

Module 7

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Key to icons



Activity



Recommended reading

Introduction and overview

Welcome to the NQF Support Link's Learning Programme 7: Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

The Purpose of this Module

This learning programme offers different options to participants who come to it with different purposes.

Unit 1 only

If you just want useful general insight into what RPL is and into some of the issues involved you might only complete unit 1. However, you should bear in mind that this is a learning programme which only works if it succeeds in stimulating engaged thinking, writing and discussion through the series of activities which it offers.

If you just want to read about RPL there are a number of texts available to you on the NQF Gateway. Unit 1 challenges you to be a critical thinker and problem solver in relation to RPL.

Units 1, 2 and 3 (part 1)

If you need a solid grounding in the policies and practices required for officially recognised RPL in South Africa, you will want to do unit 2 and the first part of unit 3 as well as unit 1. Unit 2 explores the detail of the legislation, policy, regulations, guidelines and good practices for sustainable implementation, making use of a range of case studies. The first part of unit 3 will familiarise you with all the areas required by the RPL unit standard.

If you complete Units 1, 2 and 3 (part 1 only) AND submit your notes and exercises from the units in an acceptable form you will be eligible to receive a certificate of successful attendance from the provider.

Units 1, 2 and part 1 of Unit 3 could be seen as a short course. If you complete them with full attention, and demonstrate familiarity with the demands of Unit 3 you will be a thoroughly informed participant in the implementation of RPL.

The full learning programme: Units 1, 2 and 3

Units 1 and 2 are open to anyone interested in RPL. As noted above, Unit 3 may be studied without necessarily submitting a portfolio.

The full learning programme, however, should result in the potential for highly expert leadership of RPL implementation. Unit 3 is aimed specifically at the individual who wishes to obtain the 10 credits offered by NQF Unit Standard 116587, Develop, support and promote RPL practices. This unit standard is at level 7 on the NQF, which means that it is at the level of a

first degree or higher diploma at least. It assumes a solid basis of prior knowledge about the NQF and assessment and demands 100 (notional) hours of time on task.

Unit 3 provides careful structure and guidance for the construction and submission of a portfolio of evidence showing competence in the NQF Unit Standard 116587.

Units 1 and 2 prepare the ground for unit 3. Together, all three units allow for the 100 hours required.

Learning modes

Units 1 and 2 can be completed by an individual in distance education mode, OR they may provide the programme and material for a two day workshop on RPL.

As indicated above, this can lead to a certificate of successful attendance depending on the satisfaction of some basic conditions. This could be useful on a CV, but does not count as a credit towards a qualification.

Unit 3 is only available as distance education. However, its assignments may be done on a group basis, and support workshops could be arranged at an additional charge. (Unique portfolios must be submitted individually.)

Strong recommendation

You will benefit most from this learning programme if you come to it with a clear sense of how you expect to use the knowledge you will gain. As you go into the programme, reflect on the reasons that have led you to it.

Once you have taken ownership of the concept of RPL (by the end of unit 1) you will be asked to analyse the factors at play in an actual RPL project that you might be involved in. This will prepare you for unit 2, where you will learn about the technical and administrative demands of such a project.

Overview of Unit 1

Recognition of Prior Learning on the NQF

Purpose

This unit introduces the concept of RPL in terms of its origins, genesis, theory and principles. The aim of this unit is to locate RPL on the broad stage of education and training, as an intervention that has a range of forms and intentions.

In this unit we will further explore the genesis of RPL, its different functions and some of the ideas underpinning the concept. As you read, think about what RPL means to your organization and context, in relation to both theory and implementation.

Outcomes

By the end of this unit the successful participants will be able show a general internalised understanding of the key defining features of RPL as a theory and practice, and will outline the possible implications of a range of different purposes and beneficiaries of RPL.

Overview of Activities

The unit contains 11 activities of various lengths, but mainly short.

The activities are designed either for distance learning by an individual, or for group work in a workshop. (Unit two provides further material for the workshop.)

The activities are aimed at stimulating thought and engagement. In addition, if written and collated, they could support the award of a certificate of successful attendance. Thought and formulations generated in this unit should also provide resources for the completion of Unit 3 and the related unit standard.

Unit 1

Recognition of Prior Learning on the NQF

Section 1: Opening gambit: Engaging with the challenges

We start by removing ourselves to a different time and place. We then move to some anecdotes which bring the issues closer to home.

Our intentions are to encourage some critical distance from immediate pressing concerns, and to raise some key issues across historical and national horizons. But above all, we want you to engage your talents. RPL is by no means a fixed and final product. It is very much in a process of exploration and development in South Africa and abroad. In one way or another you will help to shape the way it unfolds.

Think freely about the cases which follow and keep notes about your responses. At the end of unit two, after you have been introduced more fully to the concept and practices of RPL you will be invited to revisit your responses and assess them against your fuller knowledge.



Activity 7.1.1

Stepping back in time

One of the roots of the passion underlying the idea of RPL can be explored through the tale of *The Admirable Crichton*. This once popular play was written early in the 20th century by JM Barrie.

The Admirable Crichton*

Crichton is the butler – the chief manservant – of a very rich family in England before the First World War. He serves the family on a world cruise. Their ship is wrecked and they are marooned on a desert island.

On the island the family is useless. Their prestige, their elegant classical education and their influential social connections are no help. Crichton, on the other hand, is brilliantly resourceful. He solves their problems of food, housing and security. Even more, he shows great leadership, creating hope, courage and teamwork in the face of the island's challenges. The daughter of the family falls in love with him.

Then they are rescued and taken back to England. Crichton has to go back to being a domestic servant. The daughter is married to a Lord. When the story is published the family takes all the credit for their survival. Crichton, being the real gentleman of the story, makes no claims for himself, but looks for a new job.

(* Pronounced cry-tin)

1. Before going on, jot down your thoughts about what this story has to do with your initial understanding of RPL.
2. But would an institution that formally recognised formal system of RPL have helped Crichton? What do you think?

Time: 10 minutes

You might have commented on:

- ✓ The personal injustice and indignity – the lack of fit between real worth and social or employment recognition
- ✓ The socio-economic losses or inefficiency: What happens to a nation and its business when its talent and potential leadership skills are treated like Crichton?
- ✓ You may well have pointed out that the real problem here lies in the class system with its deeply rooted privileges, prejudices and discrimination. Until it changes, even if Crichton's story (his RPL portfolio) becomes a best-seller, he will struggle to move up in the world. As we will see, a concern with RPL involves not only helping people to get over barriers, but also getting rid of irrational barriers – or reducing unnecessary demands in processes of selection and access.



Activity 7.1.2

Role-play

Now imagine there is a revolution in Crichton's England. The new government is committed to both justice and efficiency. It wants a meritocracy to replace aristocracy and plutocracy.

You are the Minister of Human Resources. There are hundreds of thousands of Crichton's potentially (but not always actually) ready to serve their country and its industries in greatly enhanced roles.

Brainstorm a list of the challenges you face, possible solutions and the implications of those solutions (feasibility, logistics, costs, possible negative side-effects). You could do this solo.

If it helps, you could use the table in [Unit 1 Toolkit 1](#).

Time: 30 minutes

Some anecdotal cases and issues to think about

Now consider some thumbnail sketches of situations in South Africa.

Makabongwe Malusi: the lure of the factory floor



Hallo my name is Makabongwe Malusi (Bongi for short). I grew up fixing cars in the backyard with my father. Everybody use to say that I was a bright boy.



