



SOUTH
AFRICAN
QUALIFICATIONS
AUTHORITY

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

**The Recognition
of Prior Learning**
in the context
of the
South African
National
Qualifications
Framework

POLICY DOCUMENT

The Recognition of Prior Learning in the context of the South African National Qualifications Framework



**THE SOUTH AFRICAN
QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY**

Please refer any queries in writing to:

The Executive Officer
SAQA

Attention: The Director: Quality Assurance and Development

RE: Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)
Postnet Suite 248
Private Bag X06
BROOKLYN
0145
Pretoria
SOUTH AFRICA

e-mail: saqainfo@saqa.org.za

Website: www.saqa.org.za

Adopted by the South African Qualifications Authority on 12 June 2002
Decision SAQA 0242/02

ISBN: 0-9584572-1-2



Funded by the European Union
under the European Programme
for Reconstruction and
Development

*The views expressed in this
publication are not necessarily
those of the funder*

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Acronyms and abbreviations used in this document

APL	Assessment of Prior Learning
APEL	Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning
CAEL	Council for Adult and Experiential Learning
CETA	Construction Education and Training Authority
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CTP	Committee of Technikon Principals
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurance body
EVC	Erkennen van elders of informeel Verworven Competenties
FET	Further Education and Training
FNTI	First Nations Technical Institute
HE	Higher Education
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
MEIETB	Metal and Engineering Industries Education and Training Board
MERSETA	Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Education and Training Authority
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSA	National Skills Authority
NSB	National Standards Body
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
PLA	Prior Learning Assessment
PLAR	Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition
QMS	Quality Management Systems
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SGB	Standards Generating Body
SMME	Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises

Terms and definitions

Assessment is the process of gathering and weighing evidence in order to determine whether learners have demonstrated outcomes specified in unit standards and/or qualifications registered on the NQF. The generic assessor standard registered by SAQA entitled 'Plan and conduct assessment of learning outcomes' outlines the process in detail. The management of assessment is the responsibility of providers.

Moderation is the process of ensuring that assessments have been conducted in line with agreed practices, and are fair, reliable and valid. The generic assessor standard registered by SAQA entitled 'Moderate assessment' outlines the process in detail. One moderator usually checks the work of several assessors to ensure consistency. The management of moderation is the responsibility of the provider.

Verification is the process by which the recommendations from the provider about the award of credits or qualifications to learners are checked. The generic assessor standard 'Verify moderation of assessment' registered by SAQA, outlines this process in detail. It is an ETQA function to verify the claims of providers that assessment has been properly conducted and moderated.

Evidence facilitation is the process by which candidates are assisted to produce and organise evidence for the purpose of assessment. It is not an essential part of every assessment process, but is useful in many contexts, including RPL. The generic assessor standard 'Facilitate the preparation and presentation of assessment evidence by candidates' currently being generated by the SGB outlines this process in detail.

RPL advice and support services are additional services needed for effective RPL which are not covered by the assessor standard or the evidence facilitator standard. These focus on assisting learners to make effective choices about available programmes, career and work related opportunities. Practitioners require a thorough knowledge of the relevant economic sector. They should be trained to identify skills, knowledge and other attributes developed outside formal knowledge systems, and to interact with cultural sensitivity.

Constituent means belonging to the defined or delegated constituency of an organisation or body referred to in the SAQA ETQA Regulations. ETQAs have constituent providers, constituent learners and constituent assessors.

Registered constituent assessor and moderator means a person who is registered by the relevant ETQA in accordance with criteria established for this purpose by SAQA to measure the achievement of specified National Qualifications Framework standards or qualifications. All ETQAs must have a register of assessors; they may also wish to have similar registers of moderators and verifiers.

Registered constituent verifiers means persons placed on an official register by the relevant ETQA after meeting agreed criteria. Constituent verifiers may be contracted by the ETQA to carry out verification activities on its behalf in relation to the achievement of specified National Qualifications Framework standards or qualifications.

Executive summary

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in South Africa is critical to the development of an equitable education and training system. As such a policy to develop and facilitate implementation of RPL across all sectors of education and training is critical and should be carefully constructed. An RPL policy should meet the needs of all the role players, including Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies (ETQAs), providers¹ of education and training, constituents of Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and most importantly, the main beneficiaries of the process, the learners. This policy document has as its main audience the ETQAs who must facilitate the implementation of RPL and quality assure assessment policies of their constituent providers.

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 definition makes clear a number of principles in the development and execution of RPL:

- Learning occurs in all kinds of situations – formally, informally and non-formally;
- Measurement of the learning takes place against specific learning outcomes required for a specific qualification; and
- Credits are awarded for such learning if it meets the requirements of the qualification.

Therefore, the process of recognising prior learning is about:

- **Identifying** what the candidate² knows and can do;
- **Matching** the candidate’s skills, knowledge and experience to specific standards and the associated assessment criteria of a qualification;
- **Assessing** the candidate against those standards; and
- **Crediting** the candidate for skills, knowledge and experience built up through formal, informal and non-formal learning that occurred in the past.

1 “Providers” refers to all types of institutions offering education and training, including formal universities, technikons, colleges, examination and assessment bodies, workplace-based training centres and single purpose and SMME providers.

2 “Candidate” is the term used for a person who is claiming credits against a particular unit standard or qualification and is therefore not enrolled in a formal programme, as opposed to ‘learner’, who is assumed to be involved in a formal education or training programme.

As the body responsible for the development of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) articulates some of the key objectives of the NQF in this policy. The NQF objectives particularly relevant to RPL include:

- Facilitate **access** to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths; and
- Accelerate **redress** of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities.

These two objectives highlight the two main purposes of RPL, namely access and redress. The RPL policy explains these purposes in the differing contexts within which Recognition of Prior Learning may take place.

However, it should be noted that there is no fundamental difference in the assessment of previously acquired skills and knowledge and the assessment of skills and knowledge acquired through a current learning programme. The candidate seeking credits for previously acquired skills and knowledge must still comply with all the requirements as stated in unit standards or qualifications. The difference lies in the route to the assessment. RPL is a form of assessment, which ideally, should be fully integrated into all learning programmes. As such, the principles of good assessment are equally true for RPL and all other forms of assessment. This includes taking a holistic view of the process of assessment, where the context of the learning, as well as the context of the person who is being assessed is taken into account.

This policy document adheres in a logical sequence to the SAQA document *Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment of NQF registered Unit standards and Qualifications* (SAQA, October 2001). It should be read with other relevant documents such as:

- *Criteria and Guidelines for ETQAs* (SAQA, October 2001); and
- *Criteria and Guidelines for Providers* (SAQA, October 2001).

The policy addresses the following key roles and functions of ETQAs:

- (a) Accredite constituent providers for specific standards or qualifications registered on the National Qualifications Framework;
- (b) Promote quality amongst constituent providers;
- (c) Monitor provision by constituent providers; and
- (d) Evaluate assessment and facilitate moderation among constituent providers.

Recognition of Prior Learning should be an integrated feature of the assessment policies of ETQAs and their constituent providers and not an 'add-on' procedure. However, it is clear from both local and international experiences of RPL that the principles of equity, access and redress are objectives that need an explicit translation into practice if they are to be met. This policy provides direction and support for an evolving system of RPL that will be able to set the required standards to meet the challenges of social, economic and human development. At the same time it will contribute to the overall quality and integrity of standards and qualifications registered on the National Qualifications Framework. A set of specialised criteria has been developed for this purpose (discussed in Chapter 2).

Executive summary

Finally, the key challenge for the implementation of an RPL policy in South Africa is the sustainability of such a system. It would be short-sighted to suggest that RPL has a redress function only and therefore may have a relatively limited lifespan. As the South African education and training system matures, increasingly RPL will support the principle of lifelong learning. This will ensure that a nation's people are encouraged to develop and improve their skills continuously to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Structure of the document

Chapter 1 deals with the underlying principles and philosophy underpinning assessment and RPL; **Chapter 2** deals with the core criteria for quality assurance of assessment and RPL; and **Chapter 3** deals with the strategic framework for implementation of RPL in South Africa. **Appendices A, B and C** are included for clarification.

Chapter 1

Underlying principles and philosophy

Introduction

Recognition of Prior Learning in South Africa has, unlike similar initiatives in other countries, a very specific agenda. RPL is meant to support **transformation** of the education and training system of the country.

This calls for an approach to the development of RPL policy and practices that explicitly **addresses the visible and invisible barriers** to learning and assessment. Such an approach must generate the commitment of all role players to remove these barriers and to build a visible, usable and credible system as an effective and creative vehicle for lifelong learning. It is important that consensus be generated around the criteria and support systems within which the integrity and quality of all assessments will be protected. At the same time, the opportunities and benefits of RPL need to be extended to all learners and stakeholders. It is also imperative that a **viable, sustainable and credible** system is built for RPL.

While it is recognised that transforming education and training is not the responsibility of RPL alone, in the context of this policy, transformation encapsulates:

- A **holistic** approach to the process and execution of assessment;
- A **developmental and incremental** approach to the implementation of RPL, particularly in terms of sustainability;
- An acknowledgement of the **differing contexts** within which RPL will be implemented;
- Opening up of **access** to education and training;
- **Redress** of past injustices; and
- An acknowledgement of the **dynamic nature** of the construction of knowledge that will come into play as the system matures.

1.1 A holistic approach to the process and execution of assessment

In many ways, a holistic approach represents the **ideal, the vision** for the transformation of assessment, and therefore for RPL in South Africa. It incorporates the principles of good assessment, i.e. fairness, validity, reliability and practicability (as discussed in Chapter 3 of the *Criteria and Guidelines for the Assessment of NQF registered Unit standards and Qualifications*, SAQA, October 2001). But it also reflects the need to look for the intrinsic, rather than extrinsic value of someone's learning within a particular context and the ways in which some forms of knowledge are privileged. The question that we need to answer is how to redefine, systematically and consciously, which knowledge³ is valued. This is to ensure that

both old and new forms of discrimination are avoided and to mediate knowledge transfer across contexts.

