



**National Policy and Criteria for the
Implementation of
Recognition of Prior Learning (as amended
in 2018)**

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Foreword

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act 67 of 2008 mandates the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) to develop, after consultation with the Quality Councils, a National Policy for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

SAQA gazetted its *National Policy for the implementation of RPL* in 2014 and has been, and continues to be, engaged with extensive RPL-related initiatives dating as far back as 2002. However, large scale implementation of RPL in South Africa is hampered by a number of barriers. To address some of the challenges with RPL implementation, and especially, to establish a national co-ordinating mechanism for RPL, the Minister of Higher Education and Training published, in 2016, a national *RPL Coordination Policy*. As an essential next step, SAQA needed to align its *National Policy for the Implementation of RPL* with the *RPL Coordination Policy*.

The purpose of this amended *National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of RPL* is to further embed RPL in the national education and training agenda and ensure clarity and consistency regarding contexts, roles and responsibilities of all RPL role-players in the country. As an important mechanism to guide RPL in South Africa, the key intention of this amended *Policy and Criteria* is to facilitate change in the lives of RPL candidates, including workers and learners of all ages (both employed and unemployed) and other marginalised groups.

This *National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of RPL (as amended in 2018)* comes into effect on the date of publication in the Government Gazette.



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List of acronyms and names

CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
GFETQSF	General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
MHET	Minister of Higher Education and Training
NLRD	National Learners' Records Database
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OQSF	Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
Umalusi	Quality Council for General and Further Education and Training

Glossary of terms

"Access" means the opportunity to pursue education and training, including relevant qualifications and part-qualifications; professional designations, opportunities in the workplace, and career progression.

"Advanced standing" means the status granted to a learner for admission to studies at a higher level than the learner's prior formal studies would have allowed, including exemption where applicable. Granting advanced standing does not entitle the learner to claim achievement of the exempted qualification.

"Assessment" means the process used to identify gather and interpret information and evidence against the required competencies in a qualification, part-qualification, or professional designation in order to make a judgement about a learner's knowledge and skills. Assessment can be formal, non-formal or informal; assessment can be of learning already done, or towards learning to inform and shape teaching and learning still to be done.

"Assessment criteria" means the standards used to guide the recognition of learning and assess learner achievement and/or evaluate and certify competence.

"Certification" means the formal recognition of a qualification or part-qualification awarded to a successful learner.

"Credit" means the volume of learning required for a qualification or part-qualification, quantified as the number of notional study hours required for achieving the learning

outcomes specified for the qualification or part-qualification. One credit is equated to ten (10) notional hours of learning.

“Credit accumulation” means the totalling of credits towards a qualification or a part-qualification.

“Credit transfer” means the vertical, horizontal or diagonal relocation of credits towards a qualification or part-qualification registered on the same or different Sub-Framework.

“Credit accumulation and transfer (CAT)” means an arrangement whereby the diverse features of both credit accumulation and credit transfer are combined to facilitate lifelong learning and access to the workplace.

“Formal learning” means learning that occurs in an organised and structured education and training environment and that is explicitly designated as such.

“Formative assessment” means a range of formal, non-formal, and informal continuous assessment procedures used to enhance learning activities/the recognition of learning to improve attainment/recognition.

“Informal learning” means learning that results from daily activities related to paid or unpaid work, family or community life, or leisure.

“Learning outcomes” mean the contextually demonstrated end-products of specific learning processes, or the recognition of learning, which includes knowledge, skills and values.

“Learning pathway” means sequencing of qualifications that allows learners to move vertically, diagonally, and in some cases horizontally, through NQF levels giving learners recognition for full or partially completed qualifications or part-qualifications. Learning pathways can also lead to professional designations, when learning pathways include periods of structured work experience over and above qualifications.

“Lifelong learning” means learning that takes place in all contexts in life - formally, non-formally and informally. It includes learning behaviours and obtaining knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values and competencies for personal growth, social and economic well-being, democratic citizenship, cultural identity and employability.