I dropped out before the end of primary school and had to learn to be insightful and resourceful in fixing almost anything that could go wrong with almost any model that appeared in the township.

In addition, I felt that I became much better at reading, English and numbers than many of my friends who went on to high school.



I use to read manuals and motoring magazines, had long discussions with clients and other mechanics and grew street wise in addition.

Now at 30 I am becoming restless. I am making a good living, especially repairing old taxis. But the insecurity, the crime and the constant, heavy work are starting to get me down.

I am stimulated, but also threatened, by new technologies. Most new models have electronic and computerised functions that are beyond the capabilities of the best backyard mechanic.

But above all, Motorcorp has built a massive new facility in the neighbouring industrial complex.



I would love to get a job at the new factory. Imagine the clean working spaces, with regulated hours and secure salaries and benefits.

I know that I am qualified, but not fully certified, for work in the factory.



I would love to be trained further.

I realise that there are hundreds of young men queuing up for the jobs. Most have matric, but few if any have my knowledge and skill.

How might Bongji go about getting into formal industry? Does RPL have anything to offer him?

Maria van Staden: From music to management...



Hallo my name is Maria. After completing a music degree. I made a meagre living as an accompanist and taking on a few pupils. Then I married a handsome young farmer from Mpumalanga.



Over the next 18 years we developed the raw land into a highly successful fruit farm, with linked interests in canning and exporting businesses. Apart from bringing up two children and being a housewife, I found that I could use my complex musical skills into managing the business side of operations.



I had to teach myself a huge amount about books and taxes and human resources policy and practices. I had my finger on the whole operation and knew that my good judgement had a lot to do with our success.



Then came the crisis. A terrible drought plus unwise investments that I warned my husband about led to the collapse of the business. I eventually divorced my husband.



Back in Johannesburg, I had to support my children through higher education, by giving piano lessons, which isn't really rewarding.

I feel that I could do better in the corporate world.



But I have limited contacts, and the advertisements that attract me in the Sunday Times all seem to demand MBAs or commerce and accounting qualifications.



At 45 I do not have the heart or the time to start again at the beginning of such a qualification. I feel that I know much of what the courses contain and much more beside.

What would your advice to her be? Is there any place for RPL in her life?

Molly Letlape: Shifting whole cohorts



Hallo my name is Molly. As a former educator and now expert human resources manager I am passionately committed to transformation. I have just been appointed at the top of the HR hierarchy in OBEE Mining Corporation.



My first survey has shown that there are 8 352 workers who may be ready for upgrading of roles, responsibilities and benefits. Most of them are currently in low grade jobs, with low levels of formal education. The trade union leadership want me to make dramatic progress on this matter. The management are concerned with bottom lines and declining levels of profitability.



Everybody is telling me I should make use of RPL to solve this problem. But I wonder if RPL is what is needed. Maybe some quick placements tests will be enough. Or does that count as RPL? Or should we start by changing the rules? Can you advise me?

What do you think?

Khotso Moseia: The school principal's dilemma



Hallo my name is Mrs Moseia. I am the principal of a rural primary school. Most of my teachers are poorly qualified. Their pay and their prospects for moving upwards are poor. They fall into two broad groups:

1. Some are motivated and loyal and do a great job in spite of their limitations in training and their low status and their poor pay. They have really grown through their many years of experience. They also willingly attend courses – but it is very difficult for them to improve their qualifications.
2. Some just fill their spaces. It would be difficult to manage all 650 learners without them, but that is the best I can say of them. I heard an expression, something like: “Without the tools for learning from experience, twenty years of experience are just one year of experience repeated twenty times.” These teachers are like that. There’s no growth.

They would never think of going back to training, but they also want to raise their status.



Is there any way that RPL could help in this situation – in a way that would increase the happiness of the staff and lead to better teaching?

What do you think?

Only read and engage with the following statement when you have thought about the above cases:



Professor Tsolo Mabeletse: Deputy Vice Chancellor

(with oversight of instructional programmes)

The jury is out on whether RPL can work for the university. The debates have been fierce. Some faculty members think that the assumptions underlying RPL threaten the foundations of higher education. They say that experiential learning is a very inadequate basis for moving into the world of theory. Others disagree, preferring experienced adults to matriculants as students. Yet others think that RPL is unmanageable and an illegitimate burden on the institution's workload. They ask why we don't go for open admissions and let the students find their own level instead of making so much fuss.

Anyway, we have agreed to conduct RPL on an experimental basis. Among many candidates we have admitted Makabongwe Malusi to a preparatory programme in Engineering. He has been a great success at Motorcorp and has succeeded in a number of training programmes. But in spite of a successful RPL evaluation, his lecturers are worried that we will not be able to compensate for his complete lack of foundations in formal mathematical and scientific reasoning. Maria van Staden was admitted to the Business School on the basis of an interview and the recognition of her existing qualifications. She can manage her new job and her studies because she has been exempted (conditionally) from about one third of the programme. Still, she is finding huge gaps between her practical experience and theoretical studies.

My colleagues in education have met with Mr Moseia's underqualified teachers. In all but one case they believe that the teachers are so far from meeting the requirements of current educator qualifications – both professionally and in terms of content knowledge – that they cannot imagine RPL working, and doubt that they would cope with a professional programme of studies. My RPL team have pointed out to them that they may be missing the point of RPL...

What do you think?



Activity 7.1.3

Locating yourself in relation to RPL...

It is highly probable that you have personal experience of situations which seem to call for RPL. This may involve a friend or relation, someone at work, or even you yourself. Hold a brief discussion or write some notes about one such situation.

Ask yourself seriously what the benefits of this situation would be, for both the individual concerned, and the institution or workplace involved. Would there be any drawbacks? What effort would be required to turn the prior knowledge into a qualification (or at least a credit towards a formal qualification)? Would that effort be justified in terms of the benefits, either to the individual or institution/ workplace?

Time: 10 minutes

Having engaged with personal perspectives of the broad idea of RPL, you should be ready to engage with a more theoretical approach.

Section 2: The concept – in broad strokes

For most people through most of human history experience has been their major source of learning – that is, learning through doing was the route to achievement. However, modern society has long formalized learning, education and training through complex systems of defined curricula and institutional delivery. Successful completion of a course of learning was then formally recognised through an award, or what we now call accreditation or certification of the achievement of knowledge and skills.

It is the learning which falls outside these mainstream systems with which RPL is primarily concerned. This could mean, for example, learning which has been gained informally, from work and life experience; or learning which has been gained through short courses or other kinds of training which are not linked to formal certification or qualifications (sometimes known as non-formal learning).

Some people would say that RPL can also be used for checking whether formal qualifications which a person already has (for example, from another country) can be accepted in place of another qualification required for a position or for further study. There is in fact a lot of debate about what RPL is and what it is not, and in this unit we will explore the different ways in which the term is used.

The following table summarises how different forms of learning are commonly described. We will come across these terms as we work through ways of understanding RPL in this unit.

Different forms of learning and of recognition of learning

Category	Forms of Learning	Certification
Formal	School, FET college, university, university of technology, institute etc; sometimes workplace-based	Certificated, that is, awards linked to formal qualifications

	formal learning (e.g. apprenticeships, learnerships)	
Informal	Experiential learning (learning on the job, through observation, through experience); own learning or study through hobbies, interests, community involvement etc	Non-certificated
Non-formal	Short courses (e.g. computer courses, life skills courses), skills programmes in workplaces, community centre learning (e.g. first aid courses, literacy education, cooking, counselling etc)	Mostly non-certificated, or given a certificate of attendance by the provider which is not linked to any national certification. Some workplace skills programmes may link into formal awards or qualifications.



