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***LGSETA ROAD MAP SERIES
NUMBER 4:***

**GUIDELINES FOR THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR
LEARNING**

February 2003

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It is our belief that these guidelines will greatly support the LGSETA ETQA's strategy towards raising the quality of education and training provision in the sector.

We would also like to thank the team that has put together these guidelines in consultation with stakeholders, governance structures and SETA staff. In particular we would like to thank the following individuals:

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GUIDELINES FOR THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

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GLOSSARY

RESOURCE LIST

ACRONYMS

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training (leads to ABET level standards and qualifications)
CHE	Council for Higher Education
DoE	Department of Education
DoL	Department of Labour
ETD	Education, Training and Development (sector)
ETDP	Education, Training and Development Practices
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurance body
FET	Further Education and Training
GET	General Education and Training
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
LG	Local Government and Water
LGSETA	Local Government, Water and Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority
NSB	National Standards Body
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSDS	National Skills Development Strategy
OBET	Outcomes-Based Education and Training
PoE	Portfolio of Evidence
QALA	Quality Assurance of Learner Achievement
QMS	Quality Management System
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SDF	Skills Development Facilitator
SETA	Sector Education and training authority
SGB	Standards Generating Body
SSP	Sector Skills Plan
WSP	Workplace Skills Plan

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSES OF THESE GUIDELINES

*'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 in the country.'* (SAQA:6:2002)

These are the opening lines of the SAQA document *'The Recognition of Prior Learning in the context of the South African National Qualifications Framework'*. The LGSETA fully supports this intention, and hopes that, through these Guidelines and other planned strategic interventions it may be able to accelerate the implementation of a holistic and practical approach to RPL across our sector.

The LGSETA has developed this document to assist providers to make fuller and more effective use of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as an everyday part of the services they offer. Offering RPL assessments as well as programme-based assessments is a good start, but more can be done. We hope to encourage you to create an environment where people fully understand what can be achieved through RPL and what cannot; how RPL can be used for different purposes and in different contexts; and how individuals can access and use RPL as a part of their own and the sector's skills development strategy.

The LGSETA has developed a set of guidelines, known as the Road Map Series, for constituent education and training providers, aimed at assisting providers to work towards best practice models of delivering quality education and training programmes.

The Road Map Series guidelines form part of a succession of documents produced by the LGSETA ETQA in relation to its Quality Assurance Strategy. These documents include:

1. Accreditation Application Form
2. The Accreditation Manual
3. The Self-Evaluation Guide
4. Accreditation and Programme Evaluation Verification Manual
5. The Road Map Guideline Series, which includes:
 - Introduction to the Road Map Series
 - Guidelines for learning Programmes
 - Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)
 - Guidelines for the Management of Assessment
 - Guidelines for Education and Training Development (ETD) Practices

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The Road Map Guidelines form part of your set of LGSETA documents. They are not, however, legalistic or procedural document that set out requirements that need to met. They should be seen rather as resources to draw on when you are looking at your organisational practices.

These RPL Guidelines are to be used by providers of education and training seeking accreditation with the LGSETA. However, in the local government and water sector employers are often also training providers, and are responsible for developing the skills of thousands of employees in line with the needs of the sector, whether they use in-house training providers or bring in providers from outside their own organisations. RPL in this

sector cannot be isolated from the larger picture of human resource development, so the guidelines also try to assist providers as employers and clients of employers in the sector.

All sections include **Activities** and **Tools**. These aim to help you think through RPL issues and reflect on how these apply in your own context. It is important that you work through the *Activities and Tools*, as your RPL practices need to be appropriate for your specific context in relation to your learners and in relation to the kinds of programmes and qualifications you offer.

When reading these guidelines try to consider the skills development needs of the employers for whom you provide training. Whether you are part of a very large organisation, such as a municipality or a water board, or you are a provider who works for many clients within our sector, you should aim to create an environment where workplace skills plans are developed and implemented only after the possibilities for RPL have been discussed and thought through. It is a good idea to ensure that all the relevant people (for example the HRD department) receive copies of these Guidelines and that, especially if you are the in-house training department for an LG sector employer, you work together to develop an RPL policy and implementation strategy for your organisation.

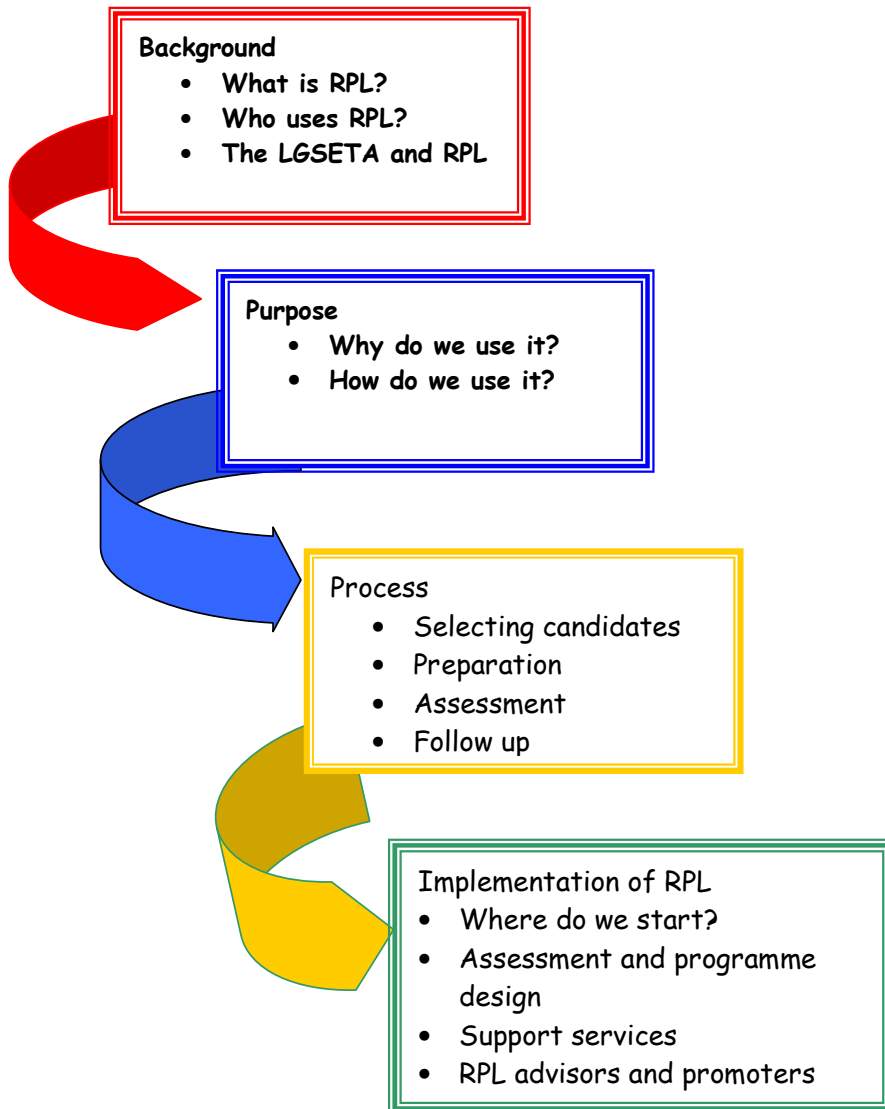


*Do my clients
(employers and
learners) know
about RPL?
Would they use it
more if we
offered it -
directly or
indirectly?*

The first priority is the provision of RPL assessments for your learners. In this context you may decide to do it yourself or to link to another provider so that you can refer your learners. If you wish to work with other employers in the sector to promote access to RPL, you might think about providing a number of related RPL support and career guidance services. If you think beyond the idea that RPL is simply provision of RPL assessments you may be able to increase its transformative impact enormously. The kind of dramatic change that the LGSETA would like to see in the long-run can only take place incrementally and will depend on the ability of providers to take one step at a time and to understand and respond to a range of contexts in a flexible and sensitive manner. We do not expect miracles overnight!

These Guidelines will first examine the background, purpose and process of RPL and then move to practical ideas about implementation.

The Focus of these Guidelines



1.2 WHAT DO WE MEAN BY RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL)?

RPL is the recognition of the skills, knowledge and capability currently held by a person, regardless of how, when and where the learning occurred. The learning may have been acquired through any combination of formal or informal training and education, work experience, community engagement or general life experience.

RPL consists of a process to help people receive formal recognition for what they have learnt through their experiences and for what they can do, know and understand. The RPL process enables a person to gain credits for unit standards or qualifications achieved. It can also help to identify gaps in knowledge or skills which can then be addressed.

SAQA has defined the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in the following way:

'the comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner however obtained against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements... the qualification may be achieved in whole or in part through the recognition of prior learning, which concept includes but is not limited to learning outcomes achieved through formal, informal and non-formal learning and work experience' (National Standards Bodies Regulation no. 18787, March 28th, 1998).

