

Project ID No.	CP 326 / 7 / 1 / 2 3
GOAL	4 SUB-PROGRAM

## Effective Networking Communities of Practice

Action plans must be submitted online to [www.reframingthefuture.net](http://www.reframingthefuture.net) by COB Tuesday 20 June 2006.

Please refer to 'How to submit an action plan online' in the Reframing the Future handout or on the website.

All sections must be completed.

Please note: sections 1 – 9 of this document will be uploaded onto the Reframing the Future website. Details of participants in item 11 will be only be used in accordance with our privacy policy and will not be published on the website.

### Name of organisation funded by Reframing the Future

RMIT University
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### 3. Project overview (100 words maximum)

What outcomes do you hope to achieve in your project?

<p>There are three intended outcomes for this project:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To form a Community of Practice based on 'self-auditing', which will act as a mechanism to deepen VET practitioner understanding of AQTF requirements, develop standards for practice and facilitate the transferring of knowledge. This Community of Practice will also offer a framework for continuous improvement through the development and exchange of knowledge about the AQTF and audit processes.</li> <li>2. To develop twelve AQTF 'Champions' (one from each School that offers VET at RMIT)</li> <li>3. To implement an AQTF self-audit tool to assist teachers to routinely audit and continuously improve program quality.</li> </ol>
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#### 4. Domain of knowledge

What aspects of the national training system will be addressed by your project?  
(e.g. establishing relationships with industry clients; improving workplace assessment or delivery; implementing new Training Packages)

This project focuses on the AQTF requirement that RTOs review their compliance with the standards at least annually, we also believe that if we have the AQTF audit processes right, there will be further quality developments throughout our programs at RMIT.

There is an annual AQTF review of one qualification from each of the 12 Schools that deliver VET. Due to the size and structure of the organization, usually the 12 programs undergoing review are isolated from each other and experiences and outcomes are not shared with other program teams. The proposition to adopt a Communities of Practice approach to quality assurance is informed by research findings about the capacity of Communities of Practice to stimulate learning amongst COP members, and also across the organisation (Mitchell et al 2005), and to add value to the working lives of VET practitioners "not just by sharing knowledge, but also sharing tools and solutions" (Mitchell & Young 2002, p.14).

One of the outcomes of a 2005 Strategic Leadership and Continuous Improvement RTF project at RMIT was the design of an AQTF self-audit tool. This tool is in the final draft stage and RMIT is committed to putting it online for use across the organization.

It is well recognized, however, that an online self-audit tool would not, on its own, achieve the desired outcomes, because the document on its own 'doesn't carry sufficient background and meaning to transfer knowledge effectively' (Lesser and Everest, 2001). Further, as Mc Dermitt (1999) observes: 'the real value in knowledge management is in sharing ideas and insights that are not documented and are hard to articulate'.

This project proposes the establishment of a Community of Practice which will bring together the 12 program coordinators whose programs are to participate in an RMIT AQTF audit during 2006. Through the Community of Practice, the program coordinators will take part in a number of informal and formal activities ranging from participating in self-auditing, to facilitated workshops on the online tool and meetings. The COP will encourage 'day to day interaction designed to solve specific work problems' (Lesser and Everest 2001, p.38). The result will be a core of 12 champions who take the self-audit tool and their in-depth knowledge of the AQTF back to their wider School communities, and encourage the introduction of continuous improvement practices, including reflection, and establishment of validation and moderation practices. An additional outcome will be the ongoing development of the self-audit tool.

While the vehicle around which this Community of Practice will be initiated is a self-audit tool, the COP is not simply about AQTF compliance and effective use of tools and techniques. Rather it is about providing a place where teaching and learning approaches and experiences can be shared, difficult questions asked and ignorance exposed without fear of ridicule, and where learning is enhanced through regular interaction (Wenger 2002; <http://www.ewenger.com/theory/index.htm>).