A holistic approach to RPL therefore attempts to prevent assessment from becoming a purely technical application, dislocated from a particular individual and broader context.

The following are the key elements of a holistic approach to assessment. A holistic approach:

- Is deeply committed to the development and maintenance of assessment systems that **protect the integrity** of standards, qualifications and institutions;
- Subscribes to the principles and values of **human development** and **lifelong learning**. As such it consciously supports the social purposes of RPL in relation to access, equity and redress, and strives to implement assessments in a manner that promotes dignity, confidence and educational opportunities;
- Is learner-centred and **developmental** where assessments are not used to penalise candidates for what they do not know, but to shape and form decisions around educational planning and career-pathing;
- Allocates a high priority to learner-centred **support systems** that will assist in the preparation for assessment;
- Seeks to address the **context and conditions** that inform the practice. This means taking steps to **remove** the emotional, educational and cultural factors that may constitute **barriers** to effective learning and assessment practice;
- Promotes the principle of **flexibility** in the use of assessment methods and instruments in accordance with the rights of candidates to participate in the selection and use of **'fit for purpose' assessment** methods;
- Recognises the rich **diversity** of **knowledge and learning styles**, which candidates bring into an assessment situation;
- Recognises that RPL should ideally be the **first step into a learning programme** that will build on the skills and knowledge already recognised and credited;
- Takes as its starting point the standpoint of critical theory, which **challenges** the **social** and **structural conditioning** of the curriculum, institutions and related opportunities for adult learners⁴ in formal education; and
- Will increasingly challenge the construction and content of **qualifications** to be more **inclusive** of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that are acquired **outside formal institutions** of learning in society.

1.2 A developmental and incremental approach to the implementation of RPL

In order to achieve the holistic ideal realistically, the transformation of education and training **needs to take place incrementally**. This means focusing on RPL as a category of assessment requiring a high degree of flexibility, sensitivity and specialisation while, as far as

3 The "knowledge" refers to "workers' knowledge, women's knowledge and indigenous knowledge" which in the past were not consciously included in curricula and learning programmes.

4 The term "adult learners" is used as a reference to the majority of learners, including out of school youth, whose primary mode of learning is non-formal and experiential.

possible, making use of existing infrastructure and resources. RPL policies must be integrated into existing processes, structures and projects. Much thought must be given to the provision of candidate support and candidate preparation, as well as to preparation of assessment methods, instruments and administrative systems to support the process and protect the integrity of the results.

A developmental and incremental approach gives providers of education and training the space to explore and experiment with implementation of the policy. This supports the need for **institutions and sectors to retain their autonomy** and to develop implementation plans within the constraints of their organisations while meeting the agreed requirements of the framework and criteria indicated in the policy.

Most importantly, a developmental and incremental approach pre-supposes implementation plans with sustainability targets against which the system measures its progress towards the objectives of the plan. Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs) will have an important role to play in facilitating and monitoring the progress towards full implementation of RPL.

1.3 The differing contexts within which RPL are implemented

The contexts within which RPL are practised are as varied as the candidates seeking credits for learning achieved. RPL is practised in the Higher Education and Training (HET), Further Education and Training (FET) and General Education and Training (GET) Bands and in Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET), in formal institutions of learning, as well as at workplace-based education and training centres and by small private single purpose providers.

In addition, RPL is done against unit standard-based qualifications, as well as against the learning outcomes of non-unit standard based qualifications. Qualifications based on unit standards and non-unit standard based qualifications are equally valid expressions of outcomes-based education. Perpetuating the division between these two types of qualification would be an unwarranted position. It is much more important to establish ways in which articulation between vocationally oriented, professional and academic qualifications can take place to facilitate the development of multiple learning pathways. Therefore, it goes without saying that the contexts within which RPL is practised will be linked to the varied purposes for embarking on a process of Recognition of Prior Learning.

These purposes include the following options:

- **Personal development** and/or certification of current skills without progression into a learning programme, if the candidate so chooses;
- **Progression into a learning programme**, using RPL to fast-track progression through the learning programme;
- **Promotion**; and
- Career or **job change**.

RPL practice therefore cannot take a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach. However, all RPL practice will be measured against the agreed criteria (discussed in Chapter 2), which are considered the core, the basis upon which all RPL systems are developed.

It is therefore acknowledged that providers of education and training will have very different strategies in implementing RPL and that these strategies will be closely linked to the target group for which the system is developed.

1.4 Opening up of access to education and training and redress of past injustices

Two distinct target groups identified in the policy are those candidates seeking **access** to further education possibilities, and those seeking **redress**.

In terms of access, the target group may be under-qualified adult learners (such as teachers or nurses), with some level of professional education wanting to up-skill and improve their qualifications. It may also include candidates lacking the minimum requirements for entry into a formal learning programme (e.g. matriculation endorsement). Certainly, at the level of Higher Education (HE), access to a programme will be the objective of an overwhelming majority who apply for RPL, but it will also include those candidates seeking certification as an end in itself.

The entry of learners to HE via non-traditional routes encourages the recognition of diverse forms of knowledge and participation. This can greatly enrich the learning experience of all involved in a programme. For these candidates to be able to achieve the kind of knowledge, skills and competencies required for progression and mobility, a particular quality and level of engagement with programmes is required. They have to be able to engage properly with programmes at higher levels in terms of the breadth, depth and complexity required. Since a certain level of academic ability can be assumed on their part, strategies such as ‘advanced standing’, ‘extended curricula’, bridging, foundation and/or access programmes are appropriate for them.

These options are likely to be practiced by formal institutions of education and training such as universities, technikons and other further and higher education institutions. The support and orientation of these candidates will be in line with the type of support currently offered to learners at such institutions.

The target group requiring redress is entirely different. These candidates may be on the shop floor, in workplaces, or may be semi-skilled and unemployed. They may have worked for many years and have gained experience in specific areas, but were prevented from developing and growing because of the education and training policies of the past. Possibly such candidates will have low levels of education. In this target group the focus of RPL may be certification as an end in itself, rather than access to further education and training (although this may also be a purpose). It would grant recognition for their contribution to the development of the country and validate their personal worth and value their worth as

employees. The strategies used here may include assessment against small, distinct ‘chunks’ of learning, and will include the very necessary support and orientation services mentioned in the criteria (Chapter 2).

In the cases of both access and redress, the primary NQF objective is to “contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large”.

A third group, not so clearly delineated, includes candidates who, having exited formal education either prematurely or at the end of a formal programme, built up substantial amounts of learning over a number of years through attending short learning programmes. These programmes (short courses or skills programmes) are a viable and a common method of gaining meaningful learning for optimal workplace functioning. They facilitate access to learning in a manageable manner, particularly in terms of cost, time and energy. Candidates should be able to attain credits towards qualifications for this type of learning. This is in line with the position of skills programmes in the system and it is foreseeable that qualifications can be achieved via this ‘lifelong learning’ route. Increasingly, RPL will become a mechanism for recognising the skills, knowledge and values thus acquired.

1.5 The dynamic nature of the construction of knowledge in a mature system

The maturing education and training system of South Africa will increasingly require institutions to question and reshape fundamental values, beliefs and paradigms to force the ‘negotiation of two worlds – the world of experience and the world of the academic’ (Osman *et al*, 2001). It will encourage providers to become not only sites of learning, that define and construct knowledge, but also places where people examine and engage with the context of knowledge creation. The education and training system should seek a meeting place for the different traditions of knowledge emanating from different sites of practice.

Deciding how to compare the conceptual understanding that a RPL candidate needs to demonstrate with what is required for specified outcomes, should be possible, rather than being overly concerned about literal matching. It will not be necessary, as assessors become experienced and the system has proven itself to be credible, to look for total correspondence between a qualification (or unit standard) and a candidate’s prior learning – rough equivalence will do.

In the future, it should be possible to move away from the idea of RPL as being solely a comparison of experience against learning outcomes for a specified qualification, to include a comparison between learning and expertise common to a range of qualifications at a particular level of the NQF. This would mean moving away from a purely technical approach to a holistic approach. The complexity and depth of learning to be recognised in communities of practice outside formal education would have to be taken into account. So would the different ways in which adult learners are differently prepared for entry into learning programmes.

A holistic approach, looking at equivalence in terms of complexity and depth of learning required for a qualification will take into account the nature and form of experiential learning of adults, challenging the ‘standards’ of those who work largely in formal institutions of learning with young learners coming from the school system.

Chapter 2 will address the core criteria against which the progress towards the development of an assessment and RPL system can be measured.

Chapter 2

Core criteria for quality assurance of RPL

Introduction

Recognition of Prior Learning is one of the principles underpinning the objectives of the NQF. In the SAQA publication *Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment of NQF registered Unit standards and Qualifications* (October 2001), RPL is described as follows:

“To, through assessment, give credit to learning which has already been acquired in different ways”.

In the legislation, regulations and criteria and guidelines documents, RPL is put forward as one of the key strategies of the emerging education and training system to ensure equitable access to education and training and redress of past unjust educational practices.

Assessment for the Recognition of Prior Learning is, as mentioned before, and, as for any assessment, subject to the following principles:

- **Credible assessment;**
- The **quality** of the **evidence;**
- An assessment planned and designed on the basis of understanding the requirements of the **unit standard, part qualification or whole qualification;**
- The use of various **methods and instruments;**
- The requirements for a credible **assessment process;** and
- **Moderation** and quality assurance of assessments.

(Paraphrased from *Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment of NQF registered Unit standards and Qualifications*: October 2001.)

In particular, this chapter will deal with ways in which Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies (ETQAs) can ensure that their constituent providers' assessment policies integrate and implement RPL. This is in accordance with the requirements for ETQAs.⁵

As mentioned in the Introduction to Chapter 1 (Underlying principles and philosophy), the visible and invisible barriers to learning and assessment must be acknowledged and strategies must be developed to deal with these. Therefore, as much as RPL is an integrated part of assessment (and will increasingly become part of teaching and learning practice), it is highlighted in this policy as a form of assessment needing particular attention.