The principles informing good RPL are the same as the principle of good assessment, and these are examined at length in the LGSETA *Guidelines for the Management of Assessment*, so they are not repeated here. However, the RPL process is more than an assessment process and it has the potential to be more enabling and transformative. For this reason it is a key element in implementing the principles of the NQF. It is particularly important in facilitating access and redress. Section 2 of these guidelines will explore the purposes and uses of RPL in more detail.

RPL is not a South African invention, but in the light of our history of colonialism and apartheid we intend to use it to achieve our own particular goal: to accelerate redress for those who have been deprived of opportunities in the formal education system. RPL has been implemented in a number of places around the world, mostly linked to access to higher education. It was used in several countries after the Second World War to provide access to higher education for returning soldiers, and is now commonplace in the UK. Experiences of RPL from around the world confirm that knowledge gained through a work-based path can effectively assist to fast-track students.

1.3 WHO MIGHT WANT TO UNDERGO AN RPL PROCESS?

As a result of the discriminatory education and labour practices of the apartheid years there are a lot of people who might benefit from RPL. However, many of them do not know about it, or do not know how to access the process, or may not realise that skills and knowledge they have learnt through experience will be valued more if their acquisition is formally recognised through the achievement of unit standards and qualifications.



Do you understand the new policies and legislation affecting RPL in South Africa? See the Introduction to the Road Map Series for more detail.



Read on, and think where most of your potential RPL candidates might start from? Is anything in place to help them?

It is important that we create an environment where people know about RPL and know how to access it. It is also important that the RPL services are broad enough to accommodate people at very different stages of readiness. Few people will be ready to go immediately with evidence of their learning to ask to be assessed against a particular unit standard or qualification. Most people start out wanting clarification about how they should prepare for RPL, and what kind of evidence of competence they should start to collect.

The bulleted paragraphs below outline four typical steps that most people would need to take. Of course, some people don't need the first step because they are already focused on a particular learning pathway, some have identified a possible career path but have very little idea about what they must do next, so they would start at step two; others already have a good idea what evidence is needed and start to collect it, so they start at the third bullet; and a very few might go straight to the last bullet:

- Some people know that through life and work experience they have learnt many skills and gained much knowledge as well as valuable work habits. So they know they ought to be recognised as someone able to aim higher than they could on the basis of their paper qualifications. So they look to the RPL process for help in identifying possible career paths before they can start on the process outlined below.
- Some people have got this far, but know nothing about the qualifications, unit standards and outcomes they must achieve; they do not have any idea what evidence of achievement might be accepted, and have not thought about how to generate or collect that evidence; in this case they need a lot of support and time to draw up, with an assessor, and assessment plan, outlining the outcomes that must be achieved and indicating the kind of evidence required. The assessment plan might also indicate the need for short learning programmes or top-up training to address identified gaps.
- Some people know what learning route they want to take and what qualification they need. If they are familiar with the standards they look at the outcomes one by one and see if they can produce evidence that they have achieved these outcomes – in which case they could bring to the RPL process evidence of achievement of most of the qualification (or part qualification or relevant unit standards). They would almost certainly need to ask some questions about what other kinds of evidence might be acceptable and how they can set about generating it, and might require top-up training or time to demonstrate competence in relation to certain standards. Collecting this evidence might be facilitated by a workplace mentor, assessor or evidence facilitator, if such people are available.¹
- Some people might have compiled a structured collection of evidence that demonstrates their applied competence in relation to a particular standard, set of standards or qualification registered on the NQF. In this case, they can go to an assessment body or provider that offers RPL and ask for an assessment of this evidence and the award of credits or an analysis of what, if any, elements are missing and what has already been achieved.

¹ See *Guidelines for Education, Training and Development Practices for details about these supportive roles*

1.4 HOW DO WE ENCOURAGE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RPL IN THE LG SECTOR?

The LGSETA believes that RPL can go a long way towards achieving its goals of equity, access and redress, and it has resolved to provide whatever incentives it can within its budget limitations for the implementation of sound RPL practices. Possible incentives include:

- supporting a small number of selected providers to achieve the accreditation plus RPL level of accreditation for the purpose of creating strategic RPL centres of excellence in the sector.
- supporting the development of QALA qualification guides and suitable assessment instruments appropriate for RPL assessments
- initiating an RPL assessment process to serve as an exemplar in the sector; this should be thoroughly documented for shared learning;
- supporting the training of RPL advisors, instrument designers moderators wherever possible
- allocating in increasing proportions each year, the Grant D allocation to workplaces that develop the WSP using RPL-based skills profiling of all employees or groups of employees targeted in line with the Sector Skills Plan;
- offering financial support for employers conducting RPL against the Fundamental unit standards;
- initiating and coordinating a communication strategy about RPL and the services on offer in the sector;
- initiating the development of unit standards and qualifications in LGSETA areas of primary focus; and
- linking the RPL services to the SETA's achievement of the NSDS targets.

1.5 AN OVERVIEW OF THE LGSETA ACCREDITATION STRATEGY IN RELATION TO RPL

The LGSETA has adopted a developmental model for the accreditation of providers, and RPL is catered for in the accreditation process in a number of ways². However, it was decided not to make RPL a core requirement for accreditation, as it is possible to provide valuable education and training services without using RPL, and the LGSETA did not want to exclude such providers from the accreditation process.

Although RPL is not a core requirement for accreditation, requirements that enable and facilitate the use of RPL are embedded within the core accreditation criteria. This means that all accredited providers should be able to use RPL assessment processes with their own learners who are registered for learning programmes. This service might be offered to provide access for learners into a learning programme, or to exempt learners from part of a learning programme, or to identify bridging or top-up needs. RPL carried out in this context may also result in the award of credits for standards or qualifications registered on the NQF.

If RPL is offered as a service to learners who are not registered with the provider, the LGSETA imposes additional criteria to ensure that the RPL provision is satisfactory. So, if you wish to offer RPL services more broadly, you should apply for 'Accreditation plus RPL' status. This means that you complete an extra section in your application form, and also conduct your self-evaluation to include the RPL section. When the LGSETA conducts the

² For detailed information about the points discussed in 1.5 and 1.6 of this document, see LGSETA Accreditation Manual, Application Form and Self-evaluation Guide

comparative review and the verification visit, it will also be checking on the additional criteria that relate to the quality of your RPL services.

Providers achieving Accreditation plus RPL status will be able to offer RPL services to learners enrolled with other providers as well as people referred by their employers or other individuals, employed or unemployed, who wish to attain recognition for the knowledge, skills and values they have acquired through experience.

Those providers who wish to achieve award level accreditation are expected by the LGSETA to offer comprehensive RPL services.

1.6 THE KEY ROLE OF PROVIDERS WITH ACCREDITATION PLUS RPL STATUS

The LGSETA is relying on a number of providers in each province to attempt and to achieve accreditation plus RPL status. They will form RPL centres which all learners should be able to access, either as individuals, or through ordinary accredited providers, or through their employers. Hopefully the example of these centres will inspire other providers to offer similar services, and RPL will just become a part of the normal planning and training processes throughout the sector. These providers could become trail-blazers in achieving award status and could play an important role in training other providers in this context. You could ask for help from the LGSETA to achieve this status when you submit your accreditation application form.

If you are a large provider with a robust teaching and learning provision record you should seriously consider the accreditation plus RPL option. If you (large or small) are involved in various networks with other providers and workplaces, and are already offering some services to these, you should also definitely apply in this context. Providers that have experience with workplace-based learners so that adult learning needs and contexts can be accommodated should also find it easier to adapt to achieve this status.

Providers with accreditation plus RPL status will also be able to offer their services to learners in related sectors, such as providers who wish to form links with the Health and Welfare, Safety and Security, Finance or Energy sectors.



Do you have enough information to develop suitable RPL strategies and apply for accreditation plus RPL status?

SECTION 2: THE PURPOSES OF RPL

2.1 RPL PURPOSES FOR EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES

RPL assessments can be used for a number of purposes all of which are aimed to facilitate access to education, training and career development, and to accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities.

In this section we are talking to you, the provider of education and training, but we also want you to think about the employers in the LG sector, and the needs of their employees. In this context, we have divided the providers in our sector into two broad categories:

- in-house training providers that are part of a large LG sector employee (water boards, municipalities); and
- independent training providers that work with several employers in the LG sector, including provision outsourced by the large employers.

If you fit more or less into the second category, education and training is probably your organisation's core business, and you may be asked to conduct training and/or RPL by a range of employers. In this case, the LGSETA believes that you should discuss the RPL process with your client before you begin the process with the learners. In this way you can make sure that the learners understand why they are being offered RPL and what the possible consequences of the process might be. This will avoid unhappy situations arising where learners have been intentionally or unintentionally misled and have high expectations which could be severely disappointed.

