowledging prior learning, RPL has the capacity to reduce time and costs". Toop and Burleigh (1993) were concerned with the cost of failing to provide RPL. According to the 'National Report on Australia’s Higher Education Sector':

The government’s concern to provide a more efficient education and training system which is responsive to industry needs has resulted in increasing demands for the recognition of skills and knowledge acquired through non-formal training and work experience.

(DEET, 1993:240)

In an economic climate of recession and high unemployment, RPL, through its cost and time saving capacity, offered economic benefit to both society and the individual, in the form of shorter training and a quicker resumption in the workforce.

In terms of the 'clever country', RPL encouraged the growth of cross-sectoral links between TAFE colleges and universities, for the benefit of all students. These links, often referred to as pathways or articulation, will be examined in more depth later.
2.3 RPL is a principal component of Competency-Based Training

RPL assessment procedures insist that credit be based on ‘what a person can do’. This behavioural stance refers directly to skills that the individual possesses which they can demonstrate to be of an acceptable standard. Collins confirmed this:

*The NFROT principles on recognition of prior learning (RPL) and assessment require that all courses focus on the demonstration of competence as a student outcome. In addition assessment approaches must measure student achievement against National Training Board endorsed competency standards.* (Collins, 1993b:10)

With RPL being integral to competency-based training, a clearer understanding of how RPL relates to competency is necessary. An early definition by the Employment and Skills Formation Council (1990:91) defined competence as, "The ability to perform a specified task, usually involving a combination of technical skill, knowledge or understanding, and attitude or outlook". This broad definition was reduced by Field, in ‘Skilling Australia’ (1990:26), where he described a competency as, “a task, process or strategy that is part of what individual workers do in their jobs”.

A particular reference to industry requirements came through the Australian NTB, which, in 1993, defined a competency as comprising:

*The specification of the knowledge and skill and the application of that knowledge and skill within an occupation of industry level to the standard of performance required in employment.*

(G. Collins, 1993a: 17)
In accordance with this industrial emphasis, ANTA, referred to competency standards as "nationally agreed industry statements, which describe the skills and knowledge required for effective performance in an industry" (1998: pamphlet). These explanations offer a performance-based approach to competency, which is the approach, preferred by government and industry with their manpower requirements.

So, with respect to RPL, for the applicant to indicate competence requires them to show that the skill gained through prior learning is something they are still able to do to a level suitable for industry employment. It is thinking such as this that has led to the rise of another term (RCC) used by many to replace the term RPL.

2.5 Concluding comments

Clearly, the concept of RPL is complex and has many elements (see Figure 1, page 56). Documentary evidence has shown that this concept is applicable to many areas of adult learning. The social justice element should be as relevant a consideration as the economic imperative. Similarly, the validity of RPL in mature age and lifelong learning is as significant as the efficiency, which the application of this concept provides.

The saying, "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts", can be seen to be applicable in this discussion of the concept of RPL. It is the ability of RPL to be
seen as having both humanitarian principles and an economic benefit that provides the concept of RPL with its value as an educational instrument.

Examination of the historical context for RPL has already revealed the lack of coordination and involvement between the University and TAFE sectors. In the following chapters, the primary data collected from universities and TAFE colleges is examined. These documents form the basis of this study. Chapter 3 examines the terminology used to describe the concept of RPL in Australia. Chapters four and five analyse the concept and the application of RPL in the university and TAFE sectors respectively.
Figure 1
Aspects of Recognition of Prior Learning
Chapter 3

RPL terminology in Australia

The concept we, in Australia, refer to as RPL has varying labels when used elsewhere. As mentioned in chapter one, South Africa also uses the term RPL, whereas both the United States of America and Canada refer to RPL as PLA, while Britain uses APL and APEL. This chapter analyses the definitions of RPL found within the tertiary sector in Australia. Gay and Wilson (1997:8) confirmed the developing view that, "confusion exists about the meaning of each of the words" in RPL. This chapter explores the terminology, in an effort to clarify some of the confusion in relation to this concept.

3.1 An analysis of generic definitions

To be acknowledged as an educationally valid proposition, RPL needs to be defined in educational terms. An investigation of the terms used reveals that all have some educational perspective included in their dictionary definitions.


Recognition' has six definitions, two of which are applicable in an educational context:
- action of acknowledging as positive, valid or entitled to consideration: Formal acknowledgment as conveying approval or sanction of something
- the mental process of identifying what has been known before.

'Prior' has three definitions, two of which apply to this study:
- preceding (in time and order) earlier, former, anterior, antecedent
- previously to ...

'Learning' has five definitions, all applicable here:
- the action of learning
- what is learnt or taught
- information
- an acquisition
- knowledge gained by study

Putting these respective definitions together reveals a concept that accredits past or previously learned information. But is it a concept valid in the educational context? According to Peters (Hill, 1990:2.25) "education is an essentially contested concept which changes it[s] contours according to the value-stances of those who use the term". In the context of this study it is necessary to qualify the use of the word 'education'.

Using the same definitional source, 'education' listed five relevant definitions:
• the process of nourishing or rearing
• the process of bringing up
• the systematic instruction, schooling or training given to the young (and by extension to adults) in preparation for the work of life
• the whole course of scholastic instruction which a person had received
• culture or development of powers, formation of character

It can be seen that these definitions are sufficient to allow that Recognition of Prior Learning could be used as a concept in education. What can be derived from this information is that knowledge can be gained through the active process of learning, either through study or as the acquisition of information and should be entitled to educational consideration. What these definitions do not explain is the nature of this consideration.

Two Australian researchers, Toop and Burleigh, found that in 1993 a range of terms were used for the same basic concept and considered that “the choice of terms reflects the particular emphasis the proponent considers important” (1993:10). They provided their own definition of RPL which was: “recognition of prior learning refers to the acknowledgment of skills and knowledge held as a result of formal training, work experience and/or life experience” (1993:11).

They noted with interest Simosko’s (1991) explanation of the words ‘recognition’ and ‘acknowledgment’. She suggested that the former word referred to
recognition by the provider of the training while the latter referred to the recognition of the wider community of employer and industry. This clearly indicates a dilemma in the use of terminology and the confusion that could result.

An investigation into the RPL definitions provided by Australian University and TAFE colleges should enable us to appreciate the emerging growth in awareness and understanding of the concept. Such an examination should also provide the first indications of where these two sectors might agree and disagree in their views on RPL.

In order to gain first-hand information about the concept of RPL in these institutions, a letter of request for RPL policy and procedure documentation was sent to sixty-three TAFE colleges and institutions and thirty-nine universities throughout Australia. The documentation collected in this way was analysed and a range of definitions of RPL identified.

The major portion of the data collection was undertaken between September 1999 and December 2000, so the analysis and findings reported were valid for that period only. Subsequent developments are only touched upon in this study.

3.2 RPL or the Recognition of Current Competency (RCC)

As outlined in chapter one, there are different names given for the concept of RPL, in other countries. In Australia, Recognition of Prior Learning was the
accepted term for many years, but recently the term Recognition of Current Competencies, or RCC, has come to the fore. This is particularly so in the TAFE sector. RCC is not a new term. As early as 1992, in his text outlining the concept of RPL Ashenden (1992, chapter 10) commented that RCC was RPL, "but using competencies as benchmarks and focusing on current competencies rather than previous experience or achievements".

A possible reason for this preference for the term ‘RCC’ could be that it removed some of the indeterminacy inherent in the phrase ‘prior learning’ by anchoring the assessment in what the student is currently able to do.

Though RCC is often spoken of, by individuals and TAFE colleges alike, as being the term presently in vogue in Australia, little has actually been written here. Indeed, few respondents from the TAFE sector referred to RCC, in their public documentation. Most still used the term RPL. In South Australia, TAFE (online) included both acronyms in their information as, ‘RCC or RPL’. The one definition, “the acknowledgment of skills, knowledge and competencies gained...” applied to both terms.

RCC, according to Gibson (1997) is a phrase more applicable to industry than RPL. He regarded RPL as being applicable to the gaining of certification and awards rather than the assessment of present competencies, which is the requirement for industry. Gibson considered it time that industry competency
standards were used as “the currency of assessment” (1997:10). This could be a controversial statement if it is intended to suggest that all education and training sectors should be oriented towards and led by the industry requirements of the day. Many university educators (Hill, 1991; Collins, 1993; Bowden and Masters, 1993; Golding, 1994; Foley, 1995) believe that education has a broader mandate than competency.

At a recent ANTA Assessment Forum ('Assessment Under the Microscope' held in Perth, September 2001), the representative of the West Pilbara College of TAFE used the term Skills Recognition (SR) in relation to the concept of RPL/RCC,. In response to a question from the floor, the speaker confirmed that RPL/RCC/SR were regarded as synonymous at her college. Other information sessions at the Forum revealed the planned implementation of RPL/RCC 'up-front' assessment.

Up-front assessment entails the provision of information about course content and assessment, to the student before the modules begin, to enable the student to apply for RPL prior to commencement of the relevant module. At present students often attend the first few lectures before they are aware of their prior knowledge of the content and then have to go through the RPL process. This is cumbersome, inefficient and costly to both the student and the college staff, and largely defeats the purpose of RPL.
3.3 Tertiary Definitions

Common use of the terminology might lead one to an expectation that a high level of common application by institutions existed, but this is not, in fact, the case. In the TAFE sector, RPL was initially developed as an aspect of the National Training Agenda. ANTA’s definition stated: "RPL refers to the acknowledgment of skills and knowledge held as a result of formal and informal training, work experience and/or life experience" (Crothers, 1996:1).

But this was only one definition. Variations in definition were widespread as was application. The National Framework for the Recognition of Training (1992) according to the Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE (1998) defined RPL as, “the acknowledgment of skills and knowledge held as a result of formal training, work experience and/or life experience.” According to the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee (AVCC, 1993), RPL was “the recognition granted for any form of knowledge and/or skills acquired through work or life experience as well as through studies in courses credentialled by providers other than Australian universities or TAFE”. Subtle though these differences may be, they form the basis of the divergence of views found to be held by the TAFE and university systems, which shall be discussed in greater detail below.

The data revealed that while each state had its own common TAFE RPL document for general use, many TAFE colleges had their own definitions,
revealing a lack of consistency within many states. Tasmania, which has a centralised TAFE system with ten campuses across the state, appeared to have some uniformity. The Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory (each having only one TAFE College, with an independent indigenous college in the Northern Territory) operated their own RPL policies.

The Tasmanian Training Authority (TASTA, 1993: 2) referred to RPL as “the acknowledgment of skills and knowledge expressed in competencies, held as a result of formal and informal training”. Together with ANTA, TASTA did not refer to the individual in its definition. This may be significant for our study.

In the light of these varying definitions, it became important to discern exactly what the individual institutions regarded as RPL. The term Recognition of Current Competencies (RCC) instead of RPL appeared to be the preference of some TAFE institutions. Canberra Institute of TAFE listed “Recognition of Prior Learning including Recognition of Current Competencies”, in its information booklet. The definition of RCC, in the TASTA documentation, was virtually identical to the RPL definition provided by TAFE colleges in other States.

3.3.1 University definitions of RPL

Twenty-two universities responded to the request for RPL policy and procedure documents (see Appendix 1). Those that did include definitions of RPL in their documentation revealed quite variable views about what constituted RPL. (see
Appendix 10) The evidence presented suggests that though the institutions were often using the same terminology, their understanding of the concept differed greatly. For example, Monash University stated, “RPL is a form of credit transfer” (Taylor, 1998:1). This is quite different from the majority of universities, which appeared to regard credit transfer as formal accreditation only.

University documentation revealed that RPL was regarded as a transfer of credit, whereas TAFE colleges indicated that credit transfer was considered as being only part of the RPL process. While most universities would only accept RPL credit for equal study, all TAFE colleges had a range of alternative methods acceptable for RPL credit. Many universities were clear in their concerns about the validity of any other forms of learning. The Victoria University of Technology referred to learning from previous studies and/or work experience, whereas Edith Cowan University (WA) regarded informal learning as the only avenue for RPL. According to the latter, credit transfer was the acknowledged form of recognition for formal learning. This particular university saw the need to be more specific in its effort to distinguish between formal and non-formal learning, intentionally breaking the link between university RPL and credit transfer.

There was no mention of ‘life experience’ in any of the university definitions of RPL for undergraduates. The consideration of general learning experiences as valid learning experiences was not recognised, as a replacement for any aspect
of undergraduate study, though this aspect appeared to be gaining credence in postgraduate arenas.

Although academics such as Taylor (1998) supported the notion that work experience was worthy of consideration, evidence from the RPL application packages suggested that the assessment of work experience was still at the developmental stage. Debate continues over what constitutes suitable work experience. Sydney University was in the process of developing Recognition of Workplace Learning (RWL) for postgraduate studies, but at this stage, it did not appear to extend downwards to include undergraduate recognition.

University documents referred to the learning gained by the prospective candidate, not to the skills and knowledge gained. What the differences are has yet to be ascertained. University learning appeared to be regarded as less tangible in nature and its measurement less definitive than that of TAFE. Victorian University of Technology, which incorporates both a University and TAFE college, chose the term ‘skills and knowledge’, leaning more towards the TAFE definition than to that of other universities.

3.3.2 TAFE definitions of RPL

Thirty-six TAFE colleges and institutions responded to the request for RPL policy and procedure documentation. (see Appendix 2) These documents presented an
array of definitions for the Recognition of Prior Learning (see Appendix 11). The most notable was that from Kangan-Batman TAFE in Melbourne. This college has pioneered the development of procedures for RPL. Their definition (developed when they were still the Broadmeadows College of TAFE), referred to the “acknowledgment of the full range of an individual’s skills and knowledge – irrespective of how it has been acquired” (1990:9). The decision by other colleges to expand upon this early definition, for their own purposes, suggested that the field of RPL was both inconclusive and incomplete.

Kangan-Batman TAFE stated that RPL did recognise “the full range” of skills and knowledge, which could suggest that skills and knowledge other than those required to reveal competency in specific learning outcomes were equally valid. Such a broad scope could easily create confusion for students attempting to comply with application requirements. This difficulty may have been clear to other TAFE colleges, as they addressed the need to clarify exactly what types of learning were acceptable by adding the categories of formal/informal learning and work/life experiences.

There appeared to be confusion over the inclusion of formal learning or credentialled learning as an aspect of RPL. It has been included as a category by some TAFE colleges, though in other definitions RPL applied to skills gained outside of formal learning. In an attempt to clarify these requirements some colleges included the explanation that RPL was an ‘acknowledgment of skills and
knowledge”, others used the term “competencies” and all three terms “acknowledgment of skills, knowledge and competencies” were used by yet another group of colleges. “The skills that you have and can demonstrate”, was another phrase used to assist the student to understand what it was that RPL represented. Skills and knowledge in a TAFE setting were primarily regarded as competency and could be assessed according to outcome criteria.

The documentation provided by several colleges addressed the person applying for RPL and commented on the ‘individual basis’ of assessment, referring to “the learner”. These colleges used the term “you” to indicate the unique and individual nature of their RPL assessment process. Others were notable for this omission. Was this an assumption, made on the part of these colleges, that the student/applicant would understand the individual nature of the process? All University and TAFE college documents supported the notion that the area of RPL was one in which precedents did not apply.

Some institutions were careful to state that prior learning was measured against criteria of a specific nature whilst most did not acknowledge this comparison, implying by omission that skills were evaluated on merit alone. TAFE colleges appeared to have the view that any avenue of learning was acceptable, indicating that it did not matter where or how skills were acquired. Universities had difficulty with this view as accreditation for formal studies completed at a TAFE College
was only transferable where articulation agreements existed. To the universities, it did matter where and how the learning took place.

