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Final Report

RPL and Mature Age Job Seekers:

Stage One

A survey of providers of training & labour market programs to mature age job seekers

Stage Two

Case studies

Research Report November 2004

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Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACE	Adult and Community Education
ALA	Adult Learning Australia
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
APEL	Accreditation of prior Experiential Learning
AQF	Australian Qualification Framework
AQTF	Australian Quality Training Framework
AQFAB	Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board
CEAP	Community Employment Assistance Program
CTP	Community Training Partnerships
CJP	Community Jobs Plan
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training
DET	Department of Employment & Training- Queensland
HTA	Hospitality & Tourism Association
LMP	Labour Market Programs
MCC	Multicultural Centre
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NTQC	National Training Quality Council
QWT	Queenslanders Working Together
RCC	Recognition of Current Competencies
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VSASA	Veterans Support & Advocacy Service Australia Inc

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1.1 Executive Summary

Background

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) has funded this research under an Innovative Research grant program. The research focus reflects ALA's commitment to investigating ways to re-engage mature age job seekers in learning and the promotion of lifelong learning in general. The research compliments existing ALA research into the development of an Individual Learning Audit Process to assist mature age job seekers make productive learning choices (Cross & Brennan, 2003).

The research involved the collection of data on recognition of prior learning (RPL) practice from providers of labour market programs (LMP) for mature age job seekers within the state of Queensland. The research was conducted using a combination of quantitative (telephone survey) and qualitative (case studies) research methods. The study investigated issues relating to current RPL practice and the potential for innovative RPL models and practice for mature age job seekers.

Since its inception, RPL has carried with it the promise and potential for recognising the life and work experience of those who have been marginalised from formal learning. In particular it can be said to offer greater possibilities for mature age jobseekers, who have accumulated a wealth of life and work experience. Unfortunately, the reality of RPL practice and up take in Australia paints a very different picture. Those most likely to utilise RPL are students who work full time, are established in the workforce and already have significant educational capital to draw from. This research has provided some insights as to why mature age job seekers are not utilising RPL, as it currently practiced through Labour Market Programes in the state of Queensland.

Project focus

The research was focused on the following three areas:

- Explore the current forms of RPL practice and activity within organisations, which provide training & labour market services to mature age job seekers

- Investigate what these organisations perceived to be the key issues and main areas of assistance required of mature age job seekers

- Gauge organisational feedback on the usefulness of current forms of RPL practice for mature age job seekers and to what extent these organisations would be interested in exploring alternate and innovative approaches to RPL

1.2 Key Findings

The key findings are listed below:

- RPL activity in the community based providers of labour market programs involved in this research was generally very low. There were three exceptions to this. Two of these were with LMPs, which had a specific RPL focus and with an RTO, which did not wish to be identified in the research. Case Study One provides a detailed account of one such project.

- The current forms of practice of RPL is largely shaped by the AQTF's Standards and compliance obligations in relation to the offering of RPL by registered training organisations (RTOs). These practices are highly bureaucratic, largely print based with a heavy reliance on the applicants gathering print based evidence which may cover extensive periods of time and past employers, organisations and situations. The model of RPL utilised appears to be a Credentialing Model of RPL which is outcome focused and directly related to assessment or credit exchange. Case Study One offers an alternative approach characterised by high levels of trainee support, flexibility and cultural sensitivity. This approach, although ultimately concerned with a credit outcome, exemplifies features of a Developmental Model of RPL which is more focused on the process.

- RPL as it is currently practiced, is not seen to be relevant to the current needs of mature age job seekers. Especially those who have not been in

the paid workforce for lengthy periods of time and/or those who have not engaged in formal learning for some time. Approaches and practices around RPL which incorporate and attend to issues of low self esteem and confidence, age related negativity, personal development, re-working the self concept and contemporary approaches to job search activities and self marketing would better suit and cater to the intermediate and medium term needs of mature age job seekers.

- The main issues effecting mature age job seekers are lack of confidence and low self esteem along with the effects of negative attitudes of employers to mature age job seekers. This is further compounded by the negative perceptions mature age job seekers have of themselves in terms of their age and employability.

- The main areas of assistance required by mature age job seekers were in the areas of: personal development, peer support, self esteem and self confidence and job search assistance. The least required assistance was skill recognition and seeking specific skill training or qualifications. Again, this highlights the fact that for those in transition and / or coming from long periods of not being in the paid workforce, current RPL practice lacks relevancy to their needs. Case Study Three is an example of how an experienced professional employs a set of proven techniques to address these issues. This project uses a holistic and individualised approach to assisting mature age job seekers become not only job ready and employed but also encourages positive self concept and fosters the recognition of prior learning at the levels of self recognition and informal recognition. The project greatly assists its participants translate their life and work experiences into definable and transferable skills and capabilities.

- A majority of the community based providers of labour market programs were interested in exploring alternative approaches to RPL. One organisation (Case Study Two) actually embarked upon the process of adopting an alternate and innovative approach to RPL by incorporating this within the development of a LMP for Mature Age Jobseekers. This involved drawing upon aspects from a new developmental model of RPL

and addressing RPL at three levels: self recognition, informal recognition and formal recognition.

- Non-RTOs are more likely to have relatively higher rates of mature age participation than RTOs. This may in part be attributed to the fact that RTOs are more likely to offer labour market related services to a wider variety of identified disadvantaged groups. However, it may indicate that a less formal learning environment associated with non- accredited learning maybe more attractive to mature age job seekers, especially those who may not have engaged in formal learning for some time. This would be consistent with the findings of the UNE research (Gelade, et al, 2003)

- A majority of the organisations in this research reported much higher rates of participation by female mature age job seekers than male mature age job seekers. This may be explained to some extent by LMPs targeted at women re-entering the workforce however this lower participation rate for mature age men needs further investigation.

Case Studies

Case Study One- Highly flexible and supportive approach to RPL

- This case study was characterised by a very flexible, supportive and yet quality assured approach to RPL. They achieved all this without "lowering the bar", or in other words without compromising the industry standards and accredited curriculum. The key components of the Inner City Hospitality Strategy project were the RTO's (HTA) readiness to collaborate with community based organisations, cultural sensitivity, the organisation's flexibility in course design, delivery methods, assessment methods and the different types and levels of support they provided the trainees. The use of interpreters and a willingness to conduct the training and assessment in several workplaces is an outstanding feature of this project.

Case Study Two – Community partnership & the piloting of an alternative model of RPL

- The Pathways Enterprise Centre was a shining example of what can be achieved through collaborations and partnerships between a wide variety of organisations / stakeholders to achieve a learning and leisure centre for the whole community. This project was initially contacted because of a Retail Training program which attracted large numbers of mature age job seekers. Further investigation found the organisation about to embark upon a new journey through the Pathways Enterprise Centre and a newly funded LMP aimed at Mature Age Job Seekers which would incorporate an alternate approach to RPL. The project has addressed recognition of prior learning at three levels and has drawn from a new developmental model of RPL. At the time of writing this report the projects commencement date had been deferred until early 2005.

Case Study Three – Holistic and individualised approach to self recognition

- Joblink demonstrates the need and effectiveness of a personalised one on one service for mature age jobseekers. The project owes much of its success to the personal and professional attributes, approaches and extensive recruitment knowledge of the project's Coordinator. The project is a proven example of how for many mature age job seekers a personalised service can be the most effective way to manage the transition back into the paid workforce. This project demonstrates the importance of addressing issues relating to the self concept and self recognition and how this can then assist mature age job seekers present and market themselves both verbally and on paper. It fosters a process which counters tendencies of mature age job seekers to de-value their skills and knowledge and turns this into a process of re-valuing and self recognition. The building of self esteem and the assistance given in translating and informally recognising the skills of the clients through a resume compilation process is a key factor in the success of this service. This approach has many common features to a Developmental Model of RPL which uses "rigorous dialogue with a supportive 'outsider'" to assist

RPL applicants engage in a reflective process which ultimately leads to the individual's empowerment and development.

As a result of this research it is recommended that:

- innovative approaches to and alternate models of RPL for mature age job seekers be investigated and explored further. In particular Developmental Models of RPL and approaches to recognition of prior learning which address the three levels of recognition (self, informal and formal).

- the Case Studies be utilised as examples of alternate approaches and innovation in respect to recognition of prior learning for mature age job seekers, through dissemination of the case studied projects activities to other community based organisations which conduct LMPs for this group.

- a network of practitioners from community based organisations and RTOs which are interested in innovative and alternative approaches to RPL for mature age job seekers be established.

- The government departments which fund labour market programs for mature age job seekers be informed of these alternate approaches and models of RPL with the view to broadening perspectives on what constitutes recognition of prior learning and what forms of RPL best suit the current needs of mature age job seekers.

- an awareness campaign aimed at employers which promotes the value of an age-diverse work force be promoted to relevant government bodies, industry organisations and the trade union movement.

2 Background

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) has funded this research under an Innovative Research grant program. The research focus reflects ALA's commitment to investigating ways to re-engage mature age job seekers in learning and the promotion of lifelong learning in general. The research compliments existing ALA research into the development of an Individual Learning Audit Process to assist mature age job seekers make productive learning choices (Cross & Brennan, 2003).
Initially, the research collected data on recognition of prior learning (RPL) practice from providers of labour market programs (LMP) for mature age job seekers within the state of Queensland through a telephone survey. This then developed into a second stage of research, which involved three case studies. All three case studies are very different and showcase outstanding examples of innovation, collaboration, partnerships, and/or effective practice in relation to mature age job seekers and recognition of prior learning.

2.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the survey was to obtain data on RPL activity and practice from a variety of community based providers of LMPs across Queensland and to enquire about the specific issues which pertain to mature age job seekers and the relationship, if any, these had to RPL. The survey also intended to gauge information about the usefulness of current RPL practice to this particular group.

The research not only investigated current RPL practice but also the potential for innovative RPL models and practice. The data from the survey and case studies will provide insights into the issues surrounding the use and non-use of RPL for mature age job seekers with the view to informing more effective practice. The research may be used to assist other organisations by providing examples of different uses, approaches and models of RPL practice. The research attempted to gauge organisational interest in becoming involved in exploring alternative approaches to RPL with particular reference to mature age job seekers.

There is a relative lack or low take up of RPL, especially from mature age job seekers with little post compulsory formal education and training. Yet it is this group of people who have so much to gain from RPL given the years of work and life experience that they can draw from.

Based on recent Australian research and current doctoral research it is the researchers view that the current dominant model of RPL practiced in Australia is not effective in encouraging and promoting RPL for this group of people. The potential of RPL as a mechanism for access and social inclusion, which could be particularly beneficial for mature age job seekers is yet to be realised.

2.1.1 Research Questions

- What are the current forms of practice for RPL within organisations, which provide training & labour market services to mature age job seekers?

- What do the organisations perceive to be the key issues for mature age job seekers?

- What do these organisations perceive to be the key issues for employers in employing mature age job seekers?

- What types of innovative recognition practice would be most likely to be taken up by these organisations?

2.2 Context of RPL in Australia

2.2.1 Definitions of RPL–conceptual confusion

RPL was introduced in Australia as part of a National Qualifications Framework in 1993. It is now part of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) charter and the AQTF Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) delivering accredited training. This involves the mandatory offering of RPL to all applicants on enrolment. There has been much contention over definitions of RPL within and between the different education and training sectors. Recent National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) funded research into RPL and private training providers in the vocational education and training (VET) sector concludes:

> 'In summary, then, there is no clear agreement among writers, researchers and major policy-influencing agencies regarding what RPL is, does or encompasses. Views vary from quite tightly defined notions of RPL as access to a training program or qualification, through to conceptions of RPL as a reflective process that can directly impact on understandings and applications of the learning process, both for learners and trainers.' (Smith 2004, p.11)

The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) provides the following definition of RPL:

> 'Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) means recognition of competencies currently held, regardless of how, when or where the learning occurred. Under the Australian Quality Training Framework, competencies may be attained in a number of ways. This includes through any combination of formal or informal training and education, work experience or general life experience.' (ANTA, 2001, p.9).

For the purposes of this study the focus is on current activity and practice with respect to RPL within community based organisations providing labour market programs to mature age job seekers. As the research will demonstrate not all

these organisations are RTOs. Some are in partnership with RTOs and some do not offer accredited training within the LMP / service.
The main aim of this study is to explore the various issues, concepts and associated practices of RPL as it pertains to a particular group, mature age job seekers.

2.3 Recent Research & Policy Initiatives – RPL

The following three reports have looked specifically at RPL policy and practice in Australia. The first report was commissioned by the Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board (AQFAB) to map RPL policy and practice in Australia, and to develop National Principles and Operational Guidelines for RPL in post-compulsory education and training. This report covers four sectors; higher education (HE); vocational education and training (VET); adult and community education (ACE) and secondary schools. These National Principles and Operational Guidelines for RPL have now been posted on the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) web site.

The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) commissioned the second report. The purpose of this report was to identify and analyse what drives and creates barriers to effective implementation of RPL in the VET sector. It has been used to provide advice to the National Training Quality Council on how to best support RTO's compliance with the Australian Qualifications Training Framework (AQTF) Standards for Registered Training Organisations. The third report provides a strategic response by the Queensland Department of Employment and Training (Qld DET) to the findings of the first two reports. The general consensus in the literature is that RPL has failed to fulfil its promised potential of encouraging traditionally under-represented and disadvantaged groups to access formal education and training. To paraphrase a common theme within the literature, there is a gap between the promise and rhetoric of RPL and the actual reality (Cameron & Miller, 2004b).

The AQFAB and ANTA commissioned reports provide empirical evidence to support this. Both reports concluded that the uptake of RPL was relatively low. The ANTA report found that the major determinant of RPL was AQF level and the second major determinant was age. In other words the higher the AQF level the higher the rate of RPL activity. The highest rates of RPL were for those students in the 25 – 39 year age range. The national aggregate figure for the uptake of

RPL was 4% for 2001 with equity groups having relatively lower rates of RPL uptake.

The AQFAB report reached similar findings with some statistics needing clarification due to complexities involved in data sets and sectors. In 2001 approximately 5% of students studying for a higher education qualification reported that they received RPL, while 8% of those studying a VET qualification reported that they received RPL. This figure includes data for the ACE and VET in school sectors (and was sourced from the ABS SETIT survey). In terms of equity groups students with a disability who received RPL was slightly higher than those without a disability and students from regional areas were more likely to receive RPL than metropolitan based students. Students from non-English speaking backgrounds were far less likely to receive RPL than students from English speaking backgrounds and Indigenous students received about half as much RPL as their non-Indigenous counterparts. Data was not available for students from low socio-economic backgrounds (Wheelahan, et al, 2003, p. 20).

> ‘ Overall, RPL was more likely to be received by older students, and by students who were studying part-time. Students who were working full-time were more likely to receive RPL. Unemployed students received the least RPL and credit transfer. Students who were not in the labour force did not achieve the same level of RPL as did students who were working part-time…those who are mid-career, established in the workforce, older, work full-time, and in associate professional, professional or managerial occupations benefit most from RPL.’ (Wheelahan, et al, 2003, p.20)

The Queensland Department of Employment and Training (DET) has responded to these two reports by developing a framework to address poor recognition of prior learning rates, quality, audit and funding issues, simultaneously. Two recent documents produced by DET expand on this framework:

- *RPL action: Toward more Queenslanders’ skills becoming recognised, recorded and rewarded. A response to the 2003 research into the recognition of prior learning in the vocational education and training sector and proposed national principles and guidelines (2003)*

- *Been there, done that! Let's get moving with Recognition of Prior Learning (2003*

DET claims that by responding to the RPL debate with this newly formulated framework they will aim for a:

> '.. vocational education and training and industry sector that confidently embraces and actively pursues RPL as a critical aspect of the suite of strategies for credentialing and access in lifelong learning and skill formation for the benefit of all Queenslanders' (2003, p. 22)

2.3.1 The National Principles and Operational Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

As a result of the AQFAB commissioned report refereed to in Section 2.3 the AQF Advisory Board developed the National Principles and Operational Guidelines for RPL. They consist of seventeen principles for RPL and operational guidelines to provide advice about RPL at a national level and to guide the four sectors of post compulsory education and training to develop RPL policies and procedures that ensure:

- 'opportunities for Australians to have their non-formal and informal learning recognised and counted towards a qualification;
- diverse and inclusive pathways to lifelong learning;
- consistency in the principles used in implementing RPL within sectors and between sectors; and,
- the quality, integrity and standing of Australian qualifications' (AQFAB, 2004, p. 2)

Several of the National Principles for RPL have direct relevance to the current research and have been listed below:

> '3. RPL is critical to the development of an open, accessible, inclusive, integrated and relevant post-compulsory education and training system, and is a key foundation for lifelong learning policies that encourage individuals to participate in learning pathways, that include formal, non-formal and informal learning;

4. There is no one RPL model that is suitable for all qualifications and all situations. In particular, different sectors give rise to different models. The model of RPL that is implemented must be aligned with the outcomes, goals and objectives of the qualification;

9. RPL assessment should be based on evidence, and should be equitable, culturally inclusive, fair, flexible, valid and reliable;

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

16. Jurisdictions, institutions and providers should include RPL in access strategies for disadvantaged learners who are not in the workforce, or marginally attached to the workforce, and who are not already engaged with studying and training.'
(AQFAB, 2004, p.4)

The National Principles and Operational Guidelines for RPL were endorsed by the AQFAB in June 2004. It is evident from these recent reports that at both a commonwealth and state level there is a commitment to ensuring that RPL is accessed and utilised more effectively than it has since its inception just over a decade ago.

2.4 Recent Calls for Policy Initiatives – Mature Age Job Seekers/Learners

In this section three major reports will be drawn upon to illustrate the recent attention the plight of mature age job seekers and workers are receiving in government discussion and policy documents.

In 2001 the NSW Committee of Ageing compiled a report on mature age unemployment and early retirement in NSW and its implications for policy and practice. The report made a range of recommendations and argued that assistance to mature age job seekers is not as well targeted, as it could be if a more articulated Commonwealth-State policy existed. The report's recommendations address not only issues resulting in inequity and loss of quality of life experienced by mature age job seekers but also seeks to reduce the current costs to governments of supporting mature age workers. The costs associated with the wastage of the expertise and resources of mature aged people are also addressed (Perry & Freeland, 2001, p. 12).