If you are an in-house department of a much larger employer organisation, the LGSETA suggests that you find a way to work closely with the human resource development and workplace skills planning parts of the organisation, since it is their core business to fulfil the needs identified by these sections. RPL processes can be a cost effective way of meeting the needs. Perhaps you could give them a copy of these Guidelines and arrange to be allowed to participate in their planning, helping to ensure that RPL is integrated into the next WSP. RPL is relevant to the needs of all your organisation's employees, not only those currently involved in training programmes.

Identifying the purposes is the starting point of an RPL process. This is important as the different role players in the process may have different purposes for participation. For example, employees may want to be part of an RPL assessment so as to receive credits that will assist to advance them in their career development. Employers on the other hand may only want a descriptive skills profile of the work force. Part of this clarification should involve reaching agreement about what assessment processes employers may be willing to pay for, and what they will recognise. In this situation, the choice of standards to be used should assist to clarify what the employer will be responsible for supporting.

The importance of reaching consensus before embarking on RPL assessment about the purposes of the RPL cannot be over-emphasised. Many of the concerns about the RPL raising unachievable expectations can be ameliorated through an up-front agreement from all role players and stakeholders about the purpose and likely implications of the proposed RPL in the specific context.

Finally, think about your own employees (training facilitators, administrators, assessors, moderators, materials developers) and whether or not they could benefit from RPL. Why not get your own house in order first, and give your own colleagues the opportunity to achieve formal recognition for the skills and knowledge they have gained through their work and other life experience? In order to identify the ETD roles may of them play, it may help you to read

the LGSETA's *Guidelines for ETD Practices*. The result may fulfil the purpose listed fourth in the list below.

The major purposes for conducting RPL are:

- to give formal recognition and value to skills and knowledge acquired through experience;
- to identify training needs more accurately for groups and individuals;
- to speed up skills development and employment equity in line with the Sector Skills Plan, saving time and money;
- to identify and use employees' talents appropriately and improve the workplace ethos; and
- to encourage lifelong learning and open up new career opportunities.

Each of these will be unpacked in the paragraphs below.

2.2 FORMAL RECOGNITION OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING ACHIEVEMENTS

Formal recognition of competence allows candidates to receive credits for unit standards or qualifications that they have successfully achieved. This can have positive psychological effects, giving individual candidates a sense of self-worth and building their self-esteem. In some cases it can help individuals to meet requirements for particular jobs or licenses to practice, or give them better opportunities for promotion.

2.3 MORE ACCURATE IDENTIFICATION OF TRAINING NEEDS

The use of RPL by employers to obtain a more accurate profile of a workforce should become more common and may well form part of annual Workplace Skills Planning in the future. Meanwhile, as a provider, you can use RPL to reveal unrecognised achievements as well as gaps in candidates' knowledge and skills and in this way their training needs can be identified more accurately. Some individuals might be directed to bridging courses or specific skills programmes; others might be asked to practise certain skills in the workplace and collect evidence of their achievement; others might be given exemption from specific modules in a training programme. In the case of groups where common strengths or weaknesses are identified, the provider should be able to adapt or tailor-make a learning programme that meets their identified needs.

2.4 ACCELERATION OF SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT EQUITY PROCESSES

RPL can improve the strategic alignment of the workplace. The Sector Skills Plan has identified growth areas and areas of skills shortage. Each employer needs to develop a Workplace Skills Plan, taking into account the priorities of the sector as a whole, as well as specific needs of the individual workplace. The needs are then linked to identified qualifications and standards, and this could be one starting point for an RPL process. Employees who believe they have some of the required skills and knowledge, but do not have formal qualifications could be asked to apply for RPL. The RPL process will help the sector to meet its training needs in the most cost effective manner and the shortest possible time, by selecting candidates who will not require the full training, or can be shown to meet minimum entry requirements.

RPL can also assist with building employment equity at the workplace, and fast tracking individual candidates. RPL can prioritise certain target groups for assessment as part of the

process of redress. In certain cases, structured links could be made between the outcomes of RPL processes and re-grading or new training opportunities. RPL can be linked to workplace restructuring processes through providing more accurate skills profiles of employees. In this way, once candidates have received credits, they should be in a better position to apply for vacancies or for re-grading when suitable opportunities arise.

2.5 APPROPRIATE USE OF EMPLOYEES' SKILLS AND AN IMPROVED WORKPLACE ETHOS

Once RPL becomes a familiar process and employees and learners begin to feel the benefits, the ethos of the workplace should become more positive. As already stated, part of the development of each Workplace Skills Plan should involve obtaining a more accurate profile of all employees, using RPL as appropriate. In this context it is important to have RPL advisors who are thoroughly familiar with the sector, its possible career paths and the relevant standards and qualifications. They should be trained to interview potential RPL candidates in a culturally sensitive manner and help them to identify relevant skills and knowledge they have acquired through work, home and community activities. Many skills are wasted because human resource departments usually only recognise the results of formal education. The hidden skills of the workforce can be identified, and put to better use. Individuals can be motivated to pursue self-development along an identified career path.

In the long term appropriate use of RPL as a key part of your human resource development strategy can improve workplace relationships giving value to each employee's contributions. This can have the effect of improving productive output and making the organisation more competitive.

2.6 ENCOURAGEMENT OF LIFELONG LEARNING AND ACCESS TO NEW CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Lifelong learning and development will begin to be a reality to most people, instead of just a slogan. With appropriate support, candidates should experience the RPL assessment as rewarding and feel more motivated in their learning and work contexts. Of course raising the level of skill in the workforce will benefit the employer as well as the individuals concerned. It is important for people to see that career paths exist so that they do not feel they are in a 'dead-end' job.

SECTION 3: RPL PROCESSES

3.1 PREPARING THE WAY FOR INTRODUCING RPL PRACTICES IN A WORKPLACE

As a provider conducting RPL assessments, it is important that the candidates come to you with realistic expectations. When individuals have identified their own needs and come to you for RPL you should find out what their purpose is in asking for RPL, and discuss with them their expectations. If they assume that RPL will automatically lead to a pay increase, a promotion, or a re-grading of their jobs, you must make it very clear that this is not the case. Achieving the credits or qualification in question may put them in a position to apply for higher level jobs resulting in possible pay increases, but there is no guarantee that either of these things



Does your RPL process have links with the employer?
Does the employer have a policy for RPL? Are learners informed of the workplace policy for RPL before they come to you?

will occur. Re-grading of a job is a different process and needs to be conducted through the HR department, where jobs can be re-evaluated and may be re-graded, but even this does not automatically lead to a pay increase.

Therefore we need to emphasise again how important it is that the provider of RPL works very closely with the employer of RPL candidates so that these individuals understand the possible benefits and limitations of RPL for themselves as individuals in the particular circumstances of their organisation. This is especially important when large numbers of people are involved, for example if the employer is conducting a skills audit of a particular category or group of workers. This could be designed to spot potential candidates for skills training or learnerships, or it could be used to identify people to retrain and/or retrain in the case of restructuring. People pushed into RPL without fully understanding the implications in their specific context are rightly suspicious. RPL of groups of people needs thorough preparation, and it must be clear what its consequences are, both for those who succeed in getting formerly unrecognised achievements recognised and those who do not.

So, although you may be a training provider offering RPL to people employed by an employer in a quite different organisation, the LGSETA believes that it is your responsibility to liaise with the employer if you are asked to conduct RPL for groups of people from a workplace. If you are assessing individuals who are clear about what they want, and understand the possible outcomes and their implications, then clearly their plans are their own business. In all cases, the confidentiality of individuals approaching you for RPL should be respected. However, in many cases it could be an employer who approaches you, and in such cases you need to be sure his or her employees fully understand the context and implications of the RPL process for the specific case.

Ideally you, as a training provider, should have an assessment and RPL policy. Your position in relation to the issues raised above should be part of your RPL policy. This policy could be part of company or organisational RPL policy if you are an in-house training section of a larger organisation. On the next page we illustrate how an RPL process could work if it were sponsored by a company and communications with all relevant stakeholders including the provider were excellent from the planning stage.

Company-sponsored RPL Process

RPL Policy interpreted into company Guidelines:

- Purposes of RPL agreed
- Financial and other support defined
- Priorities identified in relation to Workplace Skills Plans
- Relevant stakeholders involved
- Workers counselled re: purpose of RPL and expectations

Provider identified and begins process. Interview/advice identifies candidate as:

- not recommended for company-sponsored RPL process; OR
- suitable for RPL against company-sponsored standards

- Provider recommends a different training or career path process
- RPL could be offered for different standards without company sponsorship

RPL pre-assessment process shows:

- Some relevant standards/outcomes probably achieved but learner has definite gaps; OR
- RPL Assessment plan is completed (may include workplace support for collection of evidence)

Before RPL assessment plan can be completed:

- Top-up training is designed and delivered; OR
- Support built into workplace experience/learning programme to address gaps

RPL Assessment Process:

- Challenge task
- On the job observation
- Portfolio of evidence
- Other (or combinations)

Certificate awarded





TOOL

This tool is designed for providers who are asked to support employers in the development of an RPL Environment in the Workplace. If you are able to persuade your employer client(s) that they need an RPL policy and a communications strategy, with implementation to take place only after detailed planning and marketing, you may be asked to facilitate the planning process. Here is one approach that should work.