“Moderation” in RPL assessment means internal and external verification that an RPL assessment system is credible and that assessors and learners/candidates behave in an ethical way; and that the RPL assessments are fair, valid, reliable and practicable.

“Non-formal learning” means planned learning activities, not explicitly designated as learning towards the achievement of a qualification or part-qualification; often associated with learning that results in improved workplace practice.

“Part-qualification” means an assessed unit of learning with a clearly defined purpose that is, or will be, registered as part of a full qualification on the NQF.

“Professional designation” means a title or status conferred by a professional body in recognition of a person’s expertise and/or right to practise in an occupational field.

“Provider” means a legally established institution (public or private). Public entities are established by an Act of Parliament and must meet the accreditation criteria of the relevant Quality Council. Private entities offering registered qualification and part-qualification must be accredited by a Quality Council and registered by the Department of Higher. .

“Qualification” means a registered national qualification.

“Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)” means the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed for the purposes of alternative access and admission, recognition and certification, or further learning and development.

“RPL candidate” means the person seeking recognition through RPL.

“RPL practitioner” means a person that functions in one or more aspects of RPL provision, including policy development, advising, portfolio course design and facilitation, assessment and moderation, administration, monitoring and evaluation, research and development.

National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (as amended in 2018)

Purpose

1. This 2018 *National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)* (hereafter referred to as the *Amended RPL Policy and Criteria*) amends the *National Policy for the Implementation of RPL* published in the Government Gazette in 2014. This *Amended RPL Policy and Criteria* provides for the implementation of RPL within the context of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act 67 of 2008 (and any subsequent amendments), and positions RPL in relation to the overarching principles and priorities of the NQF in South Africa.
2. The Ministerial *RPL Coordination Policy* (hereafter referred to as the *Ministerial RPL Policy*) holds SAQA and the Quality Councils (QCs) accountable to perform their roles in relation to RPL as stated in the NQF Act.

Preamble

Background

3. The concept of RPL is, and has always been, aligned to the main elements of South African national policy discussion since 1994.
4. The NQF in South Africa is a comprehensive system approved by the Minister of Higher Education and Training (MHET) for the classification, registration, publication and articulation of quality-assured national qualifications and part-qualifications. It was established under the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act, Act 58 of 1995. It continues under the NQF Act, Act 67 of 2008, which came into effect on 1 June 2009.
5. SAQA is mandated to oversee the further development and implementation of the NQF including RPL. In this regard SAQA oversees the implementation of RPL on a national basis in accordance with this *Amended RPL Policy and Criteria*.
6. RPL can include any type of learning (non-formal, informal and formal) across all ten levels of the NQF.
7. There are two main forms of RPL, that reflect the different purposes and processes within which RPL takes place:
 - a. RPL for access: To provide an alternative access route into a programme of learning, professional designation, employment and career progression; and

- b. RPL for credit: To provide for the awarding of credits for, or towards, a qualification or part-qualification registered on the NQF.
8. RPL in South Africa is undertaken and awarded in a holistic way, with clear roles and responsibilities for all role players within the scope of this *Amended RPL Policy and Criteria*.

Context

9. The *Ministerial RPL Policy* is a strategic policy that is designed to provide a strong enabling policy environment for the implementation of RPL across the entire system for education, training, development and work. The *Ministerial RPL Policy* seeks to:
- a. Clarify roles of key stakeholders; and
 - b. Address the challenges and approaches to RPL implementation.
10. This *Amended RPL Policy and Criteria* must be read in conjunction with the following national policies:
- a. *RPL Coordination Policy (2016)*;
 - b. *Level Descriptors for the South African National Qualifications Framework (2012)* (and any subsequent amendments);
 - c. *Policy and Criteria for the Registration of Qualifications and Part-Qualifications on the National Qualifications Framework (2013)* (and any subsequent amendments);
 - c. *Policy for Credit Accumulation and Transfer within the National Qualifications Framework (2014)* (and any subsequent amendments);
 - d. *National Policy and Criteria for Designing and Implementing Assessment for NQF Qualifications and Part-Qualifications and Professional Designations in South Africa (2014)* (and any subsequent amendments);
 - e. *Policy and Criteria for Recognising a Professional Body and Registering a Professional Designation for the Purposes of the National Qualifications Framework Act (as amended in 2018)* (and any subsequent amendments); and
 - f. Further policies published by SAQA.
11. The RPL policies of the three NQF Sub-Frameworks must be aligned with this *Amended RPL Policy and Criteria*.