The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) produced a paper late in 2003 titled:

Adult Learning in Australia A consultation paper. You Can Too

This document was initiated by the Minister for Education, Brendan Nelson, as the beginning of a consultation process to promote discussion on adult learning. The paper listed seven key areas for consideration. Many if not all of these key areas were discovered as being characteristic of some of the projects within the current research.

Adult learning: seven key areas for consideration

- Understanding the needs of adult learners
- Building relationships between service providers, employers, government and community
- Promoting the value of adult learning
- Assisting mature age transitions
- Supporting learning in the workplace
- Ensuring access to opportunities
- Engaging communities

(DEST, 2003, p. 3)

The report makes the very pertinent point that;

> 'Overall, adult Australians who grew up in the 1950's and 1960's have lower levels of [educational] attainment – 40% of people aged between 45 and 54 did not complete secondary school. In their youth, work was a more accessible and attractive alternative'
> (DEST, 2003, p. 5)

This has meant that not only are these mature age workers and job seekers disadvantaged in today's labour market but they are also less likely to have engaged in any formal post compulsory education and training.
As part of the strategies for the implementation of the new National Strategy for VET: 2004 – 2010 the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) produced the following report for comment:

Increasing the vocational education and training participation and achievement of mature age workers: Ideas for Action

The paper noted that the proportion of mature age workers in Australia is much lower than in countries like New Zealand and the US and that:

> 'There is a strong case for individuals to extend their working lives in order to maintain their health, wellbeing and financial independence. Whether by choice or necessity, a growing number of mature age people will remain in the workforce into their sixties and beyond.
> Whereas previously Australian workers were encouraged to consider early retirement in their mid-fifties, there is now an imperative for them to be encouraged to remain actively involved in the workforce for as long as possible. Workers who are involuntarily made redundant or who are underemployed need to be assisted to transition into new or greater levels of employment.'
> (ANTA, 2004, p.2)

The paper noted the diversity of the mature age workforce and that certain factors disadvantaged mature age workers in accessing training and employment. These factors being: unemployment or marginal employment, being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island origin, being from a non-English speaking background, living in a regional or remote location or being a person with a disability. This highlights the issues and complexity of what is referred to as multiple or compound disadvantage and what Golding & Volkoff (1998) refer to as the overlapping 'cross-group factors' which act to entrench disadvantage. Drawing upon Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data the report also noted that on average mature age workers were less highly qualified, less likely to have participated in training in the last 12 months when compared to younger people and less likely to intend to study for a qualification in the near future. Of those mature age people who did have qualifications, only a few had obtained new qualifications in the last ten years (ANTA, 2004, p.3).

The report also acknowledges the fact that the mature age, do obtain new knowledge and skills in ways other than by formal learning and there is a need to recognise these other forms of learning.

> 'Mature age workers gain training and skills in diverse ways including formal and informal training opportunities. The VET sector needs to facilitate pathways that enable individuals to move easily between formal and informal training activities' (ANTA, 2004, p. 6).

The paper concludes with five ideas which outline the range of areas in which action might be taken over the timeframe of the National Strategy for VET: 2004 – 2010. The third idea presented refers to making services more 'user-friendly and flexible' and contains suggestions very much in line with the purposes of this research. These include:

- Improve mechanisms for RPL and RCC to ensure they are user-friendly
- Promote ACE as a useful pathway to informal and formal learning
- Strengthen links between VET and informal training (eg. On-the-job training, ACE or community activities)
- Provide and promote 'bite-sized' programs and introduced the idea of a 'skills passport'

(ANTA, 2004)

It can be seen from these three documents that there is a growing concern and acknowledgement within commonwealth and state governments of the need to encourage participation in vocational education and training and adult learning in general by mature age job seekers and workers. The ANTA report makes specific reference to improving RPL processes and promoting informal learning and the ACE sector as valuable pathways to learning.

3 Literature Review

To date there has been very little research and literature which specifically deals with mature age job seekers and RPL. The RPL literature tends to focus on the six designated equity groups identified across the education and training sectors. A lot of the literature pertains to existing students from within either the VET or higher education sectors. The literature relating to mature age job seekers and learners is substantial and again there does not seem to be any literature which specifically deals with the particular focus of this research. As a consequence the literature review has been divided into two main areas. This includes literature and research concerned with RPL and the literature and research focused upon mature age unemployment.

3.1 RPL

The scope of the literature review will be limited to recent research on RPL in Australia with the exception of international literature, which will be drawn upon to explore different models and approaches to RPL.

Much of the Australian literature on RPL focuses on implementation issues in general. There has also been an array of case study research with notable recent contributions focused on the aged care sector (Booth and Roy, 2004), private registered training providers (Smith, 2004) and enterprise-based RTOs (Blom, et al, 2004). During the initial stages of the introduction of RPL in Australia many Australian researchers focused upon the proposed benefits RPL would bring. It has now been just over ten years since RPL was introduced and research is now more focused on whether these benefits have come to fruition (Bowman, et al, 2003; Wheelahan, et al, 2003; Cameron, 2004, Cameron & Miller, 2004b). The general consensus is that RPL has failed to fulfil its promised potential of encouraging traditionally under-represented and disadvantaged groups to access formal education and training. To paraphrase a common theme within the literature, there is a gap between the promise and rhetoric of RPL and the actual reality (Cameron & Miller, 2004b).

Two research reports, which focused on specific VET qualifications (and at similar AQF levels) as many of the LMPs, involved in the research will be discussed to further prove this point. Many of the organisations conducting the

LMPs for mature age job seekers in the research were conducting accredited training in the areas of Commercial Cookery, Hospitality, Aged Care and Retail as part of the LMP.

A Queensland DET report on the Recognition of qualifications through multiple pathways (2003) compiled for the ANTA National Consistency Project found the majority of RTO's did not grant RPL for learners in any unit of competency within the training courses identified (Certificate II in Commercial Cookery, Hospitality Operations, Retail Operations and Clothing Production and Certificate III in Commercial Cookery, Carpentry and Clothing Production). The report concluded that there was a low rate of learner access to RPL within the qualifications examined. The majority of the RTOs did not encourage RPL. Sixty one percent (61%) of RTOs who responded did not grant RPL for learners in any unit of competency. Twenty eight percent of RTOs (28%) granted RPL for more than 10 learners and eighteen percent (18%) granted RPL for 2-5 units of competency. The RTOs reported a range of reasons for not encouraging RPL. Some of these included:

- the belief it was easier and 'better' for learners to revise knowledge and skills than to RPL
- The RTO's RPL evidence structure and pre-RPL information discourages the learner to pursue an RPL pathway
- The learner time needed to satisfy RPL evidence requests.

The report also noted several aspects of the RTO RPL strategies, which were not included. Three of these were:

- A broad range of opportunities to provide evidence verification eg, written, questioning, skill testing, direct referee communication
- A holistic process for mapping learner evidence
- RPL information strategies for learners' past or present employers

(DET, 2003, p. 65)

A review of the quality of training delivery in the Community Services and Health Industry, Aged Care Sector by RTOs in Victoria found that the application of RPL / RCC was relatively rare however two providers used RPL/RCC exclusively as the mechanism for the delivery of Certificate III in Community Services (Hoffman, et al, 2002). This research, along with the reports discussed in

Section 2.3 provide overwhelming evidence of the low utilisation and up take of RPL and provides glimpses as to why this is. The following section will address the perceived barriers to RPL in more detail.

3.1.1 Identified barriers to RPL

The barriers to RPL uptake and reasons for its failure to act as a mechanism for social inclusion are many and varied. This paper will look first at the barriers identified in the research and will then discuss the limitations imposed on approaches to RPL if it is viewed exclusively as a form of assessment before exploring different models and approaches to RPL.

The ANTA commissioned report (referred to in Section 2.3) identified the following barriers to the uptake of RPL:

- Awareness and perception
- Complex processes
- Inadequate support
- Confusing language

(Bowman, et al, 2003, p. 16)

The report concluded that equity group members were more likely to participate in training rather than seek recognition because of the perceived benefits they would gain by actually undertaking the course / training. These benefits include the social dimension of the course itself, a supportive group environment and that the training is seen as a stepping-off point & strategy for building confidence.
The AQFAB report refers to the paradox of RPL when exploring barriers to RPL for disadvantaged groups.

> 'The paradox of RPL is that it is assessing an individual's learning that has occurred mostly *outside* formal education and training, but it requires high levels of knowledge of these formal education and training contexts and the structure of qualifications and language used in education, to prepare a successful RPL application'
> (Wheelahan, et al, 2003, p. 29)

The majority of RPL processes in Australia are cumbersome, bureaucratic, lengthy, predominantly print based and place great demands and expectations upon the applicants. Mattner (1997) described RPL processes as restricting access due to the process being largely print based with exhaustive print based criteria which applicants are required to complete and compile on their own, just to achieve the first stage. He also noted the need to have sufficient English language skills, self-confidence and that the process was not culturally sensitive. Usher (1989) describes accreditation of prior learning (APEL) (Britain's equivalent to RPL) as allowing itself to become ensnared in procedures, which have become a 'restrictive and suffocating strait jacket' instead of a mechanism for access (Usher, 1989, p.79).

The ANTA report recommends:

- greater collaboration between assessors, the community & staff responsible for equity support.
- the use of group processes- a modular approach
- developing & promoting RPL practical case study examples and strategies to encourage more learners to engage with RPL processes

(Bowman, et al, 2003, p. 49)

The Canberra Institute of TAFE offer an RPL Module for students, which is a prime example of the modular approach referred to here.

The Queensland DET report (referred to in Section 2.3) compiled a set of strategic responses. Those most relevant to this discussion can be summarised as:

- Using more client-friendly and less paper-based application processes. Providing alternatives to portfolios, which take a more holistic approach to assessment.
- Using more observation, general questioning & third parties for verification of evidence
- Making RPL an upfront & actively encouraged part of integrated planning & progression for students
- A shift from student-driven to teacher-driven models of RPL

(Qld DET, 2003, p. 2)

Increasing the support to RPL applicants is needed if RPL is to become a mechanism for social inclusion. Students should be supported to learn about and use RPL (Wheelahan, et al, 2003, p. 442).

3.2 Mature Age Job Seekers

There appears to be three main areas of concern / focus in the literature relating to mature age job seekers. As a consequence the literature review has been divided into these three areas: Unemployment (long term, hidden and underemployment); employer attitudes and; training and the mature aged.

> 'Many who lose their jobs and are unable to find re-employment suffer shock, grief, humiliation, loss of confidence and long term adverse effects on their health and wellbeing. Mature age people began their careers at a time when jobs (at least for men) were expected to be permanent and full-time. Many have no recent experience in job seeking and are ill-equipped to do so. The demoralisation and age discrimination they suffer means that their employability depreciates at a rapid rate once unemployed' (Perry & Freeland, 2001, p. 9-10)

3.2.1 Mature age unemployment, (long term, hidden & underemployment)

Paradoxically Queensland employment growth has led the rest of the nation for most of the last decade however its unemployment rate has remained above the national rate. In October 2002 Queenslands unemployment rate was 7.0% while the national rate was 5.9% (DET, 2002). This along with concerns about the far reaching impacts of unemployment especially long term unemployment led to the introduction of the Queensland government's *Breaking the Unemployment Cycle* initiative. The programs under this initiative are those which provided the data sources for the research.

Long term unemployment is on the rise in Australia and particularly affects the mature aged. A report on long term unemployment in Queensland found that 33.7% of Australia's unemployed were long-term unemployed in November of 1998. The incidence of long-term unemployment is higher for the older age groups:

31.8% 25-34 year olds
48.9% 45-54 year olds
55.4% 55-59 year olds
(DETIR, 1999, p. 15)

The report found that they were largely from blue-collar and manufacturing areas, which suggests this is due to trends in displacement from the impacts of globalisation, new technology and restructuring of the economy or off shore relocation. The report investigated the attributes of the pool of long term unemployed and found that the less marketable characteristics (for example, low qualifications, mature age, youth, NESB) combined with 'duration dependence' to produce a self-perpetuating situation whereby the longer you are unemployed the less likely you are to escape to employment (DETIR, 1999, p.4). The report found that those most affected by long term unemployment are generally those who are already most disadvantaged in the community.

The Victorian Office of Post Compulsory Education, Training and Employment funded a report into the labour market and training experiences of mature aged and older people. The report found that there is a growing recognition that mature aged groups endure particular difficulties in today's labour market and have been comparatively neglected in the formulation of key policy. The report's literature review of labour market disadvantage addresses the issues of under-employment, which consists of the expansion of part-time and non-standard employment among the mature aged. It also points to a lesser access to promotional opportunities and training. Hidden unemployment appears comparatively more widespread amongst the mature aged. A large proportion of this appears to be discouraged job-seekers and length of unemployment is a factor. Mature age unemployed are unemployed for longer periods and are over-represented in the long term unemployed (ATEC, 2002, p. 8).

A survey of mature age (40 yrs +) job seekers (N=255) in the Belconnen area of Canberra found that respondents had reasonably high levels of educational attainment and that it was the recency of the educational qualifications that appeared to be related to unemployment rather than the educational level. Barriers to employment were multiple but age was considered the primary barrier. Lack of formally recognised qualifications was also seen as a barrier. Two main areas of concern in the job search process were the making of

applications and the interview. Most respondents felt that technological advances, the computerisation of the workplace and industry restructuring had left them with skills that were no longer relevant to employment. (BEST, 1998, p. 4-5).

VandenHeuvel (1999) uses the ABS definition of discouraged job seekers as 'persons who wanted a job but were not actively looking for a job due to work-related reasons' (1999, p.16). These work-related reasons were reported as the belief that they could not find a job because: they were considered too young or too old by employers; they lacked the necessary education, training, skills & experience; difficulties with language or ethnic background; no available jobs. VandenHeuvel found that:

> '…discouraged job seekers make up a considerably larger percentage of the population of older male workers (55 years and over) than of younger males. For women, the differences by age are even larger, with one in 36 women aged 55 to 59 years, and one in 42 women aged 60 to 64 years classified as discouraged job seekers. As well, unlike their male counterparts, women aged 45 to 54 years old are relatively likely to be among the hidden unemployed.' (1999, p, 16-17)

VandenHeuvel also looked at the incidence of part-time and underemployment and concluded that:

> '…despite generally low underemployment rates for mature age workers, underemployment is clearly an issue for men aged 45 to 54 years……
> In all, the greatest relative growth in underemployment over the past decade was observed for those aged 55 years and over. Although absolute levels of underemployment are still fairly low for these workers, the probability of underemployment doubled for men in this age group and increased by a factor of 1.7 for their female counterparts' (1999, p, 20-21).

3.2.2 Attitudes to mature age job seekers

There is a strong consensus in the literature that, employer attitudes to mature age job seekers is a major barrier to them securing employment. A report by the Access Training and Employment Centre (ATEC) addresses the role of

discrimination- ageism in disadvantaging the matured aged. The report refers to several studies in the area, which demonstrates age is perceived to be the major barrier to employment. Research into employer behaviours, attitude and perceptions is also referred to with both positive and negative perceptions. On a more positive note the report notes several companies who have actively recruited mature age employees. In Australia the Holiday Inn Crown Plaza in NSW, the Advance bank, Telstra, Westpac, Freehills Hollingdale and Page and the Permante Trustee Company are examples of this active mature age recruitment approach (ATEC, 2002, p. 11)

Research undertaken by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services into long term strategies to address Australia's aging population referred to the negative attitudes of employers to mature age people and mature age people on income support themselves. The research noted a high level of pessimism among mature age people in reference to finding a job (2003, p. 10). Research by Keys and Young (2000) supports this and groups negative attitudes of employers towards mature workers into perceptions about their: abilities; attitudes; adaptability and; associated costs.

In a paper given at a recent international conference on Age, Work and Employment, Kossen made the following conclusions:

> 'Misinformed, but powerful, stereotypes about ageing and mature age (or older) workers, rather than reliable data indicating favourable workplace productivity, have been (and continue to be) the root cause behind the disproportionate retrenchment, and ensuing disproportionate long-term unemployment, underemployment and hidden unemployment among this group' (Kossen, 2003, p. 139)

> '.. mature age workers will continue to be marginalised from the labour market due to widespread and systematic institutionalised age discrimination resulting in immense and prolonged hardship. While Australian governments have adopted measures to counter age discrimination in employment, they have, to date, failed to put ageism and age discrimination….on the social and political agenda and give it the serious level of attention it requires.' (Kossen, 2003, p, 158)

3.2.3 Training for mature age job seekers

Older workers are less well-educated than the average worker which has implications for the kinds of programs which are appropriate for them and also influences their willingness to participate.

> 'For older workers, their lack of prior-and especially recent-educational experience is a significant issue. Firstly it limits their interest in, and willingness to engage in, training. Moreover, once engaged, they face a series of difficulties in acquiring the knowledge and skills that are the focus of the program. In case of vocational skills, it is especially important that they be capable of being practiced and applied within authentic contexts. This is especially difficult for unemployed older persons whose likelihood of employment is low' (2003, p. 57).

Chappell, et al, (2003) compiled a table on good practice in training for older workers from the findings of seven studies and has been reproduced below as Table 2. The Keys and Young research listed twelve key findings from the research and two of these are directly related to RPL.

> - 'recognise existing skills and workplace experience when older adults enter training;
> - develop and make readily available inexpensive and efficient processes for recognition of prior learning'
>
> (Keys Young, 2000, p.1)

The report lists the major barriers to engaging in education and training for mature age workers and follows this with key suggestions for overcoming these.