⁵ Refer to the ETQA Regulations, No R1127 of 8 September 1998.

The following criteria (2.1 – 2.7) have been formulated as a guide for a system of quality assurance in respect of RPL services offered by education and training providers, but they are also true for the quality assurance of assessment policies in general.

The areas of practice are discussed individually. Each area is described by a quality statement, and is followed by an example of a self-audit tool, which may be expanded for use by the ETQAs, but may also be used by providers, both in terms of formal institutions and workplace-based providers, to measure their progress against agreed targets.

The areas of practice include:

- Institutional policy and environment;
- Services and support to learners;
- Training and registration of assessors and key personnel;
- Methods and processes of assessment;
- Quality Management Systems (moderation);
- Fees for RPL services; and
- RPL and curriculum development.

2.1 Institutional policy and environment

This area of practice highlights the fact that **an enabling environment** demonstrating **commitment to RPL** is essential. Unless proper policies, structures and resources are allocated to a credible assessment process, it can easily become an area of contestation and conflict. Assessment practice is a critical aspect in the emerging education and training system and therefore needs explicit discussion and guidelines. Please refer to SAQA's *Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment of NQF registered Unit standards and Qualifications* (October 2001).⁶

⁶ The "Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment of NQF registered Unit standards and Qualifications" must be read with the RPL policy. It is assumed that the reader is familiar with the contents thereof.

Core criteria for quality assurance of RPL

Example of the self-audit tool: **Institutional policy and environment**

(Key: Y – Yes; N – No; U – Underdeveloped)

Institutional policy and environment

There is a shared commitment on the part of ETQAs, accredited constituent providers and workplaces to provide enabling environments for learning and assessment (inclusive of close co-operation between administration, learning facilitators, evidence facilitators, advisors, assessors, moderators, professional organisations, employers, trade unions and communities, where appropriate).

	Y	N	U
The assessment policy expresses an explicit commitment to the principles of equity, redress and inclusion			
The assessment policy reflects planning and management in accordance with relevant legislation and policy			
Information about assessment opportunities and services are widely available and actively promoted			
Admission procedures and systems are accessible and inclusive of learners with diverse needs and backgrounds			
Equal access to opportunities to advice, support, time and resources for all candidates seeking assessment			
Organisational structures ensure that evidence facilitators, assessors and moderators and other key personnel, such as advisors, are given sufficient support, resources and recognition for their services			
Regional integration and collaboration are encouraged among institutions, professional bodies and workplaces, where possible			
Formal agreements between ETQAs, providers and workplaces are encouraged to ensure effective validation, articulation and recognition of assessment results, where possible			

2.2 Services and support to learners/candidates

Services and support to learners/candidates form part of pre-assessment advice and counseling (refer to the generic RPL process in Appendix A). This may include preparation for the assessment itself, educational planning and post-assessment support. This service is not dissimilar from services offered by suitably trained career guidance counselors or other advisors who are part of ‘student services’ offered at institutions. At workplaces, these type of services could be offered by trained human resource practitioners, line managers or suitably qualified education and training practitioners. As far as possible, a separate infrastructure should not be established for RPL for the following reasons:

- **Credits awarded** to learners/candidates through the process of RPL **are equal** to credits awarded to learners in formal full-time learning programmes. RPL should not be marginalised as the easy, second-best route to obtain credits. Establishing a separate infrastructure to deal with RPL may create this impression; and
- Services and support to candidates are **not unlike the support offered to adult learners** in full-time study, taking into account the need for flexible learning environments for adults facing the pressures of work and study.

However, the danger of underestimating the **levels of disempowerment** and dislocation that decades of discriminatory education and training policies and practices had on ordinary citizens, and the unfamiliarity with formal academic study, (particularly in Higher Education), cannot be ignored. Therefore the support services should consciously address the **invisible barriers** to successful assessment. This may include a re-alignment of existing academic development programmes to suit the needs of adult learners, advising programmes, assistance with identifying equivalencies and preparation for assessment. This may also include dealing with the very significant anxieties, traumas and non-technical barriers that arise when adult learners enter the RPL arena. The inclusion of advising and counseling services to complement evidence facilitation and assessment should be an important principle in the provision of RPL services.

Learner/candidate support structures are critical as a preventative measure, i.e. as a measure to enhance the success rate of candidates. This is true not only for adult learners and RPL candidates, but also for learners involved in full-time study programmes. This is in line with the current thinking in terms of the requirements for accreditation as a provider of education and training, and as such will be an aspect of the teaching and learning environment that must be quality assured⁷.

⁷ Please refer to Criterion 6 and 7 of ‘Quality Management Systems for Education and Training Providers’ (SAQA: October 2001) for more information on the criteria for accreditation and an Education and Training Providers.

Core criteria for quality assurance of RPL

Example of the self-audit tool: **Services and support to learners/candidates**

(Key: Y – Yes; N – No; U – Underdeveloped)

Services and support to learners/candidates

Through properly conducted evidence facilitation⁸, advice and other support services, including assistance in dealing with personal, social and technical barriers to assessment and preparation of evidence, candidates are able to see how to use the process of RPL to achieve their personal, educational and career goals.

	Y	N	U
Advising services and programmes assist learners/candidates to make effective choices about learning programmes, career and work-related opportunities			
Advising programmes and services provide assistance to learners/candidates in preparing for assessment			
Support services attempt to remove time, place and other barriers to assessment			
Evidence facilitators assist candidates in preparing and presenting evidence in a coherent and systematic fashion			
Structured short learning programmes or articulation-based programmes are increasingly available where required			

⁸ Please refer to the proposed unit standard for 'Evidence facilitation' included as Appendix B.

2.3 Training and registration of assessors and key personnel

The training and orientation of assessors and other staff involved in assessment has been identified as a critical component for the success of implementing the principles and objectives of the NQF. According to Chapter 5 of SAQA's *Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment of NQF registered Unit standards and Qualifications* (October 2001), the role of the assessor in an Outcomes Based Education and Training (OBET) system has changed significantly. The role of the assessors⁹ is to:

- **Inform** the candidate about the requirements of qualifications or unit standards;
- **Support and guide** the candidate in the collection of evidence;
- Help the candidate **plan** for the assessment;
- Inform the candidate about the **timing** of the assessment; and
- **Conduct the assessment** and provide **feedback**.

The role of the assessor is clearly expressed in the assessor standard, ASSMT01: "Plan and Conduct Assessment of Learning" (included in Appendix B).

For the purposes of RPL, this role has been refined and expanded, but it does not mean that it could not be the same person fulfilling the roles of both facilitating the identification of the evidence, and assessing the evidence. Each task, i.e. 'evidence facilitation', 'assessment' and 'advice', is distinctive, and should ideally be performed by different people to avoid potential conflict of interest and bias, but could be performed by the same person, or alternatively by trained practitioners, particularly in terms of the advisory function since this may require specialised knowledge and skills.

The evidence facilitator and assessor in particular, should be exposed to training components on the development of self-awareness, sensitivity and the ability to know and manage one's own biases. Whilst the critical areas of bias in South Africa focus on issues of race, language, religion, gender and class, there are also numerous other biases, including the bias against experiential and non-formal forms of learning. Anti-bias and sensitivity training needs to emphasise an understanding of these potential problems and the ways in which they may impact on assessment activities and processes¹⁰.

In some instances, training needs to include an explicit component on language bias, where language may become a hindrance to assessment, particularly where candidates make use of 'colloquialisms' for work processes, equipment and tools. Where the demonstration of skill does not require formal language skills, assessors have to be sensitive to the use of words and terms common within a particular context.

However, where language is a critical component in the acquisition of knowledge and skills, competencies cannot be assessed in the presence of linguistic inadequacy. In such cases the assessment of language is an integral feature of recognising prior learning.

⁹ The *Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment of NQF registered Unit standards and Qualifications* (Chapter 5, SAQA, 2001), provides a detailed explanation of the role and expertise of assessors. It is assumed that the reader is familiar with this document.

¹⁰ Some providers have opted for an 'assessment panel' consisting of subject matter experts and other key personnel to safeguard against bias.

Core criteria for quality assurance of RPL

Example of the self-audit tool: **Training and registration of assessors and key personnel**

(Key: Y – Yes; N – No; U – Underdeveloped)

Training and registration of assessors and key personnel

Through training of assessors and other personnel involved in assessment, the quality of assessments and the integrity of the assessment system are ensured. Training enables evidence facilitators, assessors, moderators, advisors and administrative personnel to provide a holistic, learner-centred service that is in keeping with the objectives of the NQF and related policies. Monitoring policies ensure that assessors' and moderators' professional competencies in assessment are reviewed and updated.

	Y	N	U
The criteria for the registration of assessors and moderators makes explicit provision for the requisite certification in the relevant unit standards designed for that purpose, in accordance with the relevant principles and standards for assessment and moderation as set out in SAQA and other policy documents ¹¹			
Policies and review mechanisms regarding monitoring and quality assurance of evidence facilitators, assessors, moderators and other key personnel are in place			
The functions of evidence facilitation, assessment and advising are clearly defined, and where possible, should not be performed by the same person			
Training and development encourage mentoring relationships between staff with and those without assessment expertise			
Quality assurance systems are implemented by all training providers to ensure that they increasingly meet the developmental objectives as agreed with the ETQA			

¹¹ Refer to relevant unit standards in Appendix B.

2.4 Methods and processes of assessment

Chapter 3 of SAQA's *Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment of NQF registered Unit standards and Qualifications* (October 2001), provides a detailed discussion of the principles of good assessment. These principles constitute the heart of good practice and must be applied in the design and implementation of all assessment methods and procedures.