Assumptions

12. The assumptions are that:
- a. The *Ministerial RPL Policy* is the overarching RPL Policy for co-ordination, roles and responsibilities of key RPL stakeholders and resourcing of RPL and that the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) will carry out its associated responsibilities;

- b. SAQA's *Amended RPL Policy and Criteria*, which is aligned to the *Ministerial RPL Policy*, will focus on RPL implementation;
- c. Both the *Amended RPL Policy and Criteria* and *Ministerial RPL Policy* will set the standard for the alignment of all other RPL policies and their implementation; and
- d. Funding for all implementation and co-ordination activities are provided.

Objectives

13. The objectives of this 2018 *Amended RPL Policy and Criteria* are to:

- a. Ensure that the objectives of the NQF Act are met, especially to:
 - i. Facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education and training and career paths, (section 5 (1) (b) of the NQF Act);
 - ii. Accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities (section 5 (1) (d) of the NQF Act);
- b. Ensure that policies of the QCs comply with this *Amended RPL Policy and Criteria*;
- c. Enable SAQA to:
 - i. Support the MHET and the DHET to provide firm policy principles for the further development and implementation of RPL;
 - ii. Advise, guide, and support the National Co-ordinating Mechanism for RPL;
 - iii. Conduct research into a sustainable model for the quality assurance of RPL;
 - iv. Receive RPL-related data uploads for the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD);
- d. Ensure that achievements via RPL are certificated, and that there is no distinction, other than for data analysis, between qualifications/ part-qualifications/ professional designations awarded via conventional and RPL routes respectively;

Scope

14. This Amended RPL Policy and Criteria applies to:

- a. DHET and other Government Departments, SAQA, the QCs, all registered and accredited education and training providers (public and private), SAQA recognised professional bodies, and all other entities implementing RPL in South Africa;
- b. RPL candidates; and
- c. All qualifications, part-qualifications and professional designations registered by SAQA.

Principles

15. The following principles are important elements of a holistic approach to RPL:

- a. The RPL process is multi-dimensional. It is a process through which non-formal, informal and formal learning can be measured and mediated against learning outcomes for recognition across different contexts;
- b. Qualifications, part-qualifications and professional designations registered on the NQF may be awarded in whole or in part through RPL. The processes followed must be credible, quality-assured and consistent with accepted and approved principles and criteria of SAQA and the relevant QC/ professional body/ institution concerned;
- c. RPL offers an alternative access route into a programme of learning, professional designation or recognition in the workplace to those who do not meet specified qualification entry requirements. In this regard, qualifications, part-qualifications and professional designations registered on the NQF must provide alternative entry requirements so that candidates can be admitted to the qualification, part-qualification, or professional designation through RPL;
- d. RPL is multi-contextual and differs across contexts. RPL may be developed and implemented differently for the purposes of recognition in the context of the three NQF Sub-Frameworks, professional designations, and recognition in the workplace. Furthermore, it is conducted using a variety of methods (including a combination of teaching-learning, mentoring and/or assessment approaches, as appropriate). The purposes and contexts of the RPL determine the practices and outcomes of the RPL in each case;
- e. The focus is on what has been learned and not on the status of the institution or place where the learning was obtained;
- f. Assessment is an integral feature of all forms of RPL, and exists in combination with a range of other strategies that allow for different sources of knowledge and forms of learning to be compared and judged. RPL can be used for diagnostic, formative or summative assessments, to create opportunities for, or towards credit/ exemption, access, advanced standing, professional designations or recognition in the workplace;
- g. Where credit is awarded, it must be based on the assessed evidence of knowledge and skills acquired informally and non-formally;
- h. There must be no distinction, other than that required for data analysis, between records of learner achievements for qualifications, part-qualifications or professional designations awarded as a result of RPL processes and those obtained via conventional means;
- i. The QCs must ensure that all RPL that is awarded for access and for credit in their Sub-Frameworks are reported to SAQA. This is required for the purposes of monitoring access and redress indicators over time. All RPL recognition data is published as aggregated data and does not divulge how the learner received