- 'major barriers to the education and training of mature age workers include: difficulties with computers, problems with literacy and numeracy, resistance to learning new skills, low self-esteem and confidence (particularly following redundancy), and difficulty coping and adapting to change (particularly technological change)
- to overcome these barriers the following approaches have been used with some success: an empathetic response to difficulties facing mature age workers, showing how existing skills are transferable and still valid, collaborating with mature age workers so they see

themselves as agents of change, adjusting delivery methods, and training in familiar surrounds

- training methods to which mature age adults are best suited involve experiential learning, combine in-class and on-the-job training, are self-paced, are tailored specifically to the needs of mature age workers, are practical and hands-on, implement good assessment procedures, provide extra time for those falling behind, and at the broadest level address computing and literacy and numeracy' (Keys Young, 2000, p. 2)

Table 2 Good practice in Training for Older Workers

	Education and Training issues	Workplace issues
Context	• Safe, non-threatening, less formal environment • Flexible in timing & delivery modes • Small class sizes • Older workers are involved in designing the training • Learner readiness issues are addressed	• Clear linkage to valued rewards & incentives • Clear support from management • Avoidance of a competitive context
Content	• Clearly written instructions • Learning materials facilitate recall • Material is organised into small units • Work-related tasks • Prompt feedback on performance • Build new skills on existing knowledge • Practical knowledge is the focus	• Work-related tasks are identified
Methods	• Predominantly utilise verbal rather than literacy skills • Vary amount of time allocated to tasks to accommodate individual needs • Vary amount of time allocated	• On-the-job coaching is provided • Learning time is allowed & facilitated

	to tasks to accommodate individual needs • Allocate significant blocks of time • Use active, discovery-based learning methods • Provide opportunities to practice skills as they are developed • Limit learning group to older workers • Utilise participant experience • Use self-paced methods • Include group and collegial learning strategies • Gradual transfer of learning	• Export support is provided • Opportunities to practice & apply knowledge are established

(Source Chappell, et al , 2003, p. 54.)

The Workplace Education Research Consortium form the University of New England undertook a large and robust study into good practice in training mature age people who are disadvantaged in the labour market in 2003. The research concluded that:

> 'The investigation has confirmed that securing success for mature unemployed adult learners who are disadvantaged in the labour market requires five key features. These are: an initial education experience in a safe, non-threatening environment; negotiation with learners in content, format and timing of educational experiences; the use of social cohesion and a focus on learner interests to motivate learners; a learner focused (andragogy-based) approach to learning; and organisational innovation and flexibility.
> Given the implementation of these five areas of good practice, the study has demonstrated that initial involvement in non-accredited Community Adult Education programmes can provide the pathway towards active learning for people who are manifestly socially disadvantaged. This pathway presents a bridge that, in turn, leads into active involvement in the community and on to the labour force.' (Gelade, et al, 2003, p. X-XI).

4 Methodology

4.1 Survey

The initial research was developed as a telephone survey of community based organisations, which conducted labour market programs (LMP) for mature age job seekers throughout the state of Queensland. The providers were identified on the Queensland Department of Employment & Training (DET) web site as being recipients of funding under programs within the *Breaking the Unemployment Cycle* initiative.

A representative from the organisation was contacted to seek agreement. Upon agreement a suitable representative from the organisation was identified and an interview time scheduled. The interview questions were, when possible, sent through to the interviewee beforehand to enable them to prepare any information before the actual interview process. On one occasion the organisation was very small and the contact person had a very busy training schedule so it was agreed that the representative would complete the survey questions themselves and email the responses back. Written consent was sort from the participating organisations in reference to the organisation being identified and named in the research report.

A copy of the telephone survey is contained in Appendix 1.

Details of organisations

North Queensland
Topline Training

Central Queensland
New Life Community Services Ltd.
MT Isa Skills Association Inc.

South-West Queensland
Pseudonym Three-Toowoomba
Life and Career Centre
Riverview Neighbourhood House

Wide Bay / Sunshine Coast
Fraser Coast TESS
Noosa Community Training Centre
Pseudonym One- Bundaberg.

Brisbane North
North Lakes Skilling & Employment - Hornery Institute
Multicultural Community Centre & HTA
Joblink-Veterans' Support & Advocacy Service Australia Inc.
Northside Skills Training Project

Brisbane South / Gold Coast
JobCare
Pseudonym Two - Manly
Community Support Agency

4.2 Case Studies

Several of the organisations, which participated in the survey, were identified as potential case studies for further investigative research. As a consequence three case studies were conducted.
The case studies are;

Case study one
Inner City Hospitality Strategy
Multicultural Community Centre (MCC) & Hospitality & Tourism Association (HTA)

Case study two
North lakes Skilling & Employment Project /Pathways Enterprise Centre
North Lakes Skilling & Employment-Hornery Institute

Case study three
Joblink
Veterans Support & Advocacy Service Australia Inc. (VSASA)

All three are located in the Brisbane North area.
Key personnel were identified from the relevant organisations and interview questions and schedules were arranged (see Appendix 2). Two sets of questions were developed. One set was aimed at the CEO / managerial level and the second at the trainers. Interviews where appropriate, were taped and these tapes were then transcribed. The research also involved informal meetings, telephone conversations and email exchanges. Relevant documentation was collated from the organisations and their respective web sites (see Appendix 3).

4.3 Data Sources

The state of Queensland is divided into six regional areas. Some of the regions are more populus than others and consequently the number and type of funded projects varied between the regions. The follow lists the number of telephone interviews conducted in each of these six areas;

- North Queensland 1
- Central Queensland 2
- South-West Queensland 3
- Wide Bay / Sunshine Coast 4
- Brisbane North 4
- Brisbane South / Gold Coast 3

TOTAL 17

17 providers have been interview via telephone and one organisation completed the survey without the interview process.
The providers all run some form of service &/or training for mature age job seekers. This is usually not the only activity of the organisation but one of many. The number of services and activities depends on the size & funding arrangements of the organisation.
Not all providers were RTOs (Registered Training Organisations). Some organisations, which were not RTOs had partnerships and collaborative arrangements with an RTO. Table 3 provides details of the organisations involved in the research.
Initial contact with the providers was positive and helpful with all those contacted agreeing to the interview. Details of the participating organisations and the types of LMPs they conducted can be found in Appendix 5.

5. Research findings

The findings will be divided into the three case studies and the survey data. The latter will be divided further into RTOs and non-RTOs as this has a considerable influence upon how organisations approach RPL. The AQTF Standards and compliance obligations in relation to RPL ensure RPL is much more relevant to the operations of RTOs compared to non-RTOs. RTOs are required to offer RPL and are audited on their RPL activities and compliance with the AQTF Standards, non- RTOs are not.

5.1 Findings from the survey

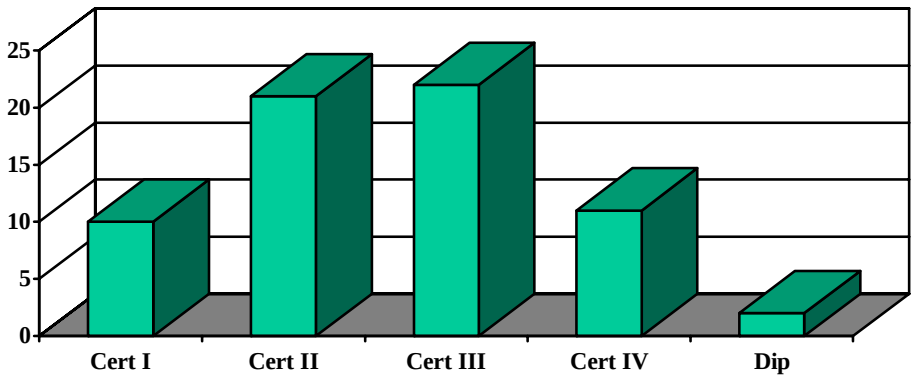
5.1.1 The RTOs

All seven of the RTOs were community based with three being local, a further three regional and one a state-wide organisation. The majority offered employment services and training with one also offering a recruitment service. Six out of the seven had a combination of federal and state funding, with varying funding ratios. One RTO had almost 100% state funding with three RTOs listing local government funding of which the funding was 5% or less. The number of sites the organisations operated from varied and is related to the size and reach of the services they provided. Three RTOs had just one site, one had three sites, another had five sites and another had eleven sites. One RTO did not respond to the question. Staffing levels also reflect the size and geographical range of each organization. The descriptions each RTO gave of the areas they serviced was mixed. Four of the seven organizations were in major regional centres, two were in either inner or outer suburban metropolitan and one was rural/ mining/ pastoral.

All seven of the RTOs offered a range of accredited courses at varying levels. Most organisations offered a range of AQF levels for the same vocational area. Graph 1 below shows the frequency at which the different AQF levels are offered by these seven RTOs. Non accredited training was also run by five of the seven RTOs, all five offered Jobsearch training. Three of these five RTOs integrated Jobsearch training into all the courses they offered. Other non accredited training offered was in the areas of literacy and numeracy, an Arts course,

Occupational Health & Safety (OH&S), Forklift Driving and a Construction Induction Certificate.
All seven of the RTOs offer a wide range of other labour market services, which includes services and programs like Work for the Dole, Job Placement, Personal Support Program, Transition to Work and Green Corps.

Graph 1 Frequency of AQF levels for courses offered by RTOs



The target client groups for the RTOs were mainly those people experiencing unemployment and specific disadvantaged sub groups. Table 4 and Graph 2 below display the percentage of mature age participants and the ratio of men to women within that group of mature age participants. Other than for RTO-7, the range of mature age participants was from 35% to 80%. The male to female ratio of these participants varied from 50:50 for two RTOs and for four others the female ratio was much higher. This may be explained in part by the type of LMPs offered which targeted women re-entering the workforce or the type of training offered.

Table 4 Mature age participants- RTOs

RTO	% > 45 yrs age	Men	Women
RTO-1	40	50	50
RTO-2	35	50	50
RTO-3	80	20	80
RTO-4	55	35	65
RTO-5	60	15	85
RTO-6	45 (80-Aged Care)	10	90
RTO-7	5	80	20

Graph 2 Ratio of male to female mature age participants for the RTOs

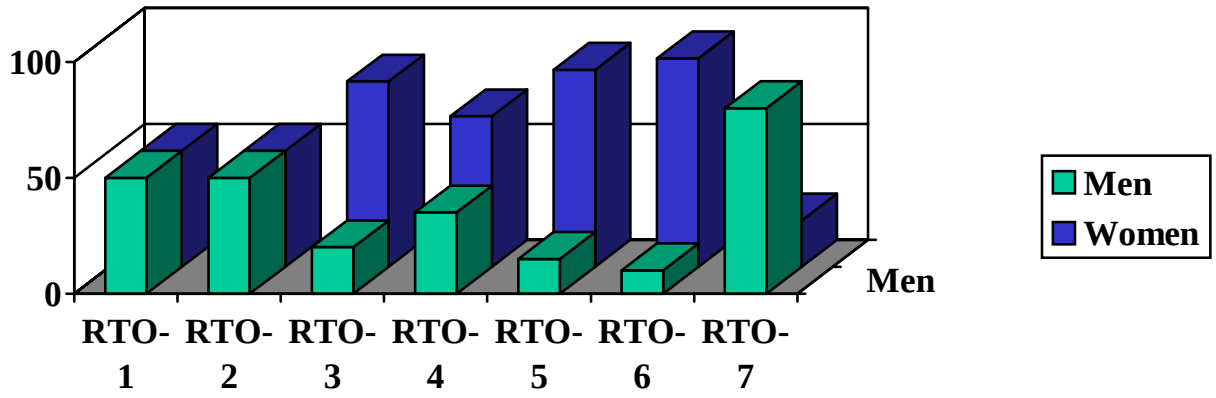


Table 5 illustrates the types of assistance the RTOs indicated were required the most by mature age job seekers.

Table 5 Types of assistance required by mature age jobseekers

Self esteem self confidence	6 ***
Personal development	6 *
Peer support / networking	6 *
Job Search related	6
Career guidance	6
Introductory / Basic computer	6
Upgrading skills	6
Skill recognition	5 *
Seeking a qualification	5 *
Re skilling	5
Information	5
Seeking specific skill training	4 *

(*= strong weighting)

The following excerpts are examples of what the organisations perceived to be the issues that affect mature age job seekers. Low self esteem and self confidence are mentioned frequently as is the length of time they have been either out of the paid workforce or been in a formal learning situation:

RTO-1 'Poor self image and confidence, low self confidence-especially the long term unemployed.

RTO-3 'Self esteem and building confidence'

RTO-6 'Self confidence, they haven't worked or studied for years'

RTO-1 They haven't been in formal training environment. They are nervous, hesitant and tentative'

RTO-2 'Health is an issue for men. For women it is confidence. They have usually been out of the workforce for anywhere up to 10 years'

Feelings of unemployability due to their age and modern work practices/ technology combine to add another dimension to the issues facing mature age job seekers:

RTO-4 'A sense of frustration that nobody is going to employ them- its almost self defeating. They are lacking confidence and are convinced they are not employable'

RTO-5 'The stigma from the community and society generally. They are their own worst enemy- 'I'm too old'. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy. In the workplace things are done differently, there is the use of IT and modern day procedures'

RTO-7 'The technology and IT. They are highly skilled but not formerly qualified'

In terms of RPL all RTOs are required to offer RPL and as a consequence all seven RTOs do so with 3 out of the seven naming the service both RPL and RCC. The six RTOs which conduct non accredited training as well as the accredited training inform those non accredited training participants of the RPL / RCC service. The most common way of informing participants of the RPL / RCC service is during the training. This is followed by RPL / RCC being described in course handouts and being referred to during the recruitment process. This is an area, which isn't promoted greatly and does not seem to be proactively undertaken anywhere beyond what is required for the AQTF Standards. This is consistent with findings cited earlier in the literature review of RPL practice in

Australia. This is also reflected in the responses these RTOs made in terms of how they rated their organisation's level of promotion of RPL. Four of the RTOs reported they had designated staff responsible for RPL and the most frequently reported position of these staff members were Training Coordinators / Managers followed by individual trainers. The majority of whom had Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment.

Table 6 lists the number of RPL applications each RTO received and the applications success in 2003.

Table 6 RPL / RCC applications for 2003

RTO	RPL Applications-2003	Successful RPL Applications
RTO-1	85	All-85
RTO-2	2	2
RTO-3	0 / 60	NA
RTO-4	<10%	60% successful
RTO-5	0	NA
RTO-6	5=Aged Care, 3=Business, 2=Retail	2/5
RTO-7	2	

With the exception of RTO-1 the level of RPL activity is very low. Three of the RTOs charged a fee for service for RPL while two RTOs incorporated the RPL costs into the LMP and one RTO was not sure about how RPL was funded in their organisation.

In terms of levels of difficulty for trainees to understand RPL and to apply for RPL, five of the RTOs rated both these aspects as either *Very Difficult* or *Difficult*. The other two rated these as *Not difficult*. None of the RTOs rated these aspects of RPL as *Easy*. Five RTOs provided support services for RPL / RCC applicants while two did not. Most RTOs believed both accredited and non accredited trainees were aware of the existence of RPL / RCC. While four RTOs rated their organizations attitude to the importance of RPL / RCC as either *Very Important* or *Important*, two RTOs rated this as *Somewhat Important* and one RTO rated RPL as *Not Important*.

In terms of the usefulness and helpfulness of RPL as it is currently practiced four RTOs felt it was not useful or helpful while two RTOs believed it was.

The following excerpts are examples of what was reported by the RTOs as being useful / helpful and not useful/helpful about RPL. Two RTOs refereed to the fact that it was either easier or more relevant to the trainees to actually undergo the training than to apply for RPL:
RTO-1
'Sometimes it is easier to do the training than the RPL application'
'In user choice training, RPL is used regularly'
RTO-3
'Clients who are long term unemployed need assistance with motivation and self esteem. They want the group activities the program offers'

While another RTO felt "It is not helpful for the long term unemployed as they have no recent skills' (RTO-2). Another RTO pointed to the difficulties in collecting and providing evidence for RPL applications:
RTO-4
'If people have the time and evidence RPL can be useful and helpful. It is more useful in building confidence and encouraging them to take the first step into training'
'Providing evidence is very challenging except when a practical demonstration is used as this is much easier'
'Providing evidence of 'soft skills' is like a job interview. How do you demonstrate or prove you have 'good interpersonal' skills or can demonstrate 'teamwork'?'

Another RTO added to this by stating 'If its not working then its not useful. Having to show so much evidence means its too difficult' (RTO-5). While RTO-6 believed there should be 'more focus on practical current abilities and the use existing workplace competencies'. One RTO responded to the question by looking at RPL from the perspective of training providers:
RTO-7
'RPL should be useful and helpful but we are not funded to encourage it. There is a high level of administration costs to do it'
'It is not treated as a way of getting recognised. Training providers don't see it that way. They see it as loosing money through cross crediting'

Two RTOs offered alternative approaches to RPL. The first practiced a "more liberal" approach to RPL and preferred the term "accelerated progression" whilst the second advocated for a more holistic and embedded approach:
RTO-2
'Through my activities in the last 5 years I have promoted a more liberal RPL. Evidence can be provided by a third party. It is not focused on documentation they come along with. The assessors get their own documentation through the applicants past employers. For one employer the RPL process was used as a performance review process'
"I would rather use the terms 'accelerated progression', flexible learning and flexible delivery. People with life skills tend to accelerate a lot faster through the training'

RTO-5 'RPL needs to be holistic and incorporated into the training. It needs to be embedded through the entire course with opportunities to test their skills and give feedback and applying their skills through demonstrations'
'RPL should be introduced at the end of the training or at a point in time after commencement of the course. If they are confronted with it prior to commencement or at commencement they will walk away from it.'
'You'll be better to judge how much you do know and don't know by starting the training'
'If you want people to re-engage in learning then you need to be able to let them achieve, they need a motivator, a non threatening environment..'

Five of the RTOs were interested in exploring further alternative approaches and models of RPL. One RTO was not because RPL is ' not relevant to our client group who are unskilled and low skilled'. Another RTO indicated an expression of interest.

Summary

In summary, the majority of RTOs relied on a combination of funding which was from both state and federal government sources. The number of sites and staffing levels reflected the size of the RTOs. Accredited training was offered most at certificate II & III AQF levels, followed by certificate level IV and I . The percentage of mature age participants ranged from 35% to 80%, with the male to female ratio being much higher for women. For two RTOs the ratio was 50:50 and for another the male ratio was much higher. The latter was based in a rural

pastoral and mining area. The types of assistance required by mature age job seekers, which rated the highest was self esteem and self confidence, personal development, and peer support. These three were closely followed by job search related assistance, career guidance, basic computer skills and upgrading of skills. Seeking specific skill training rated the lowest. Issues facing mature age job seekers were lack of self confidence and negative attitudes towards themselves and their capacity to obtain work due to their age. The length of time since engaging in formal learning and the length of time not in paid employment were also seen as issues for them.