Step 1: Involve the Stakeholders

Because of the variety of purposes and approaches to RPL, it is important to have fully representative stakeholder involvement in the development of RPL strategies. RPL must follow the same principles as other types of assessment, including transparency.

Step 2: Define the Scope of company-sponsored RPL

RPL is a very broad process, and many employers need to define their approach. Your client company (or companies) may have a particular need for RPL of existing employees, or for targeting a particular group of learners (e.g. unemployed youth), or for identifying a pre-requisite skill, or finding out who already has some of the skills, knowledge and attitudes targeted in a particular learnership. These should be clearly identified in a policy document. Help to facilitate the writing or adaptation of the company RPL policy with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders. It will need to spell out what the purposes of particular RPL processes are, what possible impact RPL may have, and how it will be followed up.

Step 3: Identify the Roles and Responsibilities

RPL is a process which needs to have dedicated people and time allocated to it. In other words – it needs to be part of somebody's job description, and to have a planned strategy! People will need to be identified and trained to perform key roles³.

Step 4: Organise the process

If your organisation decides to engage an external provider, you will need criteria for selection, commitment to your process and clear communication channels.

(Steps after Step 4 are the providers' responsibility. The steps taken by you, as the provider, will be outlined in another Tool at the end of Section 3 of these Guidelines)

³ See *LGSETA Guidelines for ETD practices for more detail about possible roles*

3.2 SELECTION OF CANDIDATES FOR RPL

People do not always consider RPL as a possible course of action. Properly conducted evidence facilitation, advice and support services should enable candidates to use RPL to achieve their personal, educational and career goals. So in addition to responding to individuals or groups that ask you for RPL, there are several other possible ways of raising awareness about the potential of RPL. These could include:

- making it a standard administrative procedure to ask people who are registering for a learning programme about their previous relevant training and experience and recording their answers;
- ensuring that all your facilitators discuss this at their first meeting with any group of learners, and that they record responses, and, where relevant, adapt the training accordingly;
- asking your employer clients if they think RPL would be an appropriate alternative for any of the candidates/learner each time they approach you to train;
- asking your employer clients if they would like you to help in the conduct of a skills audit of their employees using RPL; and
- offering all your learners (and non-learners too) career advice plus an interview to see whether or not an RPL process might be appropriate.

Your response to the information acquired could include a range of different types of provision, catering for:

- candidates for RPL;
- candidates for RPL and top-up;
- learners requiring accelerated training with exemption from certain modules;
- learners requiring full training;
- learners requiring full training with additional built in support;
- learners referred to other providers for learning programmes/ RPL in the fundamentals; or
- learners requiring a bridging programme (for example in the language of instruction) before entering the learning programme.

Activity



Here are two examples of how a person might find, access and use RPL to accelerate their education, training and development or select a suitable career path. Read each one and outline how your organisation would handle RPL in each case.

Case study: (acknowledgements to City of Cape Town)

RPL for Vuyani

Vuyani left school in Standard 7 and has been employed in the municipality for 18 years, where he has progressed to his current position as a shift supervisor. One of his key duties is that of Master Welder. Despite his long tenure, Vuyani feels vulnerable to redundancy as he does not have a Senior Certificate, which is a minimum requirement for the Master Welder position.

Vuyani presents himself for training as a Master Welder Officer. He sought credits for a number of welding unit standards via RPL. During on-the-job assessment of his

routine work, his assessor verified that he is competent in hard and soft soldering, brazing, electric arc welding and oxy-acetylene gas welding. Throughout the assessment, Vuyani followed the correct safety procedures and used the correct equipment.

In his oral presentation, he detailed what had to be done in the case of accidental electrical earth leakage. He also demonstrated how to detect gas leaks in the welding system. Vuyani supplied original job-cards for the repairs he has effected to hot water cylinders as part of his work. A direct supervisor verified the authenticity of this documentation.

During the written assessment, it became clear that Vuyani's literacy skills are not at the level required for a Master Welder. His trainer now has a greater understanding of Vuyani's educational needs. She recommends that Vuyani does a number of ABET literacy unit standards. Vuyani receives 80 credits towards the FETC in Welding, and will pursue part-time studies at college.

Case study – Career paths for Siviwe

Siviwe has been working for a municipality for seven years. For some time now he has been thinking about where he is going in his job.

He visits the Support Centre at the municipality for some advice. Gladys who works at the Centre interviews him to find out about his job – what his responsibilities are, what he likes about his job, and what things he wants to change.

Siviwe tells Gladys that in his present job, his primary role is to ensure that the parks are well maintained. This involves a number of responsibilities:

- planning & maintaining the lawn and beds;
- operating & maintaining the lawn mower and weed eater;
- keeping the park clean – weeding, collecting leaves and litter, trimming;
- disposing of waste
- separating the waste into organic waste for the municipal compost, recyclable waste, and waste for the landfill;
- planning his schedule; and
- interacting with the public – helping visitors with directions and information, controlling dog fights, and intervening when there is inappropriate behaviour in the park.

Siviwe explains that he works in a team of six other people, one of whom is the team leader.

Gladys advises Siviwe that he has a number of options because in his current job he does a number of things – he works with machines in a mechanical way, he does horticulture, he is involved with waste disposal, he gives advice to the public, and he plans and works in a team.

Siviwe decides that he would like to focus on mechanical maintenance work and begins an RPL process to find out if he can enter Technical College to study part time while he continues his current job.

An awareness of the need for RPL is often the result of a selection process for access into training or a job selection process. A selection or placement process for training might reveal, for example, the fact that the prospective trainee already has many of the competencies targeted in the learning programme they have applied to enter. From a job selection process it might emerge that an otherwise suitable candidate lacks minimum requirements in terms of formal education.

3.3 THE LGSETA SELECTION TOOL FOR LEARNERSHIPS

The LGSETA selection tool for learnerships is an example of an assessment that is designed for use in an RPL context. It is mentioned here because, although it is not a complete RPL process, it could easily provide a basis for an RPL process - beginning the task of gathering evidence of competence.

The LGSETA developed its Learner Selection Process to assist its providers and employers in appropriate selection and placement of learnership candidates. The process and related tools are found in a manual entitled *Learner Selection Process: Guidelines and Instruments* available from the LGSETA.

The manual is supported by training in application of the process at a negotiated fee. Interested parties should apply in writing to the ETQA manager in order to obtain procedures for using the manual and undertaking the training. The training is aimed at selected assessors/ facilitators who are registered assessors and have subject matter expertise in language and mathematical literacy.

The Manual provides the tools for a selection and placement process for learnerships. The selection process results in a Learnership Candidate Profile which summarises the following:

- the learner's work experience in relation to the proposed learnership;
- the learner's understanding of the proposed learnership;
- the learner's language (reading, writing, speaking and listening) competence; and
- the learner's mathematical competence.

The Profile will be helpful in a number of design and support issues relating to the learning programme for the learnership.

The Selection Process has been developed for:

- skills development facilitators and/or learnership managers in workplaces offering learnerships;
- providers offering the learning programmes for learnerships; and
- assessors.

3.4 PREPARATION OF CANDIDATES FOR RPL ASSESSMENT

RPL assessment is simply assessment that is conducted independently of any learning programme or course. It must be conducted in accordance with all the principles and procedures that any other assessments in the sector require. It is a systematic, flexible and collaborative process in which both assessor and candidate are actively involved. The LGSETA *'Guidelines for providers on ETD Practices'* booklet explains what is expected from the assessor, and how an evidence facilitator might help to support the candidate. The LGSETA *'Guidelines on the Management of Assessment'* booklet sets out the principles and procedures required for good practice in assessment. These are not repeated here. Instead,

we focus on those aspects of the provision of RPL services that go beyond good assessment practice.

As we explained in 1.3, above, people come to an RPL process at different stages. Once an individual has decided that they want to undergo an RPL process in order to gain recognition for their competence in a particular field, the process is fairly straightforward. It basically involves agreeing on an assessment plan, any support required and going ahead with the RPL assessment process. The RPL candidate is an active participant at all stages.



Do you advise/counsel learners at the beginning of the RPL process?