Activity 7.1.4

Comparing ways of seeing RPL

Read the following:

Some ways of defining RPL:

1. '.... people have inside them undisclosed knowledge and skill which if disclosed and publicly available for scrutiny might well merit some form of accreditation'.
2. 'The process of assessing prior learning is based on the relatively obvious notion that what and how people learn and have learned should be recognized and used to help them progress as learners.'
3. '... a process that enables people of all ages, backgrounds and attitudes to receive credit for achievements that they have acquired outside the classroom. The basic premise is that individuals can and do learn throughout their lives in a variety of settings and that often the ensuing skills, knowledge and abilities are equal and frequently superior to those obtained by students following traditional routes through formal education'.
4. '... the recognition of the skills, knowledge and capability currently held by a person, regardless of how, when and where the learning occurred.' (NQF Support Link, Module 1 Unit 1).
5. 'The theory of experiential learning is often quoted as underpinning RPL. Thus, whilst a particular experience might generate the learning impetus, it is only after engaging in a process of observation and reflection, creating ideas and generalizations, and applying ideas to new situations that recognizable levels of learning and understanding emerge.' (J Harris NCCRD, March 2000)
(Statements 1-4 are given in National Training Boards Committee 9 Document of Work, 'The Recognition of Prior Learning: Current Thinking and Status in South Africa', undated.)

Write and/or discuss your response to these questions:

1. Do all these ways of seeing RPL say the same thing, or are there differences between them? Discuss or write brief notes on any differences you can identify.
2. Do you think that any significant experience automatically results in learning? What needs to be in place for experience to translate into learning?

3. Think about any knowledge or skills you might have which could be subject to RPL. How would these fit in with any one of the statements above?

Time: 45 minutes

Section 3: The origins of RPL – a brief overview

Two broad impulses behind RPL:

1. The humanistic impulse, which values an individual's actual and potential capacities, and sees contextualised and situated learning on an individual level as something to be nurtured and recognized. This ties in with ideals of justice and the fulfilment of human potential.
2. The economic impulse, arising against a background of global competition where increasing demands for quality and higher value-added goods and services make skills development (upgrading and re-skilling) imperative. RPL in this context is seen as a way of fast-tracking skills development, and avoiding wasting resources on training those who may already have the required competence.

Although these two impulses need not be in conflict, the different value emphases may lead to different approaches in practice.



Activity 7.1.5

Identifying differences as a result of “primary impulse”

Discuss and list differences that are likely to arise in the practice of RPL, depending on whether the humanistic or economic impulse is given priority. Think of issues such as selection or type of assessment. Try to identify at least three differences.

You can use the table in given in [Unit 1 Toolkit 2](#).

Time: 15 minutes

Now consider the history of RPL:

A very brief history of RPL

In the USA in the 1940s, an early example of RPL dealt with the evaluation of the skills of soldiers returning from war for recognition by universities. Over 1700 universities and colleges now offer RPL assessment facilities. In the UK the focus was also on access to post-secondary education, including an emphasis on developmental RPL to help people maximize their opportunities. In Australia, RPL initiatives have been linked to the vocational education and training system as well as higher education, and to economic and employment imperatives.

In South Africa both the humanistic impulse, as illustrated in the principles of the NQF, and the economic, as illustrated in the National Skills Development Strategy, are at work. Most particularly, though, there is a strong social justice imperative, based on the political origins of the NQF. RPL is seen as a mechanism for redress for those who were excluded or disadvantaged by the apartheid-based discriminatory education and training system, and thereby from employment opportunities. This has led to the explicit mention of RPL in many of the current Acts and regulations which affect education and training. This will be dealt with in more detail in Unit 2.



Activity 7.1.6

Exploring features of RPL

Two little exercises:

- 1 The implementation of RPL in South Africa is likely to differ markedly from RPL in the USA and the UK. List at least one strength and one weakness to be anticipated in South African implementation compared with those countries. (You can think about, for example, the impact of the SA NQF, or the labour context in which we operate, or the educational backlogs that affect many people in this country.)
- 2 The humanistic and economic impulses are clearly intertwined in South Africa. Imagine a continuum between these impulses, from purely humanistic on the left to purely economic on the right.

Humanistic = = = = = Economic

- 2.1 Now go back to the anecdotes at the start of this unit. Use the initials of the person to locate each potential RPL situation on the continuum as expressed in the South African aspirations for RPL.
 - 2.1.1 Makabongwe Malusi, the backyard mechanic (MM)
 - 2.1.2 Rita van Staden, the musician become manager (RvS)
 - 2.1.3 Molly Letlape, HR director in a mining corporation (ML)
 - 2.1.4 Khotso Moseia, principal of a rural school (KM)

You need not feel embarrassed if you found it difficult to place each situation clearly on the continuum. You could have had good reasons for wanting to put a particular situation in more than one position. And you might have found that the continuum is missing a dimension or two reflecting different impulses.

- 2.2 Write about or discuss what you have observed in this little exercise.
- 2.3 Discuss and list differences that are likely to arise in the practice of RPL, depending on whether the humanistic or economic impulse is given priority. Think of issues such as selection or type of assessment. Try to identify at least three differences.

Time: 60 minutes

Relating RPL to the founding principles of the NQF:

The NQF is guided in the first place by its principles. (These are explored more fully in Learning Programme 1 of the NQF Support Link.)

As you revisit these principles you will realise how closely RPL relates to many of them. Indeed, it could be argued that RPL is close to the heart of the NQF's principles, and that without the idea of RPL the NQF itself would have limited meaning.



Activity 7.1.7

Rating RPL against the NQF principles

In the table below, insert numbers on the right hand side to indicate how closely the principle is given expression through NQF (among other things). (0 = No relationship to 3 = Very strong, essential relationship)

Time: 10 minutes

	NQF Principle	RPL Rating
Integration	To form part of a system of human resources development which provides for the establishment of a unifying approach to education and training	
Relevance	To be and remain responsive to national development needs	
Credibility	To have national and international value and acceptance	
Coherence	To work within a consistent framework of principles and certification	
Flexibility	To allow for multiple pathways to the same learning ends	
Standards	To be expressed in terms of a nationally agreed framework and internationally accepted outcomes	
Legitimacy	To provide for the participation of all national stakeholders in the planning and co-ordination of standards and qualifications	
Access	To provide ease of entry to appropriate levels of education and training for all prospective learners in a manner which facilitates progression	
Articulation	To provide for learners, on successful completion of accredited pre-requisites, to move between components of the delivery system	
Progression	To ensure that the framework of qualifications permits individuals to move through the levels of national qualifications via different appropriate combinations of the components of the delivery system	
Portability	To enable learners to transfer the credits of qualifications from one learning institution and/or employer to another	
RPL	To, through assessment, give credit to learning which has already been acquired in different ways	
Guidance of learners	To provide for the counseling of learners by specially trained individuals who meet nationally recognized standards for educators and trainers	

Section 4: The Purposes of RPL – defining ends and means

Key Purposes

All of our reflection and activities in this unit so far have been pointing to the importance of clarifying the purposes of RPL. The purpose of any implementation of RPL is central to decisions about how it is carried out. Also important is the social or economic context in which an RPL process is planned.