This project will involve developing a number of collaborative arrangements across RMIT that will include:

- the Quality Unit, who oversee university wide program quality arrangements
- the Educational Media Group (for development of the online tool)
- the Program Processes Working Group
- VETLink (RMIT's formal VET forum)
- the 12 Schools delivering VET programs.

Within this project we hope to bring together all the different understandings of the AQTF process and develop a *shared* understanding.

**5. Facilitating your community of practice**

Please describe how you propose to facilitate your group progressing through the stages of growth of a Community of Practice (see Table 4.1 in the report: *The Potential for Communities of Practice to underpin the National Training Framework*):

This project will have a representative from each of the three portfolios within the University who will form the overall project team. The team will use the five Stages of Development of a Community of Practice (Wenger, 1998) to form the basis of a project methodology that can achieve the following five conditions for the success of the COP:

1. Establishment of commitment amongst members (Mitchell & Young 2002, p. 38)
2. Agreeing on the focus for the Community of Practice (Mitchell & Young 2002, p. 22)
3. Fostering a sense of trust, mutual obligation and common purpose amongst members (Mitchell & Young 2002, p. 14)
4. Generate new knowledge and skill development amongst members (Mitchell & Young 2002, pp. 15, 74)
5. Assist in the transfer of good practice (Mitchell & Young 2002, pp. 5, 11)

The proposed methodology recognises the value of effective facilitation - particularly the use of an expert facilitator, in the initial stages to help the group get established (Mitchell & Young 2002, p. 83), and the need for COP members to develop skills as brokers (Wenger 2002, pp108-110) who can mediate the relations of the COP with the 'outside', translating new meanings developed amongst members of the COP into practices in their program teams.

It is also important that the project methodology enables the project to maintain the support of senior managers at an organisation wide and school level, and to secure organisational agreement for the roll-out of the self-audit tool as an online resource available to all VET staff.

As a means to maintain ongoing communication with senior management, it is proposed that the Program Processes Working Group (a working group of the RMIT TAFE Student Management Reference Group, convened by the Director TAFE) act as a steering committee for this project and as the vehicle for conveying proposals to decision makers. This group will also act as a point of coordination for the evaluation of the project and will review project reports and endorse communications about the project referred to the Reference Group.

Potential Stage	Coalescing Stage	Maturing Stage	Dispersed Stage	Memorable Stage
Identify program coordinators from the 12 qualifications to take part in AQTF reviews during 2006 (12 RMIT Schools).  Identify the project and the roles and responsibilities of the membership.	Launch the COP over lunch, including senior managers.  Consult on dates and places of meetings and workshops.  Establish communication and recording arrangements.  Organise process for review and redesign of AQTF audit tool.	Programs self-audit using draft tool and feedback, sharing evidence supplied against standards.  COP members share AQTF review experience and strategies for future work.  COP members develop new skills: in the use of AQTF audit tools and as brokers of new practice within the larger RMIT TAFE community.  Routinely communicate the work of the COP using RMIT's VETlink and the COP Steering Committee.	Champions working independently in Schools, acting as brokers to translate meanings established in the COP into new practice contexts.	Revisiting tool, adjusting as time progresses.

## 6. Structuring your community

Please describe how you propose to support the development of the three components of your community: its domain of knowledge, its community and its practice?

The domain of knowledge for the COP, as outlined in section 4 above, is quality assurance in relation to AQTF compliance: specifically the capacity of program teams to demonstrate quality practice in the planning, delivery, assessment and record keeping of training based on Training Package units of competency and qualifications.

The development of this domain of knowledge will be supported by involving the members of the COP in producing and trialing an online self-audit tool for subsequent adoption across VET programs at RMIT. By focusing on the practical task of critically reviewing current self-audit tools, participating in workshops with RMIT program quality assurance staff and external auditors to clarify audit requirements, designing their own online tool and introducing this to their program teams, members of the COP will have the opportunity to develop their knowledge of quality processes in a supportive environment and will be able to call on people with relevant expertise to assist them.

