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**DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING****NO. 381****31 MARCH 2016****NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK ACT, 2008 (NO. 67 OF 2008)****RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) COORDINATION POLICY**

I, Bonginkosi Emmanuel Nzimande, MP, Minister of Higher Education and Training, hereby, in terms of section 8(2)(b) of the National Qualifications Framework Act, 2008 (Act 67 of 2008) publish the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Coordination Policy.

It is important, at this stage of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) development, - especially in the light of the urgent needs of South African citizens to have previous knowledge, skills and competencies recognised towards access, mobility and career paths - that a national RPL Coordination policy is published, which can strengthen further development and implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

I express my appreciation to all individuals, institutions, Professional Bodies and organisations which provided comment to the draft RPL and Coordination policy. These have been thoroughly considered and this policy reflects the opinions raised in the comments.

**Dr BE Nzimande, MP****Minister of Higher Education and Training****Date:** 14/03/2016

## **RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING COORDINATION POLICY**

**FEBRUARY 2016**

## THE NATIONAL RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING COORDINATION POLICY

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## Acronyms and Abbreviations

CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
CEO Committee	Chief Executive Officers' (of SAQA and the QCs, and Chairperson of the Inter-departmental NQF Steering Committee) Committee
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
IDNQFSC	Inter-departmental National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Steering Committee
ILO	International Labour Organization
LLL	Lifelong Learning
MTT RPL	Ministerial Task Team on a National Strategy for the Recognition of Prior Learning
NAMB	National Artisan Moderation Body
NRPLI	National Recognition of Prior Learning Institute
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSA	National Skills Authority
QCs	Quality Councils
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAIVCET	South African Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education and Training
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SETAs	Sector Education and Training Authorities
ToR	Terms of Reference
UIL	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural organization (UNESCO) Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL)
UMALUSI	Quality Council for General and Further Education and Training
WP PSET	White Paper for Post-School Education and Training

## Background to this Policy

1. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act, No. 67 of 2008 gives the Minister overall executive responsibility for the NQF, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), the Quality Council (QC) for General and Further Education and Training (Umalusi), and the Quality Council for Higher Education (CHE) and for the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO). This policy is subject to the NQF Act, Act No. 67 of 2008, and any revision to it.
2. The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (WP PSET) which was approved by Cabinet on 20 November 2013, states that “Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) remains a key approach to redressing past injustices and recognizing competence gained through practical workplace learning and experience. There have been problems in obtaining a common understanding and approach across the post-school system” (WP PSET, 2013: 73). The objectives of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), stated in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act, No. 67 of 2008, underpin the importance of developing enabling mechanisms to “facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within, education, training and career paths”; and to “accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities”. The Skills Development Act, No. 97 of 1998 (SDA) section 26D (2) (c) and (d) recognises RPL as a route towards access to a trade test.
3. The DHET has not previously published a RPL policy, and has relied on the Skills Development Act, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act (since repealed) and the current National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act to ensure that RPL policies can be developed and implemented on a national scale across the education and training system. This has not happened as envisaged in previous and current legislation. The previous *laissez faire* approach that was adopted towards RPL, meant that RPL was not taken seriously enough and there were no incentives to implement and embed RPL in the education and training system.
4. It is important, therefore, at this stage of NQF development, - especially in the light of the urgent needs of South African citizens to have previous knowledge, skills and



competencies recognised towards access, mobility and career paths - that a national RPL Coordination policy is published, which can strengthen further development and implementation of RPL.