In addition, the quality of evidence relates to reliability, validity, authenticity, sufficiency and currency. Particularly in RPL assessment, **sufficiency and currency** are important. In the case of sufficiency, it is not only a question of whether enough evidence has been gathered. Sometimes, in an attempt to ensure rigour, assessors require too much evidence (e.g. extensive triangulation) thereby making the assessment process very onerous for candidates and for assessors. The essential reference point for 'marking' RPL is the lowest mark which enables a classroom taught candidate to 'pass'. Rarely does this mean a complete coverage of the syllabus. It would be unfair to RPL candidates to expect more than the minimum requirement for learners in full-time study.

Currency is of particular importance as candidates may have learnt skills a long time ago. How current certain knowledge, skills and competencies need to be are largely dependent on the context and occupational area.

In terms of the assessment process, it is important to note that all assessments, regardless of the subject matter and the context, follow the same basic procedure, i.e.:

- **Planning** of the assessment with the candidate;
- **Conducting** the assessment; and
- **Feedback** of the results to the candidate.

However, before the assessment can take place, the assessor has to plan, design and prepare assessments. This includes making decisions about the method of assessment, the instruments to be used and the extent to which integrated assessment, (i.e. covering more than one learning outcome), can be achieved.

Chapter 6 of SAQA's *Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment of NQF registered Unit standards and Qualifications* (October 2001), discusses the assessment process in detail. This includes the preparatory work that needs to go into the planning of assessment.

The important point here is that fit for purpose assessments must be designed and decided upon before an assessment can take place. This may include appropriate alternative forms of assessment.

Core criteria for quality assurance of RPL

Example of the self-audit tool: **Methods and processes of assessment**

(Key: Y – Yes; N – No; U – Underdeveloped)

Methods and processes of assessment

Assessment is a structured process for gathering evidence and making judgements about a candidate's performance in relation to registered national standards and qualifications. This process involves the candidate and the assessor within a particular context in a transparent and collaborative manner.

	Y	N	U
The purpose of the assessment and the expectations of the candidate are clarified			
Assessment plans take into account the form, quality and sources of evidence required (for example performance evidence, knowledge evidence, witness testimony)			
The form and quality of support to be provided to the candidate in preparing for the assessment are established			
The candidate is actively involved in all aspects of the assessment process to ensure that the assessment is fair and transparent. Possible barriers to fair assessments are identified and addressed			
Assessment plans indicate a variety of appropriate assessment methods and instruments to validate diverse types of learning			
The choice of assessment methods is fit for purpose and ensures reliable and valid assessment outcomes			
An appeals process is in place and made known to the candidate ¹²			
Assessment instruments and exemplars are developed and moderated in compliance with the ETQA requirements			
Assessment reports indicate the assessment plan, the evidence presented, the assessment outcome and recommendations for further action, including additional training and/or re-assessment			
Moderation and review mechanisms are in place, including policies for verification, evaluation and quality assurance of assessments and assessment systems			

¹² The appeals procedure is not discussed here – readers are referred to Chapter 6 of the *Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment of NQF registered Unit standards and Qualifications (SAQA 2001)*.

2.5 Quality Management Systems

Recognition of Prior Learning should be an integrated feature of assessment policies. This includes the **moderation, management and reporting** procedures that constitute the Quality Management Systems of ETQAs and their constituent providers.

The **integrity and credibility** of an assessment system requires a comprehensive system of quality assurance. Such a system proposes the standards for effective management, implementation, moderation and review of all assessment services. This includes the secure production, storage and distribution of records, reports and other data relevant to assessment and Recognition of Prior Learning.

Although the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) specifies clearly the type and form of information required from ETQAs and providers, additional information is required so that a research base that examines its implementation and its efficacy is developed. However, in its final form, credits achieved through RPL, will be recorded in the same manner as conventional assessment outcomes. This is to prevent the stigmatisation of RPL credits as being inferior to the conventional method of achieving credits and/or qualifications.

Internal and external evaluation should therefore form a critical part of the review and quality improvement processes. In terms of RPL assessments, evaluation takes place at three levels:

- **Formative:** This occurs continuously at the **micro-level** of the system, i.e. at the level of the **provider**. Evaluation of the evidence facilitation phase, the planning phase, the assessment and the feedback phase should take place at regular scheduled intervals.
- **Summative:** Overall evaluation of the degree to which **agreed goals** and targets have been met. This should be in line with the objectives for facilitating access and redress in a particular sector of education and training.
(The ETQA in particular is responsible for the establishment of sector-related targets in terms of RPL. This will ensure a coherent approach to RPL assessment and facilitate the collation of information in respect of RPL initiatives and results.)
- **Diagnostic:** Occurs at both formative and summative stages so that changes to the process can be effected at various points of the cycle, as appropriate.

This evaluation is in line with the moderation processes discussed in Chapter 7 of SAQA's *Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment of NQF registered Unit standards and Qualifications* (October 2001). The main functions of moderation systems are:

- To verify that **assessments are fair, valid, reliable and practicable**;
- To identify the need to **redesign** assessments if required;
- To provide an **appeals procedure** for dissatisfied candidates;
- To evaluate the **performance of assessors**;
- To provide procedures for the **de-registration** of unsatisfactory assessors; and
- To provide **feedback to the National Standards Bodies** on unit standards and qualifications.

Core criteria for quality assurance of RPL

Example of the self-audit tool: **Quality Management Systems**

(Key: Y – Yes; N – No; U – Underdeveloped)

Quality Management Systems

Quality Management Systems are in place to ensure the continuous improvement of assessment systems. The Quality Management System ensures the critical integrity of assessments and reporting and recording processes inform strategic planning requirements at provider, sectoral and national level.

	Y	N	U
Quality Management Systems for assessment are designed, documented and implemented in accordance with agreed criteria and specifications ¹³			
Quality Management Systems ensure the refining of assessment policies, procedures and services at all levels and inform planning for further development aimed at meeting agreed targets			
Quality Management Systems provide for input from all key stakeholders, including representatives from the candidate community			
Quality Management Systems provide for support in meeting developmental targets, including evaluation and monitoring activities			
Evaluation and monitoring activities are clearly spelt out in QMS documentation, including diagnostic, formative and summative activities			
Evaluation and monitoring activities ensure consistency within a sector			
Assessment documentation, reports and sources of evidence are maintained in accordance with agreed criteria and specifications			
RPL results are recorded in accordance with the requirements of the ETQA and SAQA's NLRD			
Information on RPL outcomes, including unsuccessful and successful applications are maintained			
The Quality Management System provides for systems to monitor progress of candidates who enter learning programmes post-RPL			
The Quality Management System provides for analyses and reporting of services and results			

¹³ Refer to Criterion 2 in Chapter 4 of *Quality Management Systems for Education and Training Providers* (SAQA: October 2001).

2.6 Fees for RPL services

RPL services and assessment **should not cost more** than a full-time face-to-face programme, particularly if such services are integrated into the existing infrastructure. The cost of developing a system and the necessary capacity to support the system, are not unlike the costs of developing a new learning programme. This means that the initial start-up costs may be relatively high, but increasingly, with learners entering such a programme, the costs are reduced and spread over a period of time. The challenge is to develop programmes and services where one-on-one contact with a candidate is kept to the minimum. RPL does not mean that each candidate must be dealt with only on an individual basis. In principle, RPL should be more cost-effective for candidates, employers and employees by reducing the cost of training in terms of those parts of the qualification for which the candidate already meets the requirements. The cost of developing RPL systems and capacity must be seen as an investment in the development of a credible lifelong learning system in South Africa.

Example of the self-audit tool: **Fees for RPL services**

(Key: Y – Yes; N – No; U – Underdeveloped)

Fees for RPL services

Fees for the delivery and administration of assessment and RPL services, do not create barriers for candidates. The development of services and programmes is an investment in the lifelong learning approach across all levels and sectors of education and training in South Africa.

	Y	N	U
Fees should not create barriers for candidates			
The fees for the assessment of prior learning should be less than the cost of a full-time module or learning programme			
Credit-bearing portfolio development or other articulation programmes are made increasingly available to assist candidates in their preparation for assessment, and to qualify for available subsidies for selected skills programmes and learnerships			
Flexible payment options, in line with the policies and procedures of the ETQA and constituent providers, are available			
Research and development priorities are identified, including those that investigate costs and cost effectiveness			

Core criteria for quality assurance of RPL

2.7 RPL and Curriculum Development

RPL and Curriculum Development highlights the extent to which the education and training system is **changing from an inputs-based** system to an **outcomes-based** system. It reflects how assessment and assessment practice will increasingly inform the development of curricula and also represents the holistic vision, the ideal discussed earlier.

RPL requires a careful analysis of the knowledge, skills and values that will prove competence in a particular field of practice. As a result, curricula and qualifications will increasingly be enriched by the additional knowledge of candidates that was acquired outside of formal education and training, and the ways in which this knowledge may make the qualification more relevant and responsive to the needs of the workplace. It is here where the critical ‘negotiation of two worlds – the world of experience and the world of the academic’ (Osman et al, 2001) becomes evident.

As the emerging education and training system matures, and as education and training practitioners and assessors become more confident of the integrity of the system, it will become possible to give credit to learning that is so interrelated that it is difficult to find exact matches with requirements for unit standards and qualifications. Then it will be possible to compare previous learning to a particular level of expertise common to a range of qualifications at a particular level of the NQF. The portfolio method may become most useful to assist candidates in developing a holistic and well-rounded picture of themselves, their career and their lifelong learning achievements. This may include a reflection on all the contexts and areas of experiential, community and workplace learning.

These issues are fundamental to the debate on RPL and assessment practice in terms of **what knowledge is regarded as valuable** and worth recognising, and whether learning generated in situations outside of the specified range or context in which assessment is being done, will be recognised.

Example of the self-audit tool: **RPL and Curriculum Development**

(Key: Y – Yes; N – No; U – Underdeveloped)

RPL and Curriculum Development

Assessment and RPL practice increasingly inform the development of new standards, qualifications, learning programmes and curricula. Providers increasingly use methods of instruction and delivery to provide curricula to meet the diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic and educational needs of learners.