In terms of RPL all RTOs complied with their AQF obligations however RPL was not proactively promoted. One RTO noted that RTOs were not funded to encourage it. With the exception of one RTO the rates of RPL were very low. The majority of the RTOs rated the difficulty in trainees understanding and applying for RPL as either very difficult or difficult. The majority of RTOs provided support services to RPL applicants. The survey did not ask what type of support and levels of support. Four of the seven RTOs rated RPL as it is currently practiced as not useful or helpful. Some of the comments surrounding this related to the fact that it was easier to do the training than to do the RPL application. One RTO noted it was not a motivator, while another thought it was. Another stated that for the long term unemployed it was better for their motivation and self esteem to be involved in the group activities the training offered. Some noted the difficulties surrounding RPL applications as relating to the time needed and the collection of evidence. One RTO promoted a more liberal approach to RPL, which saw the assessors actually verifying evidence through past employers and preferred to see RPL as part of 'accelerated progression' and flexible delivery. Another RTO advocated for a more holistic approach which embeds RPL within a course and advocated for making it available at any time during the course.

5.1.2 The non-RTOs

This category of organisations (non-RTOs) is divided into those who have partnerships with RTOs (six in total) and those which do not (four in total). The former will be referred to as P-RTOs and the latter, non-RTOs. Together they add up to ten organisations. Six of the ten indicated they were community based, with one being a private training company and two being with Church / charity or Public Benevolent Identity status. Unlike the RTOs, the core business of these organisations was varied. Two indicated Training as the core business while other areas were; apprenticeships, community development and other LMPs and services. Two indicated advocacy roles. These advocacy roles were in relation to veterans and serving members of the armed forces and the culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) community. Five organizations indicated funding sources from both federal and state government sources, with the exception of one organisation the majority of the funding was from the state government. Two indicated 100% funding from state government. Other sources of funding were user pays, local government and self employment. Nine of the organisations operated from one site. One non-RTO had five sites.
Table 7 below lists the types of accredited training offered by non-RTOs in partnership with RTOs. The partners were mainly TAFE colleges with two private training providers utilised as partners.

Table 7 Accredited training provided by non-RTOs in partnership with RTOs

RTO	Partner & Courses	AQF Levels
P-RTO1	Partnership with local TAFE-Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE, South Qld Institute of TAFE & Museums Australia Tourism, Guiding, Ticketing & Hospitality-Commercial Cookery Retail	III & IV
P-RTO2	Partnership with RTO, Diploma of Business- Computing modules Manager is trainer using own sites-RTO issues accredited certificates	II- Diploma

P-RTO3	Partnership with local TAFE. Delivery initially community based with gradual delivery at TAFE. Break down barriers	
P-RTO4	Use an RTO Cadet Training College	Apprenticeship related training
P-RTO5	Partnership with TAFE	Retail modules
P-RTO6	Partnership with RTO (HTA) Cert I & II in Hospitality Cert III Aged Care Cert II Hospitality, Small Business Management	I-II II & III

Eight of the non-RTOs conduct non-accredited training while two did not. Table 8 below lists the types of non-accredited training on offer.

Table 8 Non-accredited training provided by non-RTOs

RTO	Course	Hours
P-RTO2	Personal Development -Motivational -Lifestyle skill -Goal setting -Life course perspectives JobSearch Personal Finance Personal relationships	32 hours- LTU 16 hours Community based-offered to wider community
P-RTO3	Work Preparation -jobsearch -resume	
P-RTO5	Pre Vocational Job Search-Job market orientation	
P-RTO6	CJP-IT project DIY Programs Community café	3 months 3 months 3 months

	DIY workshops General life skill seminars	
NON-RTO1	Jobsearch	
NON-RTO2	Personal development, Resume Writing, Interview techniques 5 week, 3-4 days pw 60 hrs	
NON-RTO3	JobSearch	
NON-RTO4	'Sure Foundations'- 3 wk FT -Life Skills Development -Career Guidance -Basic Workplace Skills -Job readiness Training	

The range of other services provided by these organisations was very diverse and reflected wider community engagement than the RTOs, which were primarily focused on LMPs and training.

Staffing levels were much lower than the RTOs and ranged from 1 to 8. In two cases the staffing levels were boosted by volunteers (eight volunteers in one case and 20 in another). Three organisations serviced major rural centres and another was in the outer suburbs of a major rural centre. Two were in outer metropolitan Brisbane and another within metropolitan Brisbane. Two serviced the Gold Coast area and another the serviced the Sunshine Coast.
Targeted client groups were varied which again reflected the wider community engagement of the non-RTOs. The long term unemployed and mature age job seekers were common to many of the organizations. Two organisations targeted those job seekers who were not necessarily receiving unemployment benefits or registered with Centrelink. These organisations were targeting those who may be considered the hidden or underemployed, or existing workers. Other organisations targeted specific groups, for example the CALD community, veterans and apprentices.

Table 9 and Graph 3 below list the percentage of mature age job seekers serviced by these organisations and the Male to female ratio of this group. The data indicated that these non-RTOs generally have a greater percentage of mature age participants than the RTOs. Like the RTOs the male to female ratio was much higher for females. In fact the female ratios were even higher for non-RTOs than RTOs. This raises some pertinent questions about the low level of participation by mature age men and the relative high rate of participation by mature age women.

Table 9 Mature age participants non-RTOs

RTO	% > 45 yrs age	Men	Women
P-RTO1	25%	15	85
P-RTO2	30%-if it was >40yrs much higher	0	100
P-RTO3	LMP- 20%	20	80
P-RTO4	50%	10	90
P-RTO5	35%	20	80
P-RTO6	90%	25	75
NON-RTO1	100%	25	75
NON-RTO2	100%	40	60
NON-RTO3	60%	60	40
NON-RTO4	70%	30	60

Graph 3 Ratio of male to female mature age participants for non-RTOs

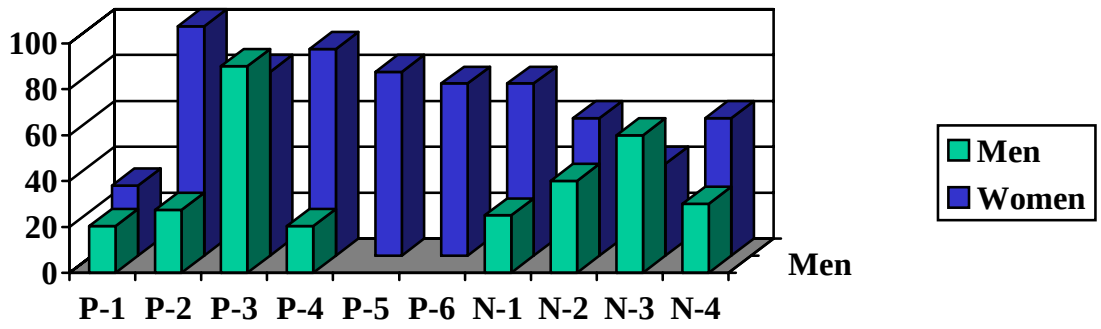


Table 10 lists the frequencies for the types of assistance the non-RTOs reported were required most by mature age job seekers. The top four types of assistance for both RTOs and non-RTOs are the same. These four types of assistance are self esteem and self confidence, personal development, peer support and networking and job search related assistance.

Table 10 Types of assistance required by mature age jobseekers-Non-RTOs

Personal development	9 *****
Peer support / networking	9 ****
Self esteem self confidence	8 *****
Job Search related	8 ***
Upgrading of skills	7
Information	6
Career guidance	5 **
Re skilling	5
Seeking specific skill training	5
Seeking a qualification	4
Introductory / Basic computer	4
Other-work experience	2
Skill recognition	1

(*= strong weighting)

The following excerpts are examples of what the organisations perceived to be the issues that affect mature age job seekers. These responses are very similar to those reported from the RTOs. Low self esteem and self confidence are again common and frequent themes, as is the length of time since they studied and worked and age related issues in the labour market.

P-RTO4
'Lack of confidence.'

P-RTO2
'Self esteem and self confidence. They believe they don't have anything to offer.'

P-RTO1
'The two biggest issues are the lack of confidence because of age and the second is that it has been so long since they have studied'
'You need to be very supportive and help build their confidence'
'Employer perceptions are also an issue'

P-RTO5
'They feel they have to compete with younger people, and its very hard.'
'How do I get out of the cycle of sitting at home. They don't want to go to Centrelink, they are the hidden unemployed.'

One non-RTO specifically referred to women wishing to re-enter the workforce by stating that: 'If they have been looking after children they became lost in that. They are lost in the technological advancement and loose confidence. They loose confidence in their own abilities and feel left behind.' (P-RTO3)

Three non-RTOs responded by focusing on the resumes and job search related activities of the mature age job seeker as a major issue:

NON-RTO1
'Lack of self esteem, not used to blowing their own trumpet and the paperwork associated with jobsearch activities. Very, very few have acceptable resumes. You have to paint them a picture'

NON-RTO2
‘ When they present resumes they must not list their date of birth because of employer attitudes. Some employers are more threatened instead of taking the attitude of “What can I learn from this experienced person?”. Sometimes there are physical limits especially in the artisan occupations. Performance is time related and you have to physically keep up.’
‘There is a strong need for life course planning’

The following two comments point to a crucial but often overlooked aspect within the process of recognition of prior learning. That is self recognition, which involves a process of self reflection in which skills and knowledge are identified and re- valued.

P-RTO2 ‘They de-value their skills and knowledge for example they could be the president of a sports club or they could run a school tuckshop’

NON-RTO3 ‘They don’t know how to identitfy transferable skills. They don’t know how the jobsearch process works. They have either been in same job for a long time or have been out of the workforce for a long time.’

Three non-RTOs refered to age discrimination in the workplace as a major issue:

NON-RTO4
‘The main issue for mature age participants is prejudice in the workplace, especially for jobseekers who have no qualifications or specific skills. Very few entry level jobs go to mature aged.’
P-RTO4 ‘ If supervisors are younger they are fearful of the experience of a mature aged applicant’
NON-RTO3
‘They don’t believe they will be hired because of their age. Low self confidence’

P-RTO6 was concerned with trainees from non English speaking backgrounds and felt that ‘language, lack of technical skills, non -recognition of qualifications and cultural background’ were major issues for this group of mature age learners.

The following excerpts are examples of what was reported by the non-RTOs as being useful / helpful and not useful/helpful about RPL. The issues which emerged were similar for RTOs. Barriers identified in the RPL process were referred to, as was the issues of relevancy and usefulness to mature age job seekers. Lack of awareness of RPL and evidence requirements were also mentioned.

One non-RTO saw the barriers to RPL as being related to the language used 'RPL can be a stumbling block because of the jargon and idea of it being so overwhelming. You need to have a very supportive role in the whole process' (P-RTO1). While another felt RPL was not useful because 'it involves a lot of red tape and applicants have to provide evidence 20 times over and above what is required if doing the course.' (NON-RTO3). Another barrier was the cost of RPL 'People can't afford to have RPL done due to the fees involved.'(NON-RTO1). And another non-RTO saw the process as intimidating:

There is an intimidation factor for those with a lack of formal training.' (P-RTO5)

The relevancy of RPL to mature age job seekers was also expressed

P-RTO-2
'RPL is not really relevant to our client group. They have been out of the workforce for extended periods of time. They need to do the training to refresh. Some have not been in the labour force for 10-15 years.'

One organisation felt RPL was not useful or helpful to their clients who were women re-entering the workforce. This organisation stated that RPL was useful to existing workers.

P-RTO-4
'We have people enquiring about RPL 'off the street'. They are usually employed and wanting to obtain formal recognition. For example the building services authority industry require people employed in the building industry to have completed a TAFE course. For these people it is useful. It can allow someone better opportunities to obtain work. It allows them to go out on their own and become self employed''

Lack of awareness was mentioned by two organisations:

P-RTO-5
'People don't know it exists. It depends on the occupation stream they have been in.

NON-RTO5
'Trainees are not aware of the concept of RPL. It has not been flagged at the large majority of them.'

NON-RTO3
'People are not aware of it as they should be. We always mention RPL and suggest gap training when doing resumes. We emphasis skill based resumes in contrast with chronological order which helps employers see current competencies.'

P-RTO-1
'Most people don't understand what it is. In a rural town people say 'Why bother, I've worked here for 10 years, why do I need to get RPLed?"

Obtaining and meeting evidence requirements is mentioned as an area of difficulty for mature age job seekers in relation to RPL:

P-RTO-2
"My client group no longer have evidence, there is that recency issue'

NON-RTO4
'The problem seems to be that the mature aged no longer have the paper based evidence to support their RPL applications. Many of our clients have chosen to do the training itself as the RPL process is beyond them. It also seems that some training organisations are reluctant to go through RPL process and encourage clients to do the full training.'

P-RTO-1
'Some people say they would rather do the course than the RPL process'

When asked whether they would be interested in exploring alternative approaches and models of RPL six non-RTOs indicated they would with three not interested.

Summary

In summary, six of the ten non-RTOs were in partnerships with RTOs. There was more variety in the organisational types than with the RTOs and as a consequence they offered a wider range of services. Two non-RTOs indicated advocacy roles. Most funding was from a combination of sources with the state government providing the most. These organisations were much smaller than the RTOs. The types of training provided by their RTO partners varied with RTO partners being private RTOs and with TAFEs in equal proportion. Eight of the non-RTOs offered non-accredited training which in the main were job search related. Non-RTOs generally had greater percentages of mature age participants than RTOs and like the RTOs had much greater ratios of female mature age participants . In fact the ratio was even higher than for the RTOs. This may in part be attributed to the LMPs target women re-entering however, it is concerning that mature age men may not be engaging with these types of LMPs.

The four main areas of assistance required by mature age job seekers was the same as for the RTOs. These being personal development, peer support self esteem and self confidence, and job search related assistance.
Skill recognition rated the lowest. Like the RTOs the issues identified for mature age job seekers were lack of confidence and age and lack of recent employment related skills. Negative attitudes by employers and their own negative perceptions relating to their age came through the comments frequently.
Again lack of relevancy of RPL to client groups was mentioned, lack of awareness, process barriers such as jargon and the overwhelming nature of the RPL process were mentioned and the fact that mature age job seekers no longer have the paper based evidence from their past employment.
The importance of what is referred to here as self recognition was mentioned in terms of mature age job seekers not knowing how to identify transferable skills and the need to reflect and re-value skills and knowledge they have.

Six of the ten non-RTOs were interested in exploring alternate models and approaches to RPL.

5.2 Case studies

The case studies are all very unique and offer examples of best practice, innovation and/ or partnerships which will provide insights into what works well, what can be achieved and what is being attempted in providing recognition of prior learning to mature age job seekers.

Case study one- *Inner City Hospitality Strategy* is an example of a large community based organisation and a large industry training provider working together to achieve the aims of the project. This is an example of how flexibility, strong support systems and cultural sensitivity can make what must seem like insurmountable barriers to undergoing RPL for a group of mature age men from non English speaking backgrounds, a possibility and reality.

The second case study- *North Lakes Skilling and Employment Project / Pathways Enterprise Centre* brought attention to the newly developed Pathways Enterprise Centre which is an example of a community partnership. Initial interest in Stage One of the research was with the Retail Training Project and was quick to identify the developments around The Pathway Enterprise Centre as an outstanding example of what can be achieved in communities. The organisation wishes to remain at the cutting edge of innovative and has incorporated a newly developed model of RPL into their recently approved Mature Age LMP. This was planned to commence in the latter part of 2004 and at the writing of this report was postponed for early 2005.

The third case study- *Joblink* is a truly effective example of a one-on-one service for mature age job seekers which is highly tuned to the particular needs of this group. The wealth of knowledge, particular service provision and approach and the many personal attributes of the Project Coordinator all combine to make this a shining example of effective service provision with real 'life- changing' results. The service uses a suite of techniques to not only build the confidence and self esteem of its participants but to embark on a process which assists mature age job seekers re- value their skills and knowledge and begin to translate these into a language and manner of expression which allows them to confidently engage in many job search activities. This service offers recognition of prior learning assistance at the levels of self and informal recognition.

5.2.1 Case Study One – Inner City Hospitality Strategy

The Inner City Hospitality Strategy was funded under the Community Training Partnerships (CTP) program and was run by the Multicultural Community Centre (MCC) in partnership with the Hospitality & Tourism Association (HTA). Both are located in Fortitude Valley, Brisbane. Interviews were conducted with the CEO and the Commercial Cookery Trainer of HTA. Unfortunately, the Director of the MCC was very busy and unable to be interviewed for the case study. The representatives from HTA liaised with members of the MCC to clarify research questions.

The Inner City Hospitality Strategy involved the training and RPL-ing of chefs in twenty nine Chinese and Indian restaurants in the Fortitude Valley / New Farm area of Brisbane. The chefs were trained in Commercial Cookery at an AQF level of certificate II.

The project seemed to develop from several areas of need. A combination of the Director of the MCC being appointed to an advisory committee to the Premier on incoming immigrants, a local Brisbane City Councillors interest in ensuring standards of food preparation, hygiene and cleanliness were understood by everyone in the industry and the introduction of a diluted version of the standards for hazard analysis critical control point (HACCP) used in food manufacturing industries, into restaurants.

The Inner City Hospitality Strategy arose from a combination of a need to look at supportive mechanisms for arriving immigrants in terms of employment, training and recognition, the concerns over chefs from other countries having to become familiar with Australia's hospitality industry standards and the need to introduce and comply with the HACCP within the hospitality industry.

The MCC was established in 1989, in Chinatown, to meet the needs of Brisbane's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) community in and around Fortitude Valley and New Farm. The MCC was formally incorporated in 1996 and operates as a charitable organization (a public benevolent institution). The MCC targets migrants, the disadvantaged, the poor and the elderly. The MCC is also actively involved in combating any form of racism and acts as an advocate and

liaison body where government and non-government bodies are concerned. It also actively promotes Multiculturalism.
The MCC is managed by a Board of Directors and is operated solely by volunteers, with equipment and administrative help provided by International City Church. The Managing Director (volunteer) is a member of several federal and state bodies and committees.
The MCC lists its priorities as:

- Providing CALD men and women with accredited and non-accredited training
- Equipping members of the CALD with Australian qualifications that result in jobs with career pathways
- Providing CALD men and women with Australian work experience.

