



SOUTH
AFRICAN
QUALIFICATIONS
AUTHORITY

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

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

POLICY DOCUMENT

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



**THE SOUTH AFRICAN
QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY**

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Acronyms and abbreviations used in this document

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

Terms and definitions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Executive summary

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

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is defined in the National Standards Bodies Regulations (No 18787 of 28 March 1998, issued in terms of the SAQA Act 58 of 1995) as follows:

“Recognition of prior learning means the comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner howsoever obtained against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements”.

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

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

Therefore, the process of recognising prior learning is about:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Executive summary

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

Structure of the document

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

Chapter 1

Underlying principles and philosophy

Introduction

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

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

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

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

1.1 A holistic approach to the process and execution of assessment

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

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

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

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

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

1.2 A developmental and incremental approach to the implementation of RPL

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.3 The differing contexts within which RPL are implemented

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

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

These purposes include the following options:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 2

Core criteria for quality assurance of RPL

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The areas of practice include:

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

2.1 Institutional policy and environment

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

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

Core criteria for quality assurance of RPL

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

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

Institutional policy and environment

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

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

2.2 Services and support to learners/candidates

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

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

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

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

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

Core criteria for quality assurance of RPL

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

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

Services and support to learners/candidates

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

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

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

2.3 Training and registration of assessors and key personnel

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Core criteria for quality assurance of RPL

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

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

Training and registration of assessors and key personnel

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

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

¹¹ Refer to relevant unit standards in Appendix B.

2.4 Methods and processes of assessment

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Core criteria for quality assurance of RPL

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

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

Methods and processes of assessment

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

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

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

2.5 Quality Management Systems

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Core criteria for quality assurance of RPL

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

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

Quality Management Systems

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

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

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

2.6 Fees for RPL services

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

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

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

Fees for RPL services

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

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

Core criteria for quality assurance of RPL

2.7 RPL and Curriculum Development

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

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

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

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

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

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

RPL and Curriculum Development

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

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

RPL and Curriculum Development continued

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

Summary

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

Such consultation will include the identification of:

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

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