	Y	N	U
Learning programmes increasingly take into account the nature and form of knowledge produced in previously excluded constituencies and locations, e.g. indigenous knowledge, women’s knowledge, workers’ knowledge			
The curriculum increasingly incorporates indigenous and other knowledge forms to reflect the diversity of needs and goals of the learner population			

RPL and Curriculum Development continued

	Y	N	U
The design of learning programmes indicates how candidates' prior knowledge has been affirmed and taken into account			
The curriculum is sufficiently open-ended to allow for flexible entry and exit points to enhance access and the achievement of learning goals			
Emerging trends from assessment and RPL where these have implications for modification and redesign of unit standards and qualifications, are forwarded to the appropriate bodies			
Where candidates demonstrate knowledge that does not easily fit existing unit standards or exit level outcomes, credit equivalencies are established in consultation with subject experts and relevant ETQAs			

Summary

The criteria discussed in this section represent the overall national approach to the establishment of a credible assessment system, which in real terms includes the processes, services and related procedures for RPL as an integral feature of the assessment policies of the education and training system as a whole. It is therefore critical that ETQAs take this to their constituencies and contextualise it to suit the needs and requirements of the sector.

Such consultation will include the identification of:

- The **purpose, context** and type of RPL to be practised in the sector, for example access RPL or redress RPL;
- The needs and resources of the sector, including the need for capacity building;
- The target groups and programmes; and
- The establishment of implementation targets over an agreed period of time.

In Chapter 3, a strategic framework for implementation on a national level is discussed.

Chapter 3

A strategic framework for implementation

Introduction

“Of all the expectations placed on the NQF, the aspiration for a system of recognition of prior learning (RPL) was perhaps the most significant;” (Report of the Study Team on the Implementation of the National Qualifications Framework; Department of Education: April 2002).

The extract above reflects the **high priority** accorded throughout the system to the establishment of a **credible, sustainable system** whereby previously acquired learning can be recognised and credited. However, RPL cannot be seen as the answer to all the questions in the emerging education and training system. In the words of the study team:

“On its own, it is not a solution to either inequalities or unemployment”, but it is an important strategy to address access to education and training for those previously excluded. As such, RPL should be seen as a key developmental strategy – both for the system and for individuals wanting to receive recognition for their learning achieved outside of formal institutions. For this reason it is placed within a framework for the enhancement of lifelong learning. ETQAs and their constituent providers must commit to the principles of access and redress and develop context-specific plans to make this possible.” (Report of the Study Team on the Implementation of the National Qualifications Framework; Department of Education: April 2002).

This policy offers a set of criteria against which to formulate a more detailed strategy. Such a strategy cannot be developed and implemented at the macro level alone – it needs to be elaborated and implemented by all key stakeholders in the system, i.e. ETQAs, accredited providers and workplaces, education and training practitioners, assessors, moderators, administrators and managers.

To this end, the following **strategic framework** for implementation is proposed:

3.1 Strategic framework

1. Audit of current practice

The self-audit tools (Chapter 2) could be refined for use by ETQAs to determine the extent and depth of RPL delivery within their constituencies. They could also be used by constituent providers and workplace-based assessors to measure their progress against agreed implementation targets.

2. The development of detailed sector-specific plans

ETQAs and their constituent providers have to develop detailed sector-specific plans for implementation and quality assurance.

3. Capacity building of resources and staff

In line with the implementation plan, the capacity development of assessors and other key staff, as well as appropriate resources, is key to the success of implementation.

4. The design and moderation of appropriate assessment instruments and tools

Appropriate assessment instruments and tools are critical to ensure the credibility of the assessments, and the integrity of the system.

5. Quality management systems and procedures

The development of review and reporting mechanisms is critical to the integrity of the system.

6. The establishment of a research base

Opportunities to, and commitment from all stakeholders to engage in the debate and development of a credible, sustainable system is critical to the integrity of the system.

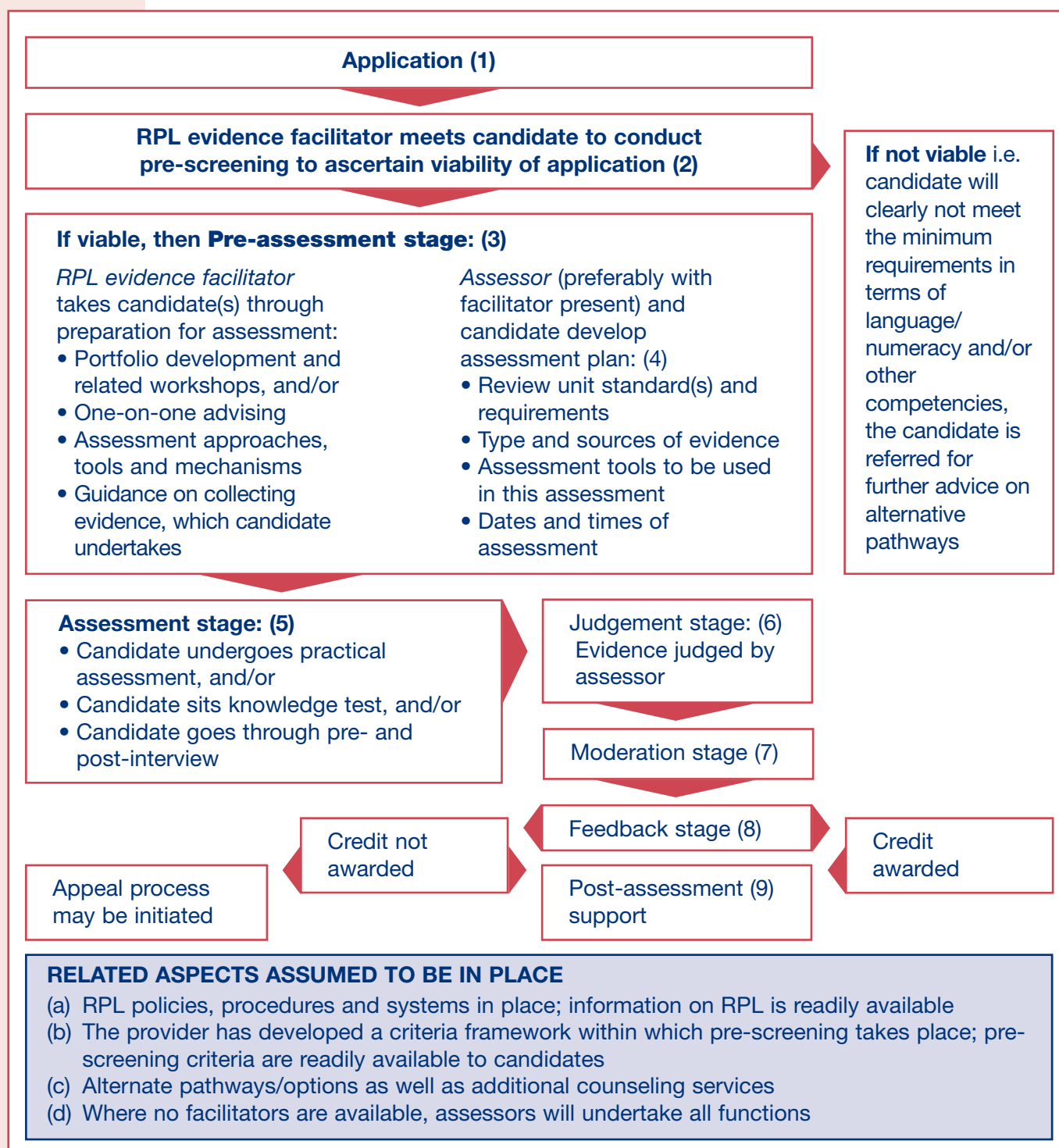
3.2 Conclusion

In developing an RPL policy, it cannot be assumed that because the policy has been approved, the system will be in place. As in the case of all the approaches, processes and procedures in the new education and training system, it is acknowledged that the development of such a system takes time. The level and extent of implementation will be determined by the ETQAs in consultation with their constituencies.

It is also acknowledged that lessons will be learnt on the road to full implementation and that **we should learn these lessons**. Recognition of Prior Learning is not a precise science, rather it builds on international best practice, takes from the lessons that which is valuable and establishes a system that is responsive to the needs of learners, but also balances this with the need for integrity of the system.

Appendix A

Example of a generic RPL process



Appendix B

Unit standards

TITLE:

Facilitate the preparation and presentation of assessment evidence by candidates



Unit standard number	12544
Unit standard level	4
Credits	4
Field	Education, Training and Development
Sub-field	Adult learning
Issue date	February 2003
Review date	This standard should be reviewed within three years of issue.

Purpose

This unit standard will be useful to people who assist candidates to prepare and present evidence for assessment. Such evidence facilitators will add value to the assessment process by ensuring candidates are ready to present well organised and complete evidence to registered assessors. Their value will be particularly felt when assisting candidates who are competent in their field, but are unable to present coherent evidence of that fact for reasons unrelated to their skill area.

People credited with this unit standard are able to:

- Provide information to candidates about assessment in general and their assessment in particular;
- Advise and support candidates to prepare, organise and present evidence; and
- Evaluate and give feedback on candidate evidence.

Learning assumed to be in place

The credit value is based on the assumption that people learning towards this unit standard already understand the key principles of an outcomes-based system, and seek to apply the assessment facilitation skills within the context of their given area of expertise.

Range statement

References to “evidence facilitator” concern the person who wishes to achieve this unit standard. References to “the candidate” in this unit standard concern the person who the evidence facilitator is helping to prepare for assessment, and do not refer to the evidence facilitator.

Assessment of the evidence facilitator against this unit standard is to take place within the context of given organisational assessment policies and procedures, using given assessment instruments that are fully designed in relation to registered unit standards.

