

### **3. What barriers and problems may hamper successful implementation of RPL? What are some of the most commonly identified issues for research and debate in RPL in South Africa?**

RPL practices vary widely across different sectors, bands and delivery sites. The following is a brief overview of some of the issues and problem areas that have been identified in RPL practices as various projects have been implemented and researched.

- Funding and costs: if RPL is properly done, according to the policies and support systems generally advocated in policy documents, it is extremely resource-intensive, time consuming and costly. Some research has identified the need for different models for mass-based RPL.
- Portfolio-based RPL models have been shown to cause barriers for some categories of RPL candidates. They experience difficulties in putting together portfolios, as this is in itself a skill which makes certain assumptions about what a learner can do. Learners may also have problems getting hold of the historical evidence or documentary proof that may be required in an RPL process.
- Some people prefer and need the support given during a learning programme, rather than working through the RPL process. The RPL process has been perceived as being more difficult than working through a learning programme.
- There can be conflict in the workplace between the time needed for doing RPL assessments and production imperatives.
- In the workplace RPL, its purposes and its consequences need to be clearly understood by all parties concerned, as it can impact on issues such as wage negotiations and worker expectations.
- There is a lack of research in terms of tracking how successful RPL candidates have performed and progressed, either in further study or in career progression.
- There are many debates around the issue of equivalence. For example, to what extent is it possible to say that different learning experiences in different contexts lead to 'the same' or comparable outcomes? Are there fundamental differences in the nature of the knowledge gained through formal, academic, discipline-based learning in an institution, and that gained through experience and exposure to applied knowledge in a particular workplace context?

- Linked to the point made above is a particular issue for providers. RPL claims to recognise different types of knowledge to formal, discipline-based knowledge; at the same time, however, equivalence of certification demands that there is a fit between the RPL assessment and the formulated outcomes in unit standards or qualifications. Providers find it difficult to design RPL models that both fit the desired outcomes and accommodate different forms of knowledge.

You will find articles and reports that address some of these issues in the Useful Background section on the main page of The NQF and RPL.

[Answer to FAQ 3 The NQF and RPL, the NQF Gateway]