3.4 Concluding comments

This analysis has revealed that there was a diversity of opinion both within and between the Universities and TAFE colleges concerning the concept of RPL. Gibson (1997:4) noted that, "RPL has almost as many meanings as there are people involved in it". Such variance may influence RPL application by institutions as well as promote inefficient practices both within and between sectors. This will be discussed further in chapter six, after an examination of the attempts by the two sectors to converge for articulation purposes.

TAFE college terminology and definitions of RPL, while clearly influenced by those of their State body, were still remarkably diverse. The most influential definition of RPL is that of the Kangan-Batman TAFE. While it was acknowledged as the original, many colleges chose to differ in their own policy definitions. It is worth noting that TAFE colleges in the Northern Territory, Tasmania and New South Wales largely accepted and used the definition provided by their public service departments, whereas in other States, colleges were permitted to produce their own definitions. The autonomous nature of many TAFE colleges has encouraged this individuality and in turn, raises concerns about the survival of a national system in such an autonomous environment.
University definitions of RPL can be seen to differ considerably from each other, ranging from RPL as credit transfer to, in rare instances, RPL as purely ‘informal learning’. The application of credit through the credit transfer of recent certificated study was the only prior learning regarded as legitimate by most universities. Indeed, RPL as informal learning did not appear to have any educational credibility in the vast majority of universities. Some universities commented to me, that they were unwilling to consider implementing RPL until a significant number of others were already doing so.

The debate still rages between the terminologies, RPL and RCC. The term RCC, while of value to the TAFE and industry sectors, does not appear to satisfy university personnel concerns about its application to university courses. In fact, Gibson (1997) conceded that universities might find the term RPL more suitable to their requirements. It is this writer’s view that Skill Recognition may be a term more transferable to the university sector, but presently it is not in common use.

Clearly the terminology in use reveals great diversity and suggests there is limited agreement on a definition of RPL. Chapter four moves beyond the definitions found in the university and TAFE sectors to a closer examination of what Australian universities consider RPL to be within their sphere.

Chapter five undertakes a parallel examination of TAFE sector practices. These chapters delve into the two sector’s respective understandings of the concept
and their practical application of RPL. Both sectors have been involved in the development of RPL, though at different levels. The separate surveys contribute to a better understanding of the differing paths and the variations in policy and procedure that have developed.
Chapter 4

University perspectives on RPL

Recognition of a student’s prior learning has always been a factor of university education (Cohen et al, 1993). School leavers rely on the recognition of their prior learning, in the form of examination results, school records and in some courses, interviews, to gain undergraduate placement at universities. Transfer of students and their academic records from one area of study to another within a university and from one university to another is an accepted practice.

Through its inclusion in the NFROT, recognition of a broader range of prior learning has become an important aspect of training reform. As a result of these changes, Cohen et al. predicted in 1992 that" The current development and implementation of RPL offers an educational challenge to universities" (Cohen et al, 1992: 46). This prediction was indeed true!

In the university sector RPL has come to be regarded by most as recognition of learning other than by credit transfer. The Victorian University of Technology (1997) stated that RPL was the term primarily used in tertiary education, differentiating it from RCC, which they noted, was the industry-preferred term. This concept of RPL was intended to serve both industrial and educational
purposes, being developed as an integral part of the training provided by TAFE colleges. Through articulation and the promotion of pathways between universities and TAFE colleges, universities could no longer ignore RPL. The impact and implications of articulation on both university and TAFE institutions is explored in chapter 6.

The ANTA definition of RPL included three additional sources of RPL: learning from uncredentialled courses, learning from work experience and learning from life experiences. Recognition of these forms of learning, however, posed many problems for universities, for while learning from experience is a natural way to learn, what is difficult is determining precisely what is learned and to understand how that learning took place. Deakin University puts the case well, stating that:

**Formal courses can be evaluated against specific criteria to determine certain learning outcomes, but it is much more difficult to assess what people have learnt from their workplace or from other practical experiences.**

(Deakin University, online: 1).

Of particular concern to universities was the maintenance of their standards, the integrity of their courses and the esteem of their students. Murdoch University stated in its legislation, “the academic standard and reputation of awards will be protected and maintained” (Murdoch University, online).

The AVCC, in 1991, voiced its concerns over the implications surrounding the application of competency standards to higher education and by 1992 had released its first official statement concerning competency standards. In an effort
to assuage these concerns NBEET conducted a number of forums and commissioned occasional papers, between 1992-1996 (see appendix 4) on issues affecting current practices and recommendations for future development of credit transfer and RPL.

4.1 The role of AVCC in university advancement of RPL

The AVCC in its role as the peak body representing Australian universities both nationally and internationally has played an important role in the advancement of higher education. In this capacity it had been instrumental in the development of credit transfer and prior learning principles and guidelines. In 1993 the AVCC accepted the responsibility for improving the national consistency for students applying for credit for undergraduate university entrance. Subsequently seven principles for credit transfer and seven related guidelines for RPL were endorsed. The AVCC "endorsed this set of guidelines for universities developing or reviewing policies and procedures for the recognition for credit of prior 'informal' learning"(1993: 3). These guidelines required that, "Universities should develop and publish policies ...on recognition for credit of prior 'informal' learning (RPL)...acquired through learning experiences other than in a course offered by an Australian University or TAFE" (Monash University Faculty of Information Technology, 1999, online: 1). The intention was to develop a nationally consistent framework for the implementation of formal arrangements.
To further assist universities in the development of prior learning policies a report was commissioned by the AVCC to assist in "identifying and addressing the key RPL issues for Australian Universities" (Cohen et al, 1993: viii), such as cost, curriculum planning and delivery. Even with such guidelines and assistance, universities were slow to add RPL to their policies and practices.

This is evident by the small number of policy documents identified by Australian universities in relation to my requests concerning this study. Questions arise about the existence of RPL policies in universities which chose not to respond to this study (Twenty-two of thirty-nine universities responded). Some universities, such as Bond University, which acknowledged that they did not have an RPL policy, were still gracious enough to respond.

4.2 The impact of the Cohen and Topley Reports

These two reports were important to the development of RPL (DEET, 1993). Cohen et al.(1993) considered the "recognition of learning gained outside formal courses" in their study entitled, 'Learning from Experience Counts', while Topley and Associates (1993) examined the recognition of formal courses, producing a report, ‘Recognition by Universities of Education and Training offered by Industry and Private Providers’.
The Cohen Report was intended to open debate on RPL issues for Australian universities. Cohen et al. (1993: vii) stated that, "a critical issue here is how to establish criteria to determine whether these types of experiential learning fulfil the requirements for university-level learning". This report recorded that, in 1993, few universities had formal RPL policies in place; some were in the draft stage, many 'were using it in an 'ad-hoc' fashion (Cohen et al., 1993: 3). As evident in this study, many universities did not publicise their RPL. Note was made that the social justice aspect of RPL was apparent in some institutions where RPL was in place for Aboriginal students. Information provided for this study revealed that social justice considerations for disadvantaged groups were visible within the TAFE sector, but not the university sector.

Topley et al. (1993) made three major discoveries:

1. Non-educational organisations were becoming recognised training providers
2. The use of competency-based standards by these training providers rendered them suitable for recognition of industry-based courses
3. Industry sought direct consultation with individual university departments, preferring bilateral arrangements with specific universities to a national unified system with a unified scale for credit transfer.

Indications were that recognition across the board was not the preferred option for credit transfer. Agreement, between industry trainers and universities on transfer pathways, was conducted on mutual terms, with specific connections

Both the Topley and Cohen reports suggested that RPL was a concept that was certainly not being ignored by all universities. Rather than being part of a national system, the active universities were seen to be developing individual and disconnected arrangements to cover their RPL requirements. Perhaps other universities have developed informal processes over time, like the TAFE colleges surveyed by Gay and Wilson (1997). In their case study, Gay and Wilson found an "increasing trend for some TAFE institutes... to implement semi-formal or informal approaches to RPL... which also hide[s] the extent to which RPL is occurring" (1997:12).

It was not inconceivable that private providers could fill the recognition void if universities did not adopt formal and consistent policies. While narrowing slightly, this gap in RPL provision is still unfilled.

4.3 University adoption of RPL

Victorian University of Technology documentation (1997) stated that it was the first in Victoria to adopt an RPL policy in 1996 and that as early as 1992 its Department of Education had introduced this concept into the graduate program. Monash University, in 1995, was also, "in the early stages of formalising the recognition for ... prior learning, faculties are working to establish appropriate
policies and practices" (Monash University, 1995:12). But other universities found the concept hard to reconcile. Swinburne University of Technology (Vic) commented correctly that, "higher education institutions have been slow to embrace the concept of RPL (online: 1). The University of Western Australia summed up the dilemma for universities Australia-wide when it explained that:

With regard to recognition of prior learning the university is cautious about committing itself to giving specified amounts of credit for courses offered by professional bodies and other private educational institutions until it has more experience on which to make assessments. ...It is unlikely that credit will be granted in response to applications which are based solely (their emphasis) on learning acquired in an uncredentialled context such as work experience or life experience. (University of Western Australia, 1996:2)

Griffith University (NSW) was faced with similar concerns. As a key principle it stated: "the university will maintain the integrity of its academic courses and protect the academic standards and reputation of its awards. Credit for prior learning will be granted only within the constraints of this principle" (Griffith University (Online 1998:1).

Documents have shown that the decision 'to RPL or not to RPL' was left to the discretion of individual university departments. Universities, such as the University of Western Australia, Southern Cross University and Monash University submitted documentation that notified staff and students of each individual faculty's responsibility for their own development and application of RPL policy. At the University of South Australia, faculties were required to indicate "the faculty's willingness or otherwise" to consider RPL in the university student documentation (1995:169). In addition to this Charles Sturt University
(NSW) formally acknowledged that applicants should "be advised of the forms and sources of prior learning which a university is prepared to take into account" (Charles Sturt University, online: 1). Murdoch University and the Victorian University of Technology considered it necessary to inform students that the learning assessed through the RPL process be, as Murdoch stated, "acquired before enrolment at the university" (Murdoch University, online: 1).

Universities, such as Edith Cowan University (WA), were careful to stress that the emphasis was on the learning from the experience not the experience itself. RPL was awarded for learning, which had to be shown to be comparable in content and standard to that of the specific course. But there was also concern expressed by both the University of New England (NSW), and Charles Sturt University (NSW) that, "the standards applied in the assessment should not be greater than those required to pass the relevant Faculty unit/s" (University of New England, ND: 2). This suggested that some university personnel were stricter and less flexible with assessment of learning from the non-tertiary arena, which was prejudicial to individuals with this form of learning.

Golding (1994) reviewed the literature on RPL in Australian higher education and found that much of the university sector had yet to accept RPL. He asserted that the pressures from the national training agenda and associated bodies to implement RPL coupled with equity, lifelong learning and accountability considerations indicated, "there may yet be a strong case for recognising prior
learning" (1994:19). AVCC guidelines were developed and promoted to assist universities to deal with these considerations.

4.4 AVCC guidelines for RPL

In many Australian universities, the process took place whereby the AVCC guidelines for RPL were endorsed or adopted and then modified to suit their own considerations. This was the case with the University of Western Australia (WA), Charles Sturt University (NSW) and Monash University (Vic), which had endorsed AVCC principles governing good practice but had altered those that were not deemed appropriate. Swinburne University of Technology (Vic), which had a TAFE division, had developed policies that were based on the AVCC guidelines while also taking their own TAFE division procedures for RPL into account.

The Southern Cross University (NSW) documented recommendations, which stated that each faculty had the responsibility for the setting of advanced standing guidelines. These guidelines had to be "formalised in line with the AVCC guidelines to ensure the national consistency intended in granting advanced standing" (1996:19).

While the universities adopted selective aspects of the AVCC guidelines for RPL this was not the case with credit transfer. The AVCC guidelines were intended to guide only, but the credit transfer principles were not only recommendations but
were devised as foundation principles to be used by all participating universities. The University of South Australia's Faculty of Business and Management had developed policies, which conformed to those set out by their University, while still adhering to the AVCC credit transfer principles. Murdoch University (WA) also indicated support for these principles.

In establishing its credit transfer principles and guidelines for RPL, the AVCC itself has made a distinction between the two terms. Is the AVCC reflecting university perceptions or directing them? As a result of this endorsement universities have generally maintained the separateness of the two concepts, as indicated below.

4.5 Credit transfer

According to the AVCC (1993: online) Credit transfer is the granting of recognition by universities for previous study and/or experience in the form of exemption from certain course requirements. James Cook University (Qld) provides a simpler explanation of credit transfer being “credit granted towards study for courses already undertaken” (1998:4).

All universities involved in this study revealed long-standing credit transfer arrangements. For most of these universities, such as Curtin University, (WA) credit transfer referred solely to the applicant's academic record. James Cook University (Qld) commented, that credit transfer also provided an opportunity for
'lifelong learning'. RPL was most commonly associated with credit transfer at Deakin University (Vic). Griffith University (NSW) regarded RPL as the granting of credit towards an award. Here RPL was considered as "formal study undertaken in recognised tertiary institutions" (Griffith University Credit Transfer Policy, 1998, online: 1), which could be enhanced by evidence of credentialled and uncredentialled learning. This was familiar territory to universities Australia-wide. Credit transfer provided university students with an educational pathway that followed academic perceptions of appropriate learning.

But some universities had begun to detour from this pathway and consider recognition of alternative forms of learning. Bowden and Masters (1993:6) found that, with regard to credit transfer, "university staff recognised that the adoption of competency-based training by the TAFE sector had implications for university courses". The Monash University Faculty of Education (Vic) in the 1998 manual, included both credit transferred from formal study and RPL in their explanation of credit transfer. Taylor, from Monash University, commented that there was much confusion about credit transfer both within the university sector and the general community. He stated that credit transfer referred to "the two ways an applicant may be exempted from being required to study subjects whose content deals with topics in which he or she may have already acquired competence" (Taylor, 1998:1). In this view "RPL is a form of credit transfer not a different approach to credit transfer".
Other universities also recognised alternative credit avenues. Victorian University of Technology adopted a policy in 1996 in which credit transfer became, "the process by which formal recognition of an articulating student's prior qualifications and/or relevant experience may lead to the granting of exemptions in a particular course" (Gay and Wilson, 1997: 14). Monash University (Vic) in their 'Admissions to Courses Handbook' recognised credit from other non-university tertiary providers. Credit for prior learning was available at Sydney University (NSW) where the applicant's experience could be documented and demonstrated to have resulted in equivalence in skills and knowledge to the unit learning for which credit was being sought.

Further variations between university perceptions were apparent with Swinburne University of Technology's (Vic) documents listing credit transfer, articulation pathways and RPL as three different concepts. Northern Territory University introduced a new policy relating to credit transfer and RPL called Skills Recognition in 2001. It is noteworthy that RPL and credit transfer are still regarded as two components within this single concept and separate procedures apply for both.

Such variations between universities in their application of these concepts are indicative of the dilemmas facing universities where recognition of any form of prior learning is concerned and the resulting lack of agreement between terms and processes.
4.6 Advanced standing

In 1993 Cohen et al. recommended that, "RPL be available in all Australian universities to students for both admission and advanced standing" (1993:46). But universities generally have had difficulties coming to accept these recommendations and, as with credit transfer policies and practices, a diversity of views exits within the university sector about advanced standing.

According to the AVCC, the term credit transfer tended to be used interchangeably in Australian universities with the term advanced standing. The Northern Territory University, taking their lead from the AVCC, considered credit transfer to be advanced standing. Likewise all credit at the University of New England (NSW) Faculty of Health Education and Professional Studies was regarded as advanced standing. Their faculty rule 27.2 relating to credit (Advanced Standing) stated that:

*Credit may be granted for units passed at a university or other approved institution... for in-house programs offered by industry and for significant learning acquired through employment and other experiences.*

(University of New England, ND: application form).