- recognition. This data must be maintained under strict conditions of confidentiality, and only shared with individuals directly involved in the recording of the data; and
- j. The quality assurance of RPL must be undertaken with the explicit intention to protect the integrity of the processes and outcomes concerned.

Roles and Responsibilities for the implementation of RPL

16. DHET and the National Co-ordinating Mechanism for RPL are accountable for all responsibilities as outlined in the *Ministerial RPL Policy*.

17. SAQA is responsible for:

- a. Aligning its 2014 *National Policy for the Implementation of RPL* to the *Ministerial RPL Policy*, and implementing its policy;
- b. Providing over-arching leadership to the QCs to implement their aligned RPL policies;
- c. Recognising professional bodies and registering professional designations that meet the *Policy and Criteria for the Recognition of Professional Bodies and the Registration of Professional Designations*, including an RPL route for the awarding of designations;
- d. Providing advice, guidance and support to the National Co-ordinating Mechanism for RPL for its further development and sustainability;
- e. Supporting the communication and advocacy initiatives of the National Co-ordinating Mechanism for RPL as required;
- f. Conducting a sector-wide study towards a feasible, sustainable model for the quality assurance of RPL across education and training institutions;
- g. Receiving relevant data on RPL, including achievements, for uploading onto the NLRD; and
- h. Ensuring that the QCs and professional bodies develop certification policies that include achievements via RPL, and do not differentiate on the basis of how the learning was achieved.

18. The QCs are responsible for:

- a. Aligning their Sub-Framework RPL policies to the *Ministerial RPL Policy* and SAQA's *Amended RPL Policy and Criteria*;
- b. Working with their accredited providers to ensure the development and implementation of RPL policies that are aligned to the RPL policies of the NQF Sub-Frameworks within which they operate;
- c. Monitoring and evaluating the implementation of RPL within their NQF Sub-Framework contexts, including:
 - i. Developing and implementing standardised approaches where appropriate;
 - ii. Supporting the training and monitoring of RPL practitioners including RPL advisors, facilitators, assessors, moderators, and administrators;

- iii. Ensuring consistency across RPL providers/practitioners in similar contexts;
- iv. Supporting the co-ordinated development of RPL toolkits and instruments relevant for particular contexts, as appropriate;
- v. Monitoring the RPL admission rates for institutions of learning, RPL Centres, and RPL providers, while maintaining the strictest confidentiality regarding individual RPL candidates and institutions; and
- vi. Ensuring that achievements via RPL are certificated, and that there is no distinction, other than for data analysis, between qualifications/part-qualifications awarded via conventional and RPL routes respectively;
- d. Advocating RPL as a means for credit, access and advanced standing;
- e. Fostering close working relationships with professional bodies in and across the NQF Sub-Frameworks as appropriate, to facilitate the implementation of RPL;
- f. Developing and maintaining information management systems that are compatible with the NLRD and other relevant government information management systems, and submitting the data to SAQA;
- g. Conducting and overseeing RPL-related research in the relevant NQF Sub-Frameworks, in collaboration with SAQA; and
- h. Reporting to SAQA on RPL implementation across the relevant accredited provider base, on a quarterly basis, for inclusion in reports to the NQF Chief Executive Officers' Committee.