If, however, it is not yet clear what gap-fill or additional training a person might require, the process begins a little further back. In such a case, rather like the case of Vuyani illustrated under 3.2, above, the provider of RPL advice and support would (for example) assist the candidate by taking the following steps, in collaboration with the assessor if they are two different people:

- identify the candidates' understanding of RPL and expectations of the process
- establish if the expectations are realistic or if a different process might be more appropriate. (In this case, make suitable alternative arrangements whenever possible.)
- identify what the candidate needs to know and be able to do for the next step on his or her chosen career pathway;
- identify unit standards or qualifications required;
- explain the kinds of evidence that would be sufficient to recognise competence in relation to the required standards and/or qualifications;
- make an assessment plan which includes a structured framework into which the evidence requirements can be slotted;
- identify the evidence which they already have or can easily put together;
- suggest ways of generating the evidence they do not yet have;
- set a date for a preliminary look at the evidence;
- follow up on the first look at evidence with further meetings to help address gaps;
- set date for assessment of candidate, ensuring that the assessor is aware of any relevant potential issues about assessment, for example the preferred language of the candidate;
- ensure that the moderation process is scheduled together with other similar assessments; and
- wish the candidate good luck!

If a person, like the example given of Siviwe, is not at all sure what he wants, then the first steps in the process will be much more broad-based. The process would be more like this:

- identify life and work situations in which he felt he had learnt useful skills, knowledge and attributes;
- distinguish between the actual experience and the learning resulting from it (unfortunately we do not always learn from experience!);
- express these learnings in the form of outcomes or broad competencies (is able to mend a puncture; is able to solve problems related to x); and
- link these competencies/outcomes to the likely career, work or learning opportunities available to the candidate.

The assessment preparation process for RPL candidates is often not the beginning of RPL. It often follows after a number of preliminary steps. Let us look at five examples where pre-assessment processes would be different:

- a person working for a municipality as a refuse collector who would like to start a new career but does not know what opportunities might be available;
- a person working for a water board as a filter operator who is not aware of any promotion opportunities or career paths in the sector;
- a person applying for a job in municipal finance who has experience but does not meet the minimum requirements in terms of qualifications;
- a person working in the public safety sector as a fireman who has no formal qualifications relating to his or her work ; and
- a person who now requires newly introduced standards or qualifications in ETD in order to continue to do their current job.

3.5 PRE-ASSESSMENT PROCESSES FOR RPL CANDIDATES

Activity 3



The assessment preparation process for RPL candidates is often not the beginning of RPL. It often follows after a number of preliminary steps. Look at the five examples below and think how the pre-assessment processes would be different:

- a person working for a municipality as a refuse collector who would like to start a new career but does not know what opportunities might be available;
- a person working for a water board as a filter operator who is not aware of any promotion opportunities or career paths in the sector;
- a person applying for a job in municipal finance who has experience but does not meet the minimum requirements in terms of qualifications;
- a person working in a trade (electrician) who has no formal qualifications relating to his or her work ; and
- a person who now requires newly introduced standards or qualifications in ETD in order to continue to do their current job.

A person working for a municipality as a refuse collector who would like to start a new career but does not know what opportunities might be available

This kind of example might apply to many employees in our sector who are relatively unqualified and use a limited selection of skills in their work. They are doing the job because they need work and they were able to get it, but it may be in an area where they feel their skills are being under-utilised, or they may feel that there is no chance of promotion as there is no career path.

The simplest type of skills audit is a qualification audit which may or may not help a person in this situation. Often we find that people do, in fact, have formally recognised qualifications which go well beyond the minimum job requirements. For example, many jobs which have an entrance requirement of Junior Certificate/ Standard 7/Grade 9 are being performed by people who have a Senior Certificate, or at least completed Standard 10/Grade 12. This is

easily discovered by a simple skills audit, and may help to identify individuals who would benefit from some kind of RPL and career guidance.

But RPL can be used to make a skills audit much more revealing in terms of identifying existing skills and knowledge. For this, it is necessary to train suitable people from an appropriate range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds (roughly matching those of the employees) to ask probing questions to discover what competence the employee has developed through experience at work, at home and in the community. She or he may manage a stockveld, act as a shop-steward, have attended several short courses, be a caregiver, cook food for weddings, sew or make pots, be a choir-master or produce a newsletter for a community group. These kinds of activities will indicate to a trained RPL advisor the kinds of skills and knowledge as well as personal attributes that the person has that go beyond his or her paper qualifications.

This could lead to a discussion of alternative career paths. The RPL advisor (who might be an assessor, an ABET practitioner, a Skills Development Facilitator or an Human Resource person) should be aware of areas of skills shortage in the workplace, the region and the sector, and should try to choose an area where jobs existed, to direct the person's ambitions in a helpful manner.

The next step could be to discuss possible skills programmes or learnerships in the sector or to refer the person to a different sector if appropriate. Further discussion or a selection process (like the LGSETA selection process for learnerships) might identify certain immediate preparatory training needs, like a skills programme in mathematical literacy.

Or possibly, by this time we might be ready to start the preparation process outlined in 3.2 above, which takes place when we are sure what is being assessed and why.

Our refuse collector might find himself in a learnership for horticulture on his way to a career in the parks department.

A person working for a water board as a filter operator who is not aware of any promotion opportunities or career paths in the sector

Many people working at lower levels in this sector have had no formal training since they left school. Until very recently, there does not seem to have been any opportunity to proceed through work experience and training along a career path to jobs at higher levels.

Many of the steps taken in the example above to identify skills, knowledge and attributes might also be useful in this context. However, here the questioning could be a little more narrowly focused, because the individual in the example definitely wants to continue in this sector, but needs to know firstly what is available, and secondly, whether he or she has a chance of availing the opportunities.

Again, the LGSETA selection tool for learnerships could play a preliminary RPL role in this context. Follow-ups might include a skills programme, formal RPL assessment to recognise current achievements, and/or entry into a learnership in water.

A person applying for a job in municipal finance who has experience but does not meet the minimum requirements in terms of qualifications

Many South Africans work in areas where they do not have formal qualifications. Some unqualified book-keepers (for example) do a good job and some book-keepers do almost the work of accountants. However, increasingly, it has become difficult to find or hold jobs and almost impossible to get promotion if you do not have the formal qualification.

However, many people in this situation are well aware that they could perform the job advertised very well, so they apply, because they believe that they have demonstrated their competence over the years. Most equal opportunity employers word advertisements saying that the applicant should have a minimum of x qualification *'or an equivalent level of demonstrated competence'*. Often the experienced person without formal qualifications is rejected by a clerk who has been instructed to weed out under-qualified people.

Increasingly, individuals are not accepting this mechanical approach, which contradicts the NQF principles of equity, redress and access. Therefore more and more individuals are likely to request RPL if they are told they have not met minimum qualifications but have relevant experience. Both employers and providers in our sector need to take note of this, and should be prepared to help suitable candidates to access an appropriate RPL process.

A person working in a trade (e.g. assistant electrician) who has no formal qualifications relating to his or her work

This example has been given in an attempt to identify a person who already has a job, is happy with the job and believes that it involves skills, knowledge and other attributes that should be recognised in a formal qualification. As soon as the qualifications are registered on the NQF for the public safety sub-sector, for example, such people are likely to request RPL processes to affirm the competence they already have.

A person who now requires newly introduced standards or qualifications in ETD in order to continue to do their current job

The LGSETA is encouraging providers to ensure that those people in the sector who play ETD roles should be qualified for them. If we take the example of assessors, many people currently assessing in our sector need only to submit a portfolio of evidence for RPL. They may then be awarded the necessary unit standard or they may be required to undergo a short top-up training course in order to achieve it.

These examples have been included to illustrate the fact that RPL is not a simple 'one size fits all' concept, but that it includes a range of options from which we must select an approach that fits each purpose.

3.6 PREPARATION FOR ASSESSMENT

Once someone has been identified as a suitable candidate for a particular RPL process, this means that the RPL advisor has decided that they are competent in relation to a particular qualification, part qualification or unit standard(s), and that the next step is to begin to collect the evidence to demonstrate this. As mentioned previously, it is a great help to provide a skeleton portfolio or other assessment plan, divided into sections relating to unit standards or exit outcomes for qualifications, and detailing the kind of evidence required for each section.

At this point the candidate may be able to complete most of the process herself (or himself), but many candidates will need support in the form of meetings to check progress and give advice, or, in the case of groups, workshops with the same purpose.

Another possibility in terms of support could be provided by a person playing the role of evidence facilitator. The unit standard 'Facilitate the preparation and presentation of evidence by assessment candidates' describes this role in detail. Evidence facilitators help to ensure that candidates are ready to present well organised and sufficient evidence to

registered assessors. This is discussed further in the LGSETA 'Guidelines for ETD Practices' booklet.

3.7 RPL ASSESSMENT

Many qualifications and/or groups of unit standards or single unit standards can be assessed in the workplace by an assessor in terms of observation of applied competence, questioning, and also the kind of controlled practical assessment of problem solving and awareness of safety regulations and other critical outcomes that is conducted in DoL trade testing centres like Indlela. This type of challenge task can be given in other contexts to confirm written testimonials about a person's skills in the workplace, but health and safety considerations must be given the highest priority. No portfolio of evidence is required for much RPL of this type, except in complete qualifications where some written evidence of mathematical and communications literacy is usually required.