5. The Department of Higher Education and Training RPL Coordination policy is built on a long developmental trajectory dating back to the proposals in the African National Congress (ANC) policy document for a post-apartheid education and training system, and the proposals from the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in the late 1980's. The erstwhile South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act, 1995 expressed these earlier policy directives and mooted RPL as a policy requirement and one of the mechanisms for transformation and redress of the education and training system post-1994. SAQA published a RPL policy in 2002, which was replaced by the SAQA RPL policy of 2013, which provides both a philosophical underpinning and operational strategies for RPL implementation.
6. This policy recognises a range of RPL-related initiatives, some that have been underway for several years, and others that are being planned for the future, as part of an integrated strategy for policy implementation, which have been developed by SAQA and the QCs. These include:
  - a) A set of key actions agreed at the 2011 national conference on RPL (captured in a Working Document);
  - b) The revised SAQA National Policy for the Implementation of RPL (approved in March 2013);
  - c) New insights gained from the 2014 national conference on RPL which focused on tried and tested tools and templates; and
  - d) A range of strategic RPL projects being managed by SAQA.
7. The *National RPL Conference: Bridging and expanding existing islands of excellent practice* hosted by SAQA in February 2011, brought together findings from RPL-related research and practice. A key conference resolution was a request to the Minister of Higher Education and Training to establish a RPL Task Team to conduct research and present findings and recommendations in the form of a report to him. A Ministerial Task Team on a National Strategy for RPL (MTT RPL) was established on 27 January 2012, with clear terms of reference (ToR). These ToR required the MTT RPL, amongst others, to:

- a) Develop a national strategy for the wide-scale implementation of RPL in the post-school sector;
  - b) Advise on personnel, training and quality requirements of a national RPL strategy, including the feasibility, structure and function of a national RPL institute;
  - c) Advise on the legislative requirements for implementation of the national RPL strategy;
  - d) Advise on resource implications of the national strategy;
  - e) Devise a funding model to support the national RPL strategy;
  - f) Advise on the roles and responsibilities of all major relevant parties in the implementation of the national RPL strategy, including DHET, other state departments, education and training institutes, the National Skills Authority (NSA), Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), and the QCs; and
  - g) Advise on any other matter that would advance the systemic application of RPL in the post-school education and training system.
8. The MTT RPL completed its work and submitted a report, with findings and recommendations to the Minister in January 2013. RPL, in the view of the MTT RPL will enhance economic, environmental, social and personal development. RPL is emancipatory, and can and should provide access to lifelong learning opportunities, and to the global knowledge economy.
9. This Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Coordination Policy is a new Policy. It is finalised after consideration of the recommendations of the MTT RPL, and the request for public comments published on 6 July 2015 in the Government Notice No. 580. It is the intention that this Policy will provide the clarification and enabling environment to address the challenges and approaches to RPL implementation. It is a strategic policy which places RPL firmly on the national education and training agenda, and holds SAQA and the QCs accountable to perform their roles in relation to RPL as stated in the NQF Act.
10. The Policy provides for the establishment of a national coordinating mechanism for RPL.

11. The national coordinating mechanism envisaged in this policy would be required to consider the recommendations of the MTT RPL report in its work. The MTT RPL report is available on the DHET website, at [www.dhet.gov.za](http://www.dhet.gov.za).

## **The Purpose of this Policy**

12. The **purpose** of this Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Coordination Policy is to provide a strong enabling policy environment for the further development and implementation of RPL across the post-school education and training system, and across all levels of the NQF. To do so, this Policy establishes a coordinating mechanism for RPL, the funding thereof, and the establishment of a fund for RPL implementation. It provides a firm policy statement to ensure that the objectives of the NQF Act are met, and especially to:

- a) Facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education and training and career paths, (section 5 (1)(b) of the NQF Act); and
- b) Accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities ((section 5 (1) (d) of the NQF Act).

13. This Policy will guide the implementation of RPL, especially as regards the roles and functions of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), SAQA, the Quality Councils, the national coordinating mechanism and the funding mechanisms for RPL implementation.

## **The Scope of this Policy**

14. The Recognition of Prior Learning Coordination Policy will have multiple users. It will be used by:
- a) The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) to:
    - i. Establish the national RPL coordinating mechanism;
    - ii. Monitor and evaluate the measure to which RPL is implemented across the post-school education and training system; and
    - iii. Establish a funding mechanism for RPL implementation which will be allocated to organizations and institutions to successfully implement RPL.



b) SAQA to:

- i. Implement the SAQA RPL policy;
- ii. Provide advice, information and reports to the Minister of Higher Education and Training about RPL implementation; and
- iii. Fulfill its overarching quality assurance oversight role.

c) The three QCs namely the CHE, Umalusi, and the QCTO to:

- i. Implement their RPL policies;
- ii. Ensure RPL is implemented in public and private accredited education and training institutions and workplace-based skills development providers; and
- iii. Quality assure the RPL processes in accredited education and training providers.

d) Other Government Departments to include RPL within their human resource and skills development policies;

e) Business and Industry to promote RPL as a mechanism towards employment opportunities, promotion opportunities and skills development;

f) South African citizens to gain access to further learning, have credits granted for relevant previous studies and experience, and transfer opportunities between education and training institutions; and

g) Professional Bodies and Professional Councils.