19. Education and training institutions and skills development providers are responsible for:

- a. Seeking accreditation with the relevant QC(s). Private providers that offer qualifications and part-qualifications located in one or more of the three Sub-Frameworks of the NQF must register with either the DHET or a provincial department of education as required;
- b. Establishing articulation policies which clearly make possible learning and work pathways, RPL, and Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) in the institution and with other institutions;
- c. Progressively developing and enhancing capacity to implement RPL in accordance with the *Ministerial RPL Policy*; SAQA's *Amended RPL Policy and Criteria*; and the RPL, CAT and assessment policies of the QC concerned;
- d. Developing an RPL information management system that meets the requirements of the relevant QC, the NLRD, and other relevant Government information management systems;
- e. Collaborating with the National Co-ordinating Mechanism for RPL, SAQA and the QCs to mitigate barriers to RPL implementation and to advance the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of RPL;
- f. Considering the establishment of an institutional forum of RPL practitioners which will participate in the RPL Professionalisation Forum of the National Co-ordinating Mechanism for RPL; and

- g. Providing quarterly reports on student achievements via RPL in the format required by the NLRD, to the QC which oversees the NQF Sub-Framework of the qualification or part-qualification concerned.
20. Professional bodies are responsible for:
- a. Complying with the *Policy and Criteria for the Recognition of Professional Bodies and the Registration of Professional Designations*;
 - b. Including an RPL route as an integral requirement for the attainment of professional designations under the jurisdiction of the Professional Body as stipulated in the national *Policy and Criteria for the Recognition of Professional Bodies and the Registration of Professional Designations*;
 - c. Collaborating with SAQA, the QCs, the National Co-ordinating Mechanism for RPL and relevant providers to incentivise and advance the provision of quality RPL in its context;
 - d. Providing, to SAQA, quarterly reports on the number of designations awarded through RPL in the format required by the NLRD; and
 - e. Progressively developing and enhancing capacity to initiate and support RPL provision in accordance with this *Amended RPL Policy and Criteria*.
21. Employers may:
- a. Develop and implement organisational RPL policies and improve human resource support for RPL;
 - b. Encourage staff to engage in RPL for recognition in the workplace; and
 - c. Ensure that accredited RPL practitioners conduct the RPL in the workplace.
22. RPL practitioners are responsible for:
- a. Adhering to the requirements as set out in this *Amended RPL Policy and Criteria* and as determined by the relevant bodies and governance structures, which may include a QC, workplace, professional body, and the National Co-ordinating Mechanism for RPL;
 - b. Registering with a professional forum for RPL practitioners which meets the requirements of the National Co-ordinating Mechanism for RPL; and
 - c. Undertaking CPD for individual RPL practitioners and meeting the professional requirements.
23. RPL candidates are responsible for:
- a. Accepting co-responsibility as an equal partner in the RPL process and fair treatment; and
 - b. Respecting, and adhering to, the procedures of institutions and workplaces.

Minimum criteria

24. The following minimum criteria should apply to RPL implementation:
 - a. The RPL role players in the scope of this *Amended RPL Policy and Criteria* should make provision for RPL according to specified roles and responsibilities;
 - b. RPL candidates should be advised regarding potential RPL routes and be guided and supported to prepare evidence of relevant prior learning;
 - c. RPL processes should be mediated: Knowledge and skills obtained non-formally, informally and formally, and the type and level of knowledge and skill required for recognition must be mediated by RPL practitioners to enable this recognition;
 - d. Candidates should be assisted with their preparation for assessment;
 - e. Assessment should adhere to fair, valid and reliable practices: the assessment principles as outlined in the *National Policy and Criteria for Designing and Implementing Assessment for NQF Qualifications and Part-Qualifications and Professional Designations in South Africa* must be applied;
 - f. RPL assessments should be moderated;
 - g. Candidates should be provided with feedback after assessment and candidates should be advised, guided and supported to fill gaps where the RPL assessment shows gaps in candidates' knowledge and skills;
 - h. Certificates should be issued for qualifications, part-qualifications and professional designations awarded through RPL; and should not specify that the achievement was obtained through RPL; and
 - i. Fees for RPL, where present, should be equitable.