In contrast, Curtin University (WA) provided both credit transfer and advanced standing options “to recognise and support the legitimate interests of students in obtaining credit for previous learning and work completed at Curtin or elsewhere” (Curtin, 1999, online: 1). At this university advanced standing was a broad generic term, "encompassing concepts of credit transfer, general and specific
credit, in addition to credit granted for practical or previous experience, prior learning or work experience” (Curtin University, 1999, online: 1). Murdoch University (WA) regarded advanced standing as being applicable, "when a student is able to enter a course of study at an advanced level, such as the second year of the course, based on prior learning" (Murdoch University, online: 2).

At Swinburne University of Technology (Vic) advanced standing was for credit transferred from another university or TAFE College only. Edith Cowan University (WA) was more specific, accepting credit from TAFE for an associate diploma or better for advanced standing. Here advanced standing was given for studies deemed to have been equivalent to university-level study.

The University of Wollongong (NSW) offered advanced standing in the form of credit or exemption based on previous studies. Conversely, Monash University (Vic) considered RPL to be “the granting of advanced standing on the basis of recognition of prior learning or experience which has occurred in the workplace or through other learning and training activities which have taken place outside an educational institution (Taylor, 1998:1). Monash University appeared to be offering advanced standing as recognition of non-formal learning.
4.7 RPL as non-formal learning

Cohen et al (1993:11) contended that, "the central premise of RPL is that theoretical, high level and quality learning can be gained through experience and informal means". Theory and research by writers such as Abrahamsson, Kim, and Rubenson (1980), Kolb (1984) Boud, Cohen, and Walker (1993) and Barnett, (1992), support this contention. Some universities appeared to be in agreement with this statement. Swinburne University of Technology (Vic) noted that RPL applied to "assessment and credit of various types of prior learning undertaken outside of Australian universities or TAFE colleges" (Swinburne University of Technology, 1997, online: 1). By 1996 Victorian University of Technology had "developed a policy for giving academic credit for uncredentialled learning and for informal or experiential learning" (Gay and Wilson, 1997:13)

A number of universities\(^1\) appeared to recognise that there were alternative means to quality learning since RPL was acknowledged by them as taking two forms: credentialled or uncredentialled. The former was learning from an alternative provider and the latter was regarded as work or life experience. This suggests that, while not endorsing workplace learning as a separate avenue

\(^1\) Edith Cowan University, University of South Australia, University of Western Australia, Murdoch University, Swinburne University of Technology and Charles Sturt University
for RPL, they were at least prepared to allow some evidence of workplace learning in a student’s application for RPL.

While the University of South Australia generally granted both credentialled and uncredentialled RPL, its Faculty of Business Management did not. Within the self-determining practices for RPL mentioned previously, this department chose to consider work experience only, in the uncredentialled context. In confirming this position, they stated that: “Learning from life experience is not recognised as a factor in granting recognition of prior learning” (University of South Australia, Faculty of Business Management, online: 2). The basis for this philosophy was the consideration that no student should have to undertake a unit in a course if they could show a satisfactory performance of the outcomes stated in the published syllabus. But if life experiences could reveal the same satisfactory performance, why might they then not be considered equally valid, as appears to be the case at the Victorian University of Technology?

4.7.1 Recognition of workplace learning

At the time of this research this aspect of RPL was only just beginning to gain a foothold in university considerations. An example of this was Sydney University (NSW) where Recognition of Workplace Learning (RWL) was an established practice in the Graduate School of Education. It indicated that this type of credit required submission of work samples of previous professional work undertaken,
within the last six years, in the form of a portfolio. Evidence sought was of "professional learning and professional participation as well as a level of critical reflection commensurate with that which might normally be expected of postgraduate study" (AIS and the University of Sydney, Professional Development Program, 1998:1).

Flinders University (SA) regarded RPL as personal competencies and employment experience. This form of RPL was anticipated to be available for university entry throughout the university by the year 2000. But at the time of data collection it was not expected to be accessible for credit for units within a course.

But some universities were reluctant to develop this RPL pathway. Southern Cross University (NSW), in a 1996 draft copy of their 'Report of the Working Party on Advanced Standing, Credit Transfer, Concurrent Learning, Articulation, Recognition of Prior Learning and Exemption' included recommendation 9:19, that "the university does not grant advanced standing for prior experience" unless professional experiences indicated skill. In this example the only valid prior learning was professional workplace experiences from which learning was evident.
4.8 Time frame for RPL

Though TAFE RPL definitions suggested that it did not matter where or when relevant learning occurred, this was not the case for universities. The University of South Australia only accepted skills gained within the previous 5 years. Sydney University (NSW) and Charles Sturt University (NSW) would only grant credit for study less than 10 years old. Murdoch University (WA) was the exception here. Their Academic Council's November 1999 meeting on university entrance agreed to award specific credit for uncredentialled learning gained up to fifteen years prior. This evidence must include written documentation about key competencies and learning outcomes, which would indicate the currency of knowledge and its application.

4.9 Cost of RPL

The financial cost incurred by universities in their establishment (Cohen et al, 1993) and provision of RPL was a big factor in decision-making, as there were few cost recovery options. Swinburne University of Technology (Vic) noted, “the Higher Education Funding Act 1988 prevents universities from charging students for RPL assessments” (online: 1). This made the development of RPL in the university sector problematic, as resources were at a premium and universities were reluctant to outlay funds on an ongoing basis. Swinburne University of
Technology documents pointed out that external private agencies, which assisted students in their application for RPL, did charge for their services.

Monash University (Vic), where applicants incurred an hourly charge for the assessment of a portfolio, appeared to have overcome this barrier. So too Northern Territory University, which asserts that, "the university will charge for processing applications" (Northern Territory University, online: 2).

The granting of RPL to university applicants forfeited the university HECS contribution by the applicant. If RPL applications were to increase and applicants were successful in gaining advanced standing, this had the very real, negative impact of reducing income for the university concerned. One option for universities lay in the outsourcing of RPL applications, which would eliminate the cost of processing RPL applications. One possible drawback of this approach would be the reduction of control over the process and its outcomes. Universities, already fearful about the encroachment of others into their educational domain, may choose to negate or ignore RPL as a viable concept and process, if they are unable to recover costs.

On the other hand however, Dawkins, in the Green Paper of 1987, "construed the non-recognition of credit as a waste and a deterrent to potential students" (Rosenman, 1996:11). Gay and Wilson (1997) were also concerned that there could be adverse costs incurred by universities in the areas of human resources,
academic stagnation and reputation considerations. They asserted that it would
be foolhardy for universities not to adopt RPL.

While there is an intrinsic appeal about RPL, this concept presents challenges to
management, staff and students at both universities and TAFE colleges. There is
a considerable administrative burden, which while undesirable for staff creates a
large workload for students (Gay and Wilson, 1997). These costs, registered in
terms of time spent to compile an application for RPL and in the assessment of
the application, are often regarded as irrelevant by governing bodies, yet they
played a major role in the RPL deliberations of students and staff.

4.10 Universities without a formal RPL policy

Considerations of RPL costs in terms of financial, personal and collegial
resources rendered RPL less than attractive to many universities. While
acknowledging that all universities have credit transfer arrangements it has
become clear that not all universities have formal recognition of other forms of
learning. Yet Cohen et al commented that,“73% of all Australian universities
already have RPL initiatives in place, but also acknowledge that the available
data is “patchy” (1993: vii). With only half of the universities responding to the
request for documentation for this study, this figure is hard to substantiate.
Some universities considered that their credit transfer policies also covered RPL, which they saw as credit transfer. At James Cook University (Qld), credit transfer was the only form of RPL recognised, suggesting that there had been no development of RPL for non-university/TAFE situations. Others had no plans to add a separate RPL policy to their range of policies, at this time. University of Newcastle (NSW) documents revealed that no RPL policy had been formulated by 1998, but the importance of the concept of RPL was acknowledged, while stating that it needed to be ‘customer designed’.

The University of Queensland Graduate School of Education had no formal programs for RPL for undergraduates in education. When RPL was requested cases were judged on their own merit. The university spokesperson wrote that there was perceived to be an insufficient need for codification and that there were ‘concerns about compromising degrees if RPL was allowed’. Credit for equivalence only, which was a form of credit transfer, was acceptable. It was thought that in many courses and programs the granting of credit would be problematic and so no formal documents were planned.

Ballarat University (Vic), which had both a Higher Education and a TAFE division, had developed an RPL policy for TAFE, but not for Higher Education. Credit transfer arrangements between these two divisions may well reduce the need for formal RPL policies for Higher education, but it would limit university access and would touch on social justice concerns if only that single pathway was available.
Monash University (Vic) stated that it did not practice RPL in all faculties and did not have a consolidated approach to RPL for uncredentialled learning. In 1998 formal RPL of the uncredentialled kind was still being developed and working parties were in the process of developing policies and procedures for RPL. This admission was of great interest as the information supplied by this university has been very useful and of greater depth than that offered by other respondents. In 1998, Taylor noted that Monash University (Vic) had made inroads into the establishment of RPL and that it appeared to be further down this path than others.

4.11 Private Universities

4.11.1 Bond University

One question, which arose from this data, was whether Bond and Notre Dame Universities, being private and independent providers of tertiary education were bound by the same constraints as the public universities? Bond University (Qld) is a full fee paying university and the Australian Government Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) does not apply.

As a young, private and independent university, Bond University (Qld) was beginning to look at accreditation in 1998, but only as credit transfer. Documentation from this university indicated that it would consider RPL for work
experience or life experiences, but only when it saw the development of a trend in the university sector. Bond University was protective of its programs and would hesitate before granting any significant credit or RPL.

Though an independent and private provider of tertiary education, Bond University is also a full member of the AVCC. In accordance with the AVCC principles, it appeared that credit was given for entry into a course but it was not stated whether credit was granted for advanced standing. Work experience, employee references and previous study are accepted for consideration in a mature age application for entry to a course of study (Bond University, online).

Bond University provided students with a 'university entrance program' to assist them to upgrade their academic skills. In this program it appears to offer a 'watered down' version of RPL as "students who perform at an outstanding level can 'fast track' into their preferred degree program" (online: 6).

4.11.2 Notre Dame University

Notre Dame University (WA), founded in 1990, as a Catholic University is bound by the Catholic faith and its values. As far as credit is concerned, Notre Dame University documents revealed that credit could be offered on the basis of previous studies, but vocational qualifications would only be considered in addition to other qualifications. These positions were not dissimilar to those of
other universities previously mentioned, who also seemed unwilling to consider alternative forms of learning.

Social justice considerations were evident in course entry regulations. Entry into a course at Notre Dame University was based upon a range of factors including "academic records, student interview, contribution to school and community life, individual motivation and recommendations by educational institutions and employers" (University of Notre Dame, online: 1). This range of alternative types of evidence will be seen to be similar to that promoted by ANTA. For example, this inclusion of the student's life and work experiences through their contribution to the community and the workplace is similar in type to the support details required in an RPL application for West Coast College of TAFE (WA). The TAFE document also lists community involvement, personal interests and skills as life experiences and the personal verification requirement enables validation from workplace employers and community figures.

As independent/non-government providers of tertiary education these universities appeared to be free to pursue their own entry and credit requirements with none of the pressures that other universities face to conform to the unified national system. Acceptance of the AVCC credit transfer principles and guidelines for RPL was a condition of entry for universities into the UNS (Ramsey et al., 1997). Both were in the unique position of being able to decide for themselves whether or not to adopt the AVCC guidelines for RPL and its promotion within the tertiary
sector and both have chosen to remain with the status quo. It is noteworthy that social justice in education is an aspect of RPL and of the Notre Dame entry process.

4.12 Innovative RPL practices

While most universities appeared to be reluctant to offer RPL policies and procedures, several universities had developed practices, which appeared to involve an innovative use of RPL. Swinburne University of Technology (Vic) provided a multi-media self-paced program called RePLay, to assist students to prepare a portfolio for RPL assessment. Charles Sturt University (NSW) had a different form of credit called 'proficiency credit' in which, "credit may be granted where students demonstrate proficiency in a subject to the satisfaction of the course coordinator" (Charles Sturt University, online: 1).

James Cook University (QLD) had an 'alternative entry' scheme which recognised life experience for entry to university courses, whilst not giving credit for units within a course. Griffith University (NSW) had a category of 'special admission' for students over the age of 21, in which the university recognised that preparation for tertiary study was not restricted to formal educational success. Valuable intellectual and skills development was acknowledged to be accessible through a wide range of experiences.
While other universities were still deciding whether or not to RPL, some universities were getting on with the job of establishing RPL within their practices. For example, Monash University (Vic) in their Faculty of Education had an Accreditation and Credit Transfer Committee which met regularly to discuss issues, advise the faculty, assess credit applications from course providers, review appeals and liaise with relevant outside bodies. Murdoch University (WA) was also active as it had a Working Party on University Entrance that presented recommendations to the Academic Council on issues concerning the incorporation of RPL within the university.

4.12 Concluding comments

In this chapter it has become evident that, when compared with TAFE colleges, universities still appear to have a long way to go in their policies and procedures for RPL. The discussion presented here supports the Nelson Report’s observation that “Australia has a unified national system of universities, of which diversity and autonomy are central features” (1998: 2). As autonomous institutions universities have chosen to go their individual ways; some choosing to embrace the concept of RPL, some regarding RPL as credit transfer only, others opting not to formalise RPL practices and still others unwilling to even acknowledge RPL as a viable concept.
ANTA, the authority that has driven the evolution of RPL in the VET system does not have the same power to enforce its adoption in the University sector. The National Training Board was aware of this inability to drive RPL in higher education.

*The NTB endorsement of competency standards, where ‘delivery is by self-accrediting higher education institutions, does not have the same effect on accreditation and delivery as in the vocational education and training sector.*

(NTB, 1992:14)

The issues facing universities in their adoption of RPL are numerous and complex. That the concept of RPL is based on the ANTA acknowledgment of behavioural competencies is the crux of the dilemma for universities. This dilemma forms the basis of the discussion on articulation in chapter 6.

Recognition of workplace learning is one area in which RPL appears to be progressing, but the question of ‘who pays’ remains a stumbling block for all interested universities. Cohen et al. found "a diversity of RPL procedures currently being used, but documentation of RPL is rarely coordinated and often incomplete". They hoped for "a more detailed national university policy" (1993: 46). As the TAFE sector reforms are directed by ANTA, a more cohesive and integrated view of RPL might be anticipated. A parallel examination of TAFE documentation, undertaken in chapter five, should provide a greater understanding of its approach to RPL and will determine if this is the case.
Chapter 5

The TAFE Perspective on RPL

The driving force behind the change to training was the need to restructure the industrial award process and improve the skills of the workforce. The Employment and Skills Formation Council (ESFC) Report, 'The Recognition of Vocational Training and Learning' revealed in 1990 that a significant proportion of the Australian workforce did not hold a recognised vocational qualification and that many were working in areas for which they were not formally qualified. It was noted that there was a great need to recognise these people's skills regardless of how they had been acquired. In 1992 the NTB confirmed that:

*The national training reform agenda's ...overriding aim is to increase the competitiveness and productivity of Australian industry through responsive reform of the vocational education and training system.*

(Collins, 1993b: 24)

These industrial changes meant that in 1992, "a convergence of work and learning and of vocational and general educational skills and knowledge" (NTB 1992:7) began to occur. One result of this convergence was the formal recognition of an employee's prior learning. Many industrial sites began to enable their employees to apply for RPL and the associated wage increases. This had a 'follow on' effect into vocational education and training where mature-age
students could similarly gain RPL for knowledge and skills gained before their present study.

TAFE SA in their RPL policy document (1994:1) acknowledged the place of RPL in education when asserting that, "Recognition of prior learning also reflects good educational practice through the recognition of the learning needs of individuals, based upon their current knowledge and skills" [author's bold]. They confirmed that, "The aim of RPL is to recognise that adults bring with them to any training or learning environment a range of experiences, knowledge and abilities" (SA DEFTA 1995:9).