Activity 7.1.8

Identifying the purposes of RPL

A range of RPL goals



“We are under pressure from our parent company to give a profile of the skills currently in our company. We want to use RPL to do a skills audit to give us an overview of the trends and patterns within the employee body.”



“We use RPL to see whether a learner can enter our institution, and at what level he or she should undertake a specific programme”.



‘We have an RPL process in place in order to exempt learners from certain parts of the course that they already know.’



“I am in a learnership in order to get a qualification for work I have already been doing for years. I want recognition and credits for what I already know, rather than having to repeat all this stuff.”



“As an informal family and neighbourhood caregiver, especially in response to the HIV AIDS pandemic, I believe I have done a remarkably responsible and professional job. When carried out properly, these roles are so important that they demand not just social recognition but formal qualifications. To affirm the need for status and reward for localised care giving I am seeking a process of RPL.”

- 1 From these statements of ambitions or hopes for RPL, list the possible purposes of RPL. You may add any purposes that are not represented through these statements.
- 2 Now read **Reading 1a, 1b and 1c.**
- 3 Then discuss and/or write about one page on what would be the key purposes of RPL in your own organisational context. Your account should touch on who the beneficiaries of RPL would be in each case, and how they would benefit.

Time: 60 minutes

You can already see from these discussions that the purposes of RPL are many and varied. One of the main delineations of purpose is the outcome of the RPL process, primarily whether or not it results in formal recognition through the award of certification. Another way of putting this is the distinction between access only, or access and award.

Section 5: Concepts and Debates

RPL Models

Debates around the purposes, scope and outcomes of RPL have led to the development of different models for RPL. These models represent different concepts about what knowledge is, and what kinds of knowledge should be recognised or promoted. Broadly, the models are as follows:

✓ **A credit-exchange approach**

This model is based on a straightforward notion of matching the knowledge acquired informally or non-formally with the specified standards or requirements of a qualification, or (in SAQA terminology) the outcomes represented by registered credits on the NQF. It has been defined as ‘the ability of the individual to perform certain job-tasks or roles a pre-defined standard’i. The aim is clearly the achievement of certification or credits, and the focus of the process is on making sure that the skills and knowledge being measured agree with the content of the curriculum and the defined standards. It is a practical approach towards recognizing knowledge achieved for qualification processes, but is sometimes criticized on the grounds that it does not challenge power relations in knowledge production, or the social and psychological elements of learning. It is closely linked to the ‘economic impulse’ discussed under 3.

✓ **A developmental approach**

The emphasis in this model is more on the individual experience of the learner and what he or she has actually learned, rather than matching to pre-agreed standards. The model aims to support and promote the personal and intellectual development of the RPL candidate, and recognises that there may be valuable learnings that have happened that are not reflected in the formal curriculum. It is based on the idea of experiential learning, that is, that learning acquired through experience needs to be thought about and applied to new situations. In this model the RPL applicant needs to be introduced to ways in which he or she can formalise the knowledge or learning achieved through experience, and acquire the generally accepted academic or technical ways of showing this knowledge. It is linked to the 'humanistic' impulse noted in 3.

✓ **A transformational model**

There are various forms of this model, also known as 'radical' or 'emancipatory' RPL. The model is linked to social transformation, and questions ways in which knowledge is constructed, what is defined as valuable, and the power relations in curricula and institutions. One of its aims is to allow experiential or marginalised learning to influence the mainstream curriculum.

In South Africa RPL has taken the form of the credit-exchange model, the developmental model, or a combination of the two. Various elements of these models are explored further throughout the units in this programme.

You will find a more detailed reading on these models in Unit 3.



Activity 7.1.9

What's in a name?

The international acronyms¹ for RPL also illustrate a possible range of approaches.

Different international terms for RPL:

Country	Abbreviation	Description
USA	PLA	Prior Learning Assessment
Britain	APL	Accreditation of prior learning (over-arching term)
Scotland	AP(E)L	Accreditation of prior (experiential) learning
Ireland	APL	Accreditation of Prior Learning

¹ M Ed dissertation, Ronel Heyns, 2004

Canada	PLAR	Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition
Australia	RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
New Zealand	RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
The Netherlands	EVC	Elders Verworwen Competencies
France	VAP	Validation des Acquis Professionels (Validation of acquired professional learning / experience)

Consider this listing and briefly discuss differences of approach that are suggested by the naming of some of the national versions of RPL:

Time: 15 minutes

Contestations and confusions

The logic of RPL seems simple enough on first acquaintance. By now, you will have realised that RPL poses some complex challenges. Like the outcomes-based or standards-based education and training to which it is linked in some ways, it has generated a certain amount of controversy.



Activity 7.1.10

Anticipate the challenges of RPL

Given what you have thought about RPL so far, quickly brainstorm the challenges, difficulties and confusions which you think might arise when implementing it. Look at the grid headed 'Possible areas for clarification in RPL' given in [Unit 1 Toolkit 3](#), as this might help you generate some points – or construct an alternative grid of your own.

Time: 15 minutes

The points that you have made should prove valuable as you work through the next two units. You will see that many of the provisions and approaches officially developed for implementing RPL in South Africa are designed to deal with the challenges that you have identified.

At this stage it will be useful to consider just two matters of ongoing debate.

The general – specific question

In the history of languages, some words lose value because they become too general, others because they become too specific. As soon as the term RPL became public property it started to face the same danger.

We have seen already that people use the term RPL to mean different things. There is a tendency to use RPL for any process vaguely related to access or even simply to exercises in improving individual self-esteem. As you have seen already, RPL will differ

depending on what it is intended to offer access to – a different job; the same work at a higher level; further studies at a higher level; a new area of learning. The differences multiply in different contexts. RPL for an airline pilot is likely to be very different from RPL for a job in interior decoration.

We need to beware of calling any related procedure RPL. Does it count as RPL if you give a quick standardised test to several thousand people where those who pass are candidates for a slightly more senior level? Does it count as RPL if one conducts an interview plus verification of letters of recommendation and perhaps a look at a sample of the individual's work? Does it count as RPL if I appoint someone whom I have watched at work for five years to a senior position?

Or is RPL only legitimately called RPL when the candidate goes through a rigorous process of evidence development with a specially trained RPL tutor, and is assessed by an independent assessor against national standards? Does the process have to result in the award of credits to be called RPL?

Remember the SAQA definition in the policy - 'Recognition of prior learning means the comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner howsoever obtained against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements'. This would seem to imply that the term RPL should only be used if the assessment aims at resulting in the award of credits.

However, policy definitions are often challenged or expanded in practice, and if you work in this field you will find that different people, organisations and sectors have varying views on how to define and use RPL. Look again at the questions posed in paragraph 3 above. Different people will probably answer these in different ways. What uses of the term have you come across in your work? How would you identify or limit RPL in relation to some of these questions?

A key contestation: The issue of knowledge

Now read the two positions summarised in the box below. (You might also find the reading on experiential learning in Unit 3 useful here.)

The issue of knowledge

Position 1

Where RPL results in certification, the central concern of stakeholders must be to ensure that the RPL award means the same as the award achieved through the undertaking of formal training or institutional learning – in other words, that there is a match between the prior experiential learning with the selected and formal learning represented

by a discipline-based curriculum, or, in NQF terms, a match with the knowledge, skills and competencies represented by unit standards and/or exit outcomes of a registered qualification.

