



Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Policy

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	3
<i>What is Recognition of Prior Learning?</i>	3
<i>What is Assessment?</i>	4
<i>Principles of Assessment</i>	5
Fairness	5
Validity	5
Reliability	5
Practicability	6
<i>Compiling Evidence for RPL</i>	6
<i>Types of Evidence</i>	7
Direct Evidence	7
Indirect Evidence	7
Historical Evidence	7
<i>Collecting Evidence</i>	8
<i>Compiling Portfolios of Evidence</i>	8
<i>PROCEDURES FOR RPL</i>	8
<i>Annexure A</i>	10
<i>Document A</i>	11

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the pivotal objectives of the NQF is the need to facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths as well as the need to accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities.

This document is situated within the enabling framework provided by the SAQA Act 58 of 1995, the ETQA Bodies Regulations (Gazette no. 19231, 08 September 1998) and the National Standard Bodies Regulations (Gazette no. 18787, 28 March 1998). It draws on the Guidelines for the Assessment of NQF Registered Unit Standards and Qualifications and the Criteria and Guidelines for Providers as issued by SAQA.

SAQA has made specific reference to RPL in the National Standard Bodies (NSB) Regulations and ETQA Regulations. In the NSB Regulations, the criteria for the registration of a qualification are outlined. One of these requirements is that the proposal should indicate in the rules governing its award, that the qualification may be achieved in whole or in part through the recognition of prior learning. The point is made that the concept of RPL includes, but is not limited to learning outcomes achieved through formal, informal and non-formal learning and work experience.

The purpose of this document is to delineate possible guidelines for the recognition of prior learning in the various faculties of Pearson Institute of Higher Education (hereinafter referred as PIHE) and to generate consensus around the criteria and support systems within which the integrity and quality of assessment practice will be protected while at the same time extending the opportunities and benefits RPL to all learners.

2. Who are the target groups?

It is envisaged that the following categories are included within the RPL policy:

1. Those seeking access to tertiary education at PIHE;
2. Those who wish to have their competence levels assessed;
3. Those seeking redress for past inequities in education;
4. Those re-entering career paths after periods of absence.

3. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) defined

RPL means the comparison of the previous learning and experience of a student howsoever obtained against the learning outcomes required for a specific qualification and the acceptance for purpose of achievement that meet the requirements of a qualification.

Conventional practice means that students are sufficiently equipped with knowledge, skills and resources to understand what is required and to prepare and produce the evidence necessary. Many adults and young people have never been part of any formal education systems or have been out of such a system for a considerable length of time. These students have also been subjected to a range of social and personal barriers and will require a high degree of flexibility, sensitivity and specialization focusing on student support and student preparation.

RPL is a key fundamental of the NQF and, particularly in as far as accelerated learning, ensures the redress of past inequalities, though not only confined for use in these instances. Learning can take place through a myriad of mediums in formal, informal and non-formal settings, for example:

- formal education and training programmes;
- formal and informal on-the-job education and training;
- self-study;
- work experience (experiential learning);
- in-house education and training, etc.

Where appropriate, such learning should be recognized and credited. The fundamental difference between assessment of RPL and that of current

learning is that previous learning is formally recognized and accepted as learning. The student is therefore not required to undergo more of the same learning, and through assessment the previous learning is given credit, and the credit is recorded and reported.

4. Assessment

Assessment is derived from *asseoir* = to set, settle and involves collecting, measuring and interpreting information relating to students' responses to the process of learning. The single most important use of assessment is to judge the performance of students so that qualifications may be awarded.

Assessment in education and training is about collecting evidence of students' work so that judgments about students' achievements or non-achievements can be made and decisions arrived at.

These decisions include:

- Is the student able to do the job assigned?
- Is the student able to embark on a particular course of study in view of previous experience and embedded knowledge?
- What other learning does the student need to be deemed as qualified?

It is critical to note that SAQA views assessment *as a structured process for gathering evidence and making judgments about an individual's performance in relation to registered national standards and qualifications.*

5. Principles of Assessment

As assessment is central to the recognition of achievement, the quality of assessment is important in order to provide credible certification. Credibility in assessment is assured through assessment procedures and practices being governed by certain principles. These principles are:

5.1 Fairness

Refers to assessment that does not in any way disadvantage or advantage a student. Unfairness in assessment may be based on:

- unequal opportunities,
- lack of resources and equipment,
- inappropriate teaching methods,
- unqualified trainers,
- perceived bias such as ethnic, gender, age, disability, social class, culture, language and race.