Many TAFE colleges and universities had been quietly providing their own version of RPL for some time. Gay and Wilson, confirmed this, commenting, "There had been an increasing trend for some institutions to do their own informal or semiformal approach to RPL" (1997:12). With the inclusion of RPL in the NFROT this process gained a definite structure encompassed by the competency-based training framework.

5.1 ANTA’s role

ANTA is responsible for the national development of policy objectives and goals for all vocational education and training. The 1991 Report of the VEETAC Working Party on Recognition of Training recommended, “The development of a national approach to the recognition of prior learning should provide for consistency in the assessment of competence against national standards” (1991:
11). Four years previously (1987), Dawkins and Holding in responding to the needs of the economy and industry had predicted a commonwealth commitment to RPL (BeeverS, 1993a).

But as Lundberg commented, "A highly detailed, prescriptive and nationally consistent strategy requires high levels of regulation (OTFE, online: 1). Rather than offer guidelines, ANTA appeared to be more directive, providing a national framework, which the TAFE sector is expected to follow. For example, BeeverS (1993a: 137) noted that "TAFE has no option but to prepare curricula in competency-based terms" and these terms included the concept of RPL. The National Agenda was delivered through the respective State and Territory TAFE governing bodies, which in turn forwarded policy guidelines to their State colleges and institutions. The Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority (NTETA) is one such body that has developed its own policy and funding guidelines for RPL (NTETA file no: 200/818). These guidelines are applicable to all Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) within their state.

5.1.1 NFROT guidelines

The National Training Framework Recognition of Training (NFROT) guidelines included six principle objectives and thirty-one principles, five of which were directly related to recognition of prior learning. As stated in a previous chapter, these principles were competence, commitment, access, fairness and support. (See appendix 8)
These principles were developed with the expectation that TAFE colleges would adopt them for their own training practices. Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE (Vic) and Centralian College (Alice Springs, NT) stated that their respective Colleges’ RPL policies and procedures were developed in accordance with and based on the NFROT principles. Most South Australian TAFE respondents provided the SA DETAFE policy manual as part of their institutions’ RPL package. In their adherence to SA DETAFE policy guidelines all followed the five NFROT principles outlined in the manual.

Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE (QLD) and Wide Bay institute of TAFE (Bundaberg, QLD) both used the NFROT definition of RPL. But not all TAFE colleges chose to follow the NFROT. In what may have seemed to be a contrast, Box Hill College of TAFE (Vic) based their RPL on the Broad Meadows College of TAFE Training Manual (1995:2). Upon examination, this actually turned out to be strikingly similar as both referred to the skills possessed and to the range of learning sources possible.

5.2 TAFE advocates for RPL

According to Gary Collins (1993b: 13) TAFE was instructed to and accepted the role of advocate for the changes to their education system. He explained, (1993b: 11), “the TAFE system nationally is being used as the primary vehicle to ensure the national implementation of a competency-based approach to the delivery of
vocational education and training programs”. All formal TAFE courses were
government funded and as such had to be accredited under the procedures laid
down by the governing body. In Western Australia, the Skills Standards and
Accreditation Board was responsible for this process (Collins, 1993b: 9). All
TAFE institutions must have prepared their curriculum in competency-based
terms to gain accreditation for that curriculum (and included in those terms is the
concept of RPL).

While being sanctioned nationally by the TAFE sector, the concept of RPL still
appeared to have variations in its establishment at both the state and individual
college level. As previously noted in chapter three, the terminology used in RPL
was open to interpretation and definitions were many and varied.
This was clearly evident in the documentation. Confusion and hesitancy often
resulted because these TAFE colleges were clearly at different stages in the
development of RPL policy and procedures.

An example is the Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE document entitled,
‘Statewide College Implementation Report’ (1991). This report documented RPL
implementation in Victoria at that time. Development of RPL policy and
procedures ranged from that of Holmesglen College of TAFE (Vic) which
recognised the value of RPL and saw that "RPL is a positive educational
response to both economic and social justice strategies" to William Angliss
College of TAFE (Vic) which reported that, “…no RPL working group has been
formed" (Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE, 1991:18). There is an expectation that the modular system in CBT format when introduced in trade areas will facilitate RPL implementation" (Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE, 1991: 22).

By 1995, some colleges such as Box Hill College of TAFE (Vic) had an RPL working party, but still the adoption of RPL was sporadic.

5.3 TAFE adoption of RPL

A working model for RPL has existed for over 50 years in the Tradesmen’ Rights Recognition Act which originated as a result of the skills shortages after World War Two (Ashenden and Simosko, ND). In spite of this, Ashenden noted in 1992, "RPL has long been neglected in Australia" (Ashenden, 1992: 1).

Unlike the universities, the TAFE colleges embraced RPL and began their process of policy and procedure development in the early 1990s. Kangan Batman Institute of TAFE (Broadmeadows, Vic) had been involved in the TAFE sector promotion and adoption of RPL for many years. A 'Recognition and Assessment Centre" was established in 1991, with services including training, publications, consultancy, workshops and research.

To successfully include the RPL concept in the learning ethos they suggested that, "The implementation of RPL requires the development and adoption of administrative procedures which allow the RPL assessments to form part of the
overall college operation" (1993:1). This view was endorsed by Wangaratta College of TAFE now part of the Goulburn Ovens Institute (Vic), in their RPL policies and procedures, which stated, "RPL shall be an integral part of all college planning" (1992:1). They went on to say that, "in the long term it is important for all members of the college teaching staff to become familiar with the principles of RPL and the college procedures to be followed"(1992:3). They too could see the need for a college-wide approach.

Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE (Vic) acknowledged the breadth of the definition of RPL, while adhering to VEETAB (Vocational Employment Education Training Accreditation Board) guidelines for RPL. This institute was particularly concerned with consistency in application of RPL across the state and comment was made in a memo of "a paper war on RPL" (Goulburn Valley Institute of TAFE memo, June, 1996). Certainly this study, through its request for documentation found itself knee-deep in paper! Material of a great variety and scope was sent and demanded much time in its reading and analysis.

5.4 TAFE documentation on RPL

Unlike the universities, most TAFE colleges did not operate autonomously. Having once been separate colleges, they were melded into conglomerates, with most institutions having many campuses. For example, the West Coast College
of TAFE in Western Australia has four campuses, the Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE in Victoria has six campuses and the Spencer Institute of TAFE in South Australia has seventeen campuses. The request for documentation from TAFE institutions resulted in information being sent from one campus per college conglomerate. This information was taken to represent the larger institution's overall perspective and policy directions for RPL, for both staff and students.

While the request was for administrative documentation on RPL policy and procedure for this study, a large number of colleges chose to send student information and pamphlets. This is in contrast to the universities. Some chose to send detailed and informative documents while others sent a pamphlet or student application form only.

The difference between the two sectors in the range and number of RPL documents available was considerable (See references A). Some TAFE colleges provided both staff and student documents, while others sent only student material. The student information proved to be of a very basic and general nature, obviously intended to inform the students of the procedures required by them, not to provide an understanding of the concept behind the practice.

The most commonly used central system appeared to be that of NSW TAFE. 'Everyone's guide to recognition: for educational and administrative staff' was the generic document provided by many NSW TAFE college respondents. For example, Southern Sydney Institute of TAFE (St George), Western Institute of
TAFE (Broken Hill) and Illawarra Institute of Technology, each sent a copy of this publication.

TAFE SA's 'RPL: an overview' brochure was presented by many South Australian colleges including Douglas Mawson Institute of TAFE, Spencer Institute of TAFE and Adelaide Institute of TAFE, which indicated the strength of this central system. Some colleges, such as Spencer Institute of TAFE also provided their own course guides.

TAFE Queensland provided a very general overview of the options available. The guidelines for advanced standing into TAFE courses stated: "These guidelines operate within a conceptual framework in which articulation, credit transfer and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) are processes which result in advanced standing". (1997:1) Emerald Agricultural College procedures are based on TAFE Queensland guidelines, as are those of Yeronga Institute of TAFE.

The Tasmanian State Training Authority (TASTA) oversaw all Tasmanian TAFE campuses. In fact they were the sole respondents from Tasmania. TAFE Queensland and TAFE NSW advised direct contact with their respective TAFE colleges whereas TASTA was the contact point for Tasmanian TAFE colleges. In 1993 TASTA endorsed an RPL policy, which was designed to be descriptive rather than prescriptive. At the time of this study TASTA was re-examining its RPL policy, due to the emergence of the RPL/RCC debate. Later contact with
TASTA confirmed that it did repeal its blanket RPL policy and from 1999 onwards responsibility rested with the providers who were expected to produce their own guidelines.

This appears to be in line with the West Australian system in which each institution behaved as an autonomous unit. No TAFE institution from Western Australia forwarded documents from a central system, all opting to send, and presumably use, their own documentation. Some TAFE colleges were so protective of their policy documents that they would not allow reading of them away from their premises and control!

At Box Hill College of TAFE (Vic) individual departments were encouraged to adapt RPL methods to its specific industry, in an effort to focus on outcomes rather than where the learning took place. Adelaide Institute of TAFE (SA) wrote that each educational unit had its own specific information and criteria for RPL, but all followed the TAFE SA guidelines. Brisbane Institute of TAFE had a set practice in which RPL information was available from the "relevant faculty client service unit or workplace assessor" (1998:3).

The Queensland, New South Wales, South Australian and Tasmanian TAFE governing bodies provided policy or procedural guidelines to assist staff to
understand and conduct RPL. ‘NSW TAFE RPL information for staff’ was included as the official document from many New South Wales TAFE colleges.² Some colleges chose to adapt the recommendations of their state body to its college's perspective and presented these manuals to college personnel. Six colleges provided a staff manual.³ Institute of Technology (NSW) responded with a range of TAFE NSW documents, one of which outlined 'Recognition' from the TAFE NSW perspective. This State body and consequently the majority of New South Wales TAFE colleges, considered 'Recognition' for a range of experiences from school to TAFE, ACE (Adult Community Education) to TAFE and TAFE to university as well as other studies, work and life experience. They acknowledged that there were many training pathways accessible through this means.

All TAFE respondents revealed the importance of providing documentation about RPL to students. The Gold Coast Institute of TAFE (QLD) wrote that the "Faculty RPL coordinator ensures RPL brochures and information are available to applicants"(1998:3). These documents ranged from general RPL information, such as the Midland TAFE (WA) booklet to specific RPL application forms and instructions like those found in the Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE (QLD) information package and the student information package from South East

² Illawarra Institute of Technology (Wollongong), Western Institute of TAFE (Broken Hill) and the Southern Sydney Institute of TAFE

³ Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE (QLD), Box Hill College of TAFE (Vic), Canberra Institute of Technology (ACT), Bendigo regional College of TAFE (Vic), Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE (Vic), and Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE (QLD).
Institute of TAFE (SA). The Kimberley Regional College of TAFE (WA) also provided examples of the range of student information available, all with clearly outlined processes.

Some TAFE colleges used additional publications for student assistance. Crothers' booklet, 'Getting Credit Where It Is Due' was one example, which was used by both Midland College of TAFE (WA) and Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE (QLD). Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE (SA) offered a video, produced by SA DEFTAFE (1995) entitled 'Recognition of Prior Learning: a bridge between learning and life' to assist applicants. To assist students to apply for RPL, workshops or lectures on RPL application were provided by Adelaide Institute of TAFE (SA) and Midland College of TAFE (WA).

5.5 RPL for Advanced standing or entry

Within the TAFE sector, not all colleges had the same perception of the concept. While agreeing that RPL was considered on an 'individual basis', there was varied opinion about whether RPL was advanced standing and/or entry. The differences between these two types of RPL were sometimes unclear. RPL for credit/advanced standing applied to students already entered into a course who wished to by-pass a module or unit for which they had previous learning knowledge or skill. RPL for entry, on the other hand, allowed mature-age
students who did not have the appropriate level of education to apply for entry, with consideration based on their non-formal learning.

In the university sector, the AVCC considered credit transfer for previous formal study to be advanced standing. But it became evident in the analysis of the documents that universities were not agreed on this point. Some, like Monash University considered advanced standing to be for transferred credit but applied this credit to all forms of RPL. In agreement, TAFE Queensland commented that advanced standing was available for previous study, training work experience and life experience (online, 19980). Their guidelines stated that they "operate within a conceptual framework in which articulation, credit transfer and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) are processes which result in advanced standing" (TAFE Qld, 1997:1). Accordingly, Wide Bay institute of TAFE (Bundaberg, QLD) granted advanced standing for credit transfer or RPL. Seven colleges offered RPL as advanced standing⁴.

Within the state of Western Australia differences in the RPL ‘adoption rate’ and options available for students were clearly evident. The West Australian Department of Education and Training (WADET) in a 1995 study, 'RPL for entry', determined that there was a lack of knowledge of RPL and its philosophical basis

⁴ Box Hill College of TAFE (Vic), South East Institute of TAFE, Adelaide Institute of TAFE and Spencer Institute of TAFE (Ceduna), (SA), Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE and Yeronga Institute of TAFE (Qld) and Northern Territory Rural College of TAFE (Katherine)
in the training sector of TAFE. It found that RPL for entry and RPL for advanced standing were being assessed independently, possibly leading to duplication and inefficient use of resources.

Some Western Australian TAFE colleges had several forms of RPL, which, although possibly confusing to the applicant, did offer more scope than the RPL available in the university sector. Midland College of TAFE offered a range of RPL options in 1997 including RPL for entry to full-time TAFE, RPL for credit, exemption and trade recognition. West Coast College of TAFE (Joondalup) had two forms in 1998: RPL for entry and RPL for credit. During the same period, Great Southern Regional College of TAFE (Albany) was in the process of gradually introducing RPL for entry to full time courses. In contrast, Central Metropolitan College of TAFE (Perth, WA) stated that RPL was for all types of learning other than credentialled learning, but did not use the terms ‘advanced standing’ or ‘entry’, in their documents.

5.6 RPL as non-formal learning

The Office of Training and Further Education (Victoria) was not alone in their concern that significant intangible non-formal learning could be overlooked at the expense of insignificant yet tangible evidence.
They stated,

_There is a danger that superficiality and observable performance will dominate more important factors, because the former are reportable within a CBT framework, rather than focus on learning experiences and less specified and behavioural goals._

(OTFE, online: 18)

In Chapter four it was indicated that the vagaries of establishing whether or not an individual had sufficient depth of non-formal knowledge of a subject were troubling for university personnel. Only a handful of universities were willing to concur that there might be merit in this type of learning, with back-up evidence.

TAFE colleges were similarly unsure of non-formal learning. Emerald Agricultural College of TAFE (QLD) was correct when it commented that, "until recently, learning that occurred outside the classroom has received inconsistent recognition" (application package, ND: 2). They offered RPL for general work and life experiences, which had particular relevance in the agricultural context.

Southern Sydney Institute (St George, NSW) offered ‘Recognition’ for previous study or work and life experience, but added the caveat that the applicant may need to do a challenge test or attend an interview to validate these experiences. The written word was not enough to validate what many regarded as anecdotal evidence.
5.7 Does RPL include recognition of workplace learning?

While representing the interests of industry and the workforce, it is worth noting that workplace learning is still regarded with skepticism, even suspicion, in the TAFE sector. In the previous chapter Universities were shown to be still grappling with the implications of recognising non-credentialled learning. While workplace learning was gaining credence in graduate circles it was not yet applied to undergraduate entry considerations.

Did workplace learning equate with work experience? If it did, then workplace learning was acceptable for RPL as was life experience, according to the definitions given by many TAFE colleges in chapter three.