The questions that are asked of RPL from this position can be summed up as follows:

- ✓ Has the learning acquired through experience equipped the learner with the theory required as well as the practical knowledge and application?
- ✓ Has the learning acquired through experience equipped the learner with the understanding of the discipline-based discourse of the subject, or the understanding of the technical terminology and standard operating procedures of the occupation, in order to be able to progress?
- ✓ What forms of assessment will adequately answer the two questions above?

The main assumption underlying this position is that the 'recognition' in RPL is against a set of pre-determined or pre-defined notions of knowledge or standards of competence. It may well be that this is entirely appropriate from a pragmatic point of view, where codified knowledge (e.g. in the natural or applied sciences) or standardized application (e.g. in industrial or workplace training) is the basis from which the learner can advance. (– ie at a specific point in an individual's study or occupational pathway it is 'given' knowledge that needs to be recognised.)

This position is closest to the 'credit-exchange model' previously described.

Position 2

However, this approach has been challenged in ways related to how knowledge is conceptualized, and to different theories of learning.

The critiques generally challenge the notion of universal, or objective 'static' knowledge: knowledge is socially and politically constructed, and interpretation is shaped by power relations, that is, who decides on what counts as knowledge, who produces it, who recognizes it, and how it is transferred. In RPL terms, the debate then is how to value the situated, contextual learning that someone has gained through experience, which may differ substantially from the codified, discipline knowledge represented by a standards framework. The questions asked of RPL from this position might be as follows:

- ✓ What is the relationship between lived experience and the particular constructions of knowledge coded into formal systems? Is there a way of identifying what these have in common? How does one compare experiential knowledge with formal knowledge? What does this mean for saying that one kind of knowledge is 'equivalent' or of equal status and value, to another?
- ✓ What is the role of knowledge that has traditionally been under-recognised, such as indigenous knowledge, women's knowledge and so on?
- ✓ In what ways can RPL practices be used to shape knowledge production, so that experiential forms of knowledge are integrated into standardized forms of knowledge?
- ✓ What are the implications of these debates for certification and award?
- ✓ What forms of assessment will adequately answer the questions above?

This position relates more closely to developmental (especially in terms of learning and assessment styles) and transformational (especially in terms of dominant modes of knowledge) models of RPL.



Activity 7.1.11

Anticipate the challenges of RPL

- 1
- 2 In relation to the context of education and training in which you work, what kind of 'experiential learning' could be recognized?
- 3 What are the differences between the formalized knowledge represented by your learning programmes, and the kinds of knowledge a learner might bring from experience?
- 4 Are there synergies between these kinds of knowledge?

Discuss and/or write brief notes on these questions

Time: 20 minutes

Alert!:

How does

1. everyday, experiential knowledge or workplace-based learning (horizontal, practice-related), relate to
2. academic, schooling or institutional learning (vertical, predominantly theoretical)?

This question has proved to be highly contentious recently. The most common point of reference is the model of the famous

educational psychologist, Basil Bernstein, which uses the terms horizontal and vertical. Some people – mainly from higher education – claim that there is no useful relationship between them, and/or that experiential knowledge provides no basis for formal recognition or certification. Some believe that experiential, especially workplace, learning is even more worthy of recognition than academic learning. A middle position is gaining favour, in which the relationship between the two sides is seen to be complex and intertwined. The related issues of certification are equally complex.

You might enter the debate and test where you stand on this question.

Section 6: Linking purpose to planning

We close this unit and prepare the way for Unit 2 with an exercise which moves you much closer to your own projects and your own reasons for doing this programme.



Activity 7.1.12

Analysing key features of your RPL project

Read the following notes carefully and then fill in the final template in Unit 1 Toolkit 4 in a way that will help you to think through your own project.

Recommended reading

Read [section 2a](#) and [2b](#) from the reader.

What is clear from the Section above is that the form and shape that a particular RPL project will take is influenced by a number of factors. These will include, centrally, the purpose for which it is being undertaken (often determined by the sector and organizational context, such as an institution of learning or a workplace) and the theoretical framework on which RPL is based. These in turn will define various features of an RPL project such as the following:

- ✓ **RPL policy:** Any organization undertaking RPL should have an RPL policy which (i) states the purposes and outcomes of RPL explicitly to the target market; and (ii) reflects the institutional position on RPL, and its systems for implementation. (See Unit 2 Readings for an example of the elements of an RPL policy.)
- ✓ **Assessment:** The approach taken to RPL assessment can vary substantially, but should articulate with the stated purpose and theoretical view. For example, RPL for access could simply rely on what has been called 'static' forms of evidence, such as documentary proof of relevant non-formal courses undertaken; RPL for applied technical skills would have to rely on observed demonstrations of competence in the real workplace; RPL for an entire qualification would obviously be a process that would involve more than one form of assessment, and would need to link theory and practice, while RPL for one or two unit standards would be more limited in scope; RPL for alternative forms of knowledge might need to be a mediated process rather than just an assessment. (See Unit 1 Readings 2a and 2b for an overview of possible forms of assessment for RPL.)
- ✓ **Reporting:** The form of reporting will be determined by both policy and purpose. Obviously, RPL for credits, certification and award purposes will be linked to the relevant systems requirements and will address issues such as the following:

- Registration of credits on the NQF

- Relevant ETQA reporting requirements
- Transferability of credits/ qualification to other institutions
- Value of credits/ qualification
- Information issued, such as an academic transcript or record of credits
- The extent to which certification or records will show that credits have been achieved through the RPL process

Now fill in **Unit 1 Toolkit 4**. Feel free to add features and rows

Time: 40 minutes

Overview of Unit 2

Recognition of Prior Learning on the NQF

Purpose

In Unit 1 we looked broadly at the concept of RPL, focusing in particular on the purposes of RPL. In this unit we will locate RPL more particularly in the SA context, in terms of both policy and practice.

The purpose of this unit is to advance your understanding of the various facets of RPL in the South African context. The unit provides an overview of the policy and regulatory landscape, and then moves on to look specifically at various operational aspects of RPL. It closes with a reflection on emerging themes for RPL.

Outcomes

By the end of this unit, participants will be familiar with the regulatory environment impacting on RPL in South Africa and be able to refer to relevant legislation where necessary. They will also understand the various elements that need to be considered in the design and implementation of an RPL project, and show how this applies in different contexts.

Overview of Activities

The activities help participants engage with different approaches to RPL, in terms of the cycle of events that are needed to operationalise RPL. Examples of processes, constraints and difficulties that occur in different sectors are explored. Participants are asked to reflect on emerging themes for RPL research.

Unit 2

Recognition of Prior Learning on the NQF

Section 1: Policies and Regulations

The key guiding document on RPL in the SA context is the SAQA Policy Document, 'The Recognition of Prior Learning in the context of the National Qualifications Framework', June 2002. This document defines RPL as follows:

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is defined in the National Standards Bodies Regulations (No 18787 of 28 March 1998, issued in terms of the SAQA Act 58 of 1995) as follows:

"Recognition of prior learning means the comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner howsoever obtained against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements."

This document should be read in its entirety, and can be found in the NQF Link Resources. Another useful document is the SAQA Guideline Document 'Criteria and Guidelines for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning', June 2004. This can be found on the SAQA website, www.saqqa.org.za.



Recommended reading

A useful overview of the relevant education acts and various national policies is provided in [Reading 1a](#), and a generic example of an RPL policy in [Reading 1b](#).



Activity 7.2.1

Barriers

Make notes on the following questions, drawing on any of the related texts you have read.