## **A national strategy for wide-scale implementation of RPL in the post-school sector**

15. RPL must be seen as a key feature of a lifelong learning (LLL) system alongside a range of related strategies, mechanisms and education and training opportunities. RPL carries specific significance as it is central to an inclusive, democratic education and training system. It is part of a national drive, under the oversight auspices of the DHET, to build a learning culture in every family, village, township and city.

16. RPL has a dual purpose: on the one hand, social justice; and on the other, access to or advancement through credit accumulation and credit transfer, to opportunities for lifelong learning.
17. For RPL to be fully expressed as part of a democratic learning system, it needs to be given concrete expression in the policies and practices of statutory bodies such as SAQA, the three QCs, education and training organizations, institutions, and the work of RPL practitioners. Since RPL is part of the wider education and training system, and other parts of the system will impact on the success of RPL implementation, clear coordination of RPL through coordinating mechanisms, roles and responsibilities will be spelt out in this policy.

### **The legislative mandate provided through the NQF Act**

18. In accordance with the NQF Act, section (8) (2) (b) which requires the Minister to determine policy on NQF matters in terms of the NQF Act, and to publish the policy in the *Gazette*, this RPL policy is determined as the overarching national RPL policy to frame other policies and guidelines developed by SAQA, the QCs and education and training institutions and other relevant stakeholders.
19. SAQA is mandated by the NQF Act, to develop policy and criteria, after consultation with the QCs for RPL, assessment, and credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) (Section 13 (1) (h) (iii)). The QCs are mandated to develop and implement policy and criteria, taking into account the policy and criteria contemplated in section 13(1)(h)(iii), for assessment, RPL and CAT.
20. In determining and gazetting this Policy, the legislative mandate provided for in the NQF Act has been relied upon. Similarly, SAQA's RPL policy is also published in terms of the NQF Act. The QCs shall publish RPL policies which align with this RPL policy and the SAQA policy, and shall advocate their respective RPL policies to their respective education and training institutes.

## **A National Coordinating mechanism for RPL**

21. A strong driver and coordinating mechanism is required to ensure that RPL is further developed and implemented on a wide scale across the education and training system. The DHET recognises that this strategy would best be served by establishing a national RPL coordinating mechanism. It should be established in two phases, to ensure that the urgency to establish the coordinating mechanism is realized, as well as to ensure that there is sufficient time to legislate the establishment of an institutional mechanism and to establish a sustainable funding mechanism for RPL implementation.

### **Steps to follow in establishing a national coordinating mechanism for RPL**

22. In the first phase, DHET will establish a national coordinating mechanism for RPL with a Reference Group. In the first phase the DHET national coordinating mechanism will:
- a) Collaborate, cooperate and communicate with SAQA and the three Quality Councils regarding RPL implementation;
  - b) Recognise and collaborate with RPL centres;
  - c) Provide guidance, support and training to implementing agencies such as education and training institutions and RPL centres;
  - d) Report quarterly to the Minister about the progress made in RPL coordination across the education and training sector. These reports will be monitoring and evaluation reports which will include the quality of RPL implementation, and identify barriers to RPL implementation which will require legislative amendments. The information for these reports will be provided by the work of the NQF Directorate, SAQA and the QCs.
23. After the initial set-up phase within DHET, the oversight of the national coordinating mechanism will be revised after a period of time. An evaluation study of the work done in phase one (1) will be conducted, which will guide the second phase of the

establishment of a National RPL coordinating mechanism. The second phase will comprise the publication of a form of legislation to be decided by the Minister.

24. The second phase should be implemented within five years after the establishment of phase 1 of the national coordinating mechanism for RPL.