The MCC has run very successful training programs funded by DET under the *Breaking the Unemployment Cycle Initiatives.* These have included:

- CEAP – Hospitality I & II
- CTP – Cert III in Aged Care / Cert II in Hospitality, Small Business Management
- CJP – Establishing / Operating a Café – Employment of IT Graduates
- CTP – Inner City Hospitality Strategy, which is the focus of this case study.

The HTA College is a not for profit, private training organisation established in 1992 by the hospitality industry to provide training in a wide range of areas of Hospitality and Tourism. The HTA College provides nationally and internationally recognised training in all facets of Hospitality Management, Food and Beverage, Cookery and Front Office and Accommodation through the delivery of short course and Certificates right through to Diploma level qualifications. HTA specialise in Tourism & Hospitality training and are the largest employer of apprentices in Queensland. They conduct more apprenticeship training in commercial cookery than any other private or public provider in Queensland. They consider themselves to be more flexible in terms of their approach and understand the constraints of restaurants of which they deal with some 270-320. They are in tune with the industry and what the industry needs and standards are. HTA became involved when they were approached to do some HACCP training for these restaurants.

The Director of the MCC identified the 29 restaurants to be involved in the project and was involved in a lot of networking within the CALD community in the area as a lot of scepticism and fear had to be overcome:

'…it is a closed knit community, there was a lot of scepticism, a lot of fear from the participants and all that had to be overcome because we were coming into their establishments. Are we going to be critical and why are we doing this? So it had to be done to gain the actual support and trust of the owners and then moving down the line to the actual trainees.' (CEO, HTA)

When HTA initially looked at the participant chefs they realised that they were very skilled and very experienced but had no qualifications. So HTA developed a certificate program and a format for its delivery was designed. HTA put forward a plan, which involved undertaking a skills gap analysis, as the chefs were all highly trained and experienced. This was conducted using a combination of observation and questioning. Every restaurant was visited and HTA staff spent time in the kitchens of all the twenty nine restaurants collecting evidence from the style of menu, the products they were using and the levels of skill involved. A series of skill matrices were compiled to establish what each establishment / workplace was doing and not doing.

HTA ran some formal off the job sessions and identified that English was not the first language for most of the chefs. An interpreter was appointed to HTA to allow communication to occur. Literacy & numeracy levels were quiet low in some cases.

'… *nevertheless from our point of view it was very important for us to have the validity of our assessments, and I suppose a moderation between the restaurants to ensure there was a continuity with the standards. That was achieved by the on and off the job assessments & oral and written exams. We did a number of oral examinations because of the low literacy and numeracy skills* '(CEO, HTA)

When asked about RPL the CEO of HTA responded:

'Everybody makes such a big deal about RPL but if you are going to government & the ATQF & they talk about cross credits and RPL they confuse the market whether it is a cross credit or RPL its all the same ' (CEO, HTA)

The CEO of HTA compared the RPL process with the job interview process in terms of the methods used and the process of matching past experience which has been acquired either formally or informally , with the job description. He referred to a range of methods of providing the evidence, which included:

'a combination of references, physically doing, experience and objective based interviewing techniques'. He added
'Soon as you mention RPL everyone runs a mile and makes it extremely difficult In the same breath if someone said I have worked 10 years as a chef and I want to be RPL-ed I will still treat them with the same vigour because as I say that's great but have you got the theoretical underpinning? I am convinced you can do all the practical side but what about this ….' (CEO, HTA)

Challenges presented by the project included the change of training environment for the trainers and gaining access to the restaurants to conduct workplace observations.

'*Sometimes with the trainers have been chefs or they have been literally trainers all their life, chef trainers are now going out to foreign environment where things are done differently, but it still all fits with what we are doing just because its not the way you normally do it, so that was some challenging parts especially the observations and gaining the access as well. The first thing a lot of the restaurants say is we don't want you here in our busy times because you will be in the way, if I'm observing I've got to be there in the busy times because that when the action is. It's no good being there at 9.00am in the morning because all I am seeing is everyone getting their coffee, that's not showing me what they do. I need to be there when the action is on and I want to be there when they've had 200 people come through the door and everything is fine in the kitchen because I can see what they do, that's the time to assess the hygiene, not at 9.00am when everything is pristine, otherwise we are kidding ourselves. There were the teething problems and we had to get quite forceful sometimes and just say, no; but we also respected that we had to gain some trust first. It changed once that trust was developed.*
……. what made the difference, as the trust formed, when they realised we were there to be supportive and not critical and that they could see the benefits of what we were doing' (CEO, HTA).

Another challenge to the program was the fact that the chefs usually worked six and a half days per week and only get half a day off a week.

..'its not like our culture where you do 38 hours a week so we were suddenly saying you've got to come to college, but they were saying I only get half a day off and so we had to go back to the drawing board and again we came up with the matrix to say out of the 29 restaurants maybe 16 of them have got to do these components an example all of them there's, a little module which is a 3-4 hour module on telephone techniques, everybody could do that but there was one component which was screening for bomb scares and of course the average person isn't going to know about that so we said, that will take us about 1 ½ hours and we'll run it on Monday morning, Monday afternoon, Tuesday morning, Tuesday afternoon, Wednesday morning and Wednesday afternoon so there's no excuse for not being able to get here. You only had to turn up to one of those sessions but we multiplied it so that different restaurants, if you were busy on the Monday you could come on the Tuesday or so on . We had to be flexible and we almost had to write daily and weekly timetables to accompany that.' (CEO, HTA).

The number of trainees at these sessions would vary from anywhere between four and twenty. Another challenge was the actual off the job training environment.

'..to leave their work environment to come to a foreign environment was very strange for them, so it was just putting those support mechanisms around…. A lot of that we actually delivered down in the hall, the church hall. We turned that into a classroom at the MCC rather than cause discomfort…. they were comfortable with the MCC, rather than a formal training environment.'(CEO, HTA)

The HTA demonstrated a very open and flexible approach to their training provision in this project and other training provided by the organisation without 'lowering the bar' in terms of meeting national curriculum standards.

'Researcher: That's a great example of your flexibility?
Now all of that means a bit extra work for us, but we do that across the board. It's not just a one off, we're quite versed in doing that now.
Researcher: so it's become part of your culture now?

Yes it keeps coming back to the bars there, we won't lower the bar but we will give you every opportunity to jump over it, we'll put the steps there for you to jump over it without lowering the standards. So when we talk about the constraints that's how we get around things and its just a different way of thinking, and that's all it takes rather than become stereotyped, we say now we can do this if we think about it.' (CEO, HTA)

The Commercial Cookery Trainer (CCT, HTA) also added many insights into the project.
He noted his own cultural heritage as assisting in gaining the trust of the chefs.

'It is very important to network and maintain links within the community that is why HTA has maintained links with the Multi Cultural Centre (MCC). We realised the partnership and my heritage helped this process.' (CCT, HTA)

The MCC provided HTA with interpreters in Mandarin, Cantonese and Indian and this was budgeted for in the project so that communication and trust between the trainer and chefs could occur. The CCT stated that the project was very positive outcome orientated and the benefits were high educationally as the chefs had their skills recognised. He also mentions the non tangible benefits as being the pride the chefs now had in there occupation. Previous to the training they did not value what they did. Now they wear uniforms with their names embossed on them and they have received recognition, whereas before the training the only recognition was the money even though they work very long hours.
The CCT and the CEO both made comments about the social consciousness or social obligation role of HTA in the project. When asked about previous involvement with labour market programs the CCT replied that he usually trained apprentice chefs and teaches in the Diploma in Hospitality Management aimed at middle managers. He also sources user pays training. He mentioned the Nundah Community Services, a disabled project, which was very rewarding.
The disabled participants opened their own coffee shop and catering service and some participants achieved their Certificate I in Kitchen Operations. Most participants had received a certificate of attendance. He noted the intangible outcomes as being teamwork, pride, self-confidence and perseverance and eluded to the project being a *'small model of how society should be'.*

'It functioned within their circle as it is hard for them to integrate into 'normal' society. The project involved 15-16 people who functioned very well together.'

The Inner City Hospitality Strategy project followed. The participants were new immigrants, aged between early to middle age. He estimated that they were 95% males and 5% females (2 females in the 25 trainees).
The trainees were new immigrants undertaking a Certificate II in Kitchen Operations which took from 6 months to 15 months / 2 yrs to complete. He described the project as an RPL process for existing tradespeople. These trainees had been tradespeople in their own country for anywhere between 2 – 12 years.
In terms of issues specific to their needs the CCT referred to the culture clash new immigrant's experience. Part of this is the Australian lifestyle and what he referred to as the '*abruptness in the European way of thinking'.* The CCT saw this as contributing to feelings of being alienated from the mainstream and being fearful. The language barriers were also referred to and that for many new immigrants they are '*scared of loosing their cultural identity and scared of changing into someone too European'*
When asked about the trainees awareness of RPL the CCT responded with:

'Most don't know about it. Those that do don't understand the process but once you sit down and explain it they see benefits, its like the 'Big unknown"
You have to ease them into it. 80% were keen to go to certificate III on RPL once the shortfalls were identified. They were keen to take lessons to gain full goal. It acted as a pathway. You need an intermediatory to assist them, for help and guidance' (CCT, HTA).

The experience of teaching on the project led the CCT to reflect on his own heritage and why he does things a certain way.
The teaching and instructional methods used by the CCT were tailored to suit and meet the needs of the trainees. The training was characterised by small groups of 3-5 people. The CCT used storytelling, comparisons and side stories as a means of gaining the trainee's confidence rather than lecture to them. He would present scenarios of when the trainee has been in similar situations. For example, Hygiene he would relate the content to the trainees own workplace, and place the content within their own environment. He mentioned a lot of '*to and fro between workplace and training rooms'.*

There were no videos or white boards although they did have booklets. There was a lot of visual observations, descriptions, questioning techniques, prompting and workplace observation.
There were issues' which emerged from the translation of training packages. Some standards did not have equivalent 'words' in the languages used by the trainees. The CCT found that there was no word that corresponds to the English word for 'Braising'. The CCT had to be flexible in interpreting the Training Package. However, after some practical demonstrations it was observed that they did indeed 'braise' but had no equivalent word in their respective language for it. Another example was the Salad Elective. Not a lot of Chinese cooking has salads so the HTA concentrated on garnishes. This led the CCT to state that there was a need for *'cultural sensitivity to wording of standards'.*

The CCT stated that a thorough series of workplace observation, and questioning, prompting and demonstrations occurred and the trainees maintained a Workbook – Record of Assessment. The trainees would also come to HTA workshops to reconfirm what the CCT had observed in the workplace. The project concentrated on OH&S and the Hygiene components of the Training Package.

When asked how he viewed the role of the trainer in the process the CCT replied with reference to the fact that:
'People are scared of change. Giving knowledge reduces the fear'

He saw himself as a role model. When he visited the kitchens of the trainees he did so in his full Chef uniform, which gave the trainees insight into how they could dress and be proud of their profession. He was sending a message to the trainees that:

'This is the way we should look. This is the respect we should have for ourselves and from others….stepping forward from a lonely dirty labourer in a kitchen into a Chefs uniform' (CCT, HTA).

On graduation day 99% had purchased a uniform themselves.

When asked the question:

Can you describe the types of personal qualities and attitudes an effective trainer of this particular group would need to have?

The CCT replied with the following:

- Patience, knowledge and experience of heritage
- Wanted to empower them
- Indian trainees- the CCT gained a broad knowledge of the Indian culture / history by hours of listening to the Indian interpreter
- Trainer needs to have a broad knowledge and application of cooking
- Ability to transpose the physical workplace demonstrable skills and knowledge into the required Training Package
- Imagination
- Personally- interest in people (gain their trust) otherwise their answers are guarded
- Own Asian heritage- trainees not as suspicious of him
- Confident- you can deal with the one on one basis as opposed to being herded like sheep. Ability to be able to establish a special one on one relationship with trainees
- Small groups
- Proud of own culture- traditional ways of doing things that fit into an Australian format
- Indian trainees- were used to English imposed authority
- Cultural sensitivity
- Careful not to treat the trainees below their level
- You are one of them – equal status

The changes observed in the trainees were that there were real improvements in Hygiene and OH &S standards and this was noted by the local Health Inspector. Other changes noted were:

- Boost in confidence
- Boost in self esteem
- Initially, a bridging step to take fear out of European culture
- Competing successfully in the Australian culture
- Open to change and ideas
- More positive – that they are part of society
- Initial first step- more so than a new migrant type program

- More faith in themselves and not so likely to sell themselves short

The tangible outcomes from the project were that they achieved a certificate II, there were improvements in awareness of practice, especially Hygiene and OH&S.
'They realise that the way Australia views Chinese restaurants rests on their shoulders so they take this more seriously and take more responsibility for that' (CCT, HTA).

The CCT added that they now had a foothold within the system and were not scared to get more qualifications. They had increased knowledge.

The less tangible outcomes were listed as:

- Greater self confidence and self esteem
- Understanding the system
- Reduced fear of European culture
- Networking
- They could compare what other restaurants were doing
- Friendships were formed
- Pride in the restaurants they worked in
- Self pride
- Power to act

'At the end of the project some of the participants had the opportunity to go onto the higher level certificate. Some went onto the Certificate III and I have actually got an apprentice who had started in the kitchens and from that the restaurant got them to do a full Cert III, from that he is doing a full apprenticeship in Australia with HTA.' (CEO, HTA)

Summary – Case Study One

This case study was characterised by a very flexible, supportive and yet quality assured approach to RPL. They achieved all this without "lowering the bar", or in other words without compromising the industry standards and accredited curriculum.

The key components of the Inner City Hospitality Strategy project were:

- the RTO's (HTA) readiness to collaborate with community based organisations,
- cultural sensitivity,
- the organisation's flexibility in course design, delivery methods, assessment methods
- use of verbal workplace assessments
- different types and levels of support they provided the trainees.
- the use of interpreters
- willingness to conduct the training and assessment in several workplaces

Case Study Two – North Lakes Skilling and Employment project

North Lakes Skilling & Employment Project was funded under the Community Training Partnerships (CTP) program and was conducted by North Lakes Skilling & Employment –Hornery Institute. North Lakes is situated in the Pine Rivers Shire, it has a relatively young population with 40% of residents aged less than 25, and areas of high structural unemployment. North Lakes is a significant, mixed use, master planned community situated in Brisbane's northern corridor. Pine Rivers Shire is currently the fastest growing major Shire in Queensland and the second fastest growing in Australia. North Lakes is strategically located on the Bruce Highway and will have a mature population of 22,000 residents by 2016. It is projected that the emerging town centre and the mixed use industrial and business area will host 13,000 new job opportunities over the next decade.

With the issuing of a job placement licence, funding under the Community Training Partnerships (CTP) program and the support of the Department of Employment and Training and Pine Rivers Shire Council, North Lakes Skilling & Employment (now the Pathways Enterprise Centre) was established by The Hornery Institute in May 2003.

The North Lakes Skilling & Employment concept and initial CTP funding arose from the work of an Employment and Training Taskforce that had the specific responsibility for evolving a strategy for skilling and employment at North Lakes.

Governance of this project is handled by a Project Advisory Committee, chaired by The Hornery Institute's Lynette Mayne, with representation from Brisbane and North Point TAFE, Education Queensland, Department of Employment and Training, Pine Rivers Shire Council, The Salvation Army Employment Plus, and Moreton Bay Coast & Country Consultative Committee.

North Lakes Skilling & Employment offers services to both job seekers and employers:

The training offered to job seekers includes prevocational training, working on a career development plan, a "Jump Start Your Job Search" training program, and a Retail Training Program for disadvantaged job seekers. This project attracted a lot of mature age job seekers and was the focal point for the intial telephone survey research.

North Lakes Skilling & Employment reported that more than half of the first 17 graduates of the Retail Training Program had gained employment within 4 weeks of completing the program. The remaining candidates receive ongoing assistance and follow up, including job matching assistance from Employment Plus.

Job Seekers

- Registration and local labour market information
- Recruitment and job searching
- Training

Employers

- Consultation to determine needs
- Candidate searching
- Meeting and training room facilities.

Through student feedback and observations, one of the most important aspects of the training programs was the work experience component. Not only did this actually give the students a chance to see how things work in practice, it is an incredible confidence boosting experience that also gives the students an opportunity to create some social and business networks.

As one of the students commented, "The work placement appointment is what made it for me. I put in 13 resumes in 8 months to a well known store with no callbacks. But on my second day of work experience I got offered a full time package – incredible! It really worked."

Candidates were initially sourced through job network referrals but as word got out and the first class graduated, community referrals and direct enquiries with North Lakes Skilling & Employment have filled the classes. Attendees range from women returning to the workforce to young community members looking to secure meaningful employment.

Although initially focussing on retail training to meet the demand for jobs at Westfield North Lakes and other shopping centres, training programs in construction and landscaping are expected to follow.

Relationships with employers are being developed with business and consumer representatives to be included on the Project Advisory Committee. A proposed survey of local employment needs and recruitment methods will underpin the future training program.

At the time of the case study research the North Lakes Skilling & Employment team were housed in former Council premises at Kallangur. Since the time of the research and the writing of the report North Lakes Skilling & Employment have moved to the Foundation Building at North Lakes and is now the Pathways Enterprise Centre.

Pathways Enterprise Centre (PEC)

The Hornery Institute leads a unique partnership between the developers of North Lakes and Pine Rivers Shire Council to meet the leisure and learning needs of residents in the growing communities of Brisbane's northern corridor. This has resulted in the implementation of the Pathways Enterprise Centre.

The Hornery Institute established the concept for the Pathways Enterprise Centre through community engagement and consultation together with market research and analysis. The Institute then led the design of Pathways and negotiated the funding to complete this ambitious project. Early in the developmental phase of North Lakes, focus group studies undertaken for the developer by Market Place Ltd indicated the need for a contemporary community to be characterised by:

- A distinct identity;
- A mixture of housing types;
- A natural setting and abundant green space;
- Ease of access;
- A sense of belonging and mutual responsibility; and
- Schools, shops and social facilities early in the life of the project.

Stage 1 of the Centre is worth $13 million and includes a 21st century library, vocational education and training centre, coffee shop, meeting rooms and community spaces, and family sports and recreation centre. Stage 1 was recently completed and the Pathways Enterprise Centre celebrated its opening on the 24th of September 2004.