1. What are the relevant regulations or policies that will affect you in your environment? Are there ways in which these regulations or policies could help or hinder an RPL process - for example, what kinds of barriers might be raised by the 50% residency clause in Higher Education described in the Reading? What kinds of support might be provided by SETA ETQA policies or guidelines?
2. Learners who have not followed a traditional route in education and training are faced with various barriers. In [Unit 2 Toolkit 1](#) you will find a diagram outlining issues to consider before implementing an RPL project. This diagram suggests some of the barriers you may need to address. Then look at the table provided, and tick the barriers that might apply to your context and the learners you deal with.
3. Can you think of any ways of addressing any of these barriers?

Time: 30 minutes

Section 2: Policies, procedures and processes in organizations

RPL is a form of assessment. An RPL system must be based on all the 'good practice' features of credible assessment, as well as additional elements in support of the unique features of RPL. ETQA's generally require that their education and training providers have assessment policies and procedures clearly set out as an aspect of their quality assurance systems, and that, where relevant, the management of assessment includes RPL.



Activity 7.2.2

Good practice assessment – your context and views

1. Write brief notes on your understanding of what the following features of an assessment policy and system would cover, either from your own knowledge and/or your organizational context.
 - ✓ Principles
 - ✓ Methods of Assessment
 - ✓ Evidence Requirements
 - ✓ Assessment Tools and Instruments
 - ✓ Timing
 - ✓ Role of assessors
 - ✓ Moderation procedures
 - ✓ Role of Moderators
 - ✓ Irregularities procedures
 - ✓ Appeals procedures
 - ✓ Recording and reporting
 - ✓ Quality Assurance
 - ✓ Monitoring and evaluation
2. What features would you need to add to this list if you were considering implementing RPL in your context?
3. In Unit 1 you were given readings on methods of assessment that could be used for RPL. In the NQF Resource Box you will find a chapter from the SAQA Policy document 'Criteria and Guidelines for the assessment of NQF registered standards and qualifications', October 2001, which will give you a more systemic view of assessment. As you read, consider how this relates to the assessment focus of RPL.

Time: 45 minutes

The decisions made about the actual assessment of RPL candidates are however only one step within the overall RPL undertaking. RPL is generally seen as a process, comprising a cycle of events along the way. As we saw in Unit 1, the nature and scope

of this process will vary greatly according to the context and purpose for which RPL is implemented.



Recommended reading

Four examples of ways of conceptualizing an overall RPL process are given in the toolkit for this unit. These examples illustrate a range of possible ways of undertaking RPL. Go to [Unit 2 Toolkit 2](#) and look at these process overviews:

- ✓ Example 1: Generic RPL process (SAQA)
- ✓ Example 2: Application-based RPL process
- ✓ Example 3a and 3b: SETA guidelines
- ✓ Example 4: Summary of approaches common to Higher Education, and extracts from the UNISA RPL process.



Activity 7.2.3

Now discuss the following questions. Refer to any of the example processes as applicable in your notes.

1. Do all these approaches require the use of a selection tool to identify RPL candidates? Why/why not?
2. In what context is buy-in from a range of stakeholders vital to the success of the RPL project? What would be the best methods to achieve this?
3. Which of these approaches would be problematic for a large scale RPL intervention, and why?
4. What are the Human Resource implications of the various processes? Are there differences between them?
5. Which of these approaches would be most appropriate to your context, and why?

Time: 60 minutes



Activity 7.2.4

Now read the following view points from two case studies of RPL projects.

Case Study 1

A project on a mine was targeted at people with no formal certification. The aim was to help people understand what skills they actually had, and to identify areas where top-up training could be helpful.

One worker's comment was:

"We were told to go and apply for this thing. We did not know what it was for. Many of us could not understand what that person was asking us in the first meeting, so some people did not go back again. Also the paper asked me what Standard I had passed – from many years ago I do not remember, so I just wrote Standard 5. I could not understand the test they gave me after."

Now make notes on the following questions:

1. What would you identify as the process gaps in this instance?
2. How would you address these?
3. What principles of RPL were neglected in this case?

Case Study 2

An assessment agency was asked to provide RPL for people already in learnerships in various companies against a set of 'generic standards' (Financial Literacy, Mathematical Literacy and Communication in English), as these standards were requirements for their qualification. The following is an adapted extract from a paper presented on this project.

Many of SAQA's core criteria for quality assurance of RPL are institution or workplace bound, in that they assume that all the players are closely connected and operating in a coherent environment. But what of the external assessment agency who is called in by a client to provide a specific service, at different sites with different consultation procedures, within a limited time frame and at a reasonable cost? Some of the desirable features of RPL may not be within the control of an assessment provider such as ourselves and others who are servicing learnerships in a range of companies for specific contracts.

We identify two issues, related to the first two quality areas put forward in the SAQA document:

Quality indicators for institutional policy and environment: in the workplace this refers to processes such as information giving and negotiation on the reasons for RPL, or logistical issues such how much time off candidates are given, whether RPL takes place during working hours or partly in own time, whether paid leave is given, who provides transport to venues etc. However, the RPL provider cannot make these decisions: the client is usually the company offering the learnership, and the arrangements for the learnerships, and the agreements in place between management, union and learnership candidates are not within our control. We advise our clients to discuss and agree on the purpose of RPL with their candidates before entering them into the process, and we recommend that most of the RPL portfolio process be done in working hours. However, we cannot insist on this – otherwise we would probably have no clients.

Quality indicators for services and support to candidates: again, the criterion assumes the existence of 'student services' or HR practitioners. How these are deployed within an institution or a workplace is not within the control of the service provider. We offer some support services, namely an introductory RPL workshop and guideline materials But the degree of support candidates receive from their own line managers and co-ordinators during the RPL process in the learnership is very variable.²

Now make notes on the following questions:

1. What are the issues of accountability raised by this extract, in terms of who takes ultimate responsibility for which aspects of the RPL process?
2. This service provider noted that the market demand for RPL is constrained by the expectation of 'reasonable cost'. What are the explicit and hidden costs of RPL suggested by this extract?
3. Are there any suggestions you could make to external service providers to address the problems raised in this extract?
4. What do the issues raised here imply for some of the RPL process overviews given in the examples?

Time: 45 minutes

The issue of costs

Read the two examples of RPL projects below.

Example 1: The Construction Industry Education and Training Authority (CETA)

² King, M A: RPL Policies and Practices: Reality Challenges. Paper presented at the 2nd National JET RPL Conference, July 2003

The CETA conducted a 3 year development project in RPL, directed at bricklayers, carpenters, painters and plumbers employed as unskilled labourers in the industry. The project aimed to provide individual access to qualifications and opportunities for further learning, and improved access to employment that required qualifications. In addition, the project supported the development of new qualifications and skills programmes. Over 8000 individuals achieved competency awards, and 27 RPL centres were established through accredited training providers. The project was funded by the European Union.

Key features:

The project was based on 3 main phases: an advisory phase, in which advisors spent time with candidates explaining what the standards were, mediating assessment tasks and advising on the compilation of the portfolio of evidence; an assessment phase, using registered assessors to evaluate the evidence presented; and a verification phase, including moderation and quality assurance of both instruments and results. The main areas of time and effort went into the training of advisors, assessors and verifiers, the development of materials and assessment tools, and the development of the quality management system.

Example 2: RPL in the Insurance Sector

The purpose of this initiative was to upgrade the minimum qualification levels of currently employed financial advisors and insurance brokers in line with the requirements of the Financial Advisory and Intermediary Services Act (Act 37 of 2002). The project was undertaken by the INSETA in conjunction with a higher education institution.

