

Enterprise RPL Research Project

Conducted for ANTA 2004/5

Executive Summary

In July 2004 the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) contracted RMIT University (Cathy Down) and Precision Consultancy (Mitch Cleary) to coordinate and facilitate an enterprise RPL project involving seven enterprises. These enterprises were originally nominated by the project steering Committee which was comprised of representatives of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), the Australian Industry Group (AIG) and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). This report summarises the experience and outcomes of the RPL process conducted within;

- Australian Red Cross Blood Service (ARCBS)
- Bluescope Steel
- Canterbury Windows
- Connex
- The Land Engineering Agency (LEA) of the Department of Defence
- Mitsubishi Motors (Australia Limited)
- RSL Care

This project grew out of discussion about the poor uptake of RPL and has proved a challenging and fascinating journey. The purpose of the project was to establish and report on models of enterprise RPL which work and to identify the opportunities for and the inhibitors of enterprises working in partnership with Registered Training Organisations to recognise the current competency of their workers against endorsed Training Packages and accredited courses within the National Training Framework.

Negotiated Outcomes

One of the important aspects of this project was the rationale for the inclusion of specific enterprises in this project. Most of the enterprises were nominated for inclusion either by their management, the particular Trade Union working with that enterprise, or a combination of the two. In all cases, participation in the project met a specific need of the enterprise. Clearly this was an important factor in ensuring the success of the project. It also meant that the negotiated outcomes of the different enterprise differed considerably.

Each enterprise developed its own action plan and budget for undertaking RPL of their employees. As might be expected, different enterprises were seeking different purposes and outcomes from the process and this process allowed for such customisation and contextualisation.

Reported Outcomes

As part of their contracted duties, all the enterprises submitted an interim and a final report outlining their progress. These reports were constructed around the following information:

- a brief description of the project and its context.
- relevant statistics for the project including numbers of employees and UoCs involved
- information as to what worked well, what needed to be changed as the project progressed and what still needs improvement
- costings calculated on a per employee and per UoC basis
- a record of expenditure, including to whom the money was paid, the purpose of the expenditure and the amount involved
- a brief evaluation of the process and its usefulness for future RPL/RCC assessments
- projected costings as to what it would cost to repeat the exercise
- the essential (and desirable) resources needed to conduct RPL on an enterprise basis.

Summaries of the comments made by enterprises in their final reports for each of these items are included in the case studies constructed as a result of the project. In addition, common findings and issues are discussed in the sections on Outcomes (p. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**) and Significant issues arising (p. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**). Of special interest are the summary of statistics on page **Error! Bookmark not defined.** and the distribution of expenditure on page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Case Studies

Seven case studies have been constructed from the progress and final reports submitted by each of the enterprises. These case studies have been formatted under the same headings to allow for comparison. These headings are:

- general information
- negotiated outcomes
- reported outcomes
- RPL outcomes
- future activity
- budget summary
- enterprise specific issues
- enterprise evaluation

Evaluation

All the enterprises involved were positive about the experience provided by the project and its outcomes, and fully expected that the program would continue (and probably expand) in the future. Evaluative comments from each participating enterprise are included in the case studies.

Resources

The issue of resources is a vexed one given the large proportion of the project money reportedly expended on resources. On one hand, this could be seen as an initial establishment cost, that is, a one-off expenditure. Alternately, this could be seen as a reflection of a VET cultural element in which the production or availability of training and assessment resources is essential to the commencement of activity.

It was necessary to differentiate between the:

- resources which were required to be developed as part of the project brief and the related contracts; and the
- resources (or support materials) which the enterprises and RTOs appeared to think were necessary.

The former are included as part of this report (including the appendices) and are designed as useful resources which can be adapted to meet a particular enterprise's RPL needs. The latter were financed from the project funding provided to the participating enterprises.

Significant issues arising from the project

Several significant issues have been identified from this project. These issues are not enterprise specific, necessarily, but a projection of what this experience tells us we might find if more enterprises sought to use an RPL process to have the current competences of their workforces recognised. These issues centre around:

- resources for RPL assessments
- the preparedness of RTOs to undertake RPL assessments
- costings
- non-recognition of enterprise expertise
- non-recognition of enterprise RPL economies.

Conclusion

The project had a very tight timeline in order to meet scheduled meetings of the National Training Framework Quality Council. This was done to ensure that the outcomes of the project could be communicated to stakeholders in a timely manner. As the project progressed, it became necessary to make adjustments to these timelines in order to achieve the desired outcomes. Just as the vocational education and training sector works to particular rhythms and timeframes, so do industry enterprises. In a collaborative project such as this it is necessary to recognise that industry enterprises have their own priorities and patterns of work, and that projects involving industry enterprises need to be sensitive to these patterns. Open and frank communication and continual renegotiation of timelines and approaches are necessary if useful outcomes are to be achieved.

This has been a very successful project in that most of the participants have achieved their major objectives. It has also generated significant understandings and practical information about the process of RPL within enterprises. Much of this learning has been presented in this report for the benefit of other enterprises and

registered training organisations who wish to undertake RPL within an enterprise context.

Recommendations

Four recommendations arising out of the project have been formulated. These are:

1. That enterprises are encouraged to work with vocational education and training providers to recognise the existing (and developing) skills and knowledge of their workforces through the design and application of a RPL process specific to their own organisation.
2. That RTOs are encouraged to prepare appropriate processes for the delivery of enterprise RPL which can be customized for specific enterprises.
3. That future research into enterprise RPL employ an applied research methodology similar to that used in this project.
4. That ANTA and DEST continue to work together with the States and Territories to find a funding formula for RPL assessments that will promote the uptake of RPL by enterprises.