For assessment procedures and practices to be viewed as fair, the influence of these factors has to be shown to have been taken into account and addressed. The assessment process should be transparent, clear and available to all students. Appeals mechanisms should be accessible to all students.

5.2 Validity

Refers to assessment measuring what it is supposed to measure. Judgments showing results of irrelevant variables are invalid. The assessment must assess the student's ability to perform designated tasks. To ensure validity, the outcome must be clearly defined and stated. The assessor should determine the kind and amount of evidence required recognizing achievement for a particular qualification or outcome.

5.3 Reliability

Refers to the consistency of assessment. Consistency refers to the same relative judgments being made in the same or relatively similar contexts each time an assessment is made. Assessment should not be perceived to be influenced by variables such as:

- Different assessors applying different standards;
- Not enough evidence gathered;
- Assessor bias in terms of gender, race, culture, language, religion, position, etc; and

- Assessor assumptions about the students' previous performance not based on evidence.

With specific reference to RPL, assessors should have: predetermined criteria and guidelines for assessment; a knowledge of the learning area to be assessed; systematic recording systems and procedures for moderation of evidence.

5.4 Practicability

Refers to ensuring that assessment takes into account monetary, time, resources and facility costs. An RPL procedure that is too costly, time consuming and cumbersome is likely to fail.

6. Criteria for the Development of Quality Assurance in RPL

6.1 Training and registration of assessors and key personnel central to the RPL process

The training of assessors and other personnel involved in RPL is a key element in ensuring the quality of assessment services to learners.

6.2 RPL and curriculum development

RPL principles inform the development of new standards, qualifications, programmes and curriculum. Multiple methods of instruction and delivery including experiential learning and problem-solving methods are used, in order to provide curricula to meet the diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic and educational needs of students. The decision of what should be included and assessed in new qualifications takes into account the nature and form of knowledge produced in previously excluded constituencies.

6.3 Methods and Processes for assessment

Assessment for the purposes of RPL is a systematic, flexible, collaborative and transparent process involving the student and the assessor within a specific context and site, using consistent and fair processes of assessment.

6.4 Quality Management systems

Quality management systems and processes are vital elements in the continuous development and provision of RPL services and programmes to the learner. Reporting and record keeping should be designed as an integral part of the QMS to sustain the critical integrity of the whole system.

7. THE RPL ASSESSMENT PROCESS

7.1 Compiling Evidence for RPL

Evidence for recognizing prior learning can come from a variety of sources. Regardless of the source of evidence, the assessment should be checked bearing in mind the following non-negotiables:

- Validity – does the evidence relate to the specific outcomes to be assessed?
- Authenticity – can the evidence be attributed to the student?
- Sufficiency – is there enough evidence to meet all the criteria needed to certify the student as competent?
- Currency – Is the evidence related to current competence?

It is the above four questions that will form the basis of assessment for RPL. The student will have to produce evidence of their ability to perform the specified outcome at a particular level as specified.

7.2 Types of Evidence

There are three main types of evidence:

7.2.1 Direct Evidence

Actual evidence produced by the student. This is the most valid type of evidence. Direct evidence easily establishes authenticity. This should be the

assessor's primary source of evidence. There are many examples of direct evidence and the ways in which it can be collected.

These include the following:

- Observation of a task
- Questioning the learner about the task
- Written evidence that the student is able to undertake the task in terms of previous work experience

Sometimes it may be necessary to corroborate direct evidence. For example, observing whether the student is competent in the task for which RPL is sought.

7.2.2 Indirect Evidence

Evidence produced by the student from another source. For example, speaking to the student's previous employer about the work of the student at his previous place of employment (see historical evidence). It may be in the form of descriptions of performance from a third party rather than the performance itself.

Sources of indirect evidence include the following:

- Verification of completed work
- Performance appraisals
- Training records
- Testimonials
- Work-based learning
- in-company short courses
- Reviews and commendations
- Certificates and qualifications

7.2.3 Historical Evidence

Tells the assessor what the student was capable of doing in the past. This type of evidence is least valid because it does not necessarily assess current performance. It may require additional evidence of corroboration.

7.3 Collecting Evidence

There is no time frame or limit for collecting evidence for RPL. Supervisory competence may require a portfolio of evidence that can be collected over several months. Operational competence may require a portfolio of evidence which will take a few weeks to compile.