But workplace learning also referred to acknowledging learning that had taken place in employment, or while employed. There was concern about who was assessing this learning, its validity and relevance to TAFE and university courses. Doubt about the quality of this learning was apparent and supported the OTFE assertion that,

*Early work on this subject (workplace learning) has been critical of workplaces as providers of highly-specific and concrete knowledge that is set apart from that which can be constructed in the classroom of educational institutions.*

(OTFE, online: 20)

Providing RPL for learning that occurred in a workplace setting was evidently not yet developed within most TAFE policy guidelines.
The two exceptions to this were Midland College of TAFE (WA) and Illawarra Institute of TAFE (NSW), which were the only colleges to state in writing that they could offer trade recognition.

5.8 RPL as Recognition of Current Competency (RCC)

One dilemma that has been causing concern and confusion for all TAFE colleges is the selection of terminology. Should it be Recognition of Prior Learning or Recognition of Current Competency? Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE (SA) (1995:33) stated that, "The principle purpose of CBT is to ensure that certification is based on achieving competencies rather than completing a training course". Discussion concerning the most appropriate terms, sought to establish just which term best explained the concept, its purpose and the subsequent processes. At the Canberra Institute of Technology (ACT) Recognition of Prior Learning included RCC. Their resource booklet outlined their definition: "The term Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is used here to also include Recognition of Current Competencies (RCC)" [Author's italics] (1998:4).

Some TAFE colleges chose to use both terms, perhaps to address student concerns over the introduction of the new and less familiar term RCC. The TAFE SA Workplace Education Service 'Working with Industry', referred to "RCC or RPL" in their documentation (online) and stressed that it was the 'current' knowledge and skills that the applicant had at the time of the application, that
needed to be substantiated. Adelaide Institute of TAFE (SA) Department of Office Studies referred to both RPL/RCC in their workshop pamphlet, yet their Management Studies pamphlet, referred to RCC exclusively, stating that it was ‘formerly RPL’. This disparity is an example of the confusion for both staff and students that could develop when individual faculties are encouraged to determine their own policies. The decision on terminology should be one that encompasses all college faculties.

Other colleges such as Midland College of TAFE (WA) chose to change their use of terms on a college-wide basis. Documentation indicated that they did use RPL in their 1997 booklet, but recent discussion with their RPL representative revealed that RCC had become the preferred term. Similarly South West Regional College of TAFE (Bunbury, WA) used RCC not RPL, though the definition remained the same, stating that the concept recognised what the individual had learned from other courses, from life experiences and work experiences

While TAFE colleges disagreed over these terms RPL was the university-preferred term - if they had to use one at all! Gay and Wilson suggested that:

RPL is used to refer to the process of granting subject exemptions within formal courses of education and training in the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) system and in higher education. ‘Recognition’ and ‘Currency of Competence’ are the terms now commonly used in industry for acknowledging relevant skills demonstrated in the workplace.

(Gay and Wilson (1997:1)
At the time of writing this study, the use of these two terms was still in contention and they seemed to be interchangeable, though some TAFE colleges did stress the use of one in preference to the other. But the term RCC appears to be gaining general TAFE acceptance. Initiatives such as the TAFE Training 2001 conference, ‘Assessment Forum’, and the new Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) referred to RCC rather than RPL.

5.9 Credit transfer

All TAFE colleges and institutions appeared to have some form of credit transfer. TAFE SA (1994) defined credit transfer as advanced standing based on prior agreements between institutions. Illawarra Institute of TAFE used the TAFE NSW (1997) definition of credit transfer as formal arrangements made with another provider based on the similarity of content and outcomes. TAFE Queensland considered that credit transfer was, "formally determined recognition of equivalence between the outcomes of subjects/modules from a student's previous formal study, based on documented evidence of achievement" (TAFE QLD, attachment 1: definitions: 7).

Exemption and credit transfer are both options at Yeronga Institute of TAFE (QLD). TAFE QLD considers exemption for comparable study, but what is recognised as 'comparable study', is not clarified. A cluster of colleges chose to regard credit transfer as transfer of the result of equivalent formal study from one
institution to another⁵. This appeared to be a more straightforward process and less open to error.

Some TAFE colleges retained the traditional form of credit transfer, which was also seen in chapter four, to be the preferred form of credit accepted at most universities. For instance, Canberra Institute of Technology (ACT) provided for credit transfer, but this transfer was only a transfer of the result of an identical module, either a CIT module or national module successfully completed elsewhere. Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE (Townsville, QLD) documentation stated that credit transfer could only be granted for competency based training modules. Credit transfer only applied to credit into and from CBT modules.

Credit transfer and exemption were two areas that appeared to overlap. Central TAFE (Perth, WA) granted recognition via exemption for previous study. Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE (QLD) and Emerald Agricultural College (QLD) offered exemption for previous equivalent formal study. West Coast College of TAFE (Joondalup, WA) also offered exemption, but they regarded it as a credit transfer. Applicants would find it confusing distinguishing between these two practices.

Another position was that of Illawarra Institute of Technology (NSW) and North Coast Institute of TAFE (Coffs Harbour, NSW). These colleges used the NSW

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⁵ South Metropolitan College of TAFE (WA), Wide Bay Institute of TAFE (Bundaberg, QLD), Northern Territory Rural College of TAFE (Katherine, NT), Spencer Institute of TAFE (Ceduna, SA).
TAFE position that recognition was an umbrella term for result transfer and exemption. Results transfer was credit for study while exemption was for recognised subjects or modules that were not eligible for result transfer. Advanced standing was for previous study, work or life experience. All three terms related to previous study in some way and this too could be quite confusing to a potential applicant.

Yet other TAFE colleges had different views. Brisbane Institute of TAFE (QLD) offered three types of credit and regarded RPL as one of them. Box Hill College of TAFE (Vic) conversely regarded credit transfer as an element of RPL. Taylor (1998), from Monash University also considered credit transfer to be one type of RPL. He saw RPL as a broad term including credit transfer within its sphere. Broadmeadows TAFE (1990:9) would concur, having commented that, “RPL is based on a broader range of information gained from learning, compared with the current reliance on formal qualifications”.

The question arising here is whether RPL is a form of credit transfer or whether credit transfer is a form of RPL. The jury is still undecided. Who would make such a decision and how would it be implemented?

5.10 The RPL timeframe

An interesting difference in the understanding of RPL between the TAFE and
University sectors' was revealed in reading the primary documentation. In University considerations RPL timeframes were related to the time elapsed between the study and the application for RPL. The timeframe mentioned in most TAFE documents, on the other hand, generally referred to the time taken to carry out an RPL assessment and for the applicant to receive confirmation of the decision.

For example, Adelaide Institute of TAFE (SA), Department of Business Studies wrote that RPL could take up to six weeks to process. Hunter Institute of TAFE (NSW) noted that the timeframe for recognition of equivalence was four weeks. Midland College of TAFE (WA) informed applicants that RPL could take from one week for an exemption to several months for an RPL for entry outcome to be officially reported.

Two TAFE colleges followed the University perception of timeframes. Yeronga Institute of TAFE (QLD) stated that currency of prior learning was accepted if the learning in question was no more than five years old. This was also the practice for another TAFE college (which has asked to remain anonymous) whose documentation stated that credit transfer would only be considered for modules 'less than five years old'.
5.11 The costs involved with RPL

Another significant difference developing between RPL approaches of these two sectors is the recovery of costs. TAFE colleges were able to charge a fee for RPL applications, whereas universities were not. TAFE SA approved fee-for-service in their RPL policy documentation, thereby acknowledging the need for appropriate cost structures. Adelaide Institute of TAFE (SA) followed these guidelines and wrote that departments were free to do RPL assessments on a fee-for-service basis for industry or enterprises.

Illawarra Institute of TAFE (NSW) noted in its documents that students did need to pay for RPL at TAFE, perhaps to clarify confusion between the practices of the two sectors. TASTA stated that TAFE colleges charged an RPL fee for an interview or a detailed investigation but not for module/subject comparison. Similarly, Canberra Institute of Technology (ACT) applied a fee for RPL with an interview or a formal assessment.

Fees are obviously an issue for RPL applicants, for TAFE (QLD) and Adelaide Institute of TAFE (SA) commented that RPL fees should not cost the applicant more than the cost of the module itself. Though it does appear to be minimal, a fee for RPL applied at most TAFE colleges and eleven colleges stated in their
information to students, that a fee was payable. In a further clarification, Central West College of TAFE (Geraldton, WA) and Great Southern Regional College of TAFE (Albany, WA) confirmed that a fee was payable but added that there was both the normal fee and a concession fee available. In contrast, no fee was required for credit transfer applications at Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE (Vic) or Adelaide Institute of TAFE (SA). Central TAFE (WA) likewise collected no fee for exemption applications and Gold Coast Institute of TAFE (QLD) did not ask for payment for either exemption or credit transfer.

5.12 Innovative practices

The use of RPL in the TAFE system is not an innovation. What is innovative is the different uses or stages some TAFE systems have achieved. Universal use of RPL, when imposed from above does not mean that it is accepted or encouraged. But there were a few colleges whose documentation stood out as being different.

Powles and Anderson (1994) noted that there were two views of the purpose of TAFE: social and economic. TAFE was seen as a channel through which

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6 West Coast College of TAFE, South Metropolitan College of TAFE, Central Metropolitan College of TAFE, Midland College of TAFE, South West Regional College of TAFE (WA), Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE, William Angliss Institute of TAFE (VIC), (South East Institute of TAFE, Spencer Institute of TAFE (SA), Hunter Institute of TAFE (NSW), Gold Coast Institute of TAFE (QLD).
economic development was promoted and as a pool of human resources, unconcerned about social outcomes. The social view took the position that the student was the focus and that equity of access within a broad framework of social concern was a guiding principle. Lifelong and recurrent learning were emphasised, as was the idea of a 'second chance'. Happily, this perception of TAFE appears to have prevailed for the OTFE in 2001 also considers that “TAFE institutes have important roles that relate to both economic and social goals” (OTFE, online: 14).

Social justice, equity and economic considerations were found to be aspects of the concept of RPL in chapter two. The innovative practices found in the research particularly addressed social justice and equity. In 1997 TAFE NSW established Recognition of Equivalence services for non-enrolled applicants. This form of Recognition was granted "by TAFE NSW to applicants who demonstrate that they meet the outcomes of a TAFE NSW module or course on the basis of previous study, work or life experience” (Hunter Institute of TAFE, ND, pamphlet). TAFE NSW did also stress that the document was not an award for a TAFE NSW qualification. What this document offered applicants was the recognition that the skills they possessed were equal to that of a TAFE course, thus providing an alternative, equitable pathway.
Three NSW TAFE colleges presented information indicating their support for and use of this service within their campus systems\(^7\). This service offered non-enrolled applicants a document reporting outcomes of the recognition assessment process.

Another innovative practice was found at Batchelor College of TAFE (NT), which is a college dedicated specifically for students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait origin. In recognition of the social and equity needs of their particular students' and their communities, it provided a more detailed explanation of steps and options in 'plain English' in their student guide.

Promotion of RPL to industry and the community at large was not a common feature of the TAFE or university documentation presented, yet in chapter two reasons were given for the economic need to provide the workforce with RPL accessibility. Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE (QLD) showed innovation in listing promotion as one aspect of the role of the curriculum officer in Townsville. While other colleges provided RPL pamphlets for applicants, no other college reported the promotion of the concept. Indeed, personal experience has revealed both privately and through research, that information was only provided to students who asked for it.

\(^7\) Hunter Institute of Technology, Illawarra Institute of Technology and Southern Sydney Institute of TAFE.
RPL appeared to be reluctantly endorsed and certainly not promoted by all colleges.

5.13 Concluding comments

Unlike the university sector RPL is mandatory within the TAFE sector. While not all documentation presented concerned policy and procedures, all TAFE respondents provided RPL documentation, oriented towards informing either staff or students. There was sufficient evidence to indicate that these colleges and institutions generally followed their established policy guidelines. Indeed with the State and Territory TAFE bodies agreeing in the early 1990s to be responsible for the development of RPL in the VET sector, all TAFE colleges were expected to have an active RPL policy.

The information gathered here revealed that RPL had become an integral part of the competency based training system. Some states have a strong central system, while other governing bodies appear to either be non-existent or to operate from ‘behind the scenes’. This suggested that some TAFE colleges operated from an independent position, while still adhering to the national guidelines.

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8 Western Australia, Victoria, Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory.
What actually constitutes Recognition of Prior Learning, Credit Transfer and Advanced Standing has been shown to be unclear. Crossover was apparent and confusion on the part of both staff and applicants was a highly likely outcome. This study supports the assertion by Goleby et al. (1997:4) that "continued evolution of policy, processes and relevant training, therefore remains crucial to meeting our best practice goals".

Innovative practices such as those by NSW TAFE have contributed much to the further development of RPL policy and practice. Furthermore, the ability to charge a fee for service seems to have facilitated implementation of enhanced policy.

Chapter six brings the two sectors together again in an examination of the articulation of students from one sector to the other. This process appears to be still maturing, for, as RPL evolves, so too, do the systems that this concept supports.
Chapter 6

Articulation

The tracing of the evolution of RPL has led the writer to the concept of articulation between these two post-secondary education sectors (see Figure 2). It became clear as this research progressed that articulation should have played a key role in the evolution of RPL from an industry-based concept to an educationally valid one. Students wanted previous learning to be included in considerations for entrance into either sector. Unfortunately the evidence has indicated that non-formal prior learning, regarded as RPL by most universities, was regarded with suspicion and doubt and inadmissible in applications for articulation.

So what is articulation? NBEET in 1993, defined articulation as "the opening of legitimate pathways to allow an ease of movement for students between or among a variety of study programs, awards, education and training institutions" (1993:76). Five years later, The Nelson Report, described the process more succinctly as "the flow of students between TAFE and higher education and the system of credit transfer which facilitates that flow" (1998: xxi). Victorian University of Technology recognised the changing purposes of learning, stating in
Figure 2
Recognition of Prior Learning in Australia: Articulation
their definition that articulation enabled students to "move easily between courses as their needs change" (VUT Faculty Handbook –TAFE section, 1998:1).

Put simply, articulation is the formalisation of credit transfer arrangements that were once made on an ad hoc basis. Murdoch University (WA) confirmed this view. "An articulation arrangement is a recognised pathway from one post-secondary qualification to another at the same or a higher level, and includes a formal arrangement about the granting of credit and exemptions" (Murdoch University Legislation, 2001:2). Chapters four and five exposed the differences between RPL and credit transfer. Both post secondary sectors regarded the two concepts as separate entities. While there were a few exceptions, the general view of these sectors was that credit transfer was of formal learning and RPL was not.

So where, in articulation, was there a place for RPL? Some university personnel, such as Taylor from Monash University (Vic), considered RPL and credit transfer to be one and the same, but they were a minority. Other universities, such as the Northern Territory University, allowed that both concepts had a place in education, but not the same place.

It maintained the distance between the two, by having distinct distinctly different application processes. If RPL were acknowledged to include all prior learning, as Taylor advocated, then its place in articulation arrangements would be clear. But
while divergent views existed about RPL, it was not openly acknowledged as valid in articulation.

In an effort to facilitate increased opportunities for credit transfer and articulation between the post secondary sectors, the Australian Qualification Framework asserted, "There should be a common understanding and agreement between all states and territories on the terminology used to describe articulation, credit transfer, RPL and advanced standing" (Golding et al., 1996: 37). Previous chapters have clearly indicated that, at this time, these four terms were still being regarded as separate entities, both within and between sectors, as well as between states and territories. No new documentation has come to light to suggest any change in this situation.