This unit standard does not distinguish between “RPL assessment” and any other form of assessment. The reason for this is because all assessment involves gathering, judging and giving feedback on evidence in relation to agreed standards. Therefore, it does not matter whether the evidence facilitator is assisting a candidate to prepare and present existing evidence in the RPL sense, or whether the evidence facilitator is assisting candidates to produce evidence afresh.

Specific outcomes and assessment criteria

Specific outcome 1: Provide information to candidates about assessment

Range: *The information provided to candidates is to include:*

- *General assessment principles and procedures;*
- *Organisational assessment policies and procedures; and*
- *The requirements of the particular assessment at hand.*

Assessment criteria

- 1.1. Basic information is provided about key concepts and principles concerning the outcomes-based system of learning and assessment, within the context of the National Qualifications Framework. Explanations of these key concepts promote understanding of the context of assessment and possible implications for the candidate at individual, organisational, industry and national levels.
- 1.2. Interactions with candidates have the potential to set them at ease and promote understanding of the organisational assessment policy and procedures and the specific assessment process and expectations. Opportunities are provided for clarification concerning the process and the expectations.
Range: *Expectations to be addressed as defined in the relevant unit standards and associated assessment instruments.*
- 1.3. The information helps candidates to identify potential sources of evidence in relation to their circumstances.
- 1.4. The information enables candidates to identify the most appropriate and effective means for producing evidence for the assessment given their circumstances.
- 1.5. Information to candidates is clear, precise and in line with instructions provided in the assessment instruments.

Specific outcome 2: Advise and support candidates to prepare, organise and present evidence**Assessment criteria:**

- 2.1. Potential barriers to gathering evidence and special needs of candidates are identified, and appropriate proposals are provided to overcome such barriers and to address special needs.
Range: *The proposals could be made to candidates and/or assessors and other role-players.*
- 2.2. The advice and support enables the candidate to identify appropriate, effective and efficient means of producing evidence of their competence.
- 2.3. The advice and support provided does not interfere with the candidate's evidence but promotes the candidate's ability to present valid, relevant, authentic and sufficient evidence.
- 2.4. Interactions with candidates enable them to organise and present evidence in a manner that contributes to the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the assessment, but without compromising the reliability and validity of the assessment.
- 2.5. The nature and manner of advice and support takes into account lessons learnt from previous such interactions as well as information from assessors.
- 2.6. Support is given in a way that builds candidates' capacity concerning assessment and promotes independence for the future.

Specific outcome 3: Evaluate and give feedback on candidate evidence

Range: *The evaluation is limited mainly to an evaluation of the completeness and appropriateness of the evidence, and is not expected to amount to an assessment judgement as would be appropriate for an assessor.*

Assessment criteria

- 3.1 The evaluation is carried out in terms of the validity, authenticity, relevance and sufficiency of evidence.
- 3.2 Evaluations are made concerning the readiness of the evidence for presentation to registered assessors, and recommendations contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of the assessment process.
Range: *Recommendations to candidates and/or to registered assessors and/or to supervisors or managers.*
- 3.3 Gaps in the evidence in relation to the requirements are identified and dealt with appropriately.
Range: *“Appropriate” means advice or coaching is only given in cases where the gaps do not reflect a lack of competence on the part of the candidate. In cases where a lack of competence is discerned, feedback is provided in such a way that directs the candidate to further learning and/or practice, and in accordance with organisational policies and procedures.*
- 3.4 Feedback about the evidence is communicated to candidates in a culturally sensitive manner and in a way that promotes positive action by the candidate.

- 3.5 Documentation is completed in line with organisational format requirements. The documentation contains a complete and accurate reflection of the entire process and the evidence produced.
- 3.6 Key lessons from the facilitation process are recorded for integration into future interactions with candidates.

Accreditation options:

- An individual wishing to be assessed, including through RPL, against this unit standard may apply to an assessment agency, assessor or provider institution accredited by the relevant ETQA.
- Anyone assessing an evidence facilitator against this unit standard must be registered as an assessor with the relevant ETQA.
- Any institution offering learning that will enable achievement of this unit standard must be accredited as a provider with the relevant ETQA.
- Moderation of assessment will be conducted by the relevant ETQA according to an agreed Moderation Action Plan.

Notes:

Critical crossfield outcomes

The following critical crossfield outcomes are addressed by this unit standard:

- Identify and solve problems using critical and creative thinking: *planning for contingencies, candidates with special needs, predicting problems that could arise during the gathering of evidence, and making proposals to address difficulties.*
- Work effectively in a team using critical and creative thinking: *working with candidates and other relevant parties prior to, during and after evidence gathering.*
- Organise and manage oneself and one's activities: *planning, preparing, conducting and recording the evidence gathering.*
- Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information: *gather and evaluate evidence and the facilitation process.*
- Communicate effectively: *inform candidates about assessment, communicate during evidence gathering and provide feedback.*
- Demonstrate the world as a set of related systems: *understanding the impact of assessment on individuals and organisations.*
- Be culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts: *work with candidates and give feedback in a culturally sensitive manner.*

Essential embedded knowledge

The following essential embedded knowledge will be assessed indirectly through assessment of the specific outcomes in terms of the stipulated assessment criteria. Candidates are unlikely to achieve all the specific outcomes, to the standards described in the assessment criteria, without knowledge of the listed embedded knowledge. This means that for the most part, the possession or lack of the knowledge can be inferred from the quality of the candidate's performance.

- Principles of assessment
- Principles and practices of RPL
- Methods for gathering evidence
- Potential barriers to assessment
- Feedback techniques
- The principles and mechanisms of the NQF
- Assessment policies and ETQA requirements

Supplementary information

Definition of terms:

- *Assessment* – a process in which evidence of performance is gathered and evaluated against agreed criteria.
- *Performance* – includes skills, knowledge, understanding and attitudes, and the ability to transfer these to new situations.
- *Assessment criteria* – state the type and quality of performance against which the candidate is assessed.

Principles of assessment:

- *Appropriate*: The method of assessment is suited to the performance being assessed and the activities in the assessment mirror the conditions of actual performance as closely as possible.
- *Fair*: The method of assessment does not present any barriers that are not related to the evidence.
- *Manageable*: The methods used make for easily arranged, cost-effective assessments that do not unduly interfere with learning.
- *Integrated into work or learning*: Evidence collection is integrated into the work or learning process where this is appropriate and feasible.
- *Valid*: The evidence produced focuses on the requirements laid down in the standard; i.e. the assessment is fit for purpose.
- *Relevant*: The evidence is relevant to the outcome.
- *Authentic*: The evidence is attributable to the person being assessed.
- *Sufficient*: The evidence collected establishes that all criteria have been met and that performance to the required standard can be repeated consistently.
- *Systematic*: The assessment process is sufficiently rigorous to ensure that assessment is fair.
- *Open*: Learners can contribute to the planning and accumulation of evidence. Assessment candidates understand the assessment process and the criteria that apply.
- *Consistent*: The same assessor would make the same judgement again in similar circumstances. The judgement made is similar to the judgement that would be made by other assessors.

TITLE Plan and conduct assessment of learning



Unit standard number:	ASSMT 01
Unit standard level:	NQF 5
Credits:	15
Field:	Education, Training and Development
Sub-field:	All sub-fields
Issue date:	14 February 2001
Review date:	14 February 2004

Purpose

This unit standard is for people who assess or intend to assess candidates against unit standards and/or qualifications. This unit standard will contribute towards the achievement of a variety of Education Training and Development Practices and Human Resource Development related qualifications.

People credited with this unit standard are able to assess learner performance against standards and qualifications registered on the NQF, using pre-designed instruments. This will be carried out in a fair, valid, reliable and practicable manner that is free of all bias and discrimination, paying particular attention to the three groups targeted for redress: race, gender and disability.

Learning assumed to be in place

The credit calculation is based on the assumption that learners have no previous assessment experience when starting to learn towards this unit standard. A candidate being assessed against this standard should have a prior qualification or equivalent competence in the relevant field of expertise. This qualification or equivalent competence should be at or above the level of qualifications/ unit standards that are to be assessed. Although it is not a requirement, it is recommended that those intending to achieve the unit standard "Design assessment instruments and guides", should do so before attempting this unit standard.

Specific outcomes

- Specific outcome 1:** Plan and prepare for assessment
- Specific outcome 2:** Prepare candidates for assessment
- Specific outcome 3:** Conduct assessment
- Specific outcome 4:** Evaluate and record evidence and make assessment judgements
- Specific outcome 5:** Provide feedback to relevant parties
- Specific outcome 6:** Review assessment

Specific outcomes and assessment criteria

Specific outcome 1: Plan and prepare for assessment

Range:

- *Planning for assessment following learning processes and for RPL.*
- *Planning assumes access to a range of pre-designed assessment instruments relevant to organisational assessment policies.*
- *Planning must include assessments that require special needs of candidates to be considered.*

Assessment criteria

- 1.1 Plans address all the assessment requirements of the unit standards or qualifications to be addressed.
Range: *assessment requirements include performance to be assessed, types of evidence to be collected, assessment methods used, timing of assessment, resources required, sequence of activities, accountabilities, deadlines, arrangements for reviewing assessment plan.*
- 1.2 Planning addresses the need for cost-effectiveness and takes into account the results of previous assessments, special needs of candidates, the assessment context, the accessibility and safety of the environment and contingencies.
- 1.3 The assessment activities, instruments and resources selected are appropriate to the outcomes and enable valid and sufficient evidence collection.
- 1.4 Assessment documentation is prepared to facilitate efficient and effective assessment. The documentation provides all details of the assessment process needed to ensure fair, open, reliable and consistent assessment.
Range: *Details include instructions to candidates, assessors and other relevant parties.*
- 1.5 Potential unfair barriers to achievement by candidates are identified and plans are made to address such barriers without compromising the validity of the assessment.
Range: *Unfair could relate to issues such as language or disabilities.*
- 1.6 Required physical and human resources are ensured to be ready and available for use. Logistical arrangements are confirmed with relevant roleplayers prior to the assessment.
- 1.7 Provision for moderation is made in accordance with relevant assessment policies and ETQA requirements.
- 1.8 A variety of assessment methods are described and compared in terms of strengths, weaknesses and applications.
Range: *The description of methods should cover situations for gathering evidence of abilities in problem solving, knowledge, understanding, practical and technical skills, personal and attitudinal skills and values.*

Specific outcome 2: Prepare candidates for assessment

Assessment criteria

- 2.1 Assessment details are made explicit, in terms appropriate to the candidate's language level and in a manner that sets candidates at ease. Opportunities for clarification are provided and responses promote understanding of the requirements.
Range: *Assessment details cover the purpose, process, expectations, roles, responsibilities and appeals procedures.*
- 2.2 Clear explanations are provided to the candidate of the key elements and implications of standards-based assessment within the context of the NQF.
- 2.3 Checks are carried out to ensure candidates are ready for assessment. In cases where candidates are deemed to be not yet ready, actions taken are in line with assessment policies.
- 2.4 Opportunities are provided for input from the candidate on possible sources of evidence that could contribute to valid assessment. Modifications made on the basis of the inputs maintain and/or improve the validity of the assessment.