The development of the community itself will be supported by bringing the members together in an environment that will facilitate the building of mutual respect and trust, and encourage openness to enquiry and willingness to share knowledge and communicate about needs and concerns. The key to community building is regular interaction and ongoing communication and the main activities that will contribute to the building of a community are:

- a) The initial gathering at which the COP will be launched, which will include time for members to talk informally over lunch and to share stories about current practice
- b) A facilitated gathering to establish agreed rules of engagement for the COP
- c) Facilitated round table discussions to review current self-audit tools and develop strategies to introduce the tool to program teams, at which COP members will be encouraged to draw on each other for support and to sue each other as sounding boards.
- d) Using the skills of the facilitator to maintain contact with individual members to ensure that emerging issues and concerns are brought to the group as a whole.
- e) Involving COP members in reflecting on the tasks at hand and the effectiveness of the COP in meeting their needs.
- f) Using email to circulate ideas, questions and reflections.

The development of effective practice in the use of self-audit tools as vehicles to enhance program quality, and in supporting program teams to develop their own skills in quality processes will be supported in three ways:

- a) through the involvement of all COP members in a set of common tasks – the review and redevelopment of the online self-audit tool, designing an approach to trialing the tool with program teams, and reflecting on the outcomes of the trials,
- b) by drawing on relevant expertise to critically support the development of good practice in self-audit, and
- c) by drawing on repositories of knowledge – for example, and primarily in Reframing the Future publications, on building effective communities of practice and implementing effective quality systems.

### 7. Anticipated outcomes (see Chapters 6-7 of *The Potential*)

Please describe the outcomes anticipated as a result of your project:

The methodology for the project aims to facilitate the establishment of conditions for the COP to cohere in the first instance as a supportive framework for skill development amongst its members, and secondly to act as a springboard for the initiation of school-based social learning systems that positively influence the practice of the participants (Mitchell et al 2005).

for participating individuals	The anticipated benefits of this COP are twofold. First there are benefits for the individual practitioners, who will have the opportunity to develop new skills and knowledge, develop a model of good AQTF practice and to build supportive collegiate relationships (Mitchell & Young, 2002, p. 57).
for participating organisations	Secondly, RMIT as a whole stands to benefit from the dissemination of new skills and knowledge, the implementation of an innovative solution to program quality assurance and through the reinforcement of strategic directions set for the RMIT VET sector (Mitchell & Young 2002, p. 64).

### 8. Evaluation

Please provide an outline of the methods you will use to evaluate the participants' learning and your project's efficiency and effectiveness.

The self-evaluation process will be coordinated by the project team and will include:

- structured reflection at the end of sessions
- summative reflection over the period of the project
- dialogue amongst key stakeholders (such as VETLink)
- regular review of processes and progress by the steering committee
- a collection of reflective data from the 12 Champions.

### 9. Project timeframe

Please list project milestones and key dates

(Please add rows as required)

Milestone	Key date
<b>SET UP PHASE</b>	
1. Gather COP (secure commitment to membership and activities)	End June
2. Action Plan finished and sent to RTF	20 <sup>th</sup> June
3. Organise Steering Committee and contract facilitator	End June
4. Organise self-audit design process Find and review current models Convene working group Secure designer time allocation	Second week July
5. Convene first meeting of COP and organise process for review and redesign of tool, meeting times etc	Second week July
6. Update Steering Committee on project	Third week July
<b>IMPLEMENTATION PHASE</b>	
1. Progress report meeting	Mid August
2. Project mid term report, RTF	5 <sup>th</sup> September
3. Progress report meeting	Mid September
4. Steering Committee meeting	End Sept
5. COP reflection on overall project (action arising)	Second week Oct

6. Final meeting – Review redesigned SAT; plan next steps for COP	End Oct
FINALISATION	
1. Review and evaluation – co-convenors working with facilitator and mentor	Nov
2. Final report RTF	5 <sup>th</sup> December
3. All aspects of project submitted, inc signed financial statement and final invoice	29 <sup>th</sup> January