While there appeared to be so much division over RPL, credit transfer was no more clearly established. As long ago as 1987, Education Minister John Dawkins was instrumental in the formalisation of this process, which became known as articulation. He saw that the system needed to change to provide fair and equitable outcomes for all students. He stated:

The most notable feature of the current credit transfer arrangements is their ad hoc nature and the problems caused by the incompatibility of courses across different institutions and sectors. Arrangements for credit transfer usually reflect decision-making procedures made at the faculty, school or departmental level rather than at the institutional level. Credit arrangements are often informal and subject to negotiation, and can vary widely within an institution. As a result inconsistencies abound. More often than not, students transferring from one higher education institution to another are given insufficient credit for their
academic attainments. (cited in Ramsay et al., 1997:1)

ANTA was very conscious that there were significant differences in the nature of the programs:

The majority of VET programs are employment based or related, and refer to a clearly defined set of skill outcomes. In contrast, higher education undergraduate learning is substantially institution-based and has broader educational, social and cultural objectives. (ANTA, 1997:9)

But economic and social justice reforms decreed that the establishment of formal articulation arrangements was necessary.

6.1 The introduction of formal articulation

This study has shown how Dawkins pursued a micro-economic reform agenda in higher education, to harness the sector to 'national needs' (De Angelis, 1998). RPL was one of the key concepts of Dawkins' plan to reshape the goals of the post-secondary education sectors. Broadmeadows TAFE (Vic) pointed out that the social justice aspect of RPL was equally applicable to articulation. They saw that RPL in articulation "responds to the social justice aspects of access to training and education, availability and access to career paths, and acknowledgment of existing skills" (Broadmeadows TAFE 1990: 30), and promoted its inclusion in articulation considerations.

Similarly, according to Cohen et al. (1993:12), quality, efficiency, equity and access - all fundamental considerations in articulation arrangements - were
regarded as, “the pillars supporting the need for RPL in higher education”.

Efficiency was present in recognising and assessing an individual’s relevant prior learning, to enable the attaining of a higher education degree in a shorter period of time. Quality was maintained by negotiating formal articulation pathways, and equity access ensured that all applicants were given the same information concerning available pathways.

It must be remembered that RPL was a component of the competency-based training system and as such was caught up in the competency debate. For RPL to be valid in the articulation process, recognition of competency as a learning approach needed to be accepted by TAFE and universities alike. While TAFE colleges have been leaders in this development, universities, in most instances, have been extremely reluctant, if not outright oppose, to accept competency-based learning as a suitable learning style. Realising the need for joint involvement in Victoria,

The VEETAC (Victorian Employment Education and Training Advisory Committee) working party included higher education institutions in their list of settings in which the credentials given would need to accommodate the achievement of competencies.

(Employment and Skills Formation Council (ESFC), 1990: 6)

To improve skills recognition, or RPL, in Western Australia, the State Employment and Skills Development Authority (SESDA) planned to “establish closer relationships between education and training providers within the state, including: TAFE, independent colleges, universities, private providers and
industry” (SESDA, 1991:4). But these actions appeared to occur on State bases only.

While formal articulation was being mooted as necessary for national training reform, in 1990, an ESFC report (1990:1) indicated that, “there was little automatic transfer of credit between states and territories and opportunities were rare for the systematic recognition of skills and knowledge gained outside of formal training”. The parochial nature of education and training, which included RPL and articulation, was very evident and may be found to be a barrier still, to a portable Australia-wide education.

6.2 The establishment of links between the 2 sectors

The National Training Reform Agenda, established in 1989 by the then Minister for Education John Dawkins, was a cooperative national response to economic and industry restructuring via the TAFE sector. While VET was changing to become more responsive to industry it was also,

Directed at the achievement of articulated pathways in vocational education and training which provide for greater efficiency through recognition of prior leaning and national portability and articulation of credentials. (NTB, 1992: 4)

NBEET in the early 1990s was cognisant of the barriers to articulation.

Communication between institutions was poor and the informal credit transfer policies already present, remained in use by those who implemented them.
Important to the new VET framework was, "better interfaces with the other sectors of education, closer relationships with industry, and new partnership arrangements" (NTB, 1992: 11).

The Rumsey Review of ANTA’s National Framework for the Recognition of Training, in 1993, further revealed the limited connection between the University and TAFE sectors. It advocated a new model to ensure the maximum number of links between TAFE and higher education credentials. Rumsey noted that Universities needed to be involved to make the most of recent changes and ensure the continuation of articulation pathways. Without university participation and cooperation articulation would not progress. Only together would the two sectors be able to successfully manage the changes by identifying the potential problems and establishing strategies to overcome them.

The AVCC, in its policy statement for the 1995-1997 triennium, indicated an awareness of the need for collaboration:

As partners, Government and universities will need to work together to ensure that mechanisms introduced to improve the design and delivery of vocational education and training do not impede the maintenance and expansion of linkage and articulation arrangements with the vocational education and training sector.

(AVCC, March 1994:15)

In the early years of articulation it was evident that, "momentum for change is primarily an upward movement for greater portability of credit from non-university into university courses" (NBEET, 1992: 45). As Golding acknowledged, "RPL has
not been university driven to this point but a number of developments have
intersected to bring it to the door of higher education institutions" (Golding,
1994:2). TAFE student demand for formal articulation with clearly outlined
pathways and the resultant need for increased communication and agreement
between the TAFE and university sectors meant that the universities could no
longer simply sideline or ignore RPL.

Under the Unified National System (UNS) “universities were encouraged to
embrace the principles of credit transfer, both within and across sectors".
(Ramsey et al., 1997: 3) Such cross sectoral linkages were introduced by the
University of South Australia to assist them to provide educational opportunities
for aboriginal people and other groups within the community who may have
suffered educational disadvantages, in other words for social justice
considerations.

6.3 The universities’ dilemma

6.3.1 Competency concerns

Research for this study has indicated that universities took no part in the VET
reforms to training. In 1992 universities were not included in the national
integration of training and education. The NTB (1993) stated, “Universities are
self-accrediting and as such are not obliged to respond to the development of
competency standards” (Harris, et al., 1995: 62). While under no obligation,
universities were to find themselves increasingly drawn into accepting competency standards via articulation.

Since its inception, universities have had concerns about the use of competency as a determination of attainment. The adoption of competency-based approaches (CBA) to education and training, including RPL, was expected to:

Have the potential not only to influence the ways in which employment-related competencies are assessed and recognised, but also to influence the structure and delivery of formal education and training programmes and to provide enhanced opportunities for articulation between sectors and for credit transfer across institutions.

(Bowden and Masters, 1993: 12)

According to Gay and Wilson (1997), one of the main barriers to RPL in universities was conflicting interpretation of the meaning of competency-based training. This is not surprising given the range of definitions and interpretations provided for this study. But, in spite of this, as Kearns (1992) noted, higher education would have to become involved in CBT if it was to become a national system: “...there is clear realisation ... that improving skill formation requires concerted action across all sectors of education and training” (Collins, 1993b: 7-8).

However, as Thomson observed, some academic personnel were not prepared to be accommodating, "we already have a fight on our hands with some in higher education" (Thomson, 1993: 17). Written documentation providing criteria that would indicate student competence at university level was not readily available
and there appeared to be a general reluctance to produce it. This is evident in the
data collection with the small number of universities that provided documentation
of their formal articulation arrangements. Variations in interpretation were not
uncommon.

There are substantial differences in the amount of advanced
standing awarded by different universities for the same TAFE
qualifications. The amount and type of advanced standing that an
applicant is eligible for varies substantially across universities and
courses.

(NBEET, 1993: 20)

Universities have been concerned about the direct influence of the use of
competency-based approaches in their courses where TAFE articulation was
available. According to Bowden and Masters (1993: 139), the prevailing
University attitude, was that, while "a competency-based approach to education
and training was acceptable and appropriate in TAFE courses ... it was
unacceptable and inappropriate in university courses". Toop and Burleigh (1993)
found only sixteen discrete RPL arrangements in their study.

Marginson made the controversial statement in 1993 that the universities "must
move to a competency-based system" (Beevers, 1993a: 193). Even while saying
this, he acknowledged that they would be able to resist such change, and
predicted that this would create a greater divide between the two education
sectors (creating a "competency-based 'vocational' system and a knowledge-
based 'professional/academic' system") (Beevers, 1993a: 193). The NBEET
working party assumed that the adoption of a CBT approach would not become
widespread in universities and requested consideration by reference groups to
suggest improvement to current practice, which might be suitable and ensure "the maintenance of academic rigour" (NBEET, 1993: 97).

By 1994 the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) had established a reference group on articulation. They were to "develop a set of agreed principles of articulation (and RPL) within and across all sectors" (Ramsey et al. 1997: 7). But four years later the Nelson report (1998:68) confirmed that course diversity remained an obstacle to credit transfer and articulation between TAFE and universities and that some universities were "unnecessarily conservative in their approach to negotiating articulation arrangements with TAFE".

Harris et al., (1995:100) have argued that the introduction of CBT "has sounded the death knell of excellence" in universities, as it tended to focus on 'mediocrity' or the 'basic standard' required of students. While this may have been true in the past, recent changes to the AQF have included the reintroduction of 'graded assessment'. Pilot programs have been conducted in some Western Australian TAFE colleges, such as the West Coast College of TAFE to judge the success of such assessment. This is apparently in response to industry requests to clarify just how competent individual students, (their potential employees) were at the completion of training.

As a result, assessments are now to be graded into three levels: Competency, Competency with Merit and Competency with Distinction. These differentiations, when substantiated, may appease university critics and remove some of the
doubt concerning the depth of skill and knowledge acquired. But, attitudinal barriers concerned with levels of risk are slow to disappear and any RPL practice "needs to be supported by curriculum practices which address entry and exit levels, flexible delivery and articulation arrangements" (Harris et al., 1995:270).

A new and interesting shift in perceptions became evident in the West Report of 1998. Here higher education was referred to as an 'industry', for the first time. West acknowledged that this view would not be popular.

Many people within the system are uncomfortable with viewing higher education as an 'industry'. We think that it is desirable and necessary for the government to take an industry perspective in the higher education sector.

(The West Report, 1998: 8)

Such a perspective could result in a requirement for universities to endorse CBT as other industry trainers do, with a further decline in autonomy for this sector of education.

6.3.2 Autonomy concerns

Golding et al. (1996: 42) were of the opinion that "Universities ... could do more to develop and activate recognition of prior learning systems", such as articulation. But universities have always been opposed to formal articulation schemes as these were seen as a threat to their autonomy. NBEET were particularly concerned about the university issues with articulation. The board noted in 1992 that:
Any coordinating authority which attempts to impose a formal mechanism of course articulation is likely to face real difficulties in achieving the cooperation and commitment of universities, unless the ultimate rights of the granting institution are protected. (NBEET, 1992: 47).

While acknowledging this situation, they were concerned that “undue deference to the ideology of institutional autonomy could condemn credit transfer to lingering failure” (NBEET, 1992: 48).

NBEET saw that articulation was "affected by the rigidity and specialisation of the receiving course structure...and the credit transfer policies and practices of the receiving institution" (NBEET, 1992: 46). University documentation collected for my study indicated a preference for individual articulation arrangements with local or regional TAFE colleges. By this means universities were able to maintain an element of autonomy and control over selection. For example, concern has been expressed that students may try to get more than one award using the same base qualification for credit.

Gay and Wilson (1997) acknowledged that there were a range of genuine concerns amongst academics about the concept of RPL and the subsequent expectations of students. How would learning from experience be assessed, even on an individual basis? Benchmarks had not been established and there was concern that transferability of knowledge would be difficult to validate. RPL for life or work experience could be seen as a new way to gain admission to university and it was paramount that academic standards be safeguarded.
Might recognition of work experience or workplace learning create gender bias towards males? If so this could render equity standards untenable.

A further dilemma concerned the amount of RPL that should be granted. ‘Recognition of what?’ and ‘For what?’ were serious questions. How much of a qualification should be granted through RPL? RPL for entry was not so great a risk as entry did not entail granting any part of a qualification, just the opportunity to gain one. The real area of concern was advanced standing, which granted the successful applicant at least the first year of a qualification.

These concerns about self-determination and independence resulted in universities being relatively unwilling to accommodate change. It was noted in the West Report (1998:10) that “current accreditation arrangements act as barriers to entry to the sector. But reforms must be balanced by minimum academic standards being maintained”. This reference to the need to retain some basic standards might have placated universities, but Paterson, Chair of the National Training Framework Committee, asserted that retaining the status quo was not an option, and that those who wished to do so would be left behind. He emphasised that:

The Australian Recognition Framework is underpinned by the concept of mutual recognition and mutual recognition of outcomes. All registered training organisations must recognise and accept the Australian Qualification Framework Qualifications and Statements of Attainments issued by another registered training organisation wherever they are issued. (ANTA, 2000: 4)
6.3.3 Standards and Benchmarking

NBEET (1992: 52) referred to the 'Tyranny of precedent' as a prominent barrier to further articulation. Practices that had been approved in the past were still regarded as acceptable, with the resulting reluctance to change views and reassess the assessment process. The AVCC tried to benchmark for credit transfer purposes but university autonomy prevented success. It appeared that the NBEET working party was right in its perception.

With the development of the CBT system TAFE colleges have had to establish standards and benchmarks. Universities have not had to comply with the same demand and have relied on their previous practice of academic understanding. One of the biggest problems for universities was that they did not have established standards or benchmarks from which to judge RPL for articulation. Golding explained that Cohen et al. (1992) in their definition of RPL had referred to "assessing relevant learning against the standards required by a university subject or course" (Golding, 1994: 4). Golding’s concern was that “Implicit in Cohen et al.’s definition is the assumption that ‘standards’ have been developed by universities, an assumption not always correct” (Golding, 1994: 4).

Golding asserted that universities did not have defined standards or benchmarks established for assessment purposes. There was justified concern about the lack of equivalence in assessment (Gibson, 1997), as life experiences were difficult to
assess with any form of accuracy when different teachers adopted different methods of assessment. Universities did not want the assistance of industry, whereas in TAFE colleges, "Industrial benchmarks influence and direct the formulation of course outcomes in current vocational education and training curriculum" (Mattner, 1997:18). Mattner explained:

Benchmarks against which skills are assessed are shown to be directed and prescribed by the needs of industry. These benchmarks which are of fundamental importance to the RPL process are embedded in and regulated by the competency-based system of vocational education and training.

(Mattner, 1997:21)

But Mattner was aware of the prescriptive nature of this involvement and suggested that it came at a price, one which might have been regarded as too high for universities. She commented that industry involvement at this level "has resulted in a focus on pre-prescribed procedural outcomes at the expense of assessing the full range of individual’s learning" (Mattner, 1997:21).

However, as McKinnon et al. (2000: 2) commented "benchmarking is as essential in universities as it is in other spheres. They need reference points for good practice and for ways of improving their functioning". Universities have always had standards but these have often seemed arbitrary and at the discretion of the lecturer concerned, rather than transparent and elucidated for all to see.

6.4 TAFE concerns with articulation

TAFE institutions did not have the same issues with articulation and RPL that
dominated university considerations. The intersectoral relationship between vocational education and tertiary education and the need for TAFE not to become subservient to universities, was of primary concern to TAFE (ANTA, National Strategy: 3). Concern would have been expressed over the OTFE’s assertion that "The TAFE environment assists students to prepare for higher education, including to compensate for any weaknesses in learning in particular fields." (OTFE, pathways and issues, (online), 2001:6). TAFE did not want to be regarded as merely a ‘bridging’ to university. The Nelson Report’s view that any overlap of TAFE and university courses “does not diminish the core functions of either TAFE or universities” (The Nelson Report, 1998: 1), may no longer apply. Though TAFE was the major VET player it did not have a monopoly (The Nelson Report, 1998) and conflict between the two sectors was not unexpected.