Stage 2, to be completed in 2006, will include a year 10-12 secondary school.

Contributors to the Pathways Enterprise Centre include Pine Rivers Shire Council, Lensworth, Education Queensland, Queensland State Librarian, Queensland

Department of Sport and Recreation, and Queensland Department of Employment and Training.

The development of the Centre has been guided by the Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC), an independent governance group comprising representatives from government, business and the community. Stuart Hornery, Chairman of The Hornery Institute, has been the independent Chair of the SAC.

The centrepiece of the development is an iconic building, referred to as the "Foundation Building", which contains:

- A model 21st century library
- A vocational education and training centre
- A coffee shop
- A suite of formal meeting rooms together with informal socialisation spaces including a "Living Room" and community garden.

The development also includes a family sports and recreation centre with:

- An indoor basketball court
- An indoor learn to swim pool
- An outdoor laps pool
- Children's leisure water area
- A village green style oval.

In order to design this project, The Hornery Institute partnered with Pine Rivers Shire Council, Sport and Recreation Queensland, Department of Employment and Training, and Brisbane and North Point Institute of TAFE.

The newly appointed CEO of North Lakes Skilling and Employment, now known as the CEO of the Pathways Enterprise Centre (CEO, PEC) was interviewed for the case study. A lot of the background information about the development of the PEC was gleaned from the Hornery Institute web site as the current CEO, although knowledgeable about the Centre was not within the organisation during the developmental stages. This will be followed by a discussion of the PEC's incorporation of an alternate approach and model of RPL within a LMP focused upon mature age job seekers.

Interview with the CEO of the Pathways Enterprise Centre

The CEO first provided some background information on the organization:

'*When the original concept of the North Lakes development was put forward to council and the level of investment was offered by the developer, council engaged the Hornery Institute at that stage to go through the process of community consultation so we could find out what the community needed. We came up with a range of things in terms of education, access to information, recreation and leisure and employment opportunities……. there are a range of government agencies collaborating on this project to deliver on exactly what the community has said it wants to see. ….so I think that pretty much demonstrates the whole of government approach, to be able to be achieved. Where Peter Beattie [Queensland Premier] even said he can't pull that many government departments together and we were able to do it and the funding arrangements really just attached themselves to the fact that each stakeholder is going to have some kind of use of the facility for whatever it might be in terms of programs. Schools are actually going to build a year 11 & 12 campus up in North Lakes College but every investor if you like, has their investment leverage because they can use other parts of the facilities. That's what we want to have as a integrated approach, as really a learning campus.'* (CEO, PEC)

The CEO talked about investigating possible future social partnerships.

'….we will continue to persue those kinds of partnerships and relationships to driving employment in the region and reducing unemployment and really trying to work with the community organisations so that we can develop a sense of community now that we've got the place, we now want to work with the people.' (CEO, PEC)

When asked about the funding of the PEC the CEO described the possible activities that maybe looked at for the purpose of creating sustainability.

'…..we will have a combination of programs that we will hope to achieve government funding for, as well as, some user pays programs also. We will set up contractual arrangements with business and corporates in respect to their training and providing the facilities in which they can deliver training and that's how we'll seek to make sure the Enterprise Centre in its own right is sustainable and in terms of how council plan to deal with it, that's a question I cant really

answer because they've got their own game plan I'd expect there is going to be some kind of loss incurred there ….. as a community service but we're also hatching plans and ideas as to how we might be able to deliver some viability to Pathways as a building as a whole through things like business incubators and that sort of stuff. So once again they are not confirmed and not concrete. That's very, very conceptional at the moment.' (CEO, PEC)

When asked about what has been the most successful achievement of the partnership to date the CEO replied in terms of future and forward planning.

'I would say the most successful achievement is, is really delivering something to the community which is ahead of the community. So what I mean by that is there was even a comment made the other day, "Gee it's interesting to see the infrastructure going in place before the people arrive", because the development down there at North Lakes will eventually have somewhere between 25,000 to 30,000 as a population. At the moment it probably has between 3-5 [3 to 5,000} so its in its early stages and yet Westfield is in there, Pathways is now in there so you would usually find in many typical master plan communities that the whole residential is built and then the after thought is what does the community wants. So this is really quite a unique approach in terms at putting it at the front end and now that also has attachments to viability because Westfield as an example is drawing on a very very much smaller catchment than they will end up drawing on cause the development by no means is near completion ' (CEO, PEC).

Aspects of the project, which have not worked well were identified as being the hurdles which needed to be overcome in the process. When you have a combination of very different types of stakeholders and organisations there maybe times when a clash of organisational culture or modus of operandum will occur. Nonetheless, these hurdles where overcome and a shared vision was arrived at.

'…it's a mix of all those [types of organisations], it presents some challenges but I think it's a credit, the fact that the projects arrived and its nearing completion, that those hurdles and obstacles have been able to be overcome and I think in all honesty the Hornery Institute and the local Pine Rivers Shire Council really need to take a lot of credit for that.' (CEO, PEC)

When asked 'What are the key ingredients for successful partnership?' The CEO identified leadership, a clear vision and compromise as the key ingredients to success.

'I think leadership is a really important ingredient. I think a clear vision. I think across the projects that the Hornery Institute gets involved in we are often able to facilitate a strong partnership because we are able to capture from the different stake holders and different players around the table a real collaboration of what it is they want to realise. To whatever the project is meant to achieve and we are able to articulate that. We are able to provide the vision as it reflects back on all the contributions all of the stakeholders have made to that process and the vision of that process is what we facilitated for North Lakes is a really good example of that. Its how Pathways came up because there was a process where a lot of discussion focus groups were hosted to make sure that the community had input, council had input local business had input, education that sort of thing…….. So collaboration is an important one. I don't think there is compromise I think council has been very clear in terms of what is expected in partners you know such as Westfield and how the shopping precinct fits in with the overall vision of North Lakes and how that fits in with the Shire. So that clear vision I don't think ever leaves. That's a constant thread because you can always come back to that and it anchors itself in the process

Researcher ; Any other ingredients that are needed for successful partnerships?

Compromise. And I think compromise on maybe where you might come to the table with your own turf and territory but not compromise on the vision and then I think its really just a matter of how do we make this happen…. all the players have to be convinced about their investment. None of this would happen without the contribution, financial contribution that each of the stake holders have made and you really need to be convinced that this investment is going to worthwhile' (CEO, PEC)

The 'uniqueness' of the project was seen in terms of what the research they conducted showed the community needed. This was seen at a federal government level as being quiet unique. The research conducted by the partnership:

'..said that this community needs to have employment opportunities that are local so that it needs to have vocational education skilling to deliver a skilled workforce, a skilled labour force and at the same time we need to look at how we work with business to increase business prospects, potential business growth because otherwise the jobs won't be there ……so we need to straddle both of those and I think one of the things that we understood in Canberra and other places is that it really is quite a unique approach to try and put skilling employment and enterprise in the same patch, in the same place and look at an integrated approach…. we don't really see it as, probably as, that unusual but our feedback suggests that its not really something that has been attempted' (CEO, PEC).

Another question asked in the case study research was:

What sort of advice would you give to other community based organisations wanting to develop partnerships?

'I think the thing that really triggered what we were able to do is to say we know and understand because we have researched. I think if community organisations try to develop and build partnerships on theories and on supposition its really tough to sell that but if you've got some really hard concrete evidence on what the community really needs then the research is very clearly substantiated. Then you've got a really good case to go into x, y, & z government departments x, y,& z perhaps corporate organizations and x, y,& z whatever, it may be in order to seek not just the funding but collaboration because they have got to say why wouldn't we play a role in this particular project or opportunity. We want to know that we are actually going to have some kind of meaningful purpose in being in it and being there and it may not be a physical thing. It may just be like via a program for example still delivering an outcome to the community but you've got to know that that outcome is really needed in the community otherwise the government probably won't come to the party. So that research is quite critical and I think it was done quite comprehensively at the inception stage of the project .'

Researcher: Is there any other advice you can give?

'I think when you are talking about community based organisations there is only one thing I say to them when I'm sitting there talking to them is I think

professionalism is a really important part of it and I completely recognise that there are resource issues and there can be constraints and that sort of stuff. If nothing else at the front of the shop, which is often your people and often your premises you really need to make an effort to be as professional as you can. I think that some organisations would say that that's not the environment that we want to create and I respect that because a lot of community based organisations quite frankly need to interest down to the, to be receptive and responsive to the type of people that are coming through their doors. So there's always a place for that but I think in terms of developing partnerships I think it's a different story and I think you really need to say "Right that's our place of work, we deal with this particular group in this community but when we take ourselves out to form partnerships our,.. if you like not so much a corporate front, we are representing ourselves as professionally as possible and that can include the way you dress, it can include a web site, it can include your stationery, your business cards, almost every single one of those things makes an impression. Its as simple as that. I think that government and other community organisations want to be involved with a group that is professional because they know that things will happen and that's characteristic of the Hornery Institute,…….. so to wrap that up in something that says we are going to do it and we do aim to deliver in most cases we do deliver but we also want people to take that journey with us and they have to know that they are taking a journey with a professional organisation, also while our track record demonstrates to other interested parties why they would want to partner with you, what have you done that says to me you're worth taking a chance on and that you're worth an element of risk because we really don't have an overly developed relationship or partnership and if you want us to start from somewhere then tell us a bit of history and tell us how you go to this place.'

The researcher then went onto ask:

'Researcher: Who do you think has been driving that?

Well we've certainly been playing the role in terms of facilitation but at the end of the day there's been some really crucial decision making that has been the domain of the Pine River Shire Council and I think they have taken some really brave steps along the way and probably ventured into unknown territory and that why it's a credit to them that its been able to arrive and be the place that it is but it is only a place at the moment, we're all really conscious of the fact that

we have delivered buildings but that's all we've delivered at the moment. The level of activity that now needs to be hosted in those buildings is the next challenge.' (CEO, PEC).

The Pathways Enterprise Centre has only just been established and has more challenges ahead. The advice the CEO of the PEC offered other organisations has centered around developing and maintaining a professional image and professional representation to other possible stakeholders / partners. This, along with being able to document and promote your organisation's history, achievements and goals and vision for the future.

Lastly, the CEO was asked the following question:

> ***In what ways do you see this partnership contributing to the larger community?***

'I just think it's a good example and a unique example of how government, a whole government approach can deliver something which is quite innovative, quite unique in what it offers to the community. I think we're yet to be proven in terms of our community engagement and our ability to do that within and beyond our four walls and that's going to be our test but certainly what we have delivered to the community is a very, very attractive facility which the community can access and I think we need to be able to sell that to the community, because there is the danger that the perception maybe that it is somewhat exclusive and we can't afford for that to happen 'cause then we start aligning ourselves with a certain demographic and we can't afford to do that if we're actually going to deliver. On the question that you asked, which is on the broader community so that remains to be seen if you like how we counteract the possibilities of those perceptions but at least up front we are aware those potentials exist and its up to us to then market and up to us to then tone that down' (CEO, PEC)

The incorporation of a new model of RPL into a Mature Age Labour Market Program

In addition to the above interview with the CEO of the PEC informal meetings, formal meetings, discussions via the telephone and email exchanges occurred with the PEC's Operations Manager (OP) and other PEC staff involved in the development and design of a LMP specifically focused on mature age job seekers. The initial survey research generated interest from the OM in looking at alternate approaches to RPL which were more appropriate and relevant to mature age job seekers. At the time of the case study research the PEC incorporated features of a new model of RPL into the LMP proposal and further developed this in the period between submitting the application for funding of the LMP and finally being informed of the applications success. The Mature Age LMP has been approved and was due to commence in October of 2004 however there were some teething problems and it has been re scheduled for early 2005 when recruitment for the project will not be made difficult by the forthcoming holiday season.

The OM was very interested in the initial survey research and wanted to discuss the possibility of incorporating a alternate model of RPL in the submission for funding of this project. The organisation explicitly states its desire to be "cutting edge" and open to innovation. It was within this environment and atmosphere of collaboration and openness to innovation that saw an alternate model of RPL becoming a reality for this particular Mature Age program. The actual training is to run for six weeks and is divided into two main areas. A personal development and empowerment area and an area focused mainly on job search related activities. The trainer for the personal development area will remain consistent over the six week period and various staff and guest speakers will present in the other area. The training will be conducted over four days per week and will be run during school hours.

The LMP adopted and drew from a new model of RPL which has four components. The model takes an interdisciplinary approach and is holistic and learner-centred. The model promotes learner autonomy and self direction and utilises experiential learning methods. The role of the facilitator is crucial in assisting the trainees engage in a process of self reflection which ultimately leads to a re-valuing of experience, knowledge and skills. This new model of RPL is a developmental model of RPL and offers a conceptual framework from

which the organisation drew from to incorporate the three levels of recognition of prior learning into the training of the LMP.

The three levels of recognition of prior learning being:

- Self recognition
  Revolves around aspects of the self concept including building self esteem and confidence, self development and the identifying and re-valuing of experience, knowledge & skills gained through life and work experience. The process of self reflection is prominent at this level

- Informal recognition
  This level deals with expressing, representing and presenting these experiences, skills and knowledge verbally and through professional paperwork. Assistance with the process of translation is central to this level

- Formal recognition
  This level is characterised by the formal RPL processes in place at institutions and organisations of formal education and training

The first level of recognition (self recognition) will be dealt with during the personal development area of the training and will be complemented by explicitly dealing with the informal level of recognition throughout the job search related area of the training. Those mature age trainees who decide that they want to embark on a formal level of recognition process will be assisted during the latter stages of the training course to prepare their formal RPL applications.

Appendix 6 contains documentation on the training program and features of the new developmental model of RPL.

Summary – Case Study Two

- The Pathways Enterprise Centre was a shining example of what can be achieved through collaborations and partnerships between a wide variety of organisations / stakeholders to achieve a learning and leisure centre for the whole community. This project was initially contacted because of a Retail Training program which attracted large numbers of mature age job seekers.

- The PEC has incorporated an alternate approach to RPL in a recently approved LMP aimed at Mature Age Job Seekers. The project has addressed recognition of prior learning at three levels and woven this through the training program. A new developmental model of RPL informed the project during the design phase of the training.

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5.2.3 Case Study Three – Joblink

Joblink is funded under Queenslanders Working Together (QWT) funding and is run by the Veterans Support & Advocacy Service Australia Inc. (VSASA) which is located in Toowong, Brisbane. The QWT program is funded by the Commonwealth Government and administered by the Queensland Department of Employment and Training. The project is in its second round of QWT funding however the organisation, VSASA has been a recipient of six rounds of CEAP funding. VSASA is a non-profit organisation, which provides assistance and support to ex-service personnel and their dependents. VSASA has both a support and advocacy role. The organisation has a Padre for pastoral support, a Women's Group and provides access to computer terminals and the internet, as well as, small workshops in leatherwork, art therapy, First Aid and cooking. VASAS also provides assistance with matters between members and the Department of Veteran Affairs, the Veteran Review Board and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal

Joblink is an employment service that offers one-on-one guidance and job seeking assistance to 'ex' and soon to be 'ex'-Service Personnel, Veterans, their families and the unemployed mature aged within the wider community. Joblink is run by the Project Co-ordinator, who was interviewed for the research. Joblink's "Charter" is to deliver quality one-on-one guidance and assistance to clients in their efforts to gain and maintain appropriate employment. Joblink provides valuable information and training to assist clients with:

- Resumes
- Selection criteria
- Preparation and evaluation
- Interview techniques
- Self-motivation – presentation
- Job guidance
- Counselling

The current rate of success is 86%, which represents participants who have obtained 20 hours or more per week of employment in a job of their choice. Recently compiled statistics from the project are presented below;

Joblink Statistics

Male participants	21
Female participants	36
Total	57

Age ranges	
43-45 years	3
46-49 Years	15
50-54 years	15
55-59 years	14
60 years +	6
Four non disclosures	

The length of unemployment and /or period of time not in the paid workforce ranged fro less than a year to 14 years in duration.

When asked what had not worked so well the Project Co-ordinator (PC) responded by referring to the cost of travel for the participants. In the first round of funding the fact that Centrelink expect the unemployed to travel up to 3 hours a day to apply for a job. The PC stated that given they are long term unemployed (LTU) they are highly likely not to have their own transport. The cost of travel became an issue, which was resolved by making the initial interview with the PC longer and subsequent contact being done via the telephone and email.

' What made a difference was if I can have them for 3-4 hours at the initial interview then everything else I can do by phone. We work together on it so everything else can be done by phone. Including pre interview counselling, responding to job applications, I teach them my method , my format to take home but everything is discussed prior to putting an application in.

Researcher-This is a bit of a side issue- but do you correspond with people through the email?

Yes, if they are on email, yes a lot.

Researcher- what sort of percentage would be on email?

Probably 95 %. Most, if they haven't got email they have got access to it. Through the local library or friends who have an email address they can utilise. If they are genuine unemployed they are supposed to have access via the Network providers'

When asked what the key ingredients to a successful program were the PC responded with dealing with the participants on a one-on-one basis and getting to know each participant well, so that we can resolve issues on a day to day basis.

'You have got to know your client well, what they can and can't do, what they will and won't do, and what are the outside pressures on them, particularly on LTU women.'

The PC went onto give an example of how some women have been the main source of childcare provision of their grandchildren and when they start to express interest in re entering the workforce their children who have come to depend on them for childcare may not wish them to do so.
The PC answered with the following response when asked "In what ways do you see this program contributing to the larger community?"

'I think it contributes to the larger community because:
a) *Most of the people who come to me have fallen through the net. There's no safety net for these people particularly those who are not eligible – say their wife is working, or their partner is working, or their husband's working, there's nothing for them. It's contributing to the larger community by placing them in employment, raising their self-esteem. They once again become a larger member of the community, whereas unemployed, they tend to become ostracised. They aren't able to participate as much because they haven't got the money – all those things flow on.'*

Researcher So, for a lot of them, they wouldn't be eligible for benefits?

b) *No. Quite a number of them are women who stay at home to look after their children and once the children turn sixteen they lose the benefit and that's not enough to sustain them. Quite a number of them are on their own, so they're paying off a home or they've probably got quite large rents. Once the*

benefits stop, so does rent assistance. I think if they put them on "Newstart" even with rent assistance, you can't live on it.'