### **The Funding of the National Coordinating Mechanism for RPL**

25. The MTT RPL recommended that the coordinating mechanism be primarily state-funded and no new contributions from the fiscus will be necessary. The funding and resourcing model must be based on making optimal use of what already exists in the education and training budget. It is acknowledged that it has been difficult to quantify the costs precisely related to RPL development and implementation. In the first phase of the establishment and life of the coordinating mechanism, state funding will be the primary source of funding and resourcing, although additional sources of funding will be sought.
26. Cost estimates of the costs associated with the setting up and ongoing operational expenses of the phase 1 coordinating mechanism in DHET will be provided to the Minister and annually reviewed.

### **A Recognition of Prior Learning Implementation Fund**

27. It is recognised that reasons given for the slow and *laissez faire* approach to implementing RPL is partly due to the costs associated therewith. The funding of the national coordinating mechanism must be differentiated from the funding required to support and drive wide-scale implementation of RPL across the education and training system.
28. Consideration will be given to identifying sources of funds to be allocated to a dedicated RPL implementation fund.
29. Based on advice from the Reference Group of the national coordinating mechanism, a funding schedule for allocation of funds to education and training institutions which implement RPL will be developed and published annually by the DHET.



30. The coordinating mechanism will advise the Minister annually on a funding schedule for allocation of funds to public education and training institutions to address teaching and learning gaps identified during a RPL intervention.

## **Roles and responsibilities for the implementation of RPL**

31. The national RPL implementation strategy relies on a number of role-players and stakeholders. The key bodies are the DHET, SAQA, the three QCs, the national coordinating mechanism, and education and training providers and practitioners.

## **Responsibilities of DHET**

32. DHET will be responsible to:

- a) Provide the legislative and policy framework for the establishment of the national coordinating mechanism and its functions;
- b) Establish phase one (1) of the national coordinating mechanism for RPL in DHET which will provide support, assistance and guidance to RPL centres and education and training institutions which establish RPL centres;
- c) Establish a RPL Reference Group to guide the work of the national coordinating mechanism in the first phase of its operations;
- d) Establish a funding mechanism for the national coordinating mechanism for RPL;
- e) Establish a funding mechanism for RPL implementation. A particular amount to be determined by the Minister based on advice from the national coordinating mechanism will be sourced and set aside to be utilized as a national RPL fund, to fund the implementation of RPL programmes and projects across the education and training system;
- f) Collaborate, cooperate, communicate and consider advice from SAQA and the QCs about all aspects related to the development, implementation and funding of RPL across the education and training system; and



- g) Monitor and evaluate the quarterly performance reports received from the national coordinating mechanism.

### **Responsibilities of the National Coordinating Mechanism:**

33. The responsibilities that the national coordinating mechanism will perform are the following:

- a) *Fund management*: Manage the RPL implementation fund as a project and report to the DHET about this fund;
- b) *Professionalization*: Establish a forum, which could take on the form of a professional body, on which educators, lecturers, RPL practitioners and skills development facilitators will be registered on a register known as a RPL practitioners register. Regular programmes will be delivered to support practitioners and provide opportunities to grow technical knowledge and skills to implement and improve RPL practice;
- c) *Management of information*: Submit such data in a format to be determined by SAQA for the recording on the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) of registered and accredited RPL providers and centres, RPL practitioners, and learner records of RPL achievements;
- d) *Research*: Commission research, in partnership with SAQA and the QCs, to examine new technologies that support adult learning; identify best practice across RPL implementation environments; identify and provide solutions to barriers to wide-scale RPL implementation; benchmark with international practice; and provide new and leading research into widening access to RPL;
- e) *Support and Advice*: Support and guide education and training institutions and stakeholders to develop clear assessment criteria for learning outcomes resulting in credible, relevant and valid assessment tools;
- f) *Policy development*: Support and guide institutions to develop RPL access policies, credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) policies and processes;
- g) *Advocacy and communication*: Communicate with a wide range of stakeholders, role-players and the general South African public about the national coordinating mechanism and its activities. The Institute will also be

required to conduct and facilitate activities that promote the public perception of RPL;

- h) *Collaboration with the Career Development Services (CDS)*: The national coordinating mechanism will liaise and collaborate with the Directorate responsible for the CDS. This collaboration can take many forms, such as partnership roadshows to advocate RPL in career path planning, credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) in career paths, and lifelong learning as part of career development;
- i) *Referrals* of learners to institutions to deal with knowledge and skills gaps identified during a RPL process;
- j) *Monitor and Evaluate* RPL implementation at education and training institutions and other RPL sites of delivery, and work collaboratively with institutions to address areas of challenge; and
- k) *Reporting*: Provide such reports to the Minister as are required.