The literature focus has been heavily directed towards dealing with the articulation from TAFE to university and the problems ensuing for universities, but Golding et al. (1996) were concerned that these pathways were not well used. The AVCC participated in national TAFE-University credit transfer schemes that were piloted from 1993 –1996. These had become mainstreamed in a growing range of fields of study with thirty-six universities offering credit transfer arrangements in 1998 (AVCC submission, 1998).

Articulation was gaining recognition as a two-way movement, not the one way assumed to be the case. Students did go from university to TAFE. The AVCC acknowledged that 'there is a clear trend of university graduates moving from
university to TAFE after graduation to gain end on 'know how' "(AVCC submission, 1998:5). The OTFE of Victoria commented that, "it is notable that both in multi-sector institutions and in large multi-campus universities the provision of articulated courses ... is growing" (OTFE, pathways and issues, (online) 2001:6).

As this study has discovered, TAFE has been the recipient of many of the program and policy changes that have emerged from the reform agenda. Another concern was for the haste with which these changes had been introduced and the difficulties encountered while establishing appropriate training programs. Because, as Collins stated (1993b: 10) "without clearly defined training outcomes (competencies) and reporting of student performance in terms of those competencies, graduates from a program cannot arrange credit transfer into other courses".

One of the biggest issues for TAFE in the articulation debate must have been the frustration with universities that were reluctant to accept TAFE qualifications and competency standards. The OTFE identified a number of issues that needed to be addressed for 'seamless pathways' to become successful avenues for learning.

Three issues (OTFE, pathways and issues, (online) 2001: 2) important to this study were:

1. Movement of TAFE graduates into higher education is currently hampered by lack of adequate and consistent credit recognition arrangements
2. The current course-by-course framework is partial and improvised

3. Universities for their part are mixed in their attitudes to TAFE students

Universities were not willing associates. "Some questioned student 'quality'...

...while others accepted a role to adapt to new populations through bridging

programs and greater supervision" (OTFE, pathways and issues, (online) 2001:

4). The OTFE also found that "some transition to higher education occurs on the

basis of prior studies, relevant professional experience or industrial experience -

for advanced standing".

In conjunction with the introduction of the AQF was the establishment of the AQF

advisory board, comprising representatives of all sectors including industry. This

suggested that the higher education sector had been included but also hinted at

the AQFAB having control over academic programs as they stated:

In the context of the AQF being fundamental to the establishment of

a seamless post-secondary education system, the AQFAB must have

the authority to ensure the overall effective operation of the

framework, particularly in ensuring that seamless pathways between

qualifications are established.

(ANTA, 1997: 23)

6.5 Seamless education

Recent developments in articulation appear to indicate a preference for what has

been termed ‘seamless education’. According to the OTFE of Victoria, “A

seamless system caters for the diverse learning needs of individuals and
recognises achievement." (OTFE principles, 2001:1) OTFE developed four ‘principles of learning’:

1. avoiding duplication
2. providing information
3. acknowledging diversity
4. promoting flexibility

Success would require considerable “collaboration and planning between sectors and institutions” (OTFE principles, (online) 2001:1).

The West Report proposed seamless funding to “minimise potential for student’s choices to be distorted by artificial administrative boundaries between vocational education and training providers and higher education institutions” (The West Report, 1998:11).

ANTA was in favour of “the development of a seamless post-secondary system” (ANTA, 1997: 3) but was concerned that the issues had been examined from primarily the higher education perspective. ANTA supported the concept of universal entitlement to post-secondary education through the seamless pathways, which enabled greater choice and flexibility. But with talk of seamlessness, there was a need to be mindful of the distinctive characteristics of both sectors, as neither sector wanted to be overtaken or subsumed by the other.
6.6 Concluding comments

What has become apparent is the lack of RPL in an application that should have been one of its primary supporters. With the evolution of articulation, even though its initial formalisation was to have included RPL we have seen that this has not been the case. Rather, the process of articulation has reverted to 'credit transfer', to the acceptance of only formal study for transition from one post-secondary sector to the other. While articulation from TAFE to university and vice versa is gaining credibility, RPL does not feature in these arrangements.

Cynically, Golding et al. suggested that credit transfer was used as a "signifier of articulation and of public accountability rather than playing an actual function in the widespread granting of credit" (1996: 37). Perhaps this cynicism is well founded. Universities generally, have remained steadfast in their determination not to succumb to pressures to relinquish some of their autonomy and accommodate competency-based training.

Gay and Wilson assert that the AQF "supports flexible education and training pathways between schools, TAFE institutions, private training institutions, universities, training in the workplace and lifelong experience" (AQFAB: 3 cited by Gay and Wilson, 1997:2). But where is the evidence to support this claim? The developments in articulation indicated in my study confirm Ramsay et al.'s
summation that, "significant progress has been made in the area of credit
transfer, and to a lesser extent RPL, since the White Paper of 1988" (1997:7).

While some articulation arrangements between individual universities and TAFE
colleges have been made, all institutions will need to provide a greater range of
articulation pathways if the notion of seamless pathways is to succeed. The RPL
principles of access, fairness and social justice and the continuance of the
economic imperatives of efficiency and effectiveness might empower
governments and students to demand it. But sadly, it seems, RPL will not be
included in these developments.
Chapter 7

Conclusions

7.1 Summary of findings

This study began from a desire to understand the concept of RPL and its applicability in the post-secondary sector. As a university student and TAFE lecturer, I was interested in examining RPL within these two sectors. I believed that RPL had an important future role in education and was interested to investigate it further.

Delving into the historical foundations of RPL it became clear that the United States had had a strong influence on the initial development - especially in shaping early developments in England and Canada. The Australian model revealed striking similarities to the English model. Interestingly the South African RPL process adopted aspects of the Australian model. Indeed it may be that the ‘Americanisation’ of RPL has been one of its drawbacks in Australia, for many Australian educationalists have been wary and reluctant to follow American trends in education.

History revealed that RPL has had both economic and social derivatives and imperatives. Australian industry in the 1980s recognised that there was a need for a more skilled workforce. The reskilling of the workforce and the recognition of
skills already possessed were necessary for Australian industry to compete on a global scale. Many workers had skills that were formally unrecognised. RPL could produce an increase in pay for the worker and economic benefits for industry. Yet, while this concept was intended as a tool for industry, RPL also had a broader reach into training and education. This potential for a wider application of RPL was acknowledged as early as 1993 by Toop and Burleigh, when they first coined the phrase, “RPL is an evolving concept” (1993:17).

Educational assumptions grew around this concept, many of which were valid. RPL was seen to be relevant to lifelong and mature age learning as well as having social justice benefits. Once RPL was endorsed as a principle of Competency Based Training in the TAFE sector, definitions, policies and practices were developed throughout the sector. But these developments were not universal. They tended to be parochial and this led to a range of differing perceptions within the sector. While some State governing TAFE bodies, such as those of NSW TAFE and Queensland TAFE, produced definitions and policies that were integrated state-wide, other States left these decisions to individual TAFE colleges. Universities, while provided with lukewarm AVCC guidelines, chose their own individual pathways. Some, such as Bond University, chose not to adopt RPL while others, such as Monash University, developed comprehensive documents.
Within the TAFE sector, there was still disagreement about whether to use the term RPL or RCC. The university sector regarded the term RCC as totally unacceptable. No universally accepted definition of RPL was found in this study, in either sector. This is an area that could be the subject of further research and development.

As part of the vocational training system, NOOSR (the National Office for Overseas Skills Recognition), has been required to assess the professional qualifications of immigrants who wanted their skills recognised as equivalent to an Australian qualification. This forced NOOSR to develop standards of competency for many professions. NOOSR was in fact, applying and validating the principles of vocational RPL to university standards. Through this avenue, universities gradually began to address competency and experience as aspects of professional learning at the post-graduate level. RPL was slowly gaining credence as a consideration for post-graduate study. While university academics indicated some willingness to consider RPL at the post graduate level, its introduction into the under-graduate arena was either slow or non-existent.

From this study there are five broad conclusions that can be reached which provide some understanding of why this concept, to date has not developed further, particularly in the university sector.
1. The educational changes that occurred in the post secondary sector were led by government and industry with TAFE sector cooperation. The lack of inclusion of the university sector in these developments was a major barrier to the acceptance of the changes which included the acceptance of RPL. Universities were generally unwilling to adopt and implement a program into which they had had no developmental input or control.

2. The implementation of Competency-Based Training as the focus of TAFE learning and training, of which RPL is one principle, was of major concern to universities. The acceptance of competency (which most university academics regarded as bringing learning down to the ‘lowest common denominator’ or most basic level) as the only standard of assessment with no recognition of graduations in skill was totally unacceptable to the university sector. Universities were not convinced that a ‘basic pass’ standard from TAFE was sufficient for university level learning. Nor could it be seen as equivalent to university learning.

3. The definitions given for RPL were many and varied both within and between sectors. The TAFE sector did not possess a uniform definition of the concept, allowing for the differences found at both State and college level. The university arena was worse, not only because autonomy allowed greater variations, but also due to the fact that individual faculties within universities could determine individual departmental RPL policy. Both sectors were open to criticism for this lack of clarity.
4. Articulation, or seamless education, has often been advocated as the way to promote equity and access in education by allowing all students the opportunity to choose their pathway and gain recognition of prior learning. But this study reveals that the prior learning preferred by educators for seamless movement is still credential study (i.e. credit transfer on the basis of prior study only). Prior learning of a ‘non-formal’ nature is still not generally admissible in these deliberations.

5. Clearly, RPL is not a concept that has been universally embraced. Much documentation reveals mere lip service or no service. This is more commonly the case in the university sector where RPL tends to be interpreted as non-formal learning, rather than as all previous learning. Apart from workplace learning, which is slowly gaining credence, no other form of un-credentialled learning seems to be acceptable within this university perspective. The fact that not all universities were prepared to consider RPL created additional problems for those seeking to implement this concept.

The broad picture which emerges here, is one of movement away from the formalising of RPL and the retention of, or return to, the ‘status quo’. RPL has always been available in an ad hoc way in Australian universities and TAFE colleges if the student chose to seek it. Formal application for RPL has been available for TAFE students since its inception in the 1990s, but this process has been tedious and off-putting. RPL, as a formal process, has also become
available at some universities at the post-graduate level (for example, Murdoch University), but not at the undergraduate level.

7.2 Future trends and issues involving RPL

7.2.1 The impact of globalisation

Recent world trends have encouraged universities to think on a global scale with universities such as Curtin (WA) and Monash (Vic) developing campuses in other countries, particularly in the Asian region. Market forces are once again dictating the direction for the post-secondary education sector. Institutions have become attuned to marketing initiatives and competition, not only with each other, but also internationally in an effort to retain or gain funding. Some consider that in the process the integrity of the tertiary institution has suffered. Both sectors have been encouraged to broaden their student base and accept fee-paying international students. There is already concern that Australian students might be denied places to make space for these fee-paying students. What then, of the often underprivileged Australian students applying for RPL?

7.2.2 Recovery of RPL costs

Central to RPL’s acceptance and promotion is the issue of ‘who pays’? Granting of RPL usually reduces a university’s income, depending upon the number of units, or years of a course, for which RPL is granted. Some level of
cost recovery is necessary for RPL to continue, but, given the different attitudes to RPL within this post-secondary sector, unanimous agreement cannot be expected. One option here is to change the law that makes it unlawful for universities to charge a fee for RPL. If RPL was to become a fee paying service then losses previously incurred through this process would be recouped in the process itself. West Coast College of TAFE (WA) charges the same fee for attending a module as it does for an RPL application for the same module. In this way there are no financial losses to the college or the student. The primary benefit of RPL to the student then becomes one of time.

7.2.3 A unified approach to RPL

Recent reviews into education and training, including the Nelson Report (1998), have confirmed that the university and TAFE sectors have, in many ways, become similar. While neither sector is happy with this apparent duplication it does suggest that there is some uniformity occurring within the post-secondary sector. Based on this, then, is a National System possible for RPL? A ‘Unified National System’ exists within the university sector, but this is for the purpose of funding, rather than the practice of RPL. My interview research suggests that a unified system for RPL is not considered possible or important enough by either sector.
Why is RPL not considered important enough? Most Universities have been united in their determination to recognise credentialed learning only and appear to have deliberately side-lined other RPL options. ANTA has enforced, nationally, the adoption of RPL by the TAFE sector but the documents supplied for this study have revealed that there is little national consistency in policy or process. In fact, many TAFE colleges have been reluctant to accept student results from other states. The new TAFE National Training Packages have been compelled to specify, in writing, that competency granted to a student in one state must be accepted Australia-wide. By association, this too, should apply to RPL granted anywhere in Australia.

7.2.4 VET in secondary schools

There is much debate within education circles concerning the change in Australia’s long-established attitudes over the hierarchy and value of knowledge. The primary purpose of education has become increasingly directed towards preparing the student for work. The lack of cooperation by the university sector has resulted in ANTA increasing the promotion of Vocational Education and Training initiatives, including RPL, in secondary schools. Many have now included TAFE options in their year eleven and twelve programs.

This development has been of interest to ANTA since 1988, when the then CEO of ANTA, Terry Moran, commented that the links, “with schools are more
important than those with higher education” (ANTA, 1988-2000, online). The focus has turned to the school to TAFE transition, with less interest in the university sector. It has been suggested that RPL may be more appropriate for a range of upper secondary school VET subjects, at TAFE level.

### 7.2.5 The role of NOOSR

NOOSR was instrumental in the development of professional RPL. International students will want RPL opportunities too and NOOSR is in the ideal position to assist here, having already determined professional competencies for the professions. A similar process to determine undergraduate competency equivalence could also be achieved. Why should this work not be used for Australian students too, to determine undergraduate RPL?

### 7.2.6 Credit transfer as the future of RPL

When considering the future of RPL, there are options suggested by some in the literature, but virtually all of these focus on the gaining of credit for previous formal study not for learning through experience. Credit transfer may be the only form of RPL to continue to evolve. One option advocated by Golding et al. (1996) is that provision for credit arrangements be made for generic skills. Universities find it more difficult to assess these skills but the TAFE national modules have already identified a range of generic skills, in the human services area for
example. If universities, TAFE colleges and industry could collaborate on the elements required to be learnt in TAFE modules then credit for articulation purposes could result in something closer to the ideal of 'seamless' education.

Another option, for formal credit transfer as RPL, is the 'Credit Bank', similar to that developed in Canada. The problem then to be negotiated is who decides what is included in this 'bank' and what level of credit is universally acceptable.

7.3 Concluding comments

When I commenced this research, it was unclear where it would end and I was stunned to discover that with articulation, the concept of RPL, which addressed both formal and non-formal learning, was unlikely to be continued. It was disappointing to discover that the only form of RPL endorsed through articulation was that of formal learning, otherwise known as credit transfer. The concept of RPL, which I consider to represent sound educational practice, is clearly not welcomed in the formal education sector.

While some educators may be coming to terms with the view that RPL concerns learning from experience and that informal learning can be equated with formal learning there is no consistency in approach. Some form of national consistency in the adoption and use of RPL is necessary to ensure equity and consistency. At present, RPL is not available at many university campuses and where it is
available; the processes are so arduous as to render it a daunting task for a student to tackle. Reluctantly, perhaps, most will choose to attend the classes instead. The present Federal Minister for Education Brendan Nelson, as a humble backbencher saw this occurring in 1998 and commented that:

*Of those students who had sought recognition of prior learning, many had formed negative impressions of the administrative process and the expense of trying to obtain it. It is not unreasonable for them to conclude that the arrangements exist to discourage, rather than encourage, articulation between the sectors.*

(Nelson, 1998: 72)

‘Attitude’ is a major barrier to the concept of RPL. Will a different set of RPL principles be needed to accommodate basic differences of outlook? TAFE and university do not have the same view of RPL. For TAFE it is integral to the competency-based approach now taken towards education and training. But universities see it as an intrusion, an imposition and an attempt by others to infiltrate and influence what are traditional, autonomous policies and practices.