Whether assessing evidence collected in a portfolio, or observing a candidate at work or carrying out a challenge task and asking questions, or any combination of these, the assessor will follow all the steps outlined in the unit standard '*Plan and conduct assessment of learning outcomes*'. This includes the preparation of the candidate for assessment and the giving of feedback to relevant parties. In the case of an RPL advisor or assessment support systems manager, the relevant parties should include yourself, so that appropriate follow-up steps can be taken. These will be unpacked in Section 3.4, below.

Portfolio assessment is being used increasingly, especially for qualifications and unit standards above at or above NQF level 3. Its major advantage is its flexibility, and it can include witness statements testifying to competence demonstrated through observation of practical demonstrations and through oral questioning of the candidate. It can also contain responses to written questions, usually with reference to the more theoretical part of the qualification. Written components can be completed under regulated conditions if there is reason to verify the authenticity of the portfolio. A verifier might also check an observation by repeating an observation or by questioning a candidate.

However portfolio assessment can be costly and time consuming, requiring intense support from a highly skilled tutor/practitioner. Learners sometimes collect too much evidence and cannot organise it effectively. For this reason, it is important to have a trained RPL advisor/ assessor give the RPL candidate support in the form of a skeleton portfolio, divided into sections which clearly state the outcomes and indicate the kind of evidence which would be acceptable in relation to each section. Candidates may need to be supported to gather and prepare their evidence of learning through attending a workshop (or a series of workshops for a complete qualification), or by working with an evidence facilitator.



Do you have clear criteria for the development of portfolios? Do you offer support to learners in this process?

As in more traditional assessments, it is not necessary for each assessment criterion to be met in full for a candidate to achieve a qualification.

RPL candidates are often compelled to demonstrate 100% competence, whereas course-based assessments allow for some degree of non-achievement. This is one of the reasons why the LGSETA needs to produce QALA assessment guides for its new qualifications (or revise and approve existing guides where appropriate). There should be guidance for course-based assessment and separate guidance for RPL assessment, and the two should

be compared to ensure that the demands on the learners to submit evidence of achievement are comparable.

Fairness is the overarching quality that captures all of the principles of good assessment put together. Assessment must be fair. In this context it is particularly important to ensure that, in testing the understanding of concepts and the ability to solve problems, for example, candidates are given the opportunity to listen to questions and give answers in their own language. There are many stories illustrating unfair assessment in which the assessor uses an unfamiliar word for a piece of equipment, for example, and as a result none of the candidates understand the question. Fairness also related to preparing candidates adequately, conducting the assessment in a reasonable environment, taking into account any disabilities and so on. These are all detailed in the unit standard 'Plan and conduct assessment of learning outcomes'. Because RPL is often an instrument for redress, it is particularly important for the assessor to be culturally sensitive.

An important aspect of fairness in assessment is **transparency**. Assessment should be transparent. Some assessments in the past, particularly in formal education, aimed to trick people into making mistakes, or to ask questions in such a way that you had to have practiced on past examples to be able to understand what was required. In these cases they were really testing 'examination technique' more than the learner's knowledge, skills and attitudes. In addition, learners who queried their results were often accused of questioning the assessor's integrity. Assessors (teachers, tutors, trainers) would be insulted and would angrily refuse to justify or explain their assessments. Proper explanations, spelling out the criteria and explaining which ones were not met, together, where possible, with advice on how to improve, are essential to transparent assessment. Learners in the 1970s and 1980s used to call for the 'de-mystification' of assessment. Outcomes-based assessment de-mystifies assessment and gives everyone a chance to understand, even if they are not 'coached' for the assessment by someone who understands its mysteries!

Reliability of assessment is also important, and the moderator's main task is to ensure that different assessor demand the same quality and amount of evidence and interpret the unit standards or qualification outcomes in the same way.

Very often the **validity** of assessment is the most difficult to achieve. Assessors cannot always find a good way of assessing what they want to assess, and often have difficulty with critical cross-field outcomes.

Moderators and verifiers can be helpful here, as they see a far greater range of assessments than an assessor does, and become adept at spotting a lack of validity. The most common mistake here is to ask for written explanations of practical tasks. If you want to know if a person can operate three different kinds of filter, it makes sense to watch them doing it and/or ask them to explain what they do and why they do it and what they would do if x or y went wrong. They may be excellent operators, but unable to explain things clearly in writing. If they fail to do so, the assessor would be failing them on an outcome like 'Operate a range of different filters' when they were in fact failing an outcome like 'Describe a process sequentially in English and explain the reasons for the different steps'. Of course, this would be an example of *invalid* assessment.

If a portfolio contains, for example, articles, newsletters or other written material produced by the candidate in the past, it is important to ask for a short written piece produced under controlled conditions, because very often work is a collaborative effort and the candidate may be unable to achieve similar results without support. **Authenticity** of evidence is an important assessment criterion.

Particularly in relation to observation of work practice, it is important to ensure that the evidence is sufficient – that the observation does not record the one lucky time the candidate performed correctly. **Sufficiency** of evidence is another criterion for assessment.

If the candidate's achievements were recorded many years ago, and the knowledge and skills in question are vital to the qualification or job targeted, then it is important to check that the key aspects are still remembered and/or performed properly. The **currency** of key outcomes is important for all assessments where the outcomes have been accumulated over many years.

Practicality is particularly important in relation to RPL assessments. Research conducted in Australia in the 1980s showed that it took people much longer to obtain a degree through RPL than it did to attend the complete degree programme! In some instances people even ended up paying **more** for the RPL process than for the learning programme. It is important to design RPL assessments carefully so that this does not happen. We shall explore this further in Section 5.

Activity 4:  **How do assessment principles apply in an RPL context?**

Call together your current assessors and moderators, including those who have not yet been trained and those who only sometimes carry out an assessor role or provide testimony as part of assessment evidence, (e.g. line managers). If there are a lot of people, let them work in groups. If only a few, then work all together.

Go through each of the principles and ask:

- a) Can you give an example where this principle was not or is not followed?
- b) Can you give an example where it is followed?
- c) Can you give an example of how it could be applied in an RPL assessment?

If you are not in a position to call a meeting, try to do this activity on your own or with one or two of your colleagues.

3.8 POST- ASSESSMENT PROCESSES FOR RPL CANDIDATES

RPL processes must have results. If the result of the assessment is 'not yet competent', it is very demoralising for the candidate to just leave it at that. Of course, just as with learners attending a learning programme, every effort should be made to give encouraging feedback and to provide further learning and assessment opportunities for any candidates who have a good chance of achieving the desired outcomes. If they have no chance, ideally they should not have been registered for the learning programme or advised to request RPL in the first place (unless, of course, they simply have made no effort – but this is comparatively rare).

Possible follow-ups to RPL assessments include:

- award the standard(s) or qualification in question;
- award the standards achieved and advise candidates where they can access training in relation to the standards not yet achieved;
- advise the candidates on how to generate some missing evidence and re-submit their portfolios or present additional evidence in some other way;

SECTION 4: PRACTICAL STEPS TOWARDS IMPROVING RPL PRACTICE

4.1 WHERE DO WE START?

The best place to start is thinking about and agreeing on where you are now. Then it becomes possible to begin to map out steps to be taken to improve practice.

In its policy document on RPL (SAQA, 12:2002) SAQA identified core criteria against which the progress towards the development of an assessment system including the best practice support for RPL can be measured. We advise any provider that wishes to achieve the status of 'Accreditation plus RPL' or 'Award Level' to download the SAQA document (see: Resources) and to engage with it fully. It provides detailed criteria arranged in a grid with space for you to evaluate your provision in relation to RPL.

However, for all providers in the LG sector we summarise below the core criteria identified by SAQA against which they will measure progress towards the development of an assessment system which is mature enough to encompass RPL to its fullest extent. These criteria were taken into consideration when the LGSETA developed its own criteria for accreditation in relation to the different possible LGSETA accreditation status types. So in working to achieve the LGSETA criteria you will be in line with SAQA's recommended pathway towards the capacity to offer mature RPL services.

The core criteria are grouped to cover seven areas of practice, and can be summarised as follows:

- institutional policy and environment (must be enabling and demonstrate a commitment to RPL);
- service and support for learners/candidates (pre-assessment, educational planning and post assessment support should be provided);
- training and registration of assessors and key personnel (RPL advisors and evidence facilitators are suggested here);
- methods and processes of assessment (these are guided by the principles that guide all good assessment, with an emphasis on sufficiency and currency, as well as fairness, reliability, validity and authenticity);
- quality management systems (moderation, management and reporting procedures are emphasised, as well as the need to adapt or specially design assessments appropriate to an RPL context);
- reasonable fees (the cost of RPL services to a candidate should be less than a full-time learning programme); and
- curriculum development (the need for learning programmes which demonstrate the value of knowledge of different kinds and have flexible entry and exit points is emphasised).

The LGSETA Self-evaluation Guide suggests questions you can ask yourselves in conducting a self-evaluation. These questions are helpful in evaluating your current practice in relation to RPL.