When asked about what was unique about the project the PC replied that :

' I care about the people that I deal with. I really want them to get a job, and they get full use, for as long as it takes…..use of email, use of the computers, we even provide stamped envelopes to post their applications'

The PC elaborated further on this:

' there are not time consumed. You can have a computer for as long as it takes you to complete the application. You're not told "you only get 15 minutes and then off!" Which is what they do at the network provider. They're on a time limit and they are forced to apply for jobs that they don't want. Which to me, is just ludicrous. I mean, how long are they going to last if they get it? (The Job) – You can't sustain being constructive in a job if you hate where you are'.

Another aspect of the project which was identified by the PC as making the project unique was the vast wealth of experience she had in the areas of recruitment.

'*the other thing that I think is unique is, about this program, is that I'm extremely familiar with the roles and responsibilities of a huge range of jobs. Whereas a lot of the others out there, aren't. They haven't got a clue. Because I've worked all around the world, and I've hired from welders to corporate managers'*

The PC had worked in London, Bahrain, the Snowy Mountain Scheme and the Argyle Diamond Mine. She had had quite a number of years in the construction industry on large scale projects.

The PC made some very strong points about how some Job Network providers treat mature age job seekers and offered the following as her preferred way of 'job-matching'.

'We sit down and discuss every single advertisement that they've marked and I'll explain to them, why that job is not suitable for their job application or why it is

suitable. Because I go through it as well and I show them what I've marked and they show me what they've marked and I explain the reason why I marked the ones I had marked, and why I believe they can do the job. They explain the ones they've marked, and if they're unsuitable I explain to them why it's unsuitable and why it would be difficult under those circumstances, and why it's time consuming to prepare such an application. If you know you haven't got what it takes to do the job, why set yourself up for failure? You know. If they've done as much as they possibly can for that week, then fine. Be comfortable with what you've done, and be happy with what you've done, because it's quality. It's a bit like a sales rep – it can make fifty calls a day and have five strikes. Isn't it better to make ten calls a day and get ten strikes? You've gotta be, it's all about quality. Because that's what the employer's looking for.'

When asked what she thought were the specific issues which affect mature age job seekers the PC listed four main areas:

- confidence building
- a professional resume
- understanding the need to express their job roles in detail &
- interview training.

Building self confidence and putting together a professional resume do not require a lot of further explanation. The PC expanded upon the third point by explaining that in todays labour market and labour force it is a rarity to find someone who has been in the same job for a long period of time. These days it is vital you explain what you do in your job role as every job will be different. Just because you were the MYOB expert in one work place won't necessarily mean you would be in another, which may have customised the program to suit their needs. The PC pointed to the fact that many of her participants had been in their last job for over 20 years and where once that was considered a positive attribute it is now looked upon negatively. It also means that it is highly likely that if you had had the same job for many years you may not have had to compete in the labour market and may be very unfamiliar with contemporary job search and recruitment practices. The PC gave three examples of participants who were in this very position. One had been a bank manager for 32 years, another had worked for a packaging company for 25 years and a third had been with the Railways for 32 years.

She made the interesting point that this was more likely to be the case for men than women and that women's paid working lives had usually been shaped by families, working in a variety of jobs, and moves associated with husbands careers. She felt this made the women more resilient than the men however went onto explain the importance of a mans job in terms of status, identity and the "breadwinner" role which impacts greatly on mature age men when they find themselves unemployed.

When asked what issues were of most importance to mature age job seekers the PC listed the following two:

- Professionally prepared paperwork
- Expressing yourself confidently

In reference to the first the PC explained that professionally prepared paperwork, no matter if it is a fax, email or resume must "*represent you in your absence".* These paper based representations of you are vital in the job search process and will determine whether you are allocated an interview or not. "*The paper work you have generated will get you through the first step, and into the door ".* The second major issue, that of expressing yourself confidently is also crucial. Whether this is done face to face or over the telephone. Mature age job seekers need to be able to speak confidently about their previous job roles, knowledge and skills.

The PC has a Certificate IV in Workplace Assessment and Training and uses one on one instructional methods with the participants at Joblink. She conducts the training informally and focuses on a real life situation (job advertisement or interview) and when this is not available will use hypothetical situations. She wants the training to be practical, with a sense of purpose and to be *"relevant to what is happening for them now"*. She tries to tailor the assistance to each particular individual and considers the key elements of this to be to:
"treat them as an equal, respect the skills they have and have a strong interest in their career path".

The PC also feels that assessing the mature age job seekers needs in a holistic manner is vitally important.
The PC was asked how she viewed her role in the process and responded with:

"I am their support, I walk beside them, that's my role. I am their mentor and bouncing board. They are priority one and I am just behind them"

The PC had numerous anecdotes to elaborate the points she was making and two which seem most relevant here are in reference to a response by a participant and her forthcoming job interview and the importance of a professionally presented resume.

The first anecdote was in reference to a participant who was about to attend a job interview and during the interview training with the PC said
"You are so good with words why don't you go to the interview for me?"
The PC responded by saying:
"I will be there with you, on your shoulder. Just remember what we have been practising……"
The PC went onto explain the continual coaching and support which was given to the mature age participant who eventually was able to express her experience, knowledge and skills confidently enough to secure employment.

The second anecdote was to do with a new participant who had come to the Joblink service with a brief resume which he had been using to apply for jobs unsucessfully for three months. When the PC gave her realistic feedback on the resume he almost broke down and was very upset as he had been given advice that a one page resume would be the best option. He had been presenting himself and his 20 years of work experience for three months with a one page document.

The PC did not feel RPL had made an impact for mature age job seekers. She felt that what does make an impact was the core skills that mature age job seekers have and how they can best represent and present these to employers. The PC felt there was a lack of depth to the RPL process and that hands on experience and underlying knowledge were the key areas which differentiate between potential employees. The PC stated that:
"RPL is not going to make any difference in them being able to get a job of their choice. The emphasis should be on the core skills they have and how these can be transferred to different workplaces"

When asked what sort of advice would you give to other community based organisations wanting to develop a similar program the PC listed highly

knowledgeable staff who are dedicated and who genuinely care about their clients and that you have a certain amount of enthusiasm and commitment to the role.

'I think you've really gotta be down to earth. You've gotta use an awful lot of common sense, with the people you are dealing with. And I think you've gotta be tough with them, but "gentle-tough-love" – you've gotta have really strong guide lines for everybody on both sides, so that it does work well.'

The PC came across as a very dedicated and genuine professional who offered her clients a very supportive and realistic service.

' and on a number of occasions who put their arms around me and give me a big hug, and said "Thanks for this morning. You know. I mean there's obviously a lot of unemployed people out there who don't have anyone else to talk to. Who don't have anyone to bounce ideas off, or just to say "Hey, you've got plenty of qualifications here". When we document them we'll see, and that's the brilliant part about our professionalism, the way it's written, is the fact that it teaches them…..to express what they've got. But that document, [resume] when they walk away with it, is definitely a morale booster.'

The PC had many anecdotes and examples of her clients and their particular circumstances/ situations. The following is just one of them:

'See the thing is, an example of common sense is:- I had a gentleman on my books who's wife is having chemotherapy. And network providers are giving him a hard time, because he can't make his appointment. Now I just said to him "How long is she going to undertake chemotherapy for?" because he has to take her there, and bring her home. He said for 4 weeks. I said alright, look, for 4 weeks, go get the paper on a Saturday, mark what you think you'd like to apply for. Email me the details, and I will write these letters and get the applications out there for you, while you're concentrating on being a support to your wife. That's taking the pressure off that man, but it's maintaining what he needs to do to satisfy Centrelink. And then after the four weeks he phoned me back and said "Look, no-one has given me support like that" then he can continue on. You know, you've got to be sensible.'

When asked what sort of changes had the PC witnessed in the mature age participants she replied:

"*They have gone from very unhappy people to very happy people. They have gone from low esteem to high esteem and from walking in here looking like dags to looking like a million $$$"*

The PC stated that they were totally different people who believed in themselves and believed in their skills.

The tangible outcomes of the training offered were listed as:

- Obtained employment of their choice
- Received a professional resume
- Went onto further training / education

The intangible outcomes were:

- Self confidence
- Assertiveness
- Ability to express their abilities and to do this in a confident manner

The PC stated that some mature age participants had gone onto to enrol in Diploma level courses and some higher education degrees, other participants had obtained managerial positions, quality area representative roles, employment in nursing homes and in technical areas.

Summary – Case Study Three –

Joblink demonstrates the need and effectiveness of a personalised one on one service for mature age jobseekers. The project owes much of its success to the personal and professional attributes, approaches and extensive recruitment knowledge of the project's Coordinator. The project is a proven example of how for many mature age job seekers a personalised service can be the most effective way to manage the transition back into the paid workforce.

The key features of this project in terms of recognition of prior learning and mature age job seekers are as follows:

- Individualised and holistic approach to mature age job seekers
- Use of a suite of proven training techniques and approaches which builds self esteem and confidence, fosters reflection and assists participants to identify and re-value their skills and knowledge
- The process of assistance given in translating and informally recognising the skills, knowledge and experience of mature age job seekers through a resume compilation process is a key factor in the success of this service
- Training, coaching and mentoring mature age job seekers in how to present, express and market themselves both verbally and on paper.
- A highly supportive, emphathetic , professional and realistic approach

5.3.1 Limitations of RPL as a form of assessment

Both the ANTA and AQFAB research reports discussed in Section 2 have made recommendations to address the identified barriers to the engagement of equity groups with RPL processes. The Queensland DET report has made recommendations for change based upon a universal access approach, which they claim will assist all potential candidates. These recommendations and strategic responses have all been made within the confines of conceiving of RPL as a form of assessment. As a consequence RPL is viewed as an access mechanism for an individual person, for a particular course, at a particular institution, at a particular point in time. It is argued here that this creates a *narrowness* around the possibilities of RPL approaches and confines RPL practice as a result. We need to broaden our vision of recognition possibilities to encompass a developmental, 'not for credit' model of recognition. A model that is not limited by a direct relationship to assessment or credit exchange. A model that is focused on the learner and the learning process. A model situated in the spaces and places those members of equity groups identify with. A model framed by the wider objectives of lifelong learning (Cameron & Miller, 2004a). What is needed is an approach to recognition which provides those who participate in it with skills and knowledge that better enable them to make informed decisions and choices about their future plans to engage in learning. As a means of expanding upon this point different models and approaches to RPL will be discussed.

5.3.2 Models of RPL

Due to the limitations of this research report a more detailed synopsis of the literature concerning models of RPL is not possible. Major contributions to the literature have come from Britain, Australia and South Africa. The key contributors have been Butterworth (1992); Butler (1993); Trowler (1996); Jones & Martin (1997) and Harris (1999). Table 1 below has been created to present key characteristics and features of the models described in the literature. Many of the contributors see the models as being on two poles of a continuum with many variations present between the two poles. At one end of the continuum is the Credential / Credit –exchange model while the Developmental / Empowerment Model is representative of the other end of the continuum. The dominant model of RPL currently practiced in Australia is the credentialing

model. It is important to reiterate the point made in Principle 4 of the newly endorsed National Principles and Operational Guidelines for RPL (see Section 2.3.1). That is, there is no one model of RPL, which is suitable for all situations and qualifications.

Table 1 Models of RPL – Two poles of a continuum

	Credential Model	**Developmental Model**
Ideology	Market orientated vocationalism	Person-orientated- associated with a form of humanism
Epistemology	Behaviourist- knowledge & skill acquisition as objectively measurable, aggregative	Knowledge & understanding seen as constructed by individual and integrated into their cognitive structures
Discourse	Human capital theory Knowledge and competence-products	Humanist language of 'Learner centeredness'
Features	Based on **frameworks of Vocational Qualifications**- job-role notion of competence **Discourse** of efficiency, accreditation, competence, access, transparency, equality of opportunity & mobility Institution driven **Sites** of formal education provision and accredited training The claimant exchanges proof of past achievements for course credits Onus is on the applicant to provide 'proof' Claimant can receive credit	Development & empowerment of the individual- confidence building, self improvement & self actualisation **Reflective process**- act as a transformative social mechanism Self-direction basis for enhancing self knowledge Learning process in it own right-with intrinsic value **Role of tutor**- assisting learners to make links between different learning contexts Centrality of rigorous dialogue with a supportive 'outsider'-trained educator Claimant can receive credit plus significant personal & professional development
Focus	**Outcome** Commodity exchange 'Equivalence'	**Process** Learner centred Equity principles embedded

Source: Cameron & Miller (2004a)

The major differences are in the emphases and purposes. The credentialing model is focused upon the outcome and views RPL as a form of assessment while the developmental model is focused upon the learning processes and not necessarily concerned with achieving a credit outcome.

Prominent researchers from Britain have called for a focus on the transformative aspects of accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL). APEL is Britain's equivalent concept to RPL.

> '.. the value assigned to the APEL process should not be restricted to its use as a springboard into more formal learning. The personal value of engaging in the APEL process in terms of confidence-building and promoting self-direction should be emphasised as a key, rather than secondary, outcome. The APEL process provides a basis for enhancing self-knowledge in a way which encourages personal development and prepares learners not only for further learning, but also for the labour market' (Whittaker, et al, 2002, p.6).

5.3.3 Levels of recognition

Recent research which looked at eight selected Australian private training providers and their RPL activities identified ten issues of which three will be discussed here. These three issues are:

- RPL can have a significant impact on learner confidence and motivation
- RPL can be a significant assistance in the development of learner-centred training programs
- RPL can be a powerful process to assist student career planning

(Smith, 2004)

This gives credence to the view being presented here that recognition of prior learning can actually occur at different levels. It can occur at the level of the self in terms of aspects of the self concept and identifying and re-valuing work and life experiences. It can occur at informal levels such as: in relation to job search and professional presentation activities, resume compilation and expressing skills, knowledge and experience both verbally and on paper. It can be done informally in the performance review process for existing workers, within a skills

audit process and when looking at learning pathways and career planning. The third level at which recognition of prior learning can operate at is the formal level. These are formal application processes of RPL within institutions and organisations of formal learning across all the post compulsory education and training sectors.

It is argued here that recognition of prior learning at the level of self, (self recognition), is a crucial prerequisite to both the informal and formal levels of recognition. It could even be argued that for mature age job seekers a great deal of assistance and training would have to occur at both the self and informal levels of recognition before any engagement with a formal recognition process was attempted.

6. Conclusion

The research has supported other recent research into RPL activity in Australia by noting the low use and up take of RPL. In the case of this research, the very low up take of RPL by mature age participants in labour market programs provided by community based organisations in the state of Queensland. Two exceptions to this being the two projects which, were specifically focused on RPL (Inner City Hospitality Strategy and Charters Towers: The World). An RTO, which did not wish to be identified in the research, also had a high rate of RPL.

The current forms of practice of RPL within the organisations researched point to practice, which is largely shaped by the AQTF's Standards and compliance obligations in relation to the offering of RPL by registered training organisations (RTOs). The associated practices are highly bureaucratic, largely print based with a heavy reliance on the applicants gathering print based evidence which may cover extensive periods of time and past employers, organisations and situations. One non-RTO described RPL as:

'*RPL is not useful or helpful because it involves a lot of red tape and applicants have to provide evidence 20 times over and above what is required if doing the course*.'

This type of approach to RPL is what has been refereed to as a Credentialing Model of RPL, which is outcome focused and directly related to assessment or credit exchange. Case Study One offers an alternative approach characterised by high levels of trainee support and flexibility in many aspects of the training program design, delivery, location and assessment methods. This approach, although ultimately concerned with a credit outcome, exemplifies features of a Developmental Model of RPL, which is more focused on the process. Another exception was an RTO, which took a "more liberal" approach to RPL by not placing all the onus of evidence collection on the applicant:

'Through my activities in the last 5 years I have promoted a more liberal RPL. Evidence can be provided by a third party. It is not focused on documentation they come along with. The assessors get their own documentation through the applicants past employers. For one employer the RPL process was used as a performance review process'

The barriers to RPL were identified as the time and procedures related to RPL processes, a lack of understanding of what RPL is all about, the difficulties in obtaining paper based evidence and the fact that for many people who have been out of the paid workforce for a long time and / or who have not undergone formal training / education for along time the advantages of actually doing the training is much more beneficial and relevant to their current needs. Undergoing a difficult, paper based and time consuming process of RPL, as it is currently practiced in Australia does not serve or meet the current needs of this group, especially those who have been absent from paid work and/ or formal learning for lengthy periods of time. The four main types of assistance required by mature age job seekers was found overwhelming to be: personal development, peer support, self esteem and self confidence, and job search related assistance followed by career guidance, basic computing and upgrading of skills. The types of assistance least required were skill recognition, seeking specific skill training and seeking a qualification.

Negative attitudes of employers to mature age jobseekers and negative self perceptions of mature age jobseekers of themselves as unemployable due to their age was identified as issues which specifically affect this group. Lack of confidence and low self esteem were also identified frequently as a major issue for this group.

The research has concluded overwhelmingly that for certain groups current RPL practice is not relevant to their current needs. If RPL can be said to act as a mechanism for social inclusion then the approaches to RPL must be viewed differently and must be tailored to the needs of certain groups who are especially disadvantaged in the labour market. The literature review drew upon international research to explore some of these different approaches and models of RPL. The recent policy initiatives and literature concerned with mature age jobseekers / workers has established the very strong and growing imperative to address issues surrounding long term, hidden and under-employment of mature age workers and the social and economic implications this creates. The literature also points to the best approaches and methods when training mature age workers / learners and jobseekers. It is argued here that LMPs, which are offered by community based organisations to mature age job seekers are very affective in meeting this groups needs.

The key issues which emerged from the research for mature age job seekers lie largely in areas related to self concept, self recognition, negative perceptions surrounding ageism and employability, contemporary work practices and job search activities. For many mature age job seekers these issues are compounded by little and /or lack of recent experience in formal education and training and extended periods of not being in the paid workforce. To a large extent, the conditions and circumstances whereby a successful RPL application can be pursued (as it is currently practiced in Australia) demands high levels of self confidence and self esteem, a well developed ability to engage in self recognition activities and the recording of these through print based mediums, recent documentation which demonstrates competence along with a knowledge and familiarity of formal learning systems. Formal RPL processes assume and demand certain abilities and conditions and circumstances, which are conducive to being able to successfully engage in the process. Paradoxically, it is these abilities, conditions and circumstances which are most lacking and in need of development in mature age job seekers. Case Study Three offers the relevant assistance and training in the areas which would allow mature age job seekers to contemplate formal levels of recognition of prior learning. This training and assistance is pitched at the self and informal levels of recognition.