Specific outcome 3: Conduct assessment and document evidence

Assessment criteria

- 3.1 The environment and assessment practices are ensured to be conducive to effective, fair and safe assessment and where applicable, in line with recognised codes of practice and learning site or worksite standard operating procedures.
Range: *codes of practice could include personal, product and worksite health, safety and environmental practices, and current legislation.*
- 3.2 The assessment is carried out in accordance with the assessment plan. The assessment approach is adapted as required by the situation, and unforeseen events are addressed without compromising the validity or fairness of the assessment.
- 3.3 Language and expressions used are at a level appropriate to the candidate and provide for clear understanding of what is required without leading candidates.
- 3.4 Questioning techniques are appropriate and have the potential to successfully elicit appropriate responses.
- 3.5 Sufficient evidence is gathered, including evidence generated over time, to enable valid, consistent and fair assessment judgements to be made.
- 3.6 The recording of evidence is sufficient for the purposes of making assessment judgements, meaningful feedback, moderation and possible appeals.
- 3.7 Key principles of assessment are described in terms of their importance and effect on the assessment and the application of the assessment results.

Specific outcome 4 Evaluate evidence and make assessment judgements

Range: *The ability to make assessment judgements must be demonstrated using diverse sources of evidence and in situations where:*

- Special needs of candidates need to be considered;
- Candidates meet all criteria;
- Candidates clearly do not meet the criteria;
- Candidates meet some, but not all criteria; and
- More evidence is required in order to make a judgement.

Assessment criteria

- 4.1 Evidence is evaluated for authenticity, validity and sufficiency.
- 4.2 The quality and type of evidence is evaluated in terms of the assessment outcomes, against the criteria in the relevant unit standard or qualifications.
- 4.3 The evaluation of evidence includes making allowances for contingencies beyond the control of the candidate without compromising the fairness or validity of the assessment.
Range: *Contingencies include unforeseen events, breakdowns, changed circumstances.*
- 4.4 Assessment judgements are justified by the quality and sufficiency of the evidence. Judgements can be substantiated in terms of the consistency and repeatability of the candidate's performance and evidence from various sources and time periods.
- 4.5 Evidence and judgements are stored in line with the Quality Assurance system used by the organisation.

Specific outcome 5: Provide feedback to relevant parties

Range:

- Parties include candidates, educators, trainers, officials, managers and moderators as applicable to the situation.
- Evidence must be provided of the ability to give written and oral feedback.
- The ability to give feedback must be demonstrated in situations where:
 - Special needs of candidates need to be considered;
 - Candidates meet all criteria;
 - Candidates clearly do not meet the criteria;
 - Candidates meet some, but not all criteria; and
 - More evidence is required before a judgement is possible.

Assessment criteria

- 5.1 Feedback is given to relevant parties in accordance with confidentiality requirements, in an appropriate sequence and within agreed timeframes.
- 5.2 Feedback focuses on the quality and sufficiency of the candidate's performance in relation to the agreed outcomes and criteria.
- 5.3 The type and manner of giving feedback is constructive and related to the party's needs. Sufficient information is provided to enable the purpose of the assessment to be met, and to enable parties to make further decisions.

Range: *Further decisions include awarding of credit and redirecting candidates to learning or re-assessment.*

- 5.4 Feedback on the assessment process is obtained from the candidate and opportunities are provided for clarification and explanation.
- 5.5 Disputes that arise are dealt with in accordance with the assessment policy.
- 5.6 Agreements reached and key elements of the feedback are recorded in line with organisational quality assurance systems.
- 5.7 The feedback process and models are described in terms of the potential impact on candidates and further learning and assessment.

Specific outcome 6: Review assessment

Assessment criteria

- 6.1 The review identifies good and bad practice in assessment design and process, and notes these for incorporation in assessment redesign.
- 6.2 Feedback from relevant parties is used to effect future assessments positively.
- 6.3 Weaknesses in the assessment design and process that could have compromised the fairness of assessment are identified and dealt with in accordance with the assessment policy.
- 6.4 Weaknesses in the assessment arising from poor quality of unit standards or qualifications are identified, and steps are taken to inform relevant bodies.

Accreditation process

An individual wishing to be assessed, (including through RPL) against this unit standard may apply to an assessment agency, assessor or provider institution accredited by the relevant ETQA.

Anyone assessing a learner-assessor against this unit standard must be registered as an assessor with the relevant ETQA.

Any institution offering learning that will enable achievement of this unit standard must be accredited as a provider with the relevant ETQA.

Moderation of assessment will be conducted by the relevant ETQA at its discretion.

Range statements

This is a generic assessment unit standard, and candidates can be assessed within any field of learning in line with their subject matter expertise. For the purposes of assessment of this unit standard, candidates should have access to pre-designed assessment instruments.

Further range statements are provided in the body of the unit standard where they apply to particular specific outcomes or assessment criteria.

Notes

Critical crossfield outcomes

The following critical crossfield outcomes are addressed by this unit standard:

- Identify and solve problems using critical and creative thinking: *planning for contingencies, candidates with special needs, problems that arise during assessment, suggesting changes to assessment;*
- Work effectively in a team using critical and creative thinking: *working with candidates and other relevant parties during assessment, as well as post-assessment;*
- Organise and manage oneself and one's activities: *planning, preparing, conducting and recording the assessment;*
- Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information: *gather, evaluate and judge evidence and the assessment process;*
- Communicate effectively: *prepare candidates for assessment, communicate during assessment, and provide feedback;*
- Demonstrate the world as a set of related systems: *understanding the impact of assessment on individuals and organisations; and*
- Be culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts: *plan, conduct and give feedback on assessments in a culturally sensitive manner.*

Essential embedded knowledge

The following essential embedded knowledge will be assessed through assessment of the specific outcomes in terms of the stipulated assessment criteria. Candidates are unlikely to achieve all the specific outcomes, to the standards described in the assessment criteria, without knowledge of the listed embedded knowledge. This means that for the most part, the possession or lack of the knowledge can be directly inferred from the quality of the candidate's performance. Where direct assessment of knowledge is required, assessment criteria have been included in the body of the unit standard.

- Principles of assessment – *see assessment criterion 3.7*
- Principles and practices of RPL
- Methods of assessment – *see assessment criterion 1.8*
- Potential barriers to assessment
- Feedback models – *see assessment criterion 5.7*
- The principles and mechanisms of the NQF
- Assessment policies and ETQA requirements
- Moderation requirements

Supplementary information

Definition of terms:

- *Assessment* – a process in which evidence of performance is gathered and evaluated against agreed criteria.
- *Performance* – includes skills, knowledge, understanding and attitudes, and the ability to transfer these to new situations.
- *Assessment criteria* – state the type and quality of performance against which the candidate is assessed.
- *Candidate* – person whose performance is being assessed by the assessor.

Principles of assessment:

- *Appropriateness*: The method of assessment is suited to the performance being assessed.
- *Fairness*: The method of assessment does not present any barriers to achievements, which are not related to the evidence.
- *Manageability*: The methods used make for easily arranged, cost-effective assessments that do not unduly interfere with learning.
- *Integration into work or learning*: Evidence collection is integrated into the work or learning process where this is appropriate and feasible.
- *Validity*: The assessment focuses on the requirements laid down in the standard; i.e. the assessment is fit for purpose.
- *Direct*: The activities in the assessment mirror the conditions of actual performance as closely as possible.
- *Authenticity*: The assessor is satisfied that the work being assessed is attributable to the person being assessed.
- *Sufficient*: The evidence collected establishes that all criteria have been met and that performance to the required standard can be repeated consistently.
- *Systematic*: Planning and recording is sufficiently rigorous to ensure that assessment is fair.
- *Open*: Learners can contribute to the planning and accumulation of evidence. Assessment candidates understand the assessment process and the criteria that apply.
- *Consistent*: The same assessor would make the same judgement again in similar circumstances.

The judgement made is similar to the judgement that would be made by other assessors.

Appendix C

Models and issues for practice

Introduction

As part of the development of this policy, a review of international and local RPL projects and practices was undertaken, so that lessons learned from other contexts and in South Africa could be used to inform the development of a forward-thinking RPL policy for South Africa. The approach taken in this description is briefly to outline a few RPL case studies that speak to some of the issues and principles that are being highlighted in this document. It will not seek to provide great detail on how RPL is practised in each context, nor does it cover all countries internationally that implement RPL.