- What is our current practice in respect of each of the SAQA criteria listed above?
- How effective are our current practices as evaluated against the core criteria and award level indicators and what should be changed to make it more effective?
- What do we hope to achieve through these changes?
- Do we have the necessary tools and resources to affect such changes and who will lead these changes?
- What other support would be necessary to support these changes (within and beyond the organisation)?

- What time-frames are realistic for these changes?

4.2 ESSENTIAL STEPS TO TAKE

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These are some aspects of offering RPL services which the LGSETA thinks are essential, and we shall briefly outline these here. They include specific aspects of the following which you may not already have in place:

- registration policy;
- language policy;
- learning programme design;
- learning programme delivery;
- assessment design; and
- learner support.

Registration policy

All learners registering with you should be treated routinely as potential candidates for RPL (or for accelerated learning or partial exemption through RPL). We are suggesting that all individuals approaching your organisation for education and training, as well as all groups you are given by clients, should be automatically asked to provide information about their previous relevant experience or informal training. Facilitators should, as a firm policy, consider the relevant information before deciding on how to deliver the learning programme – in an accelerated form, with additional support, or after RPL processes have been conducted simply filling identified gaps. Ideally, we should also like you to be able to offer career guidance and RPL advice to all candidates, and have either your own people to provide this, or a system whereby learners can be referred to another provider who can offer these services.

Language policy

It is important to match the language needs of groups and individuals as far as possible to the language capabilities of your facilitators. Although the learning programme and its written materials may be in English (for example), it is an important aspect of the redress and equity principle to try to ensure that discussion can take place in the language of the learners' preference. This avoids continuing to disadvantage those who have already suffered from lack of opportunities to access high quality education. Employing people with the required range of languages used by your learner will also help your organisation to develop a good equity profile.

Learning Programme Design

Although you may have some standard materials that are expensively produced and printed, your learning programmes must be designed to facilitate flexible delivery. Additional modules may be required to provide bridging skills for certain groups to meet the entry level requirements. Plans for accelerating or slowing the pace of the course in response to learners' needs must be addressed as part of your

course design, and ways of meeting the needs of learners with differentiated needs on the same course should also be addressed, by providing follow-up remedial tasks and alternative enrichment tasks to cater for different needs. Formative assessments should be built into the materials so that it is clear when a learner is ready to move on, and when the learner needs some extra support to achieve a group of outcomes. Ideally, your materials developers should be able to produce a tailor-made version of a course (possibly adapted from a standard one), whenever



Do you provide support based on RPL and a range of different identified learner needs?

there is a large group with a similar range of specific (support) requirements. Glossy materials often impress clients, but learners usually respond more successfully to something that relates immediately to their own experience.

Learning Programme Delivery

In the case of top-up training designed to complement an RPL process, the facilitators must understand that the learners attending may not have been successful in a formal learning environment, and they may benefit from a different approach, requiring practical examples from their own fields, and, where possible, practical implementation of processes illustrating concepts. Your facilitators must be trained to use your learning support materials flexibly. Plans for pacing the programme in response to learners' needs must be discussed in your facilitator professional development meetings, and ways of meeting the needs of learners with differentiated needs on the same course should also be discussed. Some of your facilitators might be unfamiliar with outcomes-based and learner-centred approaches to education and training. They might find it easier to adapt their approach to suit the varied background of their learners if they were to go on a training course for ETD practices. The LGSETA is encouraging such training in its core criteria for accreditation.



Are your learning programmes flexible, to allow RPL of modules and access at any point?

Assessment Design

If you intend to offer RPL assessments, you must assume that many of the candidates will already be competent and will not require training. You must therefore provide them with an assessment that is not based on your training programme. An analysis of your learning programme outcomes or the outcomes of unit standards and qualifications should show how an RPL assessment process can be designed. Learners need to demonstrate competence against the relevant exit outcomes or unit standards, to a large extent (just like the learners on the programmes who are not expected to achieve 100% competence against each outcome). The assessment plan should be discussed with the candidate, so that he or she can explain the kind of evidence he or she can easily provide, and the assessor can suggest some other kinds of evidence which could be easily generated in the context of the candidate's work or life in general. Then a folder or file should be provided, outlining the agreed evidence requirements and indicating where they should be inserted. If particular support will be needed, the assessor can advise the candidate about how to access such support.



Can your RPL assessors design appropriate RPL assessments, e.g.

- *Challenge tasks*
- *Practical demos*
- *Criteria for PoEs?*

Learner Support

We have already mentioned the importance of giving learners access to career advice and RPL advice. Once the assessment plan for an RPL assessment has been agreed, the assessor may be able to refer the candidate to an evidence facilitator to help him or her to prepare and present the evidence properly, so that the assessor does not have to constantly send the candidate away until the evidence is sufficient, valid, current and authentic enough to demonstrate the required competence. Some employer organisations may train evidence facilitators to play this role in the workplace, to save both the learner and the assessors' time and to facilitate the process of skills development. Some providers may also find this ETD role important, and may offer this support to RPL candidates and to other learners who have not much experience of formal assessment processes.

In addition, the kinds of support offered to learners in general will also be useful to RPL candidates, and they should be informed about access to computers, libraries, counselling

and relevant support materials. Where there is a barrier to learning, candidates should be referred to the relevant specialist services.

Registered assessors and moderators should also provide essential support, especially in relation to your quality management systems for all assessment, including RPL assessment.

The LGSETA 'Guidelines for ETD Practices' outlines all these roles in much greater detail.

4.3 ENCOURAGING LINKS BETWEEN PROVIDERS TO INCREASE LEARNER ACCESS TO RPL

The LGSETA wishes to encourage providers who cannot currently offer RPL services to focus on two options:

- Work towards accreditation plus RPL status; or
- Link with a provider (or providers) who already have achieved accreditation plus RPL status so that you can refer potential RPL candidates to a provider that has the appropriate advice and support systems.

If you do not want to try to provide full-scale RPL services now or in the foreseeable future, it is particularly important to make the appropriate links, so that your learners will not be disadvantaged. If you are moving towards offering these services yourself, it may still be wise to make links which will be useful to your learners in the shorter term, until you have fully developed your own services.

If you have already achieved accreditation plus RPL status you might focus on RPL services as a step towards the award level, or because learners and employees in your sub-sector have demonstrated a need for these services. The LGSETA would like to encourage you to make contact with other providers as well as employers' HR departments in your area in the LG sector, and to offer them your services. In this way, you could develop links that could result in RPL assessment and related services growing to become a major part of your core business as a provider.

For those providers who establish long-term links with each other it is advisable to state the purpose of the link and its operational scope as well as any financial implications in writing in an agreement signed by both parties.



Are you prepared to link to another provider to assist with RPL Or share RPL strategies?

4.4 ETHICAL ISSUES

If you decide to offer RPL services, you, as a provider, will need to develop an RPL policy. It might be a good idea to include a Code of Conduct for all the major role-players involved in RPL to sign, and then to require an assessor and the candidate both to sign an assessment plan at the point in the process where the RPL candidate becomes a registered learner.

Your policy might spell out your requirements of employers in relation to the purposes of RPL and employee expectations for cases where RPL is sponsored by companies. It should also address the need for learners who present themselves as individuals to you for RPL, to ensure that they, too, have a clear understanding of what will be involved and what a successful RPL process can achieve and what it cannot achieve.



Look at the case study below and think about some of the ethical issues and potential for misunderstanding if RPL is not carefully planned

Case Study

A municipal worker with 10 years practical experience, but no formal qualification, is seen by his employer as an ideal RPL candidate, to prove to other stakeholders that a Qualification Audit linked to RPL in their organisation really works. They want him to undergo RPL to demonstrate his competence in his existing position.

The employee is apprehensive about RPL. He needs to understand what the process involves, why his employer thinks it is necessary, and what he will be expected to do. He may also have concerns about the confidentiality of the process.

Both the employer and the employee need to have an understanding of what happens to him/his job as the result of the RPL process. What happens if, for example, gaps are identified? Will he be demoted, or forced to undergo further training just to keep the same position? If the RPL process proves his competence, does it mean that he will get more money or be eligible for a higher position?

If an external provider is contracted to guide the RPL process, that provider should find out what understanding has been reached and work within that context.

What steps need to be in place before the RPL process begins?

Your the assessors and moderators will be registered by the LGSETA and so they will already have signed appropriate Codes of Conduct that apply to all assessments, whether made in an RPL context or not.

On the next page is a draft Code of Conduct that you might like to adapt for your RPL advisors and evidence facilitators.

We hope that you have found these Guidelines helpful, and that you will seriously consider working out a time-frame to become a provider offering full RPL assessment and support services. If you feel that this is possible over the next three years, please include a request for support in this regard with your Self-evaluation and Development Plan when you submit it to the LGSETA.

Good Luck!