7.4 Portfolio

A portfolio is a collection of different types of evidence that relates to the work being assessed. They may include evidence from the student's day-to-day work, from previous work situations and other experiences and pursuits.

It is important that the evidence collected is sufficient and about current competence. **The student and assessor should plan the portfolio jointly.** The student is, however, responsible for the collection of most of the evidence and the compilation of the portfolio. Ideally, the portfolio would consist of a variety of evidence to support the claim for RPL.

These could include, but is not limited to:

- Observation of the task for which RPL is required
- Performance appraisal
- Questioning the student about the task
- Verification of completed work
- Training records
- Testimonials
- Work-based learning
- In-company short courses
- Workshops attended
- Reviews and commendations
- Interviews
- Projects undertaken

Obviously it is not possible to provide evidence in terms of all of the above variables without making the process cumbersome. The key is to produce evidence of their ability to perform at the required level of competence as specified in the claim for RPL. As far as possible, the evidence should be concise and direct. It is not the quantity but rather the quality of evidence that will weigh in favour of the learner.

8. PROCEDURES FOR RPL

A student requesting RPL would normally have an initial informal discussion with the registered assessor to establish if there is a likely case for RPL. The basis for RPL will either be that the student has already completed the work covered or can demonstrate knowledge acquired for which recognition is sought. The assessor should provide the student with copies of the registered standards and learning outcomes for which recognition is requested in the agreed areas of learning. The student would be expected to present evidence that the standards and outcomes have been covered to the required level.

1. If there is a case for RPL, the student completes Document A and gives it, together with the supporting evidence (portfolio), to the assessor.
2. The assessor examines the evidence, and may, if felt appropriate, ask the student for more detailed evidence. The assessor can:
 - a) decide the evidence is adequate – in this case the assessor completes and attaches Document B (PART 1) and sends both documents to the RPL Committee of the division.

or
 - b) advises the student that the evidence is not adequate – in this case the student can complete the qualification in the traditional way.
3. The Senate will receive recommendations from the assessor in the form of Documents A and B. The Senate will consider these applications and, if they are approved, will complete PART 2 of Document B. These

documents will then be filed and the assessor and student notified of the outcome. The Senate's role is to monitor the procedure and will normally expect to approve applications supported by the registered assessor. If the Senate, however, takes the view that the evidence is unsatisfactory, or does not show sufficient depth, PART 3 of Document B will be completed and returned to the assessor. The assessor will advise the student of the outcome. The student can take action 2 b).

4. Applications for RPL will attract a non-refundable fee for scrutiny of the application.
5. Applications for exemptions from a module(s) must be made in sufficient time, normally three weeks, but at the discretion of the assessor, to allow approval of the application before the start of the module or programme.

ANNEXURE A

METHODS OF ASSESSMENT AT PIHE

- Candidates can only apply for an exemption in a PIHE subject based on prior learning in consultation with the relevant Dean of Faculty concerned.
- A candidate will be required to submit a portfolio containing the following: a detailed CV, report from his/her direct supervisor stating his/her skills, capabilities and responsibilities as well as period of service in that specific field), copies of any previous qualifications as well as detailed academic records; proof of any other courses completed
- Candidate will then be assessed by either writing a theoretical exam or undertaking an oral exam on the content of the above courses (this exam will be on the same standard and format as the normal PIHE module)
- AND his/her application of the theory will be assessed through an extensive interview with the Dean and lecturer present
- The candidate will not receive any consultations on the course content or the textbook before the theoretical or oral examination.

DOCUMENT A

APPLICATION FOR RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

Student Name:

Qualification:

Date:

Application for recognition of or exemption from the following module(s):

State what prior learning forms the basis for the application?

Include a portfolio of evidence for RPL

Student's signature: _____

Received by Registered Assessor:

Name of Assessor: _____

Date: _____

Document B (PART 1)

Student Name:

Qualification:

Date:

Registered Assessor:

I have studied the evidence presented by the above student and consider that the student should be granted RPL from the following:

Signed: _____

Registered Assessor

Please attach to Document A, and any other supporting evidence, and submit to the Senate.

PART 2

The application for recognition of prior learning by the above student was considered by the Senate and was approved.

Signed: _____ Manager

Date: _____

Conditions:

This document to be copied to the assessor and student and then filed.

PART 3

The application for RPL by the above student was considered by the Senate and rejected for the following reason:

Signed: _____ Manager

Date: _____

This document to be returned to the assessor.