Key Features:

- ✓ Marketing to potential candidates
- ✓ A nation-wide road show to small and large financial services companies, explaining the implications of the Act and the presenting RPL as a solution.
- ✓ Self-assessments by candidates, followed by workshops explaining portfolio requirements.
- ✓ Design of assessment and moderation tools.
- ✓ Assessment of written portfolios, audio or visual materials, and face-to-face or telephonic performance.
- ✓ Moderation by INSETA.
- ✓ Feedback and reporting to candidates.

These two projects are obviously large scale projects, taking place across a number of sites, and planned and organized from a macro level with funding or subsidies. They do however illuminate some of the activities that will need to be costed when designing an RPL intervention.



Activity 7.2.5

Now read the following view points from two case studies of RPL projects.

From your reading of these two examples, and the thinking you have done on RPL so far, draw up a list of cost categories that need to be considered in planning a

budget for RPL. You do not have to draw up a budget, simply list the elements you will need to consider. You will need to think about the input costs in terms of processes, services, materials and human resources, and the operational costs.

Time: 20 minutes



Recommended reading

Now go to [Reading 2](#) to get an overview of what SAQA says about costs and fees for RPL.

Section 3: Integrating RPL into education and training

One of the points often made by champions of RPL is the need to 'build in' RPL to curriculum design from the start, rather than seeing it as a separate add-on project outside mainstream institutional processes. The motivations for this argument are both conceptual and practical:

1. Designing an RPL process helps practitioners understand how knowledge acquired outside formal institutions may be valued, and credited against qualification requirements. These understandings can enrich the traditional curriculum, and bring learning programmes closer to the world of work and experience. Designing for RPL and designing a curriculum should go hand in hand.
2. Integrating RPL into mainstream curriculum design and programme delivery is cost-effective. If a curriculum or learning programme is designed with 'spaces' for RPL support and assessments, this will save on design and development costs in response to RPL needs.

This approach can also apply to workplaces, in the sense that Human Resource policies can also offer space to RPL. Policies and procedures for employment and for promotion should be reviewed to check where there may be barriers for those who may have the competence but not the qualifications. 'Competence descriptions' in job profiles could be used to find ways of recognizing employees who should not be held back by regulatory barriers.



Activity 7.2.6

There are two readings given in this unit on integrating RPL into curriculum development. Once you have read these, write a paragraph on what you think would be the central RPL issue to integrate in your context, either into an institution-based curriculum, or a workplace practice.

Time: 20 minutes

Section 4: Emerging Themes

From what you have read in Units 1 and 2, you can see that RPL is a many-faceted endeavour, and can take different shapes and

forms for different contexts. We have talked about the following aspects:

- ✓ Purposes
- ✓ Beneficiaries
- ✓ Systems and process issues
- ✓ Policies and communication
- ✓ Human Resources, including training implications
- ✓ Pedagogical issues, including knowledge validation and assessment
- ✓ Costs
- ✓ Administrative issues

Interesting issues emerging from the implementation of RPL:

Read the following statements . These are in the main comments that have been made by people who have been involved in various RPL projects across different sectors.

“We want to open RPL centres for women in the rural areas – they have been working with children for years, and could get qualified. But these women are very poor, they can’t pay, without funding it is a problem.”

“In our sector there are many ad hoc skills that people have, but it is hard to get information on the exact levels of competence, and therefore it is difficult to know where to prioritise the level of RPL strategies.”

“RPL takes too long for the time they allow you, and putting a portfolio together is too difficult. Often I could not even find the right documents from the past. I would rather do the programme, where at least they give me some help with what I must do. Also, if I go on a learnership I will get the stipend.”

“In many workplaces in our sector there has not been a high uptake of RPL, even though it was funded, because of the conflict between the release time required for candidates to take the RPL assessments and the production requirements of the companies.”

“We need to share information on what has worked and what hasn’t, and understand how different approaches and models have impacted on success and failure in various contexts. There are enough policies and guidelines and tools around – what we need now is practice-based analysis.”

“Our institution has not put in place tracking mechanisms to follow up on how people who have entered programmes through RPL have done. This makes it difficult for us to justify further projects.”

“The policies say that RPL must recognize different types of knowledge. But we need to RPL against our existing programmes, against our curriculum, so how do we do this?”

“Mass-based RPL for redress brings up all kinds of problems in terms of learner selection, mediation and learner support. If it is done properly, it is

very resource intensive, time consuming and costly. But if you try to cut corners, you undermine people's confidence in the validity of the results. Mass-based RPL requires a different model."

"RPL only seems to work when individuals self-select, and are highly motivated."

"The more practical the subject, the easier it is to RPL. RPL should take place as someone is actually carrying out their workplace functions."



Activity 7.2.7

..
..
..

1. Choose the three issues which interest you most of the previous statements made.
2. Now brainstorm (on your own or in a group) "ways forward" in positive response to the challenge or dilemma in each case. Your ways forward are likely to include points relating to further investigation of the issue (research and/or evaluation) and points for action.
3. When you have sorted and ordered your points, evaluate each suggestion in terms of its feasibility or usefulness. (Use a scale of 0-3. 0 = not at all feasible or useful; 3 = highly feasible and useful)

Time: 90 minutes

Overview of Unit 3

Recognition of Prior Learning on the NQF

Purpose

Part 1 of this unit offers a thorough familiarization with Unit Standard 116587 'Develop, support and promote RPL practices'. Those seeking a certificate of successful attendance from their provider should hand in their notes and working for Units 1 and 2, plus part 1 of this unit.

Those who want to be assessed for the award of the 10 NQF credits must complete the whole unit, which sets out the summative assessments you will be required to complete, and provides readings and guidelines for these.

Please note that the unit standard is pegged at NQF Level 7. The unit standard is aimed at persons operating at a strategic, systems and managerial level of understanding and implementation of RPL, and the demands of the readings and the assessments reflect this.

People who are not submitting the assessments for credit may also want to read the whole unit, for the information provided in the Unit Standard and the Readings, and for ideas generated by the assessment tasks.

Outcomes

You will be assessed against the outcomes set out in the unit standard:

1. Demonstrate understanding of the conceptual underpinnings and purposes of the recognition of prior learning
2. Investigate current RPL practice and opportunities in an organization or sector
3. Develop RPL policies procedures and plans for an organization
4. Provide RPL advice and support
5. Promote RPL practices

Overview of Activities

The unit helps you work through the content of the unit standard. It sets out the requirements for summative assessment, which include a theoretical assignment and a practical project. You will be able to draw on what you have read and done in Units 1 and 2, and on Readings and the Toolbox provided in Unit 3 to complete these assessments.

3. What would you identify as examples of 'the visible and invisible barriers to learning and assessment'? Are there ways in which addressing these barriers would mean challenging any company or institutional policies in your context?

4. What are your views on the notion that consensus is necessary for effective quality assurance of RPL?

The second paragraph describes the typical candidate for this standard, and suggests the range of people with whom he/she may interact on RPL issues.

5. Where do you fit into this description? Who are the people you would interact with around RPL issues?

Learning assumed to be in place and recognition of Prior Learning:

6. Remind yourself of the 'key principles of an outcomes-based system in general, and standards-based assessment in particular'.

Unit Standard Range:

As you can see from the paragraph on Inclusions and Exclusions, this standard is not concerned with detailing various aspects of the implementation of RPL, such as advising candidates or conducting assessments.