Provider/Company Logo CODE OF CONDUCT
TO BE SIGNED BY RPL ADVISORS AND EVIDENCE FACILITATORS

I, the undersigned, have been trained to act in support of RPL candidates to help them to demonstrate competence against specified unit standards and/or qualifications. I hereby commit myself to abide by this Code of Conduct in relation to all my work conducted in this capacity. The Code of Conduct to which I agree is as follows:

- I shall ensure that each RPL candidate I am allocated fully understands the purpose and scope of the RPL process specified and is aware of any implications it may have for him or her personally and/or in the workplace;
- I shall conduct my work as an RPL advisor and/or evidence facilitator with integrity, seeking at all times to create a positive environment for RPL and to take note of and respect the historical diversity of candidates' cultural, linguistic and educational backgrounds;
- any conflict of interest such as a financial or family relationship or close friendship existing between myself and any candidate shall be declared in advance, and, if requested, I shall recuse myself from the process in such instances;
- all information received during my work in the context of RPL about individuals or organisations will be treated with the strictest confidentiality unless it is relevant to the fairness, reliability and validity of the RPL assessment process;
- all relevant information about any irregularities in the RPL assessment process of which I become aware will be included in my reports to the assessor and/or moderator; these will include:
 - unplanned environmental, personal or other problems which may have interfered with the performance of the candidate
 - suspected or proven irregularities committed by the candidate
 - suspected or proven irregularities committed by any other parties to the assessment process
 - any suspected or proven bribery, threats or sexual or other harassment of or by candidates
 - any grounds for doubting the authenticity of the evidence gathered for presentation in the assessment process;
- if I have reason to believe the assessor and/or moderator is not addressing irregularities brought by myself to his or her notice, I shall draw these irregularities to the attention of their line managers;
- any constructive comments about the standards or qualifications with which I am working will be included in my reports to the assessor and/or moderator, to be collated and forwarded to the LGSETA; these will be forwarded to the relevant SGB for inclusion in the SAQA review process.

I shall conduct my work in line with the vision and mission of (company name) and the LGSETA, particularly in relation to improving the quality of education, training and assessment for learners in the sector, giving guidance and support to all learners to achieve their full potential.

GLOSSARY

Accreditation

The certification, usually for a particular period of time, of a body or an institution as having the capacity to fulfil a particular function in the quality assurance system set up by the South African Qualifications Authority in terms of the SAQA Act of 1995.

SAQA accredits ETQAs to quality assure learner achievements in relation to specified standards and qualifications and the provision of learning programmes leading to those specified standards and qualifications.

ETQAs accredit providers to deliver learning programmes leading to specified unit standards or qualifications and/or to manage the assessment thereof.

Accreditation process

This is a lengthy process comprising, amongst other things, self-evaluation against criteria set down by a quality assurance body, agreement on improvement plans, implementation of plans and achievement of agreed targets.

Accreditation from the LGSETA ETQA

The LGSETA ETQA accredits providers against a set of specified criteria. Providers are required to meet a set of criteria contained in the Accreditation Manual in order to be accredited at the most fundamental level. These criteria comply with the requirements of SAQA.

Accreditation Plus RPL

The LGSETA also offers Accreditation Plus RPL status. Providers wishing to provide RPL services to learners outside of their own organisation are required to obtain this status.

Award Level Accreditation

This level of LGSETA accreditation meets all the needs of SAQA, the NQF, customers, learners and the SETA ETQA at an advanced level of quality and development

Assessment

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.

Assessment Design

This is the process of designing assessment tasks, instruments and processes, and can be integrated into learning programme design or designed as a 'stand alone' assessment for RPL. It includes the necessary scoring mechanisms, for example observation checklists, assessment grids or marking memoranda. It may include piloting, adapting and modifying assessments. The unit standard registered by SAQA entitled '*Design and develop assessments*' outlines the process in detail.

Assessor

This is the person who plans and conducts assessment of learning outcomes on behalf of the provider.

Education, Training and Development (ETD) Practitioners

These include educators, assessor, moderators and so on. Practitioners must be qualified at or above the level of the learners they are training in the appropriate field of learning, or be able to demonstrate equivalent levels of competence in that field. They should also be able to demonstrate appropriate ETD expertise.

ETD Practices

This is a term used to include all the work carried out by the ETD practitioners referred to above; and, in addition, ETD work carried out by a person whose main job is something quite different: e.g. a professional or a line manager mentoring someone in the workplace.

Evidence facilitator

This is a person who helps candidates to produce, organise and present evidence in a manner that makes it possible for registered assessors to evaluate without endless requests for further evidence. This role can be useful but it is not a requirement, as in many cases candidates and assessors have no need of this assistance. This facilitator can be especially helpful to candidates seeking RPL.

Indlela

This is the name of the Department of Labour's main Centre for Trade Testing (COTT), in Olifantsfontein.

Learning programme

This means the combination of courses, modules or units of learning (learning materials and methodology) by which learners can achieve the learning outcomes specified in standards or qualifications registered on the NQF.

Moderation

This 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. In South Africa the formal education system has often used the term 'internal moderation' whereas the training system often spoke of 'verification' in this context.

Moderator

This is the person who moderates assessments on behalf of the provider.

Outcomes

These are the contextually demonstrated end products of the learning process.

Primary focus

SETA ETQAs and professional body ETQAs are accredited by SAQA in relation to a particular set of standards and qualifications in their allocated primary focus. They may apply to SAQA to have their accreditation extended to cover additional standards and/or qualifications. A provider must try to find the ETQA whose primary focus best fits the programmes it offers. Each provider must be accredited by only one ETQA. However, this does not imply that all programmes must fall within the primary focus.

Provider

This means a body that delivers learning programmes which culminate in specified National Qualifications Framework standards or qualifications and/or manages the assessment

thereof. Those providers who use external assessment agencies must include their management of the assessment as a whole and the role of the external assessment in their application for accreditation. A provider is accredited in relation to specified standards and qualifications. It may apply to its ETQA to extend its accreditation to cover additional programmes leading to standards or qualifications.

Quality management system

This means the combination of processes used to ensure that the degree of excellence specified by a quality assurance body is achieved. The quality assurance body for providers in this sector is the LGSETA ETQA. It specifies its requirements by providing criteria for accreditation and best practice indicators.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

RPL means the recognition of the skills, knowledge and capability currently held by a person, regardless of how, when and where the learning occurred. The learning may have been acquired through any combination of formal or informal training and education, work experience, community engagement or general life experience.

RPL advisor

This person advises and supports learners who may or may not require RPL or top-up training. These are additional services needed for effective RPL which are not covered by the assessor standard or the evidence facilitator standard. The advisor 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.

RPL Development, support and promotion

Large employers and providers who wish to achieve award status should be interested in designating a person to develop, support and promote good assessment practices with a particular emphasis on RPL provision.

Registered constituent assessor

This means the person who is registered by the relevant ETQA in accordance with criteria established for this purpose by a SAQA to measure the achievement of specified National Qualifications Framework standards or qualifications.

Registered constituent moderators and verifiers

These are persons placed on an official register, available to the public, after meeting agreed criteria. All ETQAs must have a register of assessors; they may also wish to have similar registers of moderators and verifiers.

Skills Development Facilitator (SDF)

An SDF is a person identified by an employer to undertake the responsibility of facilitating the development of a Workplace Skills Plan for that organisation.

Umalusi

Umalusi is the General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Council. It carries out the functions previously carried out by the South African Certification Council (SAFCERT) and has many additional quality assurance and ETQA functions allocated to it under the General na Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Act (December 2001)

Verification

This is the process by which the results submitted by the provider about learner achievements 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. This is the QALA verification process. In addition, verification is the process by which the ETQA checks that providers have met the LGSETA criteria for accreditation. This is the accreditation verification process. The LGSETA has taken the decision to train one set of people to carry out both these aspects of verification.

Verifier

This is the person who verifies learner achievements and evaluates providers systemically as well as each of their learning programmes individually. This verification process is conducted in line with the LGSETA's policies and procedures. LGSETA verifiers are deployed by the ETQA.

RESOURCES

SAQA: The Recognition of Prior Learning in the context of the South African National Qualifications Framework; 12 June 2002, Pretoria

To access: www.saga.org.za; publications: policy documents: title

All the unit standards and qualifications mentioned in this document may be accessed through the ETDPSETA. Requests should specify which standards and/or qualifications are required and should be sent by email to aneekaj@etdpseta.org.za.

Sample learning programmes for selected Occupationally-Directed ETD unit standards are available from the ETDPSETA. Requests should be sent by email to aneekaj@etdpseta.org.za. These sample programmes are necessarily generic, and it must be emphasised that you will need to **contextualise them in your learners' sub-fields, using field-specific examples**, and asking the learners to **demonstrate applied competence in the context of their own field of expertise**.

The following forms may be obtained from annamaries@lgseta.co.za

LGSETA accreditation pack

LGSETA Road Map Guideline document series