



ENSURING QUALITY QUALIFICATIONS

Criteria and Guidelines for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning

Recognition of Prior Learning in South Africa must build on the commitment of all role players to remove the barriers to learning and develop a visible, usable and credible system as an effective and creative vehicle for lifelong learning.

GUIDELINE DOCUMENT

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**THE SOUTH AFRICAN
QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY**

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Acronyms used in this document

APL	Assessment of Prior Learning
CETA	Construction Sector Education and Training Authority
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CTP	Committee of Technikon Principals
DoE	Department of Education
DoL	Department of Labour
ETD	Education, Training and Development
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurance Body
FET	Further Education and Training
FETC	Further Education and Training Certificate
FSHFETT	Free State Higher and Further Education and Training Trust
NAP	(draft) A New Academic Policy for Programmes and Qualifications in Higher Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NLRD	National Learners' Records Database
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSB	National Standards Body
NSF	National Skills Fund
PLAR	Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SERVICES	Services Sector Education and Training Authority
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SGB	Standards Generating Body
SMME	Small-, Medium- and Micro Enterprise
SSP	Sector Skills Plan
UNISA	University of South Africa

Preface

The *Criteria and Guidelines for the Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning* was distributed for public comment from 16 April to 30 June 2003. Public comment received was generally of a positive nature and appreciative of the direction proposed in the document. However, it should be acknowledged that although thorough descriptions of possible inhibitors to the implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) were given in many cases, clear ways of addressing these inhibitors were not.

Two issues were highlighted in particular:

- regulatory and statutory requirements are still in place which may slow down initiatives to implement RPL, such as the “Matriculation with endorsement” as a prerequisite for entry to higher education, the award of qualifications, and the “50% residency clause”; and
- a lack of a clear subsidy structure for RPL in terms of public institutions, but also with regard to possible funding sources for private providers and workplaces wanting to initiate RPL within their contexts.

These issues clearly require further investigation.

A decision was therefore taken that the current guidelines would become a ‘living document’ to allow for continuous engagement with the aspects impacting on the implementation of RPL, while already giving some guidance in other areas.

This will allow for critical contextual issues to be highlighted and incorporated as these emerge from practice.

In addition, targeted responses will be elicited from a range of stakeholders, including workplaces, professional bodies, Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs) and other umbrella bodies.

RPL is a new concept in South Africa, particularly in terms of a systemic approach to its implementation. It is therefore critical that a systemic approach is developed, an approach that will allow for institutional autonomy and contextual practices and, at the same time, an overall agreed-upon approach that protects the integrity of qualifications and the award of credits. We believe that by keeping this document open-ended and non-prescriptive, it will support the development of systems and processes that ultimately enhance the implementation of RPL.

As stated in the SAQA RPL policy (2002: 11):

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

This calls for an approach to the development of RPL policy and practices that explicitly addresses the visible and invisible barriers to learning and assessment. Such an approach must generate the commitment of all role players to remove these barriers and to build a visible, usable and credible system as an effective and creative vehicle for lifelong learning. It is important that consensus be generated around the criteria and support systems within which the integrity and quality of all assessments will be protected.

It is our view that such a system can only be built through critical engagement with RPL practice and eventual consensus on the application of RPL across the system.

This “living document” hopes to contribute to such engagement.

Executive summary

In the concluding chapter of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) policy: *The Recognition of Prior Learning in the context of the South African National Qualifications Framework* (2002), a broad strategic framework for the implementation of RPL is proposed. The six steps highlighted as part of the strategic framework in Chapter 3 of the policy, and the core criteria for quality assurance (Chapter 2), while useful in themselves from a quality assurance point of view, do not expand sufficiently on those aspects which could help providers of education and training and their constituent ETQAs to implement RPL, particularly as they relate to the contexts impacting on a sector. This document seeks to address the need for guidelines in the implementation of RPL.

This document utilises the six steps and the core criteria for quality assurance as captured in the SAQA RPL policy to develop an implementation guide. The six steps are:

- 1) An audit of current practice
- 2) The development of detailed sector-specific plans
- 3) Capacity building of resources and staff
- 4) The design and moderation of appropriate assessment instruments and tools
- 5) Quality management systems (QMS) and procedures
- 6) The establishment of a research base

In addition, the document will incorporate examples from international and national case studies on the approaches, pitfalls, and best practices that have emerged in RPL practice.

The target audience for this publication is providers of education and training. However, this does not mean that providers should not and will not engage in critical debates with their constituent ETQAs. Ultimately, the ETQAs will, through their quality assurance processes, be responsible for the protection of the integrity of the system as a whole and must ensure the sustainability of their RPL systems. ETQAs must therefore take the lead in the discussions, particularly to ensure that quality assurance is accorded high priority for all RPL processes.

This document also contributes to the critical debates on the transformation of our assessment practices, not only for RPL, but also for teaching and learning practice in general. The broader purpose is to develop assessment systems and practices that are more responsive to the needs of learners, curricula and contexts.

This document complements the following SAQA documents in a logical sequence:

- *Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment of NQF registered Unit standards and Qualifications*; and
- *The Recognition of Prior Learning in the context of the South African National Qualifications Framework*

Other relevant documents include:

- *Criteria and Guidelines for ETQAs*
- *Criteria and Guidelines for Providers*

Structure of the document

Chapter 1: Making a start: An audit of current practice

Chapter 2: Planning: The development of sector/context-specific plans

Chapter 3: Getting ready: The capacity building of staff and resources

Chapter 4: The tools: Design and moderation of assessment

Chapter 5: Review and evaluation: Quality management processes