7. How detailed an understanding do you think the strategic level thinker or manager needs to have of the operational aspects of RPL? How would you support your view?

You will find the unit standards referred to in this section (12544, 7978, 7976, 14297 and ODETD SP501) in the **Resource Box**.

8. The Definition and Purposes of RPL sections are taken mainly from the NSB regulations and SAQA guidelines. From your readings and thinking in Units 1 and 2, is there anything you would like to comment on in these two paragraphs?

Process of RPL and Status of Recognition through RPL:

Read the Process of RPL and Status of Recognition through RPL section carefully.

9. What are some of the issues you have thought about so far in terms of the differences between course-based assessments and RPL assessments?

10. Are there any case studies or viewpoints that you have dealt with in Units 1 and 2 (or in your own experience) which challenge or problematise any of the statements made in this section of the unit standard? How do they do this?

Section 2: Assignment 1: Conceptualising RPL

Your task is to give a high level description of RPL which broadly covers the following areas.

- ✓ Underpinning concepts
- ✓ Key purposes
- ✓ RPL in the South African context of education and training (legislation and national policies)
- ✓ RPL in the international context (one international model)
- ✓ The impacts of RPL on individuals and providers/ organizations/ institutions
- ✓ A concluding summary of your views on the pros and cons of RPL in your sector.

You may draw on any of the resources provided in the three units, or any further reading you may have done. Examples used to illustrate your descriptions may be limited to the sector with which you are most familiar. Your assignment should not exceed 12 pages.

This assignment addresses Specific Outcome 1 'Demonstrate an understanding of the conceptual underpinnings and purposes of the recognition of prior learning' in the unit standard. Make sure that your assignment covers Assessment Criteria 1-6 for this outcome through comment and/or examples.

NB: You do not have to structure your writing in the order of the areas given above, or according to the assessment criteria as given in the unit standard.

Your assignment will be assessed against the following criteria:

Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is sufficient but concise coverage of the knowledge areas required, showing that you have read and understood the issues. - Reference is made to at least five sources of information. - Examples given to illustrate descriptions or arguments are relevant. - An opinion on RPL is given.
Organisation and Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The assignment is clearly and logically structured. - Coherent links are made between various topics or points. - Sources are clearly referenced.
Clarity of expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The assignment is readable and clearly understandable - Appropriate terminology and language is used for the topic and the level of the assessment.



Recommended reading

You will find some helpful articles and references in [Reader 2](#).

Section 3: Assignment 2: Planning for your organization or sector

Your task is to develop a detailed plan for an RPL intervention in the context of your own specific organization/ institution/ workplace/ or sector.

If you are working in a context such as a SETA or a government department, you may need to adapt the guidelines below so that your planning addresses a macro level project for a sector, or group of providers.

This assignment provides an integrated assessment of the following Specific Outcomes in the Unit Standard:

- ✓ SO 2: Investigate current RPL practice and opportunities in an organization or sector.
- ✓ SO 3: Develop RPL policies, procedures and plans for an organization.

- ✓ SO 4: Provide RPL advice and support.
- ✓ SO 5: Promote RPL practices.

Look at the Assessment Criteria for these outcomes to give you some ideas on how the outcomes can be unpacked.

You can structure your project plan in the way that suits you best, but you need to address the areas listed below. We suggest ideas for approaches you might take, and examples of the evidence required to illustrate your planning process.

Area 1: Rationale, scope and outcomes of the project

You will have to plan for a needs analysis in your organization/ sector, in order to make a decision on the kind of intervention required. This would involve some form of data collection, as appropriate to your context. If your organization is already involved in RPL activities, or has implemented specific RPL projects in the past, include a description of these. The purpose of your planning in this case would then be to build on existing interventions, or extend them in different ways.

You also need to contextualize your RPL project against your organizational objectives and the objectives of the sector in which you work. If appropriate, you can refer to relevant Sector Skills Plans and national objectives for education and training.

You may describe any other factors that motivate this project (market pressure, demands from the workplace etc).

The needs analysis will inform the scope of the project. You need to specify which unit standard/s or qualification the RPL process will address. You must describe the intended outcomes of the project, identifying the beneficiaries and target number of candidates. Discuss any other possible project outcomes you may have identified as useful to your organization/ sector.

You will also need to describe some of the limitations and/or challenges of the project. These may include factors such as legislative, administrative or regulatory constraints, or other types of barriers such as attitudinal or other contextual factors amongst the target candidates.

In the [Toolkit 1 and 2](#) you will find two examples of data collection instruments that you could adapt for your purposes. You may also develop your own survey or questionnaire instruments.

Area 2: Human Resources

Describe the human resource implications for successful undertaking of the project. Do you need to set up any dedicated committees or structures? Do you have sufficient personnel to undertake the project, and do you need to plan for any additional training (for example, for mentors, evidence facilitators, assessors or moderators)?

If you are undertaking RPL in a workplace context, you will need to consider the implications for the candidates. If they are not successful, will there be an impact on their conditions of employment? Are there any implications regarding remuneration or promotion if candidates successfully upgrade their qualifications? What are the candidates' expectations?

Area 3: Consultation, advocacy and communication

Describe the various consultation processes you may need to undertake for your context, and the different groups from whom you need to get buy-in to the project (these could be internal colleagues, external stakeholders, potential candidates, unions or management, depending on the context in which you are working). Link your consultation and communication process to the organisation's RPL policy. (If your organization already has an RPL policy, look at how you can use or adapt it for this project; if there is no policy, look at how you can develop one in the context of this project.)

As evidence for this aspect of your project plan, develop a presentation on the project either for management or for the target group of the project. Show how the project links to the key aspects of your organisation's RPL policy.

In [Toolkit 3 and 4](#) you will find some two examples of communications tools that were developed as presentations on RPL. One is a generic overview, while the other is a presentation on a particular RPL project. You would need to develop a presentation that is specific to your project.

Area 4: Planning for Operations

At this planning stage you do not need to develop the actual assessment instruments to be used, and this will in any case be a delegated responsibility. However, you need to put a framework in place for operationalising the RPL project you have conceptualized.

Address the following questions as they apply to your project:

1. What has your pre-implementation audit shown, in terms of any barriers or regulatory issues you might need to address?
2. Do you have a selection process or an admission process? Give a description.
3. What kinds of pre-RPL counseling or advice will the project offer?
4. What is the assessment approach – that is, what kind/s of assessment tools are most appropriate for this project? You will need to justify your choice in relation to the scope and aims of the project.
5. What kinds of recording and reporting systems will be required? To which groups or bodies will you be communicating learner results?

6. How will you monitor and evaluate the progress and outcomes of the project?

As evidence of this aspect of your plan you need to develop an overview specific to how the actual RPL process in this project will take place. This can take the form of an organogram, or of a sequence of steps.

Some examples of process overviews were provided in Unit 2. In [Toolkit 5](#) you will find an example of a monitoring and evaluation template.

Area 5: Planning for Materials Development

What are the materials development implications of the project? This would include your communications planning and your operational framework.

Write a briefing document that lists and describes the types of documentation and materials you will need for this project.

In [Toolkit 6](#) you will find two examples of RPL assessment instruments.

Area 6: Time Frames and Costs

Your planning document needs to put costs and time frames to the various stages of the project. Develop a budget framework which allocates cost categories (you do not have to put in actual figures). Then develop a time line for the various activities in your project plan.