

1. Why do we do RPL? What are the different purposes for policy makers, employers, institutions and learners?

RPL is undertaken for many reasons, which in turn are linked to different purposes for RPL. Here is a brief summary of why RPL might be used.

Purposes for policy makers

Policy makers such as the South African government and the developers of the NQF have emphasized RPL as a principle of redress for those who were disadvantaged by the apartheid education and training system. Many of those who were excluded from various institutions, from achieving certain forms of certification or from certain levels of jobs and occupations can get recognition through RPL for the skills they may have developed over time and through experience.

Purposes for employers/ workplaces

RPL is used for a number of reasons. These include recognition for the purposes of pay grades and salaries, facilitation of access to jobs and career paths, planning for skills development and further training by doing an audit to evaluate the level of existing skills, or for selection purposes such as entry into a learnership. RPL might also be used to promote employment equity.

Purposes for institutions/ providers

Institutions and providers may use RPL as a part of their access policies and procedures, or they may want to fast-track certain learners who already have some of the skills and experience demanded by a course or programme. RPL will identify which part of a programme a learner might be exempted from. Providers may also want to use RPL for finding out the level at which learners are able to cope, so that they can identify gaps in their knowledge in order to plan for support or bridging interventions.

Purposes for learners

Learners generally want recognition or validation of skills and knowledge that they may have acquired through work or other learning experiences, but for which they have no formal certification or qualifications. The objective for most learners is formal certification against standards and qualifications. Learners may also use undertake RPL for entry into a programme, or for exemption from parts of a course.

End result of RPL

One of the main debates on definitions of RPL is to do with the **outcome or consequence** of the RPL process – that is, whether or not it results in formal recognition through the award of certification or qualifications. Another way of putting this is the distinction between access only, or access and award. It is for this reason that some countries make a distinction in the terminology between APL (Accreditation of Prior Knowledge) and RPL (Recognition of Prior Knowledge). In South Africa the term is still used to cover both possible outcomes.

You will find more about the broad purposes and the context-specific purposes of RPL in the SAQA guides and other documents in the Useful Guidelines section of the main page of The NQF and RPL.

[Answer to FAQ 1 The NQF and RPL, the NQF Gateway]