A holistic model for portfolio development

In Canada we find an example of innovative prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) among indigenous communities. The First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI) in Ontario is an Aboriginally owned and managed education institution that has developed an ‘alternative’ set of practices within portfolio development. In this context, the portfolio is used not only as a method of assessment in a narrow academic sense but also as a way to explore a wide range of individual and collective learning stemming from colonialism and social and cultural oppression. In a context in which both personal healing and cultural renewal are seen as part of the whole educational programme, educators and learners are encouraged to develop a wide range of learning, assessment and therapeutic skills with which to reconstruct their lives, their communities and the whole approach to education and training. According to FNTI, a valid assessment of past learning cannot take place outside this context; when constructing a portfolio of past experiences, individual students inevitably confront the barriers to learning and assessment, both those that arise from its structural and political realities, as well as from the ways in which adult learners have painfully internalised them (Michelson 1997).

Increasing adult learner participation rates in higher education

It is in the USA that prior learning assessment (PLA) developed approximately 25 years ago. One of the most interesting features of the USA model is its commitment to lifelong learning and to increasing access to learning opportunities for adults in meaningful and cost-effective ways. Thus, since the 1970s, there has been a concerted effort in many institutions in the USA to increase access to HE for adult learners. This has been successful to the degree that, in 1999, 41.1% of all undergraduate students at USA colleges and universities were over the age of 24 (Dumbleton & Strain 1999). Some universities, such as DePaul University in Chicago and New York State University, have colleges dedicated to adult learners (School for New Learning and Empire State College respectively).

One of South Africa's earliest RPL pilot projects was started at the University of the Free State. A 'niche' qualification, targeting working adults in positions of management and leadership, but without having formal qualifications, was started in 1999. Two of the programme's cornerstones are its RPL component (of which portfolio development is a significant part) and its flexible curriculum structure that allows learners to adapt their learning programmes to suit their learning and career needs. The portfolio development course (PDC) is compulsory for all candidates wishing to enter the Bachelor in Management Leadership (BML). For those candidates who have the necessary matriculation exemption, the course is credit-bearing. For those candidates without matric or matriculation exemption, the PDC has been approved by the Matriculation Board as an alternative entry onto the BML, and these candidates make up the extra credits elsewhere in the course. The demand for the course has been extremely high, and the course is now offered off-campus and in other provinces of South Africa.

Creating an enabling framework for RPL through a National RPL centre

In the Netherlands, *Erkennen van elders of informeel Verworven Competenties* (EVC) is being applied in order to contribute to the skills shortage by increasing the flexible 'deployment' of individuals by identifying their current competencies and using educational planning to fast-track appropriate new learning that is individualised. RPL practice in the Netherlands has not yet moved much beyond an experimental phase, and its implementation success is due largely to 'enthusiastic pioneers'. For this reason, the Dutch government set up the Knowledge Centre APL, with funding, at the beginning of 2001 for a period of four years. The functions of the Knowledge Centre APL are: the development of expertise and dissemination of information on APL; research and development of best practices; networking; and supporting the new vocational qualifications framework.

Models of regional RPL provisioning

Two very different types of regional RPL arrangements have been found in North America. The one, representing institutional collaboration, is one of very few of its kind. The other type of arrangement, a community-based and/or semi-independent RPL centre, is more common.

Vermont State Colleges (VSC)

The VSC is a partnership between 15 community colleges in Vermont, USA. The VSC RPL service is aimed at learners who do not fulfill the conventional college entry requirements, or who have learning from experience for which they wish to gain credit towards a formal college qualification. Most of the learners who do the programme request first or second year college credits. Learners can sign up at any participating institution in Vermont, and the portfolio development course (the main assessment tool) is implemented from a common template. Furthermore, the learner need not necessarily apply for further learning at the institution where s/he is receiving portfolio development assistance.

The programme is co-ordinated from a central office with two staff members who play a co-ordinating and administrative role. The VSC draws its assessors from the participating institutions, and industry where appropriate. Each participating institution has instructors (or advisors) trained in helping learners understand and complete the portfolio, which is then submitted to the central office. Copies of the portfolios are subsequently redistributed to subject-specific **panels** of academic assessors representing the member institutions, as well as to an industry representative where appropriate. The assessors individually assess the portfolios and then come together at the central office to compare notes and consensually agree on and **recommend** a result. The credit(s) is **transferable**, not only across Vermont but also across the US, although it is up to the individual institution, where the RPL candidate may be applying to enter a programme of learning, to accept the RPL credit recommendation(s). The New England Association of Schools and Colleges certifies academical viability and transferability of credits across institutions.

The greatest strength of this model is the participative collaboration of all institutions, from delivering a common PDC, to jointly developing assessment criteria, and awarding of credit through panels of assessors.

PLA Centre, Halifax

The PLA Centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada offers RPL services to individuals **and** organisations that have a range of development needs, from education and training; to those facing unemployment or retrenchment; to career advancement. The PLA Centre is a joint project involving five Halifax universities, the provincial community college system, representatives from community groups, voluntary organisations, labour, the private sector and government.

The Centre has a small staff of 4 to 5 housed in the ground floor of a shopping mall tower block in central Halifax. While most PLA in Canada focuses on helping learners access post-secondary education (PSE) the Halifax Centre process might include PSE access at some point in the learner's development, but this is not its main emphasis. Assessors, advisors and trainers are drawn from the partner institutions. The Centre offers individuals and groups a range of RPL programmes and services, namely: individual interviews with a PLA advisor, the Transferable Skills Workshop, and a 30-hour portfolio development course.

Some of the strengths of this approach include its practicality for industry and large organisations like the navy, particularly given the rapidly changing nature of the world of work, and the need to re-skill people in the face of retrenchment. Also, RPL plays an important role in steering people away from social assistance and welfare, towards gainful employment and a sense of empowerment over their own life path and choices. Lastly, the Centre is accessible in terms of location and structure of services.

Workforce development projects

There are examples of RPL-inclusive workforce development projects in the USA, many of which are quite large, e.g. Ford Motor Company, Qwest, and IBM. However, such projects are not the norm. The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) has pioneered a model of workforce development that takes “the employed adult worker as the focal point, linking the needs and interests of employees, employer demands for skilled and flexible employees, and the capacity of educational providers” (Flynn et al 1994:2). The approach is collaborative and participative, and includes the following components: career and education planning, **assessment of prior learning**, motivational workshops, financial assistance for tuition, and a comprehensive information and fund management system through which all data, contracts and reports are processed.

In the *Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Education and Training Authority (MERSETA)* in South Africa, a model that is moving towards a holistic approach to RPL and related services is emerging. A RPL pilot project has been undertaken in the New Tyre Chamber. This project emerged from an evaluation of an early assessor training course in which components relating to bias and sensitivity, and RPL were inadequate. A new assessor training course, substantially inclusive of these components and aligned with the national unit standards for assessors, has been developed. Workers are provided with time off to attend a one-day ‘Returning to Learning’ workshop, in addition to one-on-one guidance, in order to assist them in preparing for their assessments. Various components of the project have been concerned with using and adapting similar strategies found in the FNTI model.

In 1997, the *Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)* undertook a participatory RPL research project in the auto and mining sectors. The project is important in highlighting some of the problems that can undermine RPL implementation if not addressed in the planning and consensus-building stages. For example, it emerged that management and workers had different purposes in mind for the RPL activity (management wanted a skills audit, while workers assumed that they would be recognised, receive higher pay and have access to further education and training opportunities). A number of factors contributed to workers being disillusioned with RPL: information relating to RPL procedures and assessment tools was not readily made available; some of the assessment tools used were inappropriate; many workers were given no opportunities to prepare for their assessments and nor did they have access to the standards or criteria against which they were to be assessed; many workers disregarded the outcome of their assessments, as the grading system was not explained, and no verbal feedback was provided. One of the spin-offs was that the RPL exercise mitigated against the development of a notion of lifelong learning. Also, the equity agenda so often assumed inherent in RPL practices did not meet the goal of certifying large numbers of workers.

The findings from the research were used to develop an RPL policy for COSATU affiliates that sets out eight implementations, including developing a union mandate, establishing a Joint Committee, agreeing on the purpose(s) of RPL, putting in place support structures for workers, in order to create a worker-supportive and participatory RPL framework for workplaces (COSATU 2000).

Some overall comments and issues emerging from the case studies

The discussion above highlighted a number of diverse approaches to providing RPL services and programmes, all of which reflect innovative responses to particular contexts, issues and stakeholders. However, in reviewing these case studies for the purpose of learning lessons for a broad-based implementation of RPL in South Africa, a number of important contextual issues and/or differences need to be highlighted.

Firstly, a number of case studies are from First World countries that are not faced with the same issues relating to levels of literacy, participation of citizens in formal education, or unemployment rates as occur in South Africa. Secondly, RPL in those contexts often takes place in a situation where one of the concerns relating to groups such as immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees, is on assimilation into the culture, language and economy of the receiving country. Issues relating to the transformation of society to reflect the developmental needs of the majority are generally not part of the discourse or practice of RPL in the First World contexts examined. Thirdly, although much of the literature examined indicated that financial resources for RPL in these countries is insufficient, the resources that are available for RPL implementation is quite considerable, such as in the Netherlands. Fourthly, the issue of language, as in South Africa where the majority of people do not speak English, is less of an issue in these other contexts. Finally, the experience of the COSATU research, with regard to the social redress and equity agenda of RPL being undermined unless carefully designed, is an issue that has been foregrounded by the FNTI experience. It is evident that all stakeholders involved in RPL implementation and quality assurance will need to ensure that their processes are inclusive, participatory and stakeholder-driven.

On the other hand, these case studies point to the fact that it is possible to provide RPL services more cost-effectively in a context of scarcer resources. The two regional models represent the basis on which more cost-effective options for South Africa can be explored. Secondly, the UFS case study indicates that where institutional will exists, non-traditional groups of learners can be accommodated within institutions in meaningful ways. The MERSETA case study demonstrates the possibilities for developing a holistic model within an economic sector.

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Funded by the European Union
under the European Programme
for Reconstruction and
Development

*The views expressed in this
publication are not necessarily
those of the funder*

ISBN 0-9584572-1-2



South African Qualifications Authority
Postnet Suite 248, Private Bag X06, Waterkloof, Pretoria, 0145