Relevancy of the current Credentialing model of RPL practiced in Australia is a major issue for mature age job seekers in terms of recognition of prior learning. It is also the starting point whereby alternate approaches to RPL can be

contemplated. This research has pointed to the need to adopt approaches and models of RPL, which are relevant to the current needs of mature age job seekers. It is argued here that the answer to these problematic issues lies in approaches to RPL, which draw from Developmental Models of RPL. Case Study Two is an example of an innovative development in building community partnerships around learning. The project has actively sought to incorporate a developmental model of RPL into its next LMP for Mature Age Job Seekers. It can be utilised as a precedent and test case for the incorporation of alternate approaches to RPL for other community based providers of LMPs for mature age job seekers. The majority of organisations in this research expressed interest in exploring alternative approaches to RPL. This research and the case studies involved in it, offer a starting point for this exploration.

This research has demonstrated overwhelmingly that mature age job seekers need assistance with recognition of prior learning at both the self and informal levels. This reframing of recognition can assist in explaining why so few mature age job seekers apply for formal RPL and why it is perceived by the organisations which run programs for mature age job seekers as not relevant to their current needs. What these organisations have identified as and provided for in terms of assistance and training for mature age job seekers centres around issues to do with the self and self recognition (building self confidence and self esteem, processes of reflection to encourage the identifying and re-valuing of skills and knowledge) and how to then present and express this at an informal level (resumes, interview techniques, job search related activities).

7. Future research & recommendations

As a result of this research it is recommended that:

- innovative approaches to and alternate models of RPL for mature age job seekers be investigated and explored further. In particular Developmental Models of RPL and approaches to recognition of prior learning which address the three levels of recognition (self, informal and formal).

- the Case Studies be utilised as examples of alternate approaches and innovation in respect to recognition of prior learning for mature age job seekers, through dissemination of the case studied projects activities to other community based organisations which conduct LMPs for this group.

- a network of practitioners from community based organisations and RTOs which are interested in innovative and alternative approaches to RPL for mature age job seekers be established.

- The government departments which fund labour market programs for mature age job seekers be informed of these alternate approaches and models of RPL with the view to broadening perspectives on what constitutes recognition of prior learning and what forms of RPL best suit the current needs of mature age job seekers.

- an awareness campaign aimed at employers which promotes the value of an age-diverse work force be promoted to relevant government bodies, industry organisations and the trade union movement.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Telephone Survey
Appendix 2 Case Study Interview Questions
Appendix 3 Case Study Documentation
Appendix 4 Published references to the research
Appendix 5 Organisational details and LMPs
Appendix 6 Case Study Two – An alternate model of RPL
Appendix 7 case Study Three – Examples of Resumes

Appendix 1 Telephone Survey

ALA Research Grant 2004
RPL and Mature Age Job Seekers
QLD Community Based Training Providers

CONTENT

1. Organisational Details
2. Participant Details
3. RPL / RCC Structure
4. Current RPL / RCC Practice
5. Alternative Approaches to RPL

INTERVIEW DETAILS

Interviewee **Position**
Organisation
QLD Region
Date
Time Interview Started
Time Interview Ended
FOLLOW UP NEEDED;
Organisational chart to be sent to Ros

ALA Research Grant 2004
RPL and Mature Age Job Seekers
QLD Community Based Training Providers

Section 1 Organisational Details

1.1 What type of organization are you?

Community Based
Private
Enterprise
Group training
Church / charity
Local Govt

Local
Regional
State wide
National

1.2 What is your organizations core business ?

1.3 Funding Sources
How are you funded and in what proportions do you receive funding ?

SOURCE OF FUNDING	PROPORTION of FUNDING Total=100%
Federal Govt	
State Govt	
Local Govt	
Fee for service training /User pays	
Other, please specify	
EXAMPLE	
Federal Govt	*40%*
State Govt	*50%*
Local Govt	*In kind-free rent*
Fee for service training	*N/A*
Other, please specify	*10% sponsorship/ fund raising*

1.4 How many sites does our organization operate ?

1.5 Are you an RTO ? YES NO

1.5.1 Please list the ACCREDITED training programs you run

Training Course	Module or Full Course	AQF Level
Example; *Aged Care*	*3 Modules*	*Cert 11*

1.6 Do you run non-accredited training ? YES NO

1.6.1 Please list the NON ACCREDITED training programs you run

Training Course	Duration=Hours
Example: JobSearch	*100 hours*

1.7 What other services do you provide ?
Eg's; JobNetwork, Work for the Dole, Intensive Assistance etc

1.8 Please list your organisation's staffing levels

Position	No#	F/T P/T Casual	Fixed term/ contract	
Eg Trainer	*5*	*1=F/T, 2 Casual,2=P/T*	*3- fixed term*	

1.9 What geographic area does your organisation service?

1.10 What is the population of that geographic area ?

1.11 How would you describe the area you service ?
Example 1: Rural , major regional centre, agriculture based economy
Example 2; Gold Coast hinterland, high unemployment & high population growth
Example 3; Outer metropolitan Brisbane, low growth, high unemployment, low socio-economic

1.12 Could you please attach a copy of your organisations Organisational Chart

Section 2 Participant Details

2.1 Who are your targeted client groups ?
Example: Long-term unemployed, mature age jobseekers, Intensive Assistance Clients, sole parents, ATSI, NESB, Youth at risk etc…..

2.2 What percentage of your participants would be classified as mature aged *(over the age of 45 years)* ?

%

2.3 Of these mature age participants what is the ratio between men and women ?

E.g: (Men 40:60 Women)
Men : Women

2.4 What types of assistance do your mature age participants require ?
(Tick as many as apply)

Up grading of skills
Skill recognition
Re skilling
Seeking specific skill training
Seeking a qualification
Job Search related
Career guidance & counselling
Introductory / Basic Computer skills
Personal development
Self Esteem /self confidence
Peer support / networking
Information
Other, please specify

2.5 Are there any issues that effect mature age job seekers in particular?

Section 3 RPL / RCC

3.1 Do you offer a Recognition service ?
YES
NO **If No goto the last section-Section 5**

3.2 What do you call this Recognition Service?
RPL
RCC
Other, please specify

3.3 Do you have a Recognition Policy?
YES
NO

3.4 Do you inform your participants undertaking NON ACCREDITED training of your RPL / RCC service?

YES
NO If No, goto Q 3.6
Do Not Offer non accredited training

3.5 If YES to Q 3.4, How do you inform your participants of your RPL / RCC service? *(Please tick as many as apply)*

RPL / RCC refereed to on all advertising and promotional material
RPL / RCC described on course handouts
Part of policy kit given to clients
Participants told during recruitment
Participants told in training
Other, please specify

3.6 How would you rate the level of promotion your organisation gives your Recognition service to clients?
A scale from 1-5. 1=lowest & 5=highest

1 2 3 4 5

3.7 Are all your staff aware of your recognition policy?

3.8 Is or are there staff who are designated the responsibility for your organisations RPL / RCC service?

YES
NO **If NO goto Section 4**

3.9 If YES to Q 3.8, Please give details of the designated staff responsible for RPL

STAFF POSITION	FULL TIME / PART TIME	MAIN DUTIES
Example; Training Coordinator	*F/T*	*Coordinating all accredited training*

3.10 Do the staff who are responsible for RPL have any of the following training? *(Tick as many as apply)*

Workplace Assessor
RPL Assessor
Cert IV Workplace Training & Assessment
Other relevant training or professional development, please specify

None of the above

Section 4 Current RPL / RCC Practice

4.1 How many RPL / RCC applications did your organisation receive in 2003 ?

4.2 If your organisation did receive RPL/ RCC applications, how many where successful?

4.3 Does your organisation have a set of RPL / RCC proformas / RPL / RCC Kits for RPL applications ?

YES NO

4.4 How is RPL / RCC funded in your organisation ?

4.5 Are participants charged a fee to submit an RPL / RCC application ?

YES NO

4.6 How easy or difficult do you think it is for trainees to understand RPL / RCC principles ?

Very Difficult Difficult Not difficult Easy Not sure

4.7 How easy or difficult do you think it is for trainees to prepare RPL / RCC applications ?

Very Difficult Difficult Not difficult Easy Not sure

4.8 Does your organisation provide support services for RPL / RCC applicants – advice on whether they are eligible, how to prepare their applications etc ?

YES NO

Other, please specify

4.9 How aware are your participants in ACCREDITED training of the existence of RPL / RCC ?

Very aware Aware Not aware Very unaware Not sure

4.10 How aware are your participants in NON ACCREDITED training of the existence of RPL / RCC ?

Very aware Aware Not aware Very unaware Not sure

4.11 How would you rate your organisations attitude to the importance of RPL / RCC ?

Very Important	Important	Somewhat important	Not important	Not sure

SECTION 5 ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO RPL

Current RPL models seem to follow an outcome focussed / assessment based approach. This approach has a heavy reliance on the applicant supplying print based evidence combined with assumed levels of literacy and knowledge of formal training systems and the associated jargon.

5.1Is RPL as it is currently practiced useful & helpful to your mature age clients / participants ?

YES NO NOT SURE

5.2 What is useful/ helpful ? 5.3 What is not useful / helpful ?

5.3 Would you be interested in exploring further alternative approaches and models of RPL ?

YES NO NOT SURE

Appendix 2 Case Study Interview Questions

Research questions – Phillip Charlton – HTA September 16th 204

2. **Can you tell me about your social partnership- its partners, links with levels of government and funding arrangements?**

3. **What has been the most successful achievement of the partnership to date?**

4. **Is there anything that hasn't worked so well?**

5. **What happened in this situation? What made the differenc ?**

6. **What are the** key ingredients **for successful partnership ?**

7. **In what ways do you see this partnership contributing to the** larger community?

8. What do you consider to be **unique** about your particular partnership?

9. What types of **constraints** has the organisation experienced in trying to achieve its aims?

10. What types of **opportunities** have arisen to assist the organisation in achieving its aims and vision?

11. What sort of **advice** would you give to other community based organizations wanting to **develop partnership** ?

    Key ingredients?

    Key strategies?

Questions for Tony Ching- Trainer

1. What sort of training programs have you been involved in at HTA & LMP?

2. What percentage and type of mature age jobseekers are involved in the training programs you are involved in?

3. What issues are specific to their needs?

4. Of all these issues, what is the most important or crucial?

5. Do you think RPL has made an impact on training for mature age jobseekers as perhaps it should or could? Why?

6. How would you describe the group of trainees?
   Their characteristics and their need?

7. What types of teaching / instructional methods do you use when training mature age job seekers? (one on one, group learning, excursions, projects, role plays, etc)

8. What particular instructional tools or techniques do you find most effective when working with this particular group of trainees?

9. How do you view your role in the training process- content, relationship with the participants, evaluation?

10. Can you describe the types of personal qualities and attitudes an effective trainer of this particular group would need to have?

11. What sort of changes have you observed in the participants who have undergone the training?

12. What types of tangible outcomes do participants get from the training ? (employment, further training, presentation skills)

13. What types of less tangible outcomes do participants gain from the training ? (self confidence / assertion, involved with community organizations)

Research questions – Michael Rheinberger

- Can you tell me about your social partnership- its partners, links with levels of government and funding arrangements?
- What has been the most successful achievement of the partnership to date?
- Is there anything that hasn't worked so well?
- What happened in this situation? What made the difference?
- What are the key ingredients for successful partnerships?
- In what ways do you see this partnership contributing to the larger community?
- What do you consider to be unique about your particular partnership?
- What types of constraints has the organisation experienced in trying to achieve its aims?
- What types of opportunities have arisen to assist the organisation in achieving its aims and vision ?
- What sort of advice would you give to other community based organizations wanting to develop partnerships?
- Key ingredients?
- Key strategies?

Research questions – Krystyna Sparrow - JOBLINK
16th September 2004

1. Can you tell me about your links with levels of government and funding arrangements?

2. What has been the most successful achievement of the program to date?

3. Is there anything that hasn't worked so well?

4. What happened in this situation? What made the difference?

5. What are the key ingredients for a successful program?

6. In what ways do you see this program contributing to the larger community?

7. What do you consider to be unique about your particular program?

8. What types of constraints has the organisation experienced in trying to achieve its aims ?

9. What types of opportunities have arisen to assist the organisation in achieving its aims and vision?

10. What sort of advice would you give to other community based organizations wanting to develop a similar program?
    Key ingredients?
    Key strategies?

11. What sort of training / service provision / programs have you been involved in at AUSVETS ?

12. What percentage and type of mature age jobseekers are involved in the training / service provision programs you are involved in?

13. What issues are specific to their needs?

14. Of all these issues, what is the most important or crucial ?

15. Do you think RPL has made an impact on training for mature age jobseekers as perhaps it should or could ? Why ?

16. What types of teaching / instructional methods do you use when training mature age job seekers ? (one on one, group learning, role plays, etc)

17. What particular techniques do you find most effective when working with mature age job seekers ?

18. How do you view your role in the programs service provision ?

19. Can you describe the types of personal qualities and attitudes an effective service provider of mature age jobseekers needs ?

20. What sort of changes have you observed in the participants who have been involved in the JOBLINK program ?

21. What types of tangible outcomes do participants get from the program ? (E.g., employment, further training)

22. What types of less tangible outcomes do participants gain from the program ? (E.g., self confidence / assertion,)

23. How do you evaluate the JOBLINK program ?

Appendix 3 Case Study Documentation

Appendix 4 Published references to the research

The research has been published in the following:

Cameron, R (2004)
'A learning survey of job seekers. Does RPL have a role?'
13th National VET Research Conference, July 2004, Tweed Heads, NCVER.
http://www.ncver.edu.au/newevents/events/papers/trconf13.html

Cameron, R & Miller, P (2004)
'Recipes for recognition and lifelong learning: Community based approaches to fostering learning transitions' *Making Connections: Transition to University* conference, QUT, 26-28 September, Brisbane
http://www.carseldine.qut.edu.au/conferences/makingconnections.jsp

Conference papers (refereed) to be presented

Cameron, R & Miller, P (2004)
'A transitional model of recognition'
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Appendix 5: Organisational details and LMPs

Table 3. Details of the community based providers of Labour Market Programs (LMPs) involved in the research.

Organisation	Qld Region	Organisation Type	LMP	RTO Status
Topline Taining CHARTERS TOWERS	North Qld	Private Consultancy	CTP Project *Charters Towers:The World*	Non-RTO
New Life Community Services Ltd. MACKAY	Central Qld	Local-community based	CEAP Project *Steps to Better Business*	Non-RTO
Mt Isa Skills Association Inc. LONGREACH	Central Qld	Regional - community based	CEAP Project *Integrated Employment Services*	RTO
Pseudonym Three-Toowoomba TOOWOOMBA	South-West Qld	State wide - community based		RTO
Life & Career Centre TOOWOOMBA	South-West Qld	Public Company, Public Benevolent Identity status	QWT Project *Sure Foundations-Intensive Workplace Re-entry Program*	Non-RTO
Riverview Neighbourhood House IPSWICH	South-West Qld	Local - community based	QWT Project *REAL (Riverview Employment & Learning)*	Non-RTO
MIGAS-Manufacturing Industries Group Apprenticeship Scheme MAROOCHYDORE	Wide Bay / Sunshine Coast	Non profit-Community based	CEAP Projects *Return to Work Program & Aged Care Support Services*	Non-RTO
Fraser Coast TESS MARYBOROUGH	Wide Bay / Sunshine Coast	Regional-community based	CEAP Projects *Work Empowerment for Women & Aged Care*	RTO

Organisation	Qld Region	Organisation Type	LMP	RTO Status
Noosa Community Training Centre NOOSAVILLE	Wide Bay / Sunshine Coast	Local-community based	QWT Project *Training That Works*	RTO
Pseudonym One-Bundaberg. BUNDABERG	Wide Bay / Sunshine Coast	Local - community based	QWT Projects	RTO
North lakes Skilling & Employment - Hornery Institute NORTH LAKES	Brisbane North	Community Based - Offices in Melbourne & Sydney	CTP project *North Lakes Skilling and Employment Project.*	Non-RTO
Multicultural Community Centre FORTITUDE VALLEY	Brisbane North	Community based	CTP Project *Inner City Place Hospitality Strategy*	Non-RTO
VSASA Veterans' Support & Advocacy Service Australia Inc. TOOWONG	Brisbane North	National-community based	QWT Project *Joblink*	Non-RTO
Northside Skills Training Project NORTHGATE	Brisbane North	Regional SE Qld Community based	QWT Project *Training Across The Ages*	RTO
JobCare SOUTHPORT	Brisbane South / Gold Coast	Affiliated with Anglicare	CEAP Project; *Anglicare Age Advantage*	Non-RTO
Pseudonym Two - Manly MANLY	Brisbane South / Gold Coast	Local - community based	CJP Project & CEAP Projects	RTO
Community Support Agency REEDY CREEK	Brisbane South / Gold Coast	Community based, not for profit	Pilot Program *45-45-45*	Non-RTO

The LMPs were mainly funded under *the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle* initiative through the Queensland Department of Employment & Training. A variety of these programs exist under this initiative. Those applicable to the research are;

CEAP- Community Employment Assistance Program
This program provides funds for community groups to provide long-term unemployed people with employment preparation, job search assistance and training to increase their employment opportunities.

CJP - Community Jobs Plan
The CJP focuses on creating job placement for the long-term unemployed in labour intensive public works, environmental and community projects.

CTP - Community Training Partnerships
CTP is a Smart State initiative, to provide opportunities for communities to identify their current and future employment needs aligned to economic & social development, and to broker the appropriate training.

QWT - Queenslanders Working Together
This funds public sector and community organisations to assist mature-aged, parental, and other job seekers to find work or to access training. The focus is on people aged 45 years and over and who are unemployed and seeking work and job seekers with dependent children.

Appendix 6: Case Study Two – An alternate model of RPL

Appendix 7: Case Study Three – Resume examples

Before and after

The first resume is an example of what a mature age client came to the service with and the second is an example of the style of resume that they obtain through the service.

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