### **Responsibilities of SAQA:**

34. SAQA will be responsible to:

- a) Align its RPL policy with the RPL Coordination Policy of the Minister, and to implement its RPL policy;
- b) Provide overarching leadership to the QCs regarding implementation of their own RPL policies across the education and training system;
- c) Provide such advice, guidance and support to the national coordinating mechanism for RPL as is necessary to ensure its further development and sustainability;
- d) Support the communications and advocacy initiatives of the national coordinating mechanism as required;
- e) Conduct a sector-wide study of a feasible and sustainable model for RPL quality assurance (including assessment, verification and awards) across the education and training institutions. SAQA must consider input from the QCs, SETAs, higher education institutions (HEIs), technical and vocational

education and training (TVET) colleges, professional bodies, organized business and organized labour and other organizations and institutions in the research;

- f) Receive data uploads of RPL assessments from the QCs, for recording on the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD);
- g) Ensure that the QCs develop certification policies which include RPL as a route to achieve qualifications and part qualifications; and
- h) The certification policies of the QCs must state that certificates will not be differentiated based on whether the learner has achieved the certificate through RPL.

### **Responsibilities of the QCs**

35. The QCs will be responsible to:

- a) Develop their RPL policies and ensure that these policies are aligned to the Minister's policy and to the SAQA RPL policy;
- b) Work with accredited providers to ensure that these providers have RPL policies and are implementing RPL per institution and organization;
- c) Certificate learners who achieve qualifications or part qualifications through a RPL route;
- d) Robustly advocate RPL as a means for access, articulation and CAT within and between the sub-frameworks; and
- e) Provide quarterly reports to SAQA for inclusion in the Chief Executive Officer's (CEO) Committee about the implementation of RPL across their accredited provider base.

### **Responsibilities of education and training providers and practitioners**

36. Education and training providers will be responsible to:

- a) Establish policies which clearly establish articulation routes within the institution, through the mechanism of CAT;

- b) Provide reports about the progression of RPL students within the institution, which will inform further development of RPL research and future policies and legislation;
- c) Work collaboratively with the national coordinating mechanism, SAQA, the QCs and other education and training institutes to ensure that challenges and barriers to wide-scale RPL implementation become known, and are mitigated;
- d) Consider establishing an institutional forum of RPL practitioners which will be part of the professional forum which will be established by the national coordinating mechanism, and register all RPL practitioners in the institution with the professional forum.

### **Funding for RPL Implementation**

- 37. The absence of sustainable funding has been identified as a clear barrier to wide-scale RPL implementation. The national coordinating mechanism will advise the Minister on a funding mechanism and funding sources for RPL implementation.
- 38. It is possible that RPL implementation would become feasible and sustainable if there were a secure and regular funding source for at least the next five year period, as the first phase of this RPL policy is implemented.

### **Transitional Arrangements**

- 39. A scoping research project will be undertaken by the DHET, in collaboration with SAQA and the three Quality Councils, to establish the size and scope of current RPL centres wherever these may be operating. This information will provide a basis from which the coordinating mechanism can begin to develop a costing framework for its own operations and gain understanding of the possible financial scale of funding required to fund RPL implementation.
- 40. An initial proposal about the funding requirements for the national coordinating mechanism and for the RPL implementation fund will be developed by DHET, and submitted to the Minister for consideration and approval. This should be completed within three months of the publication of this Policy.

41. Once this Policy is published, the DHET will undertake national workshops with all interested parties to guide the establishment of RPL centres.
42. There are current RPL projects which are managed by SAQA. These should continue until they are completed and the progress in these projects should be reported to the DHET, as part of SAQA's quarterly reporting against its Annual Performance Plan (APP).