The range of terms and practices evident in my study has revealed a lack of agreement within and between institutions in both sectors with regard to RPL. Neither the university nor TAFE sector can claim to be free of doubt about their own sector and its future directions, including the evolution of RPL. This is evident in the confusion that surrounds these two areas of learning.

In my assessment, RPL, excluding credit transfer, seems unlikely to evolve further in this environment. It has plateaued. It seems likely that economic imperatives, globalization and the ‘bottom line’ will ensure that RPL remains
largely ‘sidelined’. However, RPL will probably be available to some of those proactive students, who actively seek it.

In the Nelson Report of 1998, Brendan Nelson argued that all governments, Federal, State and Territory, had a vested interest in ensuring that articulation was a more effective and efficient process. In his Report he also referred to the notion that people who already knew and hence could do, units of a course, should not be wasting time or resources being taught again.

**Without clear, consistent and equitable articulation arrangements Governments will fund places for, and pay support to, students who already know what they are being taught and who could otherwise complete their desired qualification earlier. Sub-optimal articulation arrangements waste public and private resources and impose high opportunity costs on students.**

(Nelson, 1998 66)

In my study of the evolution of RPL, the primary research question was, ‘What form and direction will and should the future of RPL take?’

The university reform agenda has slowed since the heroic days of labor government in the late 1980s (Richardson, 2002). The evolution of RPL has been a victim of this lack of momentum. Will universities only tackle RPL if it is forced on them, as was the case with the TAFE adoption of RPL? Recently Brendan Nelson, the Chairperson of the 1998 Nelson Report, became the Federal Minister for Education, Science and Training. In his new capacity as Minister, he has a prominent role in the development of education and training in this country.
As Federal Minister, Brendan Nelson now has the power to help or hinder the future of RPL. As part of his commitment to education reform, particularly that of higher education, will he maintain the position he espoused in 1998 and insist on the optimisation of articulation using the full range of RPL options including non-formal learning, or will the concept of RPL become lost, subsumed, overtaken by expediency and a change in priorities? The future is in his hands.
Postscript:
In August, 2002, an issues paper of particular interest and relevance to this study was released by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training. Entitled, ‘Varieties of learning: the interface between higher education and vocational education and training’, it followed the Ministerial discussion paper ‘Higher Education at the Crossroads’, as one of a series of issues papers to focus public debate on a range of important areas of higher education reform.

Dealing with the issues of articulation, credit transfer and cross sectoral links between the university and VET sectors, this issues paper proposes that these approaches represent a growing imperative for education reform. It confirms that the original purposes of education and training reform, and RPL as part of that reform are still present in 2002. Confusion about RPL is recognised in this paper as a contributor to the ad hoc developments of RPL and in a climate of increasing collaboration between sectors, the writers put forward the premise that some form of recognition of prior learning must become part of a national system.

My research, tracing the development of RPL from its origins to the present, reveals that there are very significant barriers to be overcome, for RPL to be acceptable to both the university and TAFE sectors, and that the only present forms of Recognition of Prior Learning are credit transfer and articulation. It is disappointing to note that only recognition of prior study is under consideration in these reforms.

It is noteworthy that the Australian Quality Framework Advisory Board (AQFAB) is to commission a research project to “survey current recognition of prior learning policy and practice within and across the sectors” (DEST, 2002:9), which is what this study set out to do three years ago.
Appendix 1

Universities from which RPL documentation was requested

| Universities                                           | Respondents | *
|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---
| Catholic University (Christ Campus)                    |             |   
| (Signadou Campus)                                      | *           |   
| Edith Cowan University                                 | *           |   
| University of Canberra                                 |             |   
| Central Queensland University                          |             |   
| Flinders University                                    | *           |   
| University of Adelaide                                 |             |   
| University of Ballarat                                 |             |   
| Deakin University (Geelong)                            | *           |   
| Charles Sturt University                               | *           |   
| Bond University                                         | *           |   
| Griffith University                                    | *           |   
| James Cook University                                  |             |   
| Monash University                                       | *           |   
| Northern Territory University                          |             |   
| Macquarie University                                   |             |   
| Latrobe University                                     |             |   
| Queensland University of Technology                    |             |   
| Australian National University                         |             |   
| Curtin University (online)                             |             |   
| University of Sydney                                   |             |   
| University of Technology Sydney                        |             |   
| University of Western Sydney                           |             |   
| Victorian University of Technology                     | *           |   
| University of Tasmania                                 |             |   
| University of Western Australia                        | *           |   
| Southern Cross University                              |             |   
| University of Wollongong [online]                      | *           |   
| University of Melbourne                                |             |   

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<td>University of Southern Queensland</td>
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<td>Murdoch University</td>
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22/39
Appendix 2

TAFE colleges from which RPL documentation was requested

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TAFE Colleges and Institutions</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
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<td>Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE</td>
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<td>South East Metropolitan College of TAFE</td>
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<td>Northern Territory Rural College</td>
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<td>Emerald Agricultural College</td>
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<td>South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE (Granville)</td>
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Appendix 3

106 Brompton Rd
Wembley Downs
Perth, 6019
WA.

Attention: RPL officer

Dear Sir/Madam

Subject: Recognition of Prior Learning

My name is Libbie Doddrell and I am an MED (Honours) student at Murdoch University in Perth, WA.

My Honours dissertation involves the present status of Recognition of Prior Learning. The subject of my dissertation is: "The clarification and operationalisation of the concept of RPL, including a comparison of the problems and procedures associated with learning through general experience and credentialled leaning."

I am presently at the stage of data collection and am interested to collect documents on RPL from a large range of Universities and TAFE colleges throughout Australia. As RPL is part of the National Agenda it is necessary for my study to have a broad base

I would really appreciate your cooperation in this task. It would assist me greatly if you could supply me with any available documents on your college's development and use of RPL and credit transfer. Any other information that you consider may be relevant or of interest to my study would also be appreciated.

My mailing address is above, but I am also available via email on: doddrell@iinet.net.au.

I am studying under the supervision of Professor Brian Hill, of the School of Education. If you would like further information concerning my study, please contact either Professor Hill or myself. You may wish to contact Professor Hill by e-mail on hill@central.murdoch.edu.au.

Yours sincerely,

Libbie Doddrell
Appendix 4

Studies Commissioned by Government Departments:

Australian National Training Authority (ANTA)

(March 1994) Description of the National Training Reform Agenda.


(May 1998) The ABC of Vocational Education and Training

Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee (AVCC)

(Dec 1993) Credit Transfer Principles and Guidelines on Recognition of Prior Learning

(Jan 1994) Recognition of Prior Learning in Australian Universities: Credit Transfer Project


Department of Employment Education and Training (DEET)


DEET (1994) Recognition of Prior Learning in Australian Universities: Australian vice-chancellors’ committee, credit transfer project.

National Board of Employment Education and Training (NBEET)


**House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training.**

(The Nelson Report)

**National Training Board (NTB)**


Appendix 5

Studies commissioned by State Government Departments

Western Australia:


South Australia:


Victoria:

Appendix 6

**OECD Education Policy**

In summary, in the 1989 OECD document the following educational changes are suggested:

- Skills are to be conceptualised as competencies;
- Competencies are to be work-related, documented and transferable and nationally recognised,
- Mechanical ability to use technology is to be preferred to complex knowledge or understanding;
- Skills training is to be paid for by enterprises and individuals; and
- Outcomes such as positive attitudes to innovation, teamwork, and productivity are to be given priority

(Soucek in Kenway, 1994: 66)
Appendix 7

The Finn and Mayer Competencies

The Finn Committee’s key areas of competence (1991):
Intended for use as a framework of employment-related competencies

- Language and communication
- Mathematics
- Scientific and technological understanding
- Cultural understanding
- Problem solving
- Personal and interpersonal characteristics

(Borthwick in Collins, 1993: 24)

The 7 key competencies proposed by the Mayer Committee (1992):

- Collecting, analysing and organising information
- Communicating ideas and information
- Planning and organising activities
- Working with others and in teams
- Using mathematical ideas and techniques
- Solving problems
- Using technology.

(Randall, in Collins, 1993: 51)
Appendix 8

The NFTROT principles for RPL and Credit Transfer
(Hawke and McDonald, 1996:26-27)

Prior Learning

Principle 1: Competence
The recognition of prior learning will focus on the competencies a person has acquired as a result of both formal and informal training and experience - not how, when or where the learning occurred.

Principle 2: Commitment
It is important that training providers have a commitment to recognising the prior learning of individuals.

Principle 3: Access
Every individual must have his or her prior learning recognised.

Principle 4: Fairness
All participants must be confident that the recognition of prior learning process is fair.

Principle 5: Support
Individuals must be given adequate support.

Credit transfer:

Principle 1: The integrity of accredited courses.
To preserve the integrity of courses, credit must only be awarded where there is a parity of training outcomes.

Principle 2: Credit transfer shall aim to provide the maximum legitimate credit. This promotes access and helps students complete in less time and without repetition.

Principle 3: The whole training program, or an appreciable part of it.
Credit transfer must consider the whole set of competencies learned in a training program.

Principle 4: Adequate reporting.
Credit transfer will only be awarded if there is documentation that a student's competency level matches the competency requirements of a training program.

Principle 5: Duration
Credit transfer is valid for the life of the accredited course.
Appendix 9

The Rumsey Review of NFROT

The key findings were:
- Significant inconsistencies existed between States and Territories
- Expectation of reciprocity of recognition had not been met
- Information on NFROT was not widely available
- The absence of a competency-bases system of qualification created difficulties
- The slow progress on national competency standards inhibited course development

The report recommended:
- A number of changes to be made to various of the NFROT principles
- Action to be taken to clearly define and clarify all NFROT principles
- Staff of accreditation authorities and board members should receive adequate training on NFROT and its implications
- Recognition authorities should agree on a minimum set of resource requirement specifications
- Regular meetings of recognition authorities should occur to deal with inconsistencies.
- A strategic approach be taken to identifying priority areas of course development
- Policies linking NFROT and industry-based recognition arrangements be developed
- Improve information services about NFROT
- A policy on inclusion of short courses within NFROT should be agreed
- A long-term strategy for managing and monitoring NFROT be considered.

(Hawke and McDonald, 1996: 28-29)
Appendix 10

University Definitions

AVCC (1993) CASMAC credit transfer project glossary:

RPL is recognition granted for any form of knowledge and/or skills acquired through work or life experience as well as through studies in courses credentialled by providers other than Australian universities or TAFE.

Credit transfer is the granting of recognition by universities for previous study and/or experience in the form of exemption from certain course requirements. This term tends to be used interchangeably in Australian universities with the terms Advanced standing and/or status.

Monash University, Faculty of Education. Learning from Experience: a credit transfer handbook for students and selection officers, p7.
Quotes the Australian Credit Transfer Agency’s definition of RPL as:
An assessment of the learning which a student may have gained from his/her previous study and/or work experience, to establish whether this learning is equivalent to that which might have been gained in the university course in which he/she wishes to enroll.

University of Sydney, graduate division of the Faculty of education notes
Recognition of Workplace Learning- RWL —evidence of professional learning and professional participation as well as a level of critical reflection... from a portfolio of previous work up to 6 yrs old.

RPL is the process of acknowledging skills and knowledge already acquired by a person from work and/or life experience, or from previous study.

Edith Cowan University: Academic Services: Exemptions/Credit Transfer/Advanced Standing. Definition of terms.
http://www.cowan.edu.au/acaserv/exempt.html (7.11.98)
RPL reflects a recognition of 'informal' learning, that is, knowledge, skills, attitudes and or attributes which have been acquired through learning experience other than in a course offered by an Australian University or TAFE.
University of South Australia, policy and guidelines, 1995:164
RPL is recognition of what individuals know or can do, before undertaking a task, job, or course of study or training, wherever and however they may have acquired the knowledge/skills.

Griffith University: Credit Transfer Policy.
http://qu.edu.au/una/aa/ppm/pae/content/Credit_Policy.html (6 8.99)
The Credit transfer policy document refers to recognition of prior learning as “formal study undertaken in recognised tertiary institutions… and may extend under certain conditions to programs provided by professional bodies and… demonstrable expertise and relevant experiences
Appendix 11

**TAFE Definitions**

**ANTA definition — Crothers, 1996, p1**
RPL refers to the acknowledgment of skills and knowledge held as a result of formal and informal training, work experience and/or life experience.

**National Framework for the Recognition of Training: definition of RPL, from Barrier Reef College of TAFE**
Recognition of prior learning refers to the acknowledgment of skills and knowledge held as a result of formal training, work experience and/or life experience.

**TASTA policy guidelines, 1993, p2**
RPL refers to the acknowledgment of skills and knowledge, expressed as competencies, held as a result of formal and informal training.

**TASTA 1994 guidelines**
Credit transfer is the acknowledgment of skills gained through formal accredited training which has a predetermined credit value in relation to other structured and accredited training. It is the granting of predetermined credit value to formal studies, done in a different course or from another institution.

RPL is the acknowledgment of the full range if an individual’s skills and knowledge – irrespective of how it has been acquired.

**Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE. Recognition of Prior Learning, D9, p5. (Vic)**
RPL refers to determination on an individual basis of the competencies obtained by a person through previous formal or informal training, work experience and/or life experience.

**Goulburn-Ovens Institute of TAFE. Policy relating to the recognition of prior learning, 1994, p1. (Vic)**
The broad definition of RPL is the acknowledgment of skills and knowledge obtained through formal/informal training, work and/or life experience.

RPL refers to the acknowledgment of skills and knowledge held as a result of formal training, work experience and/or life experience. (NFROT definition)
Wide Bay Institute of TAFE (Bundaberg, QLD)
RPL is the determination, on an individual basis, of the competencies obtained by a learner through previous training, work experience and/or life experience and the advanced standing the learner is entitled to as a result of these competencies.

Emerald Agricultural College. Recognition of Prior Learning: application package, p1 (QLD)
RPL is the formal acknowledgment of skills, knowledge and competencies obtained through formal and informal training and education, work and life experience

The formal acknowledgment of skills, knowledge and competencies obtained through formal and informal training and education, work experience and life experience against learning outcomes in CBT courses.

The term recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is used here to also include Recognition of Current Competencies (RCC). It is recognition based on training, work and life experiences not recognised in the transfer of result or credit transfer categories

Recognition of Prior Learning: information for applicants, 1998, pamphlet. Credit for skills and knowledge you already have e and can currently demonstrate.

Spencer Institute of TAFE. Recognition of Prior Learning: application form, p1. (SA)
The process of assessing the appropriate credit to be given to a student who can demonstrate has previously acquired, by some means, skills and knowledge relevant to a particular DETAFE course.

South East Institute of TAFE. A step by step guide for students, 1996, p1. (SA)
RPL is the advanced standing the learner is entitled to as a result of previous formal training, work experience and/or life experience.

Adelaide Institute of TAFE. Department of Business: Application for Recognition of Prior Learning.
RPL involves receiving credit for competency achieved outside of formally assessed studies. It could involve on or off-the-job training, work experience, or
life skills where you have reached the standard required for the award you are studying.


Midland College of TAFE. Information booklet, 1997, p (WA)  
RPL is the process whereby a person’s skills can be formally assessed and acknowledged irrespective of where or how they were acquired. It recognises that many people acquire skills not only through schools and training centres but often, also through work and life experiences.

West Coast College of TAFE. Recognition of Prior Learning: information booklet, 1998, p2. (WA)  
RPL is a process whereby the skills you have acquired from life, work experience, and from formal and informal training can be formally acknowledged, irrespective of where or how they were acquired.

South West Regional College of TAFE. Recognition of Current Competencies: client information, 1998, p1. (WA)  
RCC – recognises what you have already learned from other courses, from life experiences, from work experiences and measures it against the module or course for which